

Meeting God in Worship

Rich Nathan

February 10-11, 2007

Meeting God in the Psalms Series

Psalms 24

Most of you are probably aware of the fact that we have been involved with very frustrating negotiations with the nation of North Korea about their testing of missiles and the acquisition of nuclear capabilities. There is an article in the paper almost every week about a new round of proposed talks with North Korea.

But how many of you have actually ever visited the official website of the North Korean government? Here on the screen is the official website for the government of North Korea.

SLIDE – First Page of Website

On the left is the former leader of North Korea who died in 1994, Kim Il Sung, called The Great Leader Kim Il Sung and on the right is his son, who took over, Kim Jong Il. And then there is the banner over their two photos: “The Leaders are the sun of the nation and mankind.” I’m sure in Korean this probably makes more sense. But whether stated in Korean or in English, it is not a particularly humble claim.

What you may not be aware of is that there has been a concerted attempt to deify the North Korean dictators in a way that would probably make the old emperors of Rome blush, or perhaps say: Why didn’t we think of that? Parents are required to deposit their children at State-run nurseries at age 2½. These toddlers only see their parents on the weekends. During the week, they live at the nursery and they undergo a systematic indoctrination into the cult of personality surrounding the North Korean leader. Instead of nursery rhymes, the children sing and dance together making identical facial expressions to tunes like *Long Life and Good Health To the Leader* and *We Sing Of His Benevolent Love*. One song that the preschoolers sing contains this verse:

SLIDE

*Who gave us the happiness
Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il
Thank you Marshal Father*

Even when they eat the children are taught that their happiness depends upon their Great Leader. And so at the end of each meal, the children chant in unison:

SLIDE

*Great Leader, thank you for our food.
We ate well.*

40% of the entire content of North Korea's primary school textbooks is said to be devoted to the two Kim's. The figure for senior high is 43%. At Kim Il Sung University, in the capitol, there are 6 full departments specializing in the thoughts of the former dictator and his son.

Dan Rather recently filmed a report from North Korea. He said that being in North Korea was one of the most bizarre experiences of his life. You can't go anywhere without your controller, that's what they call themselves – government people who follow you everywhere. And if in public you say, "Good morning," to someone, they are very polite and will smile and say [direct quote]:

SLIDE

Yes. Our Maximum Leader told us this morning on the radio that it was going to be a beautiful day. And you know what, sir? It is a beautiful day.

In fact, in a time of famine and poverty in North Korea, the government spending on Kim Family deification is now nearly 40% of the entire government budget. There are 30,000 Kim monuments around the country. There are film festivals and books and billboards and 40,000 research institutes, historical sites, rock carvings, circus theatres, training programs, other worship events – all around the two Kim's.

Or, consider the recently deceased president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov.

SLIDE – Saparmurat Niyazov

He renamed himself Turkmenbashi and until his death a couple of months ago, he was labeled one of the world's most authoritarian and repressive dictators. And if you think Saddam Hussein was fond of himself, you are not familiar with Turkmenbashi. There is a poster or statue of him in nearly every single public space in the entire country. There is a gold-plated statue of him on top of the capitol's largest building.

SLIDE – Turkmenbashi Statue

This statue rotates so that it will always face into the sun and shine light on the capitol city. The government has given him the Hero of Turkmenistan Award five times. Turkmenbashi said that he really didn't like having his picture and statue everywhere, but that was what the people wanted.

You say, "Why would we care about this little petty dictator in a Central Asian Republic?"

I forgot to mention that Turkmenistan sits on one of the world's largest oil reserves. The U.S. thought that Turkmenistan was so important that in the early 90's we had Henry Kissinger trying to negotiate vast leases. And then just a few years ago, Donald Rumsfeld went to Turkmenistan to meet with this Supreme Leader.

Turkmenbashi shut down every rural library in the country so that the only books that could be read in rural regions were books that he personally wrote, offering his own spiritual guidance and philosophy about life. He renamed the month of January "Turkmenbashi" and he renamed April after his mother.

Now, there is nothing new in all of this. During WWII a man named David Tsutada, a Japanese Christian, was thrown into jail in 1942. What was his crime? He was accused of treason by the Japanese government and held in solitary confinement for 1½ years in a tiny, dingy, damp basement cell. How did he commit treason against the Japanese government? He referred to Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He would not say that the Emperor Hirohito was greater than Jesus Christ.

