

## Summer Psalms

*Approaching the King of Glory* (Psalm 24:1-10)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tam at Houston Chinese Church on June 21, 2026

### Introduction

- ❖ Think of the last time you had a job interview. **I'm sure you were asked to submit a resume that lists out all your qualifications for that particular job.** They were probably looking for a certain level of education or a specific amount of experience. Maybe that job required specific skills and technical training. So they asked you about your qualifications. And I'm sure you took no offense to that. It was totally reasonable.
  - If I'm scheduled for surgery, I want to be sure someone has checked that doctor's qualifications. **Not everyone is allowed to perform surgery.** That makes sense.
    - Or think about our plans for the building next door. We had multiple committees carefully vet the architecture and construction firms. To make sure they're qualified to design and build a space we can use for the next fifty plus years, Lord-willing. **Not everyone is allowed to construct a building.** You have to be qualified. And no one would object to that.
  
- ❖ But what if—instead of performing surgery or constructing a building—what if we're talking about worshipping God? **What if, at the sanctuary door, we were to ask for qualifications for who's allowed to approach God in worship this morning?**
  - Now you might be objecting. Why would anyone need qualifications to approach God? Doesn't he accepted everyone? **Are you suggesting we have to meet certain conditions before we can worship God?**
  
- ❖ I'm not the one suggesting it. King David is. That's what he's saying in v3. Look at it carefully. "*Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?*" The *hill of the Lord* here is a reference to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the *holy place* refers to the Temple itself where the worship of God took place in the OT.
  - So David is essentially asking, "***Who shall ascend the Temple Mount? Who shall stand before God to offer sacrifices of worship?***" And to even ask these questions implies that some qualifications exist. Some are able to ascend the hill and stand before God in worship—while others are not.
  
- ❖ **I think we have a disconnect because we don't live in OT times where there's a temple and a temple guard, keeping close watch to ensure that only qualified worshippers enter the temple grounds.** If you're a Gentile living back then, or if you're a woman, or if you're ritually unclean, there were limits placed on you. You couldn't approach God as closely as a ritually clean, Israelite man. And even *that* man faced limits. He couldn't approach as closely as a ritually clean, Israelite, Levitical priest. There were conditions to be met.
  - That's so foreign to us. We're not used to thinking like that. **We live in a time and place where anyone and everyone is welcome, any given Sunday, to congregate with us in this sanctuary.** There's no one guarding the door, checking people's qualifications. That's why it sounds strange to read a psalm that's asking about who is allowed to ascend the Temple Mount and offer your worship to the LORD.

- ❖ But that's what Psalm 24 is talking about. **It's a psalm that stresses the necessary qualifications for coming before the presence of our holy God.** And it's not about your gender, or your ethnicity, or how vigilant you are about ritual purity. **The conditions you have to meet for approaching the King of Glory have to do with your heart and soul.** You need these qualifications if you want to approach God.
  - Again, I realize that might be discouraging to hear. It might not sound like good news. But stick with me. Because the people of God, over the centuries, have felt differently about this psalm. According to tradition, first-century Jews would regularly sing Psalm 24 on the first day of every week, on Sundays. **And the early church preserved this practice because Psalm 24 sounded like good news to them.** It reminded them of Jesus's Ascension to his heavenly throne. So Psalm 24 was eventually worked into the church's liturgical calendar and sung every Ascension Day, celebrated forty days after Easter Sunday.
- ❖ **That means, from early on, Christians have recognized a glimmer of the gospel in this psalm.** Without discounting its historical context, we can confidently say that Psalm 24 points to Jesus and his gospel. That means this is not just a psalm ready to be sung. It's a gospel text waiting to be preached.
  - Follow along, as I've broken up the psalm into three sections. Vv1-2 introduce us to *who* it is that requires qualifications. Vv3-4 tell us *what* those qualifications are. While vv5-10 explain *how* a person can attain them.

