

Who May Dwell with the Lord?

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Bible Text: Psalm 24:3-5
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The word of God we read this morning is Psalm 24. Psalm 24. This is God's word.

1 The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. 2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. 3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. 6 This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. 7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.

That's the reading of the of the Psalm.

The text is verses 3 through 5 this morning in connection with the Lord's Supper. The question and the answer in verses 3 through 5. "3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." The text before us puts a very important question to us and that is what are you doing here? If we may speak very informally but very pointedly, what are you doing here? That is, what right do you have to be here in worship in God's presence? What right did you have to come into this building and stay here? And for those of you who are going to partake of the Lord's Supper, what right do you think you have to take from the hands of the elders the broken bread and the poured out wine?

It's a very important question. It's the question that the text puts before us, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?" You understand the hill of the Lord in the Old Testament was that high hill on which was built the temple of the Lord where God dwelt. Remember, the tabernacle was at different places, that

temporary dwelling place, but when God gave them their place in Canaan and their city of Jerusalem in that city, on that high place Solomon built that temple of the Lord. That's the reference in the text.

Now who is it that shall ascend into that temple and stand there in the presence of God? That's what they did in the Old Testament. Regularly at least once, probably three times per year, if not more, all of the people of God made that trek. That's why some of the Psalms are called Psalms of Ascent, Psalter numbers that they sang as they ascended to that temple. And now the question comes to all of those who are coming up to that holy place where God lived, who may go there and who may stay there? To bring your gifts, the sacrifices, the burnt offerings, the sacrifices of thanksgiving, who is permitted to ascend that hill, enter into that dwelling place of God where God's glory shines forth in all of its beauty, and intimidating beauty, and stay there to receive from God his blessing? The blessing of the testimony of God's own voice, "You are mine, and I am yours. And I love you." Who? That's the question that was put to the people of God in the Old Testament as they sang this Psalm and that's the question that's put to us this morning. And so I go back to that beginning rather informal question but important nevertheless, what right do you have to be here? What makes you think you belong here? And that staying here, you will receive from the Lord blessing? That's the end of the text, isn't it? "He shall receive the blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation." Why you? Look at your hands. Think about your heart and ask yourself, do you have the right with your dirty hands and your corrupt heart to be here and to come there?

So we hear this word of God briefly at the occasion of the Lord's Supper with that question, who may dwell with the Lord, who? And then it's not three answers that I have in the three points this morning, but it's three that I want to call your attention to. To us, first of all, that's the first point a holy people. Then I want you to direct your attention to God, and the text does that too, so that's the second point, the holy God. And then in the third place to Christ. A holy people, a holy God and a holy Christ, and then we will know the answer to the question who may dwell with the Lord.

So first of all, the holy people. The text calls a people who come into the presence of God a holy people, but not exactly in those words, but in words that you recognize. They have clean hands and that word "clean" means holy and they have pure hearts and that word "pure" means holy, and all of us understand the doctrine of holiness. Holiness is that gift of God to you that separates you from sin and devotes you to God. It's that simple. Think separation from and consecration to. Or think of it in other words that the Bible describes, holiness as its work of the work of God to free us from the filth of sin, to wash us from the pollution of sin, to break the bonds of slavery to sin. That's why I prayed the way I did in the congregational prayer, that sometimes the people of God are enslaved to a certain sin and then we pray, "God, do not let sin rule over me." But there are times when it does, and it's in those times when it does that we don't come to the Lord's table, but we seek help.

A holy person is one who is washed from the filth of sin, freed from its pollution, the bonds of the slavery of sin are broken from him, and he's devoted to God. He's consecrated to the Lord. He wants the things of the kingdom. He doesn't want the things of the world. And a holy person, we need to be upfront about this at the very beginning, realizes that that's not a description of him everyday, that's not a description of everything in him. And when he realizes that, that's a sign of holiness too, that he hates the sins that he finds in himself and he loves the holiness that God does a work in him even if it's just in beginning.

