

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 20, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 279, 44:3, 73, 64, 644.

Lessons: Daniel 7:9-14, Hebrews 9:11-15, Matthew 7:13-14.

Sermon Text: Psalm 24.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This is one of many Messianic Psalms which were written to prepare the believers of the Old Testament for his coming and to inspire the believers of the New Testament era also to welcome him – first at the celebration of his birth to redeem mankind and second at his coming to judge the living and the dead. As we look at this psalm, we can see several applications for the pictures here.

Some writers suggest that this Psalm was used for the solemn procession bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the tabernacle in David's time or into the temple Solomon built for it.

Another application fits, too. Because of the sin of all mankind, the gates of heaven are shut and locking out all of mankind. But because Christ atoned for all sin by his blood sacrifice, he had the right to enter heaven. And because he can enter, all his true followers can enter, too.

Another application can be made about the gates and doors of the human heart. Because of man's sinful nature, his heart rejects Christ. It is only through the Word of God that Christ can come into anyone's heart. We may apply it to Christ's entrance into the hearts of men by his Word and Spirit, so that they may become his temples. Christ's presence in them is like that of the ark of the covenant in the temple. It sanctifies them.

We may apply it to the ascension of Christ into heaven and the welcome given to him there. When he had finished his work on earth he ascended in the clouds to heaven. Our Old Testament lesson told us, in prophecy, of Daniel seeing Jesus Christ ***"coming with the clouds of heaven. [Daniel] approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."*** Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV) The gates of heaven must then be opened. Because our Redeemer by his blood made atonement for sin and gained the privilege to enter into the holy place, he can enter. As one having authority, as the forerunner, he has entered and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

We may also apply it to his second coming with glorious power. Although all these ideas can be found in applying this psalm, let's concentrate on the fact that

**THE GATES ARE OPENED!**

- 1. We see the power of the Lord God.**
- 2. The question is asked 'Who may approach him?'**
- 3. Because of what the Messiah did, the gates of the city of the Lord are open for you.**

Can there be any doubt about the power of the Lord God? ***"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."*** We believe, we accept as fact, that God founded – created – all things. He "owns" everything, if we can use that word which makes sense to us in a world where "ownership" is important. This is the Lord God. We also hear his only-begotten Son, the one whose coming to earth we celebrate soon, telling us that ***"All authority", ["All power"] in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*** Matthew 28:17-18 (NIV)

This introduction to the psalm is a reminder that God together with his Son the Messiah has all power and authority. And he is the one whom we are addressing and whom we want to approach in this Psalm.

Then the Psalmist asks a question: ***“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?”*** Who dares to approach and come near to such a powerful being as the Triune God? Of course, God’s only Son the Messiah, who was sinless, may certainly approach and stand in God’s holy place. And with him, all his genuine followers, all believers.

But not everyone may ascend and stand. Unbelievers and hypocrites, though they may be in the visible church, are not part of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. All mankind, believers and pagans alike should tremble in fear to approach one with such power and authority.

But the Psalmist then tells us who may dare to approach this all-powerful God. ***“He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.”*** Anyone with outwardly sinless clean hands may approach. External wicked actions prevent one from approaching. But just outward cleanliness isn’t enough. Purity of heart is essential. The one who wants to approach and enter must have ***“a pure heart”***. OK, when you remember what we learn from the commandments of God, that means we shouldn’t be able to approach this Supreme Being. But it is easy to think ‘I am not one who has worshipped an idol.’ ‘I am not one who has sworn by any false god.’ So we haven’t physically, outwardly bowed down to an idol? But the Psalm warns that the one ***“who does not lift up his soul to an idol”*** cannot approach. So you see that even the soul, the heart, the inner being must not have given any honor to any kind of idol. And you learned from the study of the First Commandment that many things can become idols: power, prestige, possessions, our abilities and talents, even the human body. We certainly do not have clean, sinless hearts, even though no one else may be able to see into our hearts. But remember that it is through the very life and death of the child who will be born in a stable in Bethlehem that we are made clean. Jesus always had clean hands and a pure heart. He never bowed down to an idol. In fact, he stood up to the very king of idols, Satan himself, during his lifetime. That is especially evident in the three major temptations recorded early in the Gospels, when Jesus was hungry in the wilderness.