Throughout history, one of the activities that has been most threatening to dictators and tyrants is the very simply activity of worshipping the Lord as God. You wouldn't think it would stir up so much fuss. But you can read back in the Old Testament book of Daniel that this simple act of worshipping the Lord as God and not worshipping King Nebuchadnezzar got three Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego thrown into a fiery furnace. It was calling Jesus Christ Lord and Savior and refusing to give those titles Lord and Savior to the Roman Emperor that caused the early Christians to be thrown to the lions.

Today we are going to talk about worshipping God. But we are going to talk about it not simply as a private religious act. But as one of the most subversive and threatening and revolutionary things you could ever find yourself doing. I've called today's talk, "Meeting God in Worship." Let's pray.

SLIDE

Ps 24:1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ² for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. ³ Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not put their trust in an idol or swear by a false god. ⁵ They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob. ⁷ Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. ⁹ Lift up your heads, you gates; lift

them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory.

So this psalm of worship begins with the subversive revolutionary claim in v. 1.

SLIDE

Ps 24:1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

We ask the question: Why should we worship God? And the first answer the psalmist gives:

SLIDE

Because everything belongs to God.

The earth is the Lord's, it is his, not ours, not nobody's, not an accident, and not run by us. The earth is the Lord's.

Now, I began by talking about the

SLIDE

The rejection of God through rival claims

These petty dictators like Kim Jong Il and Turkmenbashi, and Hirohito, and Nebuchadnezzar, who tried to get others to worship them. They wanted to compete with the Lord for the affection and control of human hearts. But here is the awful truth, friends. We all, to some degree, have little Kim Jong Il's, little Turkmenbashi's, little Hirohito's living in our own hearts demanding to be worshipped, stealing from God what is due to God alone.

The man who began the Protestant Reformation defined sin as life curved in on itself.

SLIDE

Sin = Life curved in on itself.

Instead of having your life revolve around God, instead of calling other people to have their lives revolve around the Lord God, as sinners all of us try to be the center of the universe. You've heard me say this before, but have you ever listened to married couples fight?

I want you to meet my needs.

I'm tired of trying to meet your needs. You need to pay attention to my needs.

All I want is for you to listen to me.

No, you first listen to me.

Listen to teenagers fight with their parents.

You don't respect me.
Well, you don't respect me.

Life curved in on itself. We may not have the power and opportunity to run the show like Kim Il Sung or Hirohito, but we can run our little corner of the world through mood control. Everyone in the house has to walk on eggshells. We're going to give someone the silent treatment until they guess what's wrong with us. Employees have to run around catering to our needs, living in a state of fear. Worship me, don't worship God.

Remember, friends, that the original temptation in the Garden of Eden was,

SLIDE

You shall be as God knowing good and evil.

This was the temptation presented to our first parents, Adam and Eve. You shall be as God. You don't have to listen to God, or let him determine what is right and wrong for your life. You shall be as God knowing good and evil.

Whenever you say, "I know that God feels this way about this, but I don't think it is wrong. I'm going to do it anyway. I know God's Word says premarital sex is wrong. But I don't think it is wrong if we love each other and at some point plan to be married. I don't think it is wrong. I don't think it is wrong if I am not sleeping around, if my relationship is exclusive. I don't think it is wrong. I don't think it is wrong if we do everything but...I don't think its wrong if we don't live together."

Whenever we rationalize our disobedience, whenever we say: I reject your standard for right and wrong; I'm going to create my own standard here – why it is OK to lie to a client; why it is OK in this instance to gossip about a coworker; whenever we do this, we are involved in anti-worship. We are saying the earth is not the Lord's, at least this part of the earth belongs to me. I am going to run the show over this little corner of the world.

We not only reject God through rival claims, but we reject God by marginalizing God.

SLIDE

The rejection of God through marginalizing God

Psalms 24.1 says:

SLIDE

Ps 24:1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

But I will tell you, virtually every message in contemporary society attempts to deny this basic truth. We try to shove God into some corner of life. We say the church is the Lord's and everything in it. Religion is the Lord's. This one hour a day, my quiet time, is the Lord's. Sunday mornings are the Lord's. 10% of my income is the Lord's.

The world comes with its little condescending smile and says to Christians: It is nice if you want to believe that the Lord is God. That's good for you. We are going to marginalize your faith to some little corner of the world. Do you see how incredibly threatening it is when we say, "No, the earth is the Lord's and everything in it." We have a million ways of trying to reduce the claims of God over all of life. We practice what I call "grapefruit Christianity." You know what grapefruit Christianity is, don't you? Like a grapefruit, we say this section of my life belongs to God.