### Who is Requiring Qualifications to Approach?

- ❖ Let's begin by asking this question: **Who is requiring qualifications to approach him?** The idea that God would ask for qualifications to approach him is a hurdle for many. It doesn't seem right. **Who is God that he can demand such things?** If we can't answer this properly, instead of being good news, this psalm will sound like a conceited demand from a petty god.
  - **Imagine if I required qualifications for you to approach me.** What if I said you have to have a graduate degree, be fluent in at least three languages, and possess an IQ score of 120 or higher—if you want to have a conversation with me after service. You would think I was full of myself. Who do you think you are? **So then who is God that he can make qualifications without being equally guilty of arrogance?**
- ❖ V1 introduces us to this God. *"The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."* **Simply put, this God is Yahweh—the Sovereign Ruler over everything on the earth, including you and me.**
  - The term LORD represents the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh. So the first half of v1 says that the earth and everything in it belongs to Yahweh. The earth is the LORD's. It belongs to him. The second half of v1 parallels the first, but now David's focus narrows down to the *"world"* and on humans in particular. Those who dwell therein are the LORD's. Every person belongs to Yahweh.

- ❖ Now v2 tells us the reason why this is so. Why does the earth and everyone in it belong to Yahweh? *“For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.”* **In other words, the LORD derives his authority over creation by virtue of being its Creator.**
  - So it’s this God—the Creator and Sovereign Ruler of all—who requires qualifications to approach him. And he has every right to do so. **He made us, so he can set the terms and conditions necessary to be in relationship with him.**
    - And they’re *not* arbitrary. The conditions I made up for approaching me are arbitrary. But God’s qualifications have good reason.
  
- ❖ **His qualifications are necessary if you want to approach God—a Holy God—in safety.** For unholy creatures like us, to approach a Holy God is deadly. **It’s like why there are qualifications for who can approach an activated MRI machine.** The machine is a huge, powerful magnet, so if there is any bit of metal in your body, you’re disqualified from getting close when it’s turned on. Doing so would be deadly. So complain all you want about the strict qualifications, but they’re there for your safety!
  
- ❖ Now imagine what it’s like to approach the Holy God. His holiness is like white-hot fire. **Instead of attracting sin like a magnet, it actually consumes sin like fire consumes stubble.** So if our hearts are tainted with even the slightest trace of sin, then we’re undone. If we approached the white-hot holiness of God, we’d be consumed.
  - **So there’s good reason why God would demand that only qualified people ascend his holy hill and approach his holy presence.** It’s for our own safety. Not just anyone can approach. It’s only for the qualified.

### What are the Qualifications Required to Approach?

- ❖ That leads to a second question. What exactly are these qualifications? **If the slightest taint of unholiness would be our undoing, then the qualifications to approach must be really high!** And not surprisingly, that’s what we see in vv3-4. *“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”*
  - V4 gives a list of qualifications to ascend this holy hill, but let’s not read it as an exhaustive checklist. Rather read it as a portrait of the kind of person that can safely approach the King of Glory. It’s summarized into four particular qualifications.
  
- ❖ **First, to approach the King of Glory we must have “clean hands.”** Clean hands refer to righteous actions. The word *clean* is translated elsewhere in Scripture as *innocent*—as in innocent blood. So to have “clean hands” means to have hands that are clean of innocent blood. It obviously means you haven’t murdered anyone, but it also means you’re not oppressing or injuring anyone. **Simply put, to have clean hands means that your behavior and treatment of others can be characterized as innocent (righteous).**

- ❖ **Second, to approach the King of Glory we must have “*pure hearts.*”** Now the attention is shifted inwards— to not just our actions—but our thoughts and motives. Because, if you try hard enough, you can keep your hands clean. But, all the while, still possess an impure heart.
  - I’m not surprised if many of us are good at keeping our hands clean. We know how to keep the rules so that, on the outside, we look innocent. If clean hands were the only qualification, some of us might have a chance of passing. But we can’t overlook the necessity of a blamelessly pure heart. That will disqualify us all.
  
