

Tough and Tender Psalm 24

Psalm 24 is most likely a liturgical psalm, written for the participation of all present in Jerusalem when the Ark of the Covenant is brought back to Jerusalem during the events of 2 Samuel 6. We get to imagine this beautiful call-and-response with God's people, all joining together to celebrate the representative presence of the LORD returning to them. While the Ark of the Covenant would have been an awe-inspiring and moving relic, it's nothing compared to the God it represents; and that's what this Psalm reminded the Israelites, and reminds us of.

The verses in Psalm 24 point us to two infinitely perfect aspects of our incomparable God: His power and His love. I like to think that this Psalm paints the picture of God as tough and tender- themes we see throughout all of Scripture. Verses 1-2 and 7-10 celebrate the might and omnipotence of God. In verses 1 and 2, the earth was not only created by God, but it all belongs to Him- all of it...the mountains, the oceans, the nations, the governments. That includes us! We belong to God, whether as an enemy or an ally, but we are all still God's...nothing that happens is out of His control.

In verses 7-10, the moniker for God is "King of Glory," which is used five times in this call-and-response portion of the text. "King" connotes the ideas of reigning- of being in charge and ruling over something- in this case all of creation. "Glory," in this context, is a Hebrew word that means "weightiness" and connotes "heft." In other words, God is a King whose magnitude and power are worthy of praise in and of Himself- no other standard for righteousness and strength exists outside of God. He is described as "strong and mighty." These verses compel us to recognize the gravity and greatness of the God they were worshiping. [There are other important aspects to the term "glory" that relate to the initial instructions from God for building the Ark of the Covenant and the rest of the tabernacle trappings, but that's for another discussion.]

In verses 3-6, we see that the toughness of God, who is "mighty in battle," works hand-in-hand with his perfect tenderness. There is a calling in verses 3-4, 6 for someone who is worthy to stand in the presence of the holy God and receive "blessing" and "Righteousness" (v. 5). The qualifications for this duty are pretty steep and nigh unattainable for us creatures. At least, unattainable on our own. But notice that God is also called "God of his (our) salvation." We are not the author and creator of our own salvation...God is. God provided that for the Israelites through the sacrificial system, and He provides that for us today through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ. How much tougher do you have to be to sacrifice your own child for the salvation of the people who will time and time again reject him? Only God is tough enough to do that. Through belief in Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection, we are now able to "ascend the hill of the Lord" and "stand in his holy place." Just as Hebrews 6:19 says we can now "enter[s] into the inner place behind the curtain" because Jesus has placed his

righteousness on us. Praise the LORD that He alone has provided us the way to receive his blessings and righteousness.

We serve the Creator and Master of the universe, yet He has imbued His righteousness on us- creatures who by no means deserve it. Jesus ultimately fulfilled the foreshadowing of this Psalm in his returning to Jerusalem in Matthew 21. Just as the Ark, an earthly representation of God's glory returned to Jerusalem so intercession could be made by the priests for the people, so Jesus, God's corporeal presence on earth, came to Jerusalem to cheers and praises and worship so that he could die and make intercession for us eternally. And Jesus represented God with perfect obedience, fulfilling the qualifications of verses 3-6. When we believe in the death and resurrection of the incarnate God, God sees our filthy rags as His righteousness. As if we need more reason to hope and trust and exalt Him, what an amazing truth in which to find joy and rest.