I remember growing up in New York City, we Jewish kids would go to synagogue and then after synagogue and after the Catholic kids went to mass, we would go out and get drunk together. This section of my life belongs to God – the religious section. Then I have my dating section; my job section; my entertainment section; what I do with my body section; and my discretionary time section; and my discretionary income section.

Do you understand how revolutionary it is to say the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. That everything and everyone is to come under the lordship of God and worship him. Do you understand how threatening it is, how absolutely different is the claim of the psalmist to the claims of the religious. Why do we worship God? Because everything belongs to God. And in v. 2,

SLIDE

Everything depends upon God

SLIDE

Ps 24:2 for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

In the Bible the sea is the symbol of restlessness, of disorder and chaos. As you watch the ocean, there is constant turmoil. There is constant restlessness. The sea in the Bible is a symbol of confusion and chaos and meaninglessness.

But it says that God put in the midst of the sea, land. We read in Genesis 1.9-10 these words:

SLIDE

Ge 1:9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

God sets boundaries on chaos in the world. God sets boundaries on disorder and anarchy and disintegration. But the sea is always there. The anti-God, anti-creation forces are always crashing like waves onto the beach. There is a tendency of everything apart from God to disintegrate – families, marriages, morals, cultures – everything breaks down when we turn from the worship of the Lord as God. When we divorce ourselves as people, or as a society from God. When we say God doesn't have any relevance to politics, or our view of life, or marriage, or our sexuality or science; God is not relevant in this area, we watch the area disintegrate.

Even in our own persons, when a human being divorces themselves from God, when we say, "I'm going to run my own life; I'm going to take control away from God. I'm tired of his leadership; I'm tired of being bossed around, or run by anyone else; I'm going to take control," what do we find happens? Friends, some of you have certainly seen this in your life. I know I have. Our lives begin to fall apart. We are blown around like the waves in the ocean. Only God can take a life that is cast adrift on the sea and put it on solid ground.

Do you understand that not only does everything in the world belong to God, but everything that works depends on God to work. It is by God's sheer goodness that the organs in your bodies and my body work. It is by the sheer grace of God that your heart continues to beat as you sit here today. It is by the sheer grace of God that you have any sanity, that your mind works with any clarity, if you have any sanity at all. It is only because of God's goodness that any of your relationships work, that you are able to get along with anyone. It is only because God holds it up that this world continues to function.

Here is what it says in Colossians 1.17,

SLIDE

Col 1:15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And I would say parenthetically that if your life is chaotic right now, if emotionally you feel like you are falling apart, if relationally in your family, marriage; if things in your life in some area or another are disintegrating, you are out at sea, there is a restlessness there, there is lots of confusion and disorder, God can put you on

solid ground. He puts solid ground in the midst of the sea. And it doesn't matter how desperate the situation is, how chaotic things are.

I read a study by a Harvard economist named Richard Freeman about the disintegration of families, and particularly the epidemic of fatherlessness that we see now in both urban areas of our country as well as suburban areas. And everyone throws up their hands and says, "What can we do about this epidemic of fatherlessness?" I think there are some things we could do, but must it be that if a child is in a fatherless family that they head down the road of experimenting with drugs and dropping out of school and becoming sexually active?

Listen, this is from a Harvard economist, Richard Freeman:

SLIDE

Church attendance is a better predictor of who escapes poverty, drug addiction, and crime than family income, family structure, and other variables.

See, what the Bible teaches is true. In him, in Christ, all things hold together.

Morgan Reynolds, the director of the Criminal Justice Center at the National Center for Policy Analysis, reports this:

SLIDE

Other criminologists' find that even under poor social and economic conditions church-going serves as an insulator against crime and delinquency. These and other findings give evidence to the importance of character formation – teaching the difference between right and wrong, and the value of morality.

In him, in Christ, everything holds together. Your life is falling apart; your child's life is falling apart – turn to Christ. Immerse yourself in the church. Immerse your kids' lives in the church.

Why do we worship God? Because everything belongs to God and everything depends on God.

Well, who can meet with God in worship? Vv. 3-6

SLIDE

Ps 24:3 Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not put their trust in an idol or swear by a false god. ⁵ They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.

The whole Bible is the story of how God has made it possible for us to draw near to him. The whole Bible is the story of how God has made it possible for us to

reconnect with him and have him become the center of our lives and the center of this world. There is a wonderful picture of worship in v. 3 where we read:

SLIDE

Ps 24:3 Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?

Worship is ascending the mountain of the Lord.