- ❖ **Third, to approach the King of Glory we must not “*lift up our soul to what is false.*”** What’s in view here is our loyalty to him as King. To lift up one’s soul to someone or something means to trust that person or thing. Look at **Psalm 25:1-2**. “*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; O my God, in you I trust.*” So we’re to lift up our soul to God—to trust him!
  - But instead, we’ve lifted up our soul to what is false. Some translations say to an idol. Now just because you don’t have a shrine at home, doesn’t mean you’re in the clear. Idols aren’t just statutes of wood or stone. **Any person, position, or possession that replaces God as the object of our ultimate trust is a potential idol.** So when we lift up our souls to them and put our trust in them, we’ve disqualified ourselves.
    - **Fourth, to approach the King of Glory we must not “*swear deceitfully.*”** In other words, we must have complete integrity before God. So if we’ve pledged our exclusive loyalty to God, but then break that pledge by lifting up our soul to another—we’re disqualified!
  
- ❖ **So to sum it up, if we’re to approach the LORD, the King of Glory, we have to be perfect as he is perfect** (Mt 5:48). We need hands that are spotlessly clean, hearts that are blamelessly pure, loyalty to God that’s exclusive, and integrity before God that’s complete. We need to be perfect! And as our Creator, God has every right to make these demands. But remember these qualifications are for our good. Or else we’d be consumed by his holiness.
  
- ❖ **So who’s ready to ascend that holy hill? Who here is ready to stand in the holy place before a holy and righteous God?** I think I can speak for us all when I say, “Not I.” I’m not ready. None of us are ready. We all fall short of the standards. And we know it.
  - **Look, even if you don’t believe in God or don’t believe universal standards exist, you know you fall short of even your own standards.** Imagine if you had to wear a special recording device around your neck that was designed to capture any sentences out of your mouth that included the words “*you should / you must / you ought to.*”
  
- ❖ **Imagine at the end of a week we played back every imperative you made, every standard you placed on others. How would you measure up?** Even if we laid aside God’s standards and qualifications, I think you would admit that you fall short of even your own.
  - But since we have the Scriptures before us, we don’t have to just rely on our own standards and use our own qualifications. God has made his known. We must be as he is—perfect and righteous as he is.

## How Can We Attain These Qualifications?

- ❖ I know what you're thinking. **That standard is unreasonable. It's too high for any one of us to achieve.** We're fallen humans, prone to sin and error. *How can anyone attain these qualifications?* That's our third question. How can we be qualified to stand before God?
  - V4 has already disqualified every one of us. If the psalm stopped here, this would be the worse news ever. **But thanks be to God that the psalm continues with good news.** Look at vv5-6. *"He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob."*
  
- ❖ **These verses describe a man who is able to approach God. But notice how he's not relying on his own righteousness to ascend the hill.** In v6 he's described as part of the generation of those who seeks the face of God. And for so doing, v5 says, *"He will receive blessing from the Lord."* And not only that, he'll receive *"righteousness from the God of his salvation."* (Some translations say he'll receive *"vindication from God his Savior."*)
  - This is an example of parallelism—which is common in poetry—where the second line of a poetic stanza develops the idea introduced to us in the first. So the *blessing from the Lord* is being paralleled with *righteousness from God*.
    - **In other words, the blessing from the Lord is righteousness from God. And it's by this blessing—this gift of righteousness—that we'll be deemed qualified to ascend the hill.** That's what it means to be vindicated by God. It means he'll declare you righteous and qualified to approach him.
  
- ❖ This is the good news! **The qualifications we need to approach God—though they cannot be achieved by human effort—they can be received by a divine blessing of righteousness.** Available to all who seek the face of the God of Jacob. .
  - The mention of Jacob refers back to Genesis 32 where he wrestled all night long with the LORD—not willing to let go until he received a blessing. Finally at daybreak, the LORD blessed Jacob. And in morning light, he realized he'd been struggling with God, saw his face, and lived! So he named the place Peniel which means *face of God*.
  