To use the language of the Bible, a holy person is a saint. A saint is not one specially designated by the church as different from all of the common members and put up on a pedestal. A saint is a description of every single one of you who is a believer. You are a saint. That does not mean that you are perfect. It does not mean that there is no sin in you, but it does mean that the work of God to make you holy, separating you from sin and consecrating you to him goes from top to bottom in you inside and outside in all the dimensions of your life, or as the book to the Thessalonians puts it, in your mind and body and soul and spirit, all of you.

Now the text looks at you, the holy person, from two different perspectives. First of all, just looks at you and me as we are, and then the text looks at you and me in our relationships that go horizontal and our relationships that go vertical. So those two dimensions, first of all, who you are apart from any relationship to others and then who you are in your relationship to other people and to God.

First of all, it looks at you with regard to who you are, and it first looks at you inside and then it looks at you outside. The outside is what the text talks about with regard to your hands, "He that has clean hands," and a hand simply represents everything that we do, the work we perform in our jobs, in our family lives, in our homes and our church life, in our leisure, what other people can see of you. And the word of God says that the person who's permitted to come to the Lord's table, stand in his presence and receive blessing from him, is one who is outwardly holy. He's not blamable. He doesn't have guilt. And positively what is performed by him outwardly is in conformity with the law of God. His words are clean and pure. His activities toward his wife or her husband or their children or their parents are godly and upright. That's the person who may ascend into the hill of the Lord.

That's what you can see though. The text also talks about what you can't see. You can see of me what I do outwardly with my hands, eyes, ears, tongue and so forth. What you can't see of me and I can't see of you, is what you do inwardly, and that's the reference in the text to the heart. He has clean hands, he also has a pure heart and all of us understand that the heart in the Bible is the source of what we do outwardly. You mustn't think simply of the spiritual center of a man altogether apart from mind and will, but you must think when you hear the word heart of all of the internal life of man. What you think. I can't see what you think. How you feel with regard to your emotions toward God, toward me, toward others in the congregation. I can't see what you want, desire. You can that's inside you, that's the heart. What you like and don't like, what you love and what you hate in all

your relationships. The heart, then, the word of God says must be pure. Within I'm separated from sin. What I think about what I want, what I like, what I don't like, what I love, what I hate, inside me must be separated from sin, and inside me must be consecrated to God. That's the man or that's the woman who's permitted to come into the house of God and stay there and receive his blessing. In other words, he's not a hypocrite. What you see outwardly is also true inwardly. They correspond. There are some people whose outward life is very different from their inward life. You don't know that, the word of God warns about that, the Heidelberg Catechism when it talks about the Lord's Supper and who's permitted to come, warns about hypocrites, that is, they want you to think that they are something but deep within they're something altogether different. Now a hypocrite, understand, is one who isn't genuine at all. You mustn't imagine that none of us has hypocrisy in us. We all do. We're all embarrassed as to what we think about sometimes and want sometimes and love sometimes, and then we hate that, we're sorry about that. But that's true for all of the people of God. I'm talking now about the man or the woman or the young person whose outward life is altogether different than what is inside. The outward life is Sunday dressed best but the inward life is corrupt.

But then the text asks us not just to look at us as we are but asks us to look at ourselves as we relate to others and as we relate to God. Holiness is described in terms that are negative in the text, "Who have not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." And that's a reference to the two tables of the law, lifting up your soul unto vanity is a reference to your relationship to God or the substitutes for God, and swearing deceitfully has reference to how you relate to the neighbor.

Let's start with those now or go to those. Lift up your soul to vanity this week? I did and you did too. Vanity is the name of an idol in the Old Testament and it's called vanity, the idol is something other than God because there's no substance to an idol, there's no value in an idol, there's nothing that the idol can give to you that's real, enduring, lasting of worth. Think about that for a moment as that contrast to our God who's substantial and worthy, whose words are true and promises are yeah and amen. When you go to him, you get something. When you go to an idol, you get nothing. Nothing. So the one who may come to the Lord's table, the one who may expect blessing at the Lord's table, is one who doesn't think about all of the time, vanity, the idol. He isn't loving vanity, the idol. He isn't wanting the idol. And don't think of some object that you set up in your home that's like a Buddha or some other statue, but think of anything that you love and trust in for your satisfaction apart from God. And that might be your house or the house you want. Or your job. Or your family. Or leisure. Or sex. Or things. Or honor. All of those are idols, and all of those can be described in the word of God as vanity.