SLIDE

Ascending the hill of the Lord.

Now, there are lots of pictures of worship in the Bible. One main picture of worship in the Bible is bowing down low before God. The picture is what we might find among Muslims in a mosque – bowing down low before God. Whenever you get low before God, whenever you get off your high horse, in other words – what you think about what's right and wrong, and you begin to submit and surrender control of an area of your life to God, you are worshipping him, bowing low before him.

A second picture of worship in the Bible is ascribing to God the glory that is due him. Psalm 29.1-2,

SLIDE

Ps 29:1 Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

The word “worship” comes from the old English word “worth-ship”

SLIDE

Worship = Worth-Ship

Giving God supreme worth in your life. In other words, we are worshipping the Lord when we value him above everything else. When we value relationship with him above everything else. When we say: God, you are my supreme treasure. There is nothing in my life more important than my relationship with you. That is worship.

But here in Psalm 24, the psalmist gives us a different picture of worship – ascending the hill of the Lord, v. 3.

SLIDE

Ps 24:3 Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?

Now, in the Old Testament Jewish people would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year to go to the Temple during the great pilgrimage feasts of Passover and Shavuot, what Christians call Pentecost, and Sukkot, which we call the Feast of Tabernacles. But there were these three pilgrimage feasts in which Jewish people would make their way to Jerusalem. You may know that Jerusalem is topographically the highest city in Israel. But this ascending the hill of the Lord to go to the Temple was not just literal, it was metaphorical. A trip to Jerusalem was an enacted out journey of a life that is aimed upward towards God. Worship is aiming your life upward towards God.

Ascending the hill of the Lord is responding to the Lord's invitation that he made to Abraham in Genesis 13 when the Lord said in 13.14,

SLIDE

Ge 13:14 The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are,

Get above your circumstances, in other words. Rise above the world's vantage point. To ascend the hill of the Lord is to begin to see life from heaven's vantage point rather than from ground level.

Sunday morning you are debating should I go to church this morning, or should I stay in my nice warm bed? It is cold outside. I am really tired. I haven't gotten much sleep. There is snow on the roads. It is going to be a real hassle getting the kids up. Why should I go to church with all of its ordinariness instead of just skipping it and staying here in my nice warm bed?

Because the Bible teaches that when we come to worship, we are not just going to a church building, we are ascending the hill of the Lord. Do you know what is going on when you worship God? Here is what Hebrews 12.22-24 says about worship. This is what's going on.

SLIDE

Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

This is what's going on. And I tell you because in worship ascend the hill of the Lord that church-going in America is still infinitely popular than watching a football game on TV, than fishing or gardening, playing golf, or any other single activity in the United States on Sunday mornings. Nowhere else and nothing else is going to bring you up Mt. Zion to fellowship with the angels, and to meet with God other than worship.

Now, the psalmist asks the question: Who may ascend the hill of the Lord and who may stand in his holy place?

SLIDE

Standing in the holy place

In America we basically believe the lie that anyone of us, anybody is good enough to be in God's presence. Anyone can stand in God's holy place because we are basically all nice people at bottom. But you know, the entire Bible tells us repeatedly that it is an impossibility for a person on their own to ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place. Coming into God's presence, becoming intimate with God, meeting with God, connecting with God, all these things the Bible teaches are impossible on our own.

You see, we are people who make rival claims to God. We are the people who demand to be the center of the world and continually reject the notion that the earth belongs to the Lord and everything it. We are the people who demand that the world revolves around us. We are the people who marginalize God. We push him to the corner of the world. We reduce God's influence.

The reason why it is impossible for us on our own to ascend the hill of the Lord is because of who God is and who we are. God is holy and we are sinful. Holiness and sin cannot coexist. They are utterly incompatible. Just as light and darkness are utterly incompatible. The distance between human beings and God is expressed throughout the Bible with a number of different metaphors. Sometimes the distance between us and God is expressed as God being high above us. God is called the high and lofty one who lives in heaven. He is called the Most-High God, the Lord, Most-High. Heaven is his throne and earth is his footstool.

Not only is God said to be high above us, but he is also said to be far away from us. Throughout the Old Testament, people were repeatedly told not to try to get too close to God. When Moses had his experience with God by the burning bush, God said to Moses in Exodus 3, "Don't come any closer." When Moses was called up on Mt. Sinai, the Lord directed to him to put a fence around the mountain. "Don't let the people get too close. Because if anyone touches the mountain, an animal touches the mountain, a human being touches the mountain, they are going to die. Back off." When God gave instructions regarding the building of the Tabernacle in the Temple, there was a thick curtain

that separated the holy place where priests made their offerings from the Holy of Holies, where the presence of God was.