- ❖ Like any sinner before God, Jacob deserved to die for his sins, but God spared him. And more than that, he blessed him! **In the same way, those who seek Peniel, the face of God—who hold fast to him by faith like Jacob—will not only be spared from his judgment but blessed with his righteousness.** With that gift we're vindicated. Christians are declared righteous in view of God's holy qualifications. And we're welcome to approach.
  
- ❖ **But how can God call me qualified when I have yet to do anything to meet those qualifications? How can he do that and remain just?** It doesn't seem right to vindicate unclean, impure sinners who lack both loyalty and integrity. **How can he justifiably declare sinners like us to be righteous when we're still so unrighteous?**

- ❖ The answer to these vexing questions is in vv7-10. **The imagery shifts from God the Holy Judge** (who declares sinners righteous, who deems the unholy qualified) **to the imagery of God the Warrior King** (who fights to ensure the reality of what he declares us to be).
- ❖ Throughout their history, Israel often found itself in bondage to other nations, which led the Israelites to cry out to God for rescue. And in mercy, he would save them. He would free them from their bondage. But think about it: **Did God just sit on his heavenly throne and make a royal declaration that Israel is free—while they suffered in chains?** Was his declaration of their freedom just a legal fiction with no grounding in reality?
  - No, the LORD, on many occasions, would come down as a Warrior King to fight on behalf of Israel. **He fought their battles to ensure the reality of what he declared them to be.** He not only called them *free*. He made sure they were.
    - **In the same way, it's not as if God merely calls us Christians *righteous* and *qualified*. No, he came down to make that a reality.**
- ❖ When commentators try to connect Psalm 24 to a historical event in David's life, they say he probably wrote it to commemorate the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. Which took place after God had defeated all their enemies. The story is found in 2 Samuel 6.
  - As David led the procession that day, you can just imagine him approaching the gates of Jerusalem, crying out in a loud voice, "*Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in.*"
    - And coming from inside the city gates, he heard a voice asking, "*Who is this King of Glory?*" And with a triumphant voice, David and the entire procession with him shouted, "*The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of Hosts – he is the King of Glory.*"
      - **And those words reminded the Israelites that they didn't achieve their freedom on their own.** It was the Lord of Hosts who fought for them to actually accomplish the reality of their freedom.
- ❖ **But as glorious as David's ascent on that day must've been, it only foreshadowed another day, when another man would make that same ascent.** A thousand years later, another man would approach the gates of Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. He would be welcomed by a throng of people shouting, "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" (Mt 21:9), causing the inhabitants of the city to ask themselves, "*Who is this?*" (Mt 21:11).
  - And on that day, the first day of the week before Passover—on *Palm Sunday*—he would ascend the hill of the Lord, enter the temple courts. And ironically, on that very day, the temple priests were leading worshippers in singing Psalm 24.
    - **And as they sang about the qualifications needed to ascend the holy hill and stand in the holy place, little did they know that the only man who has ever qualified to ascend by his own righteousness was standing there in their midst.**

- ❖ But instead of recognizing him as the rightful Messiah, they turned on him. They trumped up false charges and condemned him to death. And on the following Friday, they crucified him outside the city gates.
  - **But little did they know, that on the cross, the King of Glory, would accomplish his greatest victory.** On the cross, God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).
  
- ❖ And after Jesus was buried, on the third day, he rose victorious over sin and death. And then he ascended on high to the ancient gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem. And a multitude of angels and all the host of heaven sang on that day, *“Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in.”*
  - **The Lord Jesus—our Warrior King—returned home a victor.** He returned to his heavenly throne, where he awaits that coming day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
  
- ❖ **And on that day, every one of us will be presented before the King of Glory, and he’ll be looking for qualifications.** Many will stand condemned. Their mouths will be shut, and they’ll be cast from the King’s presence into outer darkness. But those who have put their trust in the King’s life, death, and resurrection will be mercifully spared.
  - **It’s only because our sins have been paid for by the King’s death. And the King’s righteous life has been credited to our account.** So we, who are in Christ, are declared “Not Guilty” for sin and at the same time “Qualified” to enter the kingdom.
  