Because His only-begotten Son had atoned for sin, God had declared all mankind clean and pure. This is justification. Because we have been washed in the blood of the Messiah we ***“may stand in his holy place.”*** By faith in him we receive the coat, the cloak, the cover, the robes of his righteousness and perfection.

But only the one who believes and accepts that in faith receives all the blessings of Jesus’ work. That person is the one who ***“will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior,”*** namely, the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, imputed to all believers and assuring them of their salvation.

Vindication is a word we don’t often use. It is often translated “righteousness”. It also means absolution, for that is what God did in justifying mankind. He forgave our sins, he absolved us. And of course because of that vindication, we receive many blessings from the Lord almighty, both earthly, temporal blessings and spiritual, eternal blessings.

Such blessings are ours because we belong to a people, a generation, who seek the face of the true God, the ***“God of Jacob.”*** Here we see a reminder that these blessings come upon those who are children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, both literal descendants and especially spiritual descendants. For most of us have no claim to the bloodlines of Jacob, but we are, by the working and grace of God, spiritual descendants, among the ***“generation”*** of those who seek the true God.

Then comes probably the best-known picture from this Psalm. ***“Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.”***

Many psalms were sung. In the case of this psalm, some words may have been sung antiphonally, and part of a choir, or group of singers would ask ***“Who is this King of glory?”*** Then others would answer: ***“The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.”*** It is repeated, just in case no one paid attention to it the first time.

We want the Lord of Glory to come into our hearts, and we want to be admitted to his kingdom in heaven.

The picture of gates being “lifted up” may be a bit hard to understand unless we think of a portcullis-type gate. Look at the picture on the last page of this sermon. This type of gate hangs by pulleys above the entrance and can be let down at any time to close up the city or the castle. When it is lifted up, and appears

above the head or top of the gate, then people – or a king and his followers can come in. This is a gate, which instead of opening like we usually think of doors, opens the gate to a castle by being lifted up, like we would see at the end of the ramp or bridge over the moat. It was raised and lowered, and here we see that it is to be raised.

The picture is that of a mighty host moving forward to take possession of Mount Zion, with a great King, who wants to enter the city, the congregation of the saints, at its head. The challenging cry rings out that the gates of Zion, of the spiritual Temple of the Lord, should lift up their heads, open up and make room for the entering of this great King.

The Messiah is eager to enter into the hearts of all those who will accept his love and mercy.

Just as we are to be admitted into God's kingdom, so we are to make preparations to admit such a grand king into our hearts. This king is the Messiah. He has conquered his enemies and brought salvation to Israel – and to Gentiles – to all men. It is theirs through faith.

Because we have been cleansed and our sins are washed away, the gates of the city are open. The gates of the city of the Lord are open for you. We can come in along with the King of Glory, the Lord almighty.

And because we have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, by the working of the Holy Ghost, we are welcome in the holy place, in the holy city, in the city of God, that is, the Holy Christian Church, the invisible gathering of believers.

The gates of the city are open and who is this King of glory? The answer is Jesus Christ.

Lord, just as you opened the gates of heaven to your followers washed clean with your blood, so, too, open the everlasting door of our souls by your grace, that we may now receive you in faith, and 'be wholly thine.'

May every heart be opened to Him in joyful welcome in order that He may enter in and abide throughout eternity, in the majesty of His greatness and in the beauty of His love.

We close with words from another psalm, Psalm 118: ***“Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.”*** Psalm 118:19-21 (NIV) Amen, yes, may it be so!