Over and over the biblical message is God is high above us, far away from us. God is light and we are darkness. God is pure and we are clothed with filthy rags. Intimacy with God is impossible for human beings to achieve on their own. And I'll tell you something, friends, whether you are not yet a Christian or you are a Christian, you are spending your efforts attempting to achieve the impossible. You are trying to get close to God on your own.

The Good News of the gospel is that Christ has achieved for us what we cannot achieve on our own – access to God, closeness to God.

Let me read to you from Hebrews 10.19-22:

SLIDE

Heb 10:19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

When Christ died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple that separated human beings from God, the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, was torn from top to bottom by the invisible hand of God, visibly displaying to us that intimacy with God is now possible through the blood of Christ. The thing that kept us from God, namely God's wrath directed toward our sins, has been satisfied. Payment has been made. The penalty has been paid. God's wrath has been appeased. God's perfect law has been obeyed. Satan has been defeated. His accusations have been answered. God's love and justice have been demonstrated. And we have been saved. Not only saved from our sins, but saved for worshiping God and intimacy with God.

What an extraordinary thing that because of Christ and his accomplishment on the cross, through his name, and through his resurrection we can have access to God. We can stand in God's presence.

Let me try to bring this issue of access to God down with a very simple illustration. Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, I was invited down to the Mayor's office to meet with one of the Mayor's assistants and some other pastors and local government officials regarding the response of our community to people who had been displaced by the flood. Well, I was told to park in the parking lot right by City Hall. But there was a gate down. And I leaned out the window and told the parking lot attendant that I was there for a meeting with the Mayor. The attendant looked at me with her arms crossed and said, "Uh-huh."

I said, "Well, it is a meeting about Hurricane Katrina and here is the Mayor's assistant who I will be meeting with."

She did not uncross her arms. She just said, "Uh-huh."

I said, "Well, there is going to be a number of pastors attending. I am a pastor here in the city. I pastor a church called Vineyard Columbus on the North East side of town. We're all meeting and I was told to park here."

She said, "Uh-huh."

And then I remembered that we have a member of the church who oversees the parking lot. And I said, "Well, I am a friend of Bernie Larson and he said I could park here."

She said, "Bernie! Why didn't you mention Bernie. Sure!" Immediately the gate went up and I had access to the parking lot.

My friend, Bernie, said, "Isn't it good to have friends in low places?"

You know, when you turn to Christ you have a friend in low places. The Bible says that God stepped down from heaven and became a man. And then he stepped down, having become a man, again and took the form of a servant. And then having taken the form of a servant, he took another step down and hung on a cross for our sins. We have a friend who went to the very lowest place to rescue us.

And do you know that when you turn to Christ, you have a friend in the highest place. It says in Phil. 2.9-11,

SLIDE

Phil 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

How can we stand in God's presence? The whole Bible answers this question: Only by trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Only by giving up your pretension to rival him. Only by giving up your demand that everything in life centers on you. Only by acknowledging that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. That the world belongs to the Lord, including your life. And everything depends on the Lord.

You say: "Rich, I've trusted in Christ. I've turned to him, but I don't feel close to God in worship. In fact, I never feel like I make connection with God. Worship

never takes me up the hill of the Lord where I feel like I am truly meeting with God. I rarely experience his presence. I don't know the warmth of his touch."

Well, let's look at v. 4,

SLIDE

Ps 24:4 Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not put their trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

Here is another dimension of worship. I would call it

SLIDE

Authentic living before God.

Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? Who can stand in God's holy place? Only the person who has trusted in Christ. Only the one who God has clothed with Christ's garments of righteousness. Only the one who has exchanged their own filthy rags for the clean robes of Christ – only that person can stand before God.

And yet, v. 4 reminds us that we can never separate our faith from our lives. There has to be an authentic living out of our Christian profession if we ever hope to experience God. Let me put it this way. Turning to Christ in faith and repentance, turning to Christ will produce union with Christ. The moment you turn to Christ and you ask Christ's forgiveness for your sins, you trust in him, the moment you say the only way I'm going to gain access to God, the only way the gate is going to lift and I will be allowed to come into God's presence is through this name, Jesus, God says you can stand in my holy place. I will grant you access.