Who may come to expect blessing from God? The one who is clean outwardly with his hands, inwardly in his heart, and then in his relationship to God he hasn't lifted up his soul to vanity. He's lifted up his soul to God, the one who's valuable, who's substantial, who's weighty and worthy, so that this is the man or the woman he thinks about God. Not always and then he's sorry about that. He loves the things of the kingdom. Not always and then he's sorry about that and he wants growth. That's the description of the man who's permitted to come and expect blessing from the Lord. But that man in that

relationship to God is also a man or a woman who relates to others in the congregation, and there in the text is the reference to swearing deceitfully and that too is put in the negative, but you understand the positive, swearing in oath. Is what I do in my relationship to you, I promise to do you good, you promise to do others good, and then having sworn that oath to do them good, to protect their life, to promote their well being, and all of the rest, you turn around and stab them in the back. You swore deceitfully. You said you were going to do good and you didn't do good. Not that man may expect blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

But there are many who do that, and there are many opportunities for us to make promises and to swear oaths and to take vows. Let me just mention a few of them this morning. Marriage is a very important one, where before a minister of the gospel and all of the witnesses, the man and the woman stand together and make a promise. The man to the wife and the wife to her husband, "I will live with you faithfully until we die. I swear before all these witnesses and I want all of these witnesses to hold me accountable." And then he doesn't or she doesn't. That's swearing deceitfully. He's unfaithful perhaps in the worst way, in adultery, or maybe in other ways, that he lives with her but not really, he lives for himself, for his things, for his pleasure. He comes home only when he needs to come home, or she the very same thing. That's swearing deceitfully.

When those two come together and God blesses them with children, then they sit here and come up here and take another vow. It's like swearing an oath. And in that oath they say, "We promise to the utmost of our power to raise these children in the fear of God. We're going to teach them from the word of God. We're going to make sure that they learn how to pray. We're going to bring them to church. We're going to rear them in catechetical instruction. We're going to give them the best Christian education that we can. We're committed to devoting our lives to them." That's the promises that the parents make. And then when they have children, then they don't keep those promises. They let their children have everything they want. They don't discipline them when they sin. They're not really interested in their catechism instruction and whatever Christian education they get is just because everyone else does it, but they're not committed to it. That's swearing deceitfully. That's stabbing their children in the back as much as a man can stab his wife in the back when after he makes promises to her, he doesn't remain faithful to her.

Promises, we make all kinds of promises. These men who are sitting in the front row made promises to you when they were installed into office, the deacons to minister mercy to you, and the elders to watch over your spiritual well being. They made very serious promises. And then it's possible not permissible, that these office-bearers take up that office as God gives it to them and use it for themselves and not for you. That's swearing deceitfully.

But in all of those cases, it's possible that some of you might say, "But that's not where I am. I'm not married maybe or I don't have children perhaps, or I certainly am not an office-bearer," but actually this applies to every one of you, especially those of you who are confessing members. When you stood here to make confession of faith, you also

made a promise and that promise included that you would live in the communion of the saints and the congregation. And in that communion of the saints, you promised, and now we're thinking about the second table of the law, remember, swearing deceitfully lifting up soul to vanity is a reference to the first table of the law, only God, worshiping God properly, using his name not in vain and remembering his day, we now come to the second table of the law. All of you, I included, made a promise when I became a member of the church to do good to all of the rest of you.

Now think of the other commandments, the 5th. Then I'm going to honor, honor all of you who are over me and if I have authority in a position that's over you, I'm going to use it for your well being. Not just children and their parents, the parents their children and not just members to the elders, but the elder, the 5th Commandment. I made a promise to honor the members.

The 6th Commandment to protect your life. Not only not to murder you, but to do good to you as much as I am able to do good to protect your life, to see to it that no one else hurts you. I promise that. And then it comes to marriage. And a life of chastity and sexual purity. I make a promise to you as I become a member of the church and you do everyone else, that you will live chastely in marriage or in single life. You will protect the marriages of your neighbor. You'll see to it that the single members in the congregation aren't harmed in any way sexually.