- ❖ **And this declaration will be no a legal fiction, for the King has ensured the reality of what he declares us to be.** If the devil were to accuse and ask, “What about all your sin? Shouldn’t that bar you from God?” We can simply point to the cross and say, **“There it is. My sin is nailed to the place where Jesus died. The penalty is paid. It is finished.”**
  - And if the devil were to ask, “Where is all your righteousness? Don’t you need to be perfectly clean and pure, with perfect loyalty and integrity, if you want to approach God? Where are your qualifications?” We can point to heaven and say, **“There he is. Seated at the right hand of God. Jesus is my righteousness.”**
    - Through faith alone, Jesus *becomes* your righteousness. **He becomes your necessary qualifications to ascend that holy hill and stand before God.** That’s the gospel, the good news of Christianity.
  
- ❖ I’m not surprised if many of you are thinking: This is different. I’ve never heard this before. I never knew God requires qualifications. That he has these conditions and standards that must be met before you’re approved to approach him. **You feel like this is something new. But is that really true? I think, deep down, you already knew this.** You already knew that God has qualifications, whether you’ve ever thought deeply about it or not.

- ❖ It's why you often feel guilty and like you're not enough. **One of the struggles we all face is the fear that we're not good enough.** Recall how we don't meet our own standards, let alone God's. We're not as good of a student as we expected (or as our parents expected). We're not as good at our jobs as we pretend to be. We're not as good of a husband or wife or father or mother than we thought we'd be. We're not that good of a friend to others and not that good of a friend to God. **We thought that, by now, we'd be better people than we are.**
  - That's an uncomfortable thought. **And that's why we find ourselves living for the approval of others.** And to gain that approval, we perform. We perform to meet those standards and achieve those qualifications.
  
- ❖ So it's no surprise if you approach a relationship with God in the same way. **You try to perform to qualify yourself—to be good enough in his eyes. And when you eventually fail, it's tempting to either give up on yourself or on God.** You'll despair over yourself or you'll end up denying God.
  
- ❖ But let this gospel truth sink in. **If you're a Christian, remind yourself that Jesus came down to meet those standards and achieve those qualifications *for you*.** And by virtue of your union with him (the fact that you're hidden in him), Jesus is now *your* righteousness.
  - **That means when God looks at you, he doesn't see your sin but the sinlessness of his Son.** He doesn't see your disobedience but the obedience of Christ that qualifies you to safely approach the King of Glory.
  
- ❖ **If this truth sinks in, you'll no longer be living *for* God's approval but *from* his approval.** You'll be living with the confidence that he already approves of you *in Christ*. And then you'll have the proper and stronger motivation to pursue clean hands and a pure heart, to live a life of loyalty and integrity.
  - And you'll do it out of love. From a place of security, not fear. From a posture of peace, not anxiety. **Because you'll know, by faith, that you're fully qualified before God in Christ.** That's what this gospel truth can do in your heart and life.
  
- ❖ **And if you are not a Christian, I realize that, initially, you might be turned off to discover that God requires qualifications.** But truly, would you want anything less from him? Would you really want to serve a god who asks for no qualifications? A god whose standard of holiness is no greater than your own? Is that a god worth giving your life to?
  - Wouldn't you rather believe in a God who is utterly holy with the highest of standards; but who's so loving and merciful that he came down to live the life you should've lived and die the death you should've died; so that if you seek his face with your whole heart; he'll bless you and qualify you to live in relationship with him?
    - That's the God of Christianity. And he makes this blessing available to you today if you seek his face with a heart of faith.