But to experience God's presence, once you've been given access to God, we have to live our lives in the light. 1 John 1:5-6 says this:

SLIDE

1Jn 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

You see, friends, there is a difference between having union with God and having communion with God. Anyone who turns to Christ in faith will be united with God through the Holy Spirit. The Bible describes our new relationship with God through faith in Christ using a number of different metaphors. Jesus said he is the vine and we are the branches. The apostle Paul said that Christ is the head and we are the body. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Groom and we are the bride.

There are a number of different word pictures to describe the fact that when a person turns to Christ, they have union with God through the Holy Spirit. But union with God, being able to stand in the presence of God, having access to God, is different than having communion with God. And communion with God, an experience of God's friendship and an experience of God's presence, a sense that your prayers are not just bouncing off the ceiling, but that you are making contact and connection with God – this depends on living before God with authenticity. That's what Psalm 24.4 is all about.

SLIDE

Ps 24:4 Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not put their trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

Not being a fake, having your deeds and your heart inclined towards God. Being the kind of person who can look yourself in the eye when you wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, and can say: The person staring back at me has integrity before God. I am not just all show. It is not just all religious veneer. I know that God knows the trajectory of my life and it is towards the light. I am by no means perfect, but I am trying to keep short accounts with God. I am regularly confessing what I've done wrong to God. I am turning back to the light as much as I know how to do. I am trying to keep short accounts with other people. I am not carrying out a bunch of grudges. There is not a bunch of secret stuff about me. I am not opening myself up to any other powers other than the power of the Lord. I am regularly rejecting my self-centeredness and asking God to be the center.

Let me ask you this probing question, friend. Can you say about your own life before God, honestly before God: I don't feel like a fake. Honestly before God, it is not just religious veneer and hypocrisy. I really am making an attempt to be the real deal. I am not there. I haven't arrived. But the direction of my life, the road I am on, the trajectory of where I'm basically going is towards being and doing what God wants me to be and do. Is this true of you? Are you real?

There is no peace in the world that can replace the peace of knowing that you've not only been declared right with God, but that you're being made right with God. That you've not only accepted Christ at some point in the past, but you are walking with Christ – no games, no manipulation.

And what is the goal of worshipping God? Vv. 7ff,

SLIDE

Ps 24:7 Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. ⁹ Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory.

In v. 7

SLIDE

Ps 24:7 Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

The procession comes to the top of the hill of the Lord. They are ready to enter the city itself. And we find the Lord returning from battle. It could be a picture, prefiguring the day of Christ's resurrection, having defeated sin at the cross, having defeated death in the resurrection. The Lord now returns to the city to reclaim the world.

It could be the day of the Lord's advent, the day of the Lord's coming. When God entered the world through the womb of the virgin to reclaim the world for himself.

But whether it is the day of the resurrection, or the day of the Lord's coming, we have here the goal of worship. And the goal of worship is to have every single person, every single church, every single community, to open up to the Lord and welcome the presence of the Lord.

We ascend the hill of the Lord. We stand in the presence of God. We stand there through trust in Christ. We come into God's presence with authentic lives, with a real and authentic faith. But the goal of worship is for God himself to come to us. To encounter the Lord; to meet with him. You see, worship is not just something we do. It is not a one-way transaction. Worship is completed by God.

There is a wonderful picture in the book of Revelation where the Lord Jesus Christ comes to the church at Laodicea. Here is what we read in Rev. 3.20,

SLIDE

Rev 3:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.

God challenges every individual, every church, every community saying, "Open up to me." Friends, today the Lord wants to reclaim what belongs to him. In every place in our life where we've pushed God out, God says, "I'm standing at the door knocking. Open that place in your life up to me." In every place we've set up an independent standard and we've said, "I know what is right, even if it contradicts God," God says, "I want you to bend low to me." In every way that we've been fake before God, God says, "I want you to be real with me. I'm coming to reclaim my church." Allow yourself today to be captured by the Lord.

Let's worship him. Amen.

Meeting God In Worship

Rich Nathan

February 10 and 11, 2007

Meeting God in the Psalms

Psalm 24

I. Why Should We Worship God? (Ps. 24.1,2)

A. Everything Belongs To God (v. 1)

1. Rejection Of God Through Rival Claims

2. Rejection Of God Through Marginalizing God

B. Everything Depends On God (v. 2)

II. Who Can Come To God In Worship (Ps. 24.3-6)

A. Ascending The Hill Of The Lord (v. 3)

B. Standing In The Holy Place (v. 3)

C. Authentic Living In The Presence Of God (v. 4)

III. What Is The Goal Of Worshipping God? (24.7-10)