And then come to the 8th Commandment that has to do with possessions. I promise to do you good materially. You say to everyone else, "I swear an oath that if you have needs, I am there to supply those needs in the Benevolent Fund, or perhaps even aside from the Benevolent Fund when I minister to you with material things." That's the 8th commandment.

And then comes the 9th you have a name and I have a name, and all of us promise, that's really an oath, isn't it, a vow we make to protect the name of the other members, and that includes not only that we never speak poorly of others, but when we hear someone speaking poorly of you, we're going to deal with that and make sure that that does not continue.

And yet there are people who come and become members of the church, who make that commitment to be faithful members and live in such a way that all of the other members of the congregation are in their view to protect and do good too, and yet they have no interest in that. They're only interested in themselves. They've sworn deceitfully.

And then implied. people of God is the positive, the one who may come to the supper of the Lord, enter into the sanctuary, expect a blessing from God, is one who swears honestly when he makes a promise to his spouse or her spouse, who swears honestly with regard to the children. And there are many weaknesses in that in our being husbands and wives and being parents. We're committed to doing the best we can by the grace of God. We're not hypocrites. We don't mean that at all. When we're office-bearers, we serve in weakness, but with sincerity. We want to do good to the members of the congregation

and they do. And when we're members of the congregation, we realize that we don't have the ability to do what everyone else has, but we in our own small place in the congregation are going to use our gifts for the advantage and the well being of the other members. That's the description of the man or the woman who has the right to come in here and stand before God and expect his blessing.

Now you've looked at yourselves, and I myself, now turn your attention up and look at the Holy God. And if for a moment even for one moment, you thought that you had the right to come in here, then you didn't think about five minutes or so about the holy God, and the text asks us to think about that too. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? This is a holy place because the God who inhabits this place, the church of Christ, is a holy God, and if you've not given some thought to that this past week, then do so this week, the holiness of God, awesome holiness. Think about in the Old Testament when the tabernacle was first erected and then many generations later when the temple was first built, that glorious temple and the glory of God descended into that dwelling place, and the priests could not even stand to minister there because of the holiness of God. Think of the angels who stand in the presence of God and have to cover their face because of the holiness of God and say, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory." And if angels who don't have any sin express that kind of sentiment and feeling when they stand in the presence of God, how much more ought we not do that when we who are sinners stand in the presence of God? Holy, Holy, Holy. And so every day when we come to church, we ought to have that sense, "What right do I have to be here? God is holy and I am unholy."

So you understand that the requirement of God for us to be in his house isn't arbitrary but it fits with the very being of God. God is a holy God. They that want to dwell with God must be a holy people. That's what Peter said in 1 Peter 1 when he's quoting the Old Testament says, "Be ye holy for God says I am holy." That's why you must be what you must be, because God is what God is. And so we sing about that in psalter 252, "And holy must thy servants be who in thy temple dwell."

Now think just a moment about that holiness of God as it's reflected right there, right there. Why the bread broken, and why the wine poured out? Very important elements of the sign to begin with, you must not imagine that it's only the bread that you eat and the wine that you drink. First, the bread must be broken and the wine must be poured out as a testimony of the holiness of God. How? That's what God thinks of sin. That's what God thinks of your sin and mine. He hates sin so much that this is how he manifested it, by the breaking of the body of his own Son and the pouring out and the shedding of the blood of his own Son. And in his love for you and me, he would do nothing less than what was required, manifest his holiness in such a way that he gave up his own Son.

Look at the holiness of God. Think about the purity of God. Think about how much he hates sin and how little you hate sin. Think about how much he loves himself and the things that he has made and how little you and I love him and the things that he's made. And then you say when you look at your hands and you think about your heart, when you meditate upon your oaths and where your soul has been, you say, "I ought to have stayed

outside and I have no right to come here." And even though in our churches we don't practice coming up to the table, that would be a very good part of the symbolism of this supper too, that we come up and sit around a table. And then think about our hands and meditate upon our hearts and look back on the last week as to where our souls have been lifted up to all the vanities, and that's why we need to look in the third place at the holy Christ.

The holy people are you. A holy God, is he. And the Holy Christ who he sent for an unholy people. Think about him. That's the text, isn't it, in its context. Where is Christ, you say? Well, think about it. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up you everlasting doors and the King of Glory is going to come in." He ascended to that holy hill. The gates were opened for him in order for him to take responsibility for all of our sins and to bear them away on the cross. Think about the holy Christ in all of his perfect purity outwardly and inwardly. There's no spots on his hands. There were no evil thoughts in his heart. Every day he lifted up his soul to his Father in heaven, loved him in perfection, and when he related to the people around him, he loved them with all of his being, even though it cost him everything, everything. You might say about him, he didn't have a life, not the kind of life you describe when you say, "This is what I'd like to have in my life." Then you say he didn't have a life. The life he had was for you and for me. He bore our sins and bore them all away.

And then look at that ascension in a different dimension. After he was finished on that holy hill, he ascended up on high into heaven at the right hand of God, and he presented there before his Father in heaven his own blood for you and wrote down again, as it were, your name and said, "They have the right to my blessings. All of them." Every one of your names he wrote down and that's what gives you the right to come, because of what he did. And then having finished that work, God gave him the Spirit, and some days after his ascension, he poured out that Spirit upon us, called the Holy Spirit, and by that Holy Spirit, he goes to work to purify our hands and to sanctify our hearts, minds and wills and loves and hates, so that we begin, we really begin outwardly with the things of the kingdom and in our hearts even we really begin thinking about and loving those things that are godly. And when we lift up our hearts to something that we trust in, we lift them up to him, and probably the greatest evidence of this sanctifying work of the Spirit in us is that when we don't, we're sorry. We're truly, genuinely, deeply sorry with a godly sorrow.

"I hate sin. And I see so much sin in me." That's a testimony that the Holy Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ begins to work in you. And then you have evidence, don't you, that you may come. And if you've thought about that during the week, then you understand that, and if you haven't thought about that properly throughout the week by preparing yourselves, then you're ashamed of that. And the next time you ought to write in the mirror in your bathroom with an erasable marker, "Preparatory week," so that every time you wake up in the morning, you see that and you think about it. But you're sorry for your sins and that's an evidence of the holy Christ beginning his sanctifying work in us so that we truly can be described as a holy people.

And the implications of this are simple but profound. Your Holiness is not what gives you the right to come here, it's the holiness of Christ that gives you the right to come here. It's the work that he did, not the work that you do. It's the sacrifice that he made and not the sacrifice that you make, mothers for your children, parents for your offspring, elders and deacons for the members of the congregation. That's not what gives you the right to come here, that you exercise yourselves in service to the people of God and in love for him. That's all afterwards. First you say, "I have the right to come because of the holiness and purity and perfection of the Lord Jesus alone." And that's why I love him because he doesn't ask me to make myself worthy to come. He says, Trust in my worthiness. Lean on my obedience. Depend on what I've done for you and come thinking about that." If ever you think for a moment that you come here because of what you've done this week, you make a very, very serious mistake. His righteousness and his righteousness alone.

So you're admonished this morning, repent of your unholiness. You're called today to pursue holiness, outwardly and inwardly, in your relationship to the members of the congregation and outside of the church and in your relationship to him. And you're warned, you are warned that if you have no intention to be holy and to grow in holiness, you have no right to expect any blessing from Jehovah in heaven. He says to his people who want to be holy as he is holy, "Come, come to the supper and eat and drink and I'll give you blessing." This blessing, righteousness, blessing from the Lord, righteousness from the God of his salvation. So by faith embrace righteousness first when you see that bread broken for you and that blood poured out for you. That's righteousness. And then when you eat that bread and drink that wine, that's what Christ does in you and receive that too. You receive that blessing every Sabbath when you hear the word preached. It's not something different that you get at the Lord's Supper. It's the very same blessing but now the word of God goes into your eyes and you touch the word of God with your hands, and you eat that word of God in symbol with your mouth, and in that way, in a special way there's blessing for us who partake. His righteousness and his holiness make you worthy to come. Depend on it. Amen.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, bless thy word to our hearts when we hear it, believe it, embrace it, repeat it to our children and to others, and cherish it as the only valuable possession that we have because in that word we have thee. Forgive us, O God, and sanctify us now, for Jesus' sake. Amen.