

Psalm 24 – Who Shall Stand in God's Presence! (part 1 of 2)

INTRODUCTION – Christianity is so diluted today that the apostles would turn in their graves if they were to see who are calling themselves Christians today. The name "Christian" was first used in the city of Antioch in Acts 11:26. Today, it has little or no resemblance to that time. The Christians in Acts were fearless and totally devoted to Christ. They rejoiced when they were cast into prison and physically beaten for Christ's sake and remarked that "they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." (Acts 5:41) In stark contrast and to our shame, 21st Century Christians are softies and care more for self interests than the interests and glory of God. Furthermore, the falling away (i.e. apostasy) that the Lord spoke of in 2Thessalonians 2 is already before us. The last days are before us. The face of Christianity is evolving and becoming more and more like the Devil and less and less like Christ. This was prophesied and is inevitable. However, our testimony as truly born again believers should also be inevitable. The fact is that when the darkness gets darker, the light of Christ ought to shine brighter! Is this not the truth in science? How much more in the spiritual realm!

In times like these, true believers who are redeemed and privileged by God to stand in His holy presence must rise to the occasion and must not fail the Lord by cowering in fear and living in sin and carnality! The enemy of Christ and His true believers is stepping up in his evil deeds to deceive the world. There is no deception more deadly than falsifying the truth. Christianity has taken a beating on a global scale never seen before in the history of the Christian Faith. There are more false believers today than in any period of church history. Europe, the centre of the Christian faith in the time of the apostle Paul (the New Testament epistles were written to churches in Europe like Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica and Rome), is now nearly dead and faith is as dry as the desert sand. Then there was the second privilege given to Europe by God when the Sixteenth Century Reformation ignited Europe once again with the light of the gospel and the Truth! But alas! Europe died again spiritually. To find a sound and godly church of some size today is impossible. Britain was great when Christianity was vibrant and alive in her veins. But sadly, like neighbouring Europe she too died a spiritually death when her people rejected Christ. If there are any fundamental and conservative believers left in Britain, they are no longer a force to be reckoned with like in the days of Andrew Bonar (1810-1892), Robert M McCheyne (1813-1843), Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910), J Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) and Charles H Spurgeon (1834-1892). As an example, in the latest battle for the perfect Bible (the doctrine of VPP), there was not even one effective voice or article that defended the perfect Bible (which originated from Europe). The mighty USA used to be strong when Christianity was alive and vibrant but she is also dying, or rather, drowning in her own spiritual vomit. There is more doctrinal nonsense originating from America than ever before. Theistic evolution, neo-evangelicalism, charismaticism, are a few of such nonsense that originate from America. These are deadly spiritual diseased teachings that have crept into practically every seminary that is of some size and significance in America. Such spiritual decay has affected the world because of the internet. Many who call themselves believers are nothing more than people who profess to be believers.

Where can we find true fundamentalist Christianity on this earth today? Many professing believers presume that they will stand in the presence of God and will be received by Him with open arms and hear Him say to them "well done my good and faithful servants!" Frightfully and sadly, many will find themselves rejected and cast out of the presence of God and into Hell (Matt 7:15-23)!

It is of the utmost importance that no one should take his/her salvation for granted as if he/she is definitely going to enter into the kingdom of God and will stand in His holy presence accepted. Thank God for Psalm 24 which reveals to us who shall stand in the presence of God! This is very needful today in this spiritual climate of falling away! David wrote this psalm. The occasion when this psalm was written is not revealed.

I. THE IDENTITY IDENTIFIED --- vv 1-2 – Not all creatures created by God can stand in His presence accepted. This is especially true when it comes to those who have fallen into sin. Angelic beings that sinned against God do not have salvation. The moment they surrendered their place in heaven by sinning against God, they have remained in a state of condemnation for eternity. They cannot be restored back to their state of holiness. However, this is not so for man. The earth belongs to the LORD. All that are in the earth also belong to Him. Therefore, all are under His sovereign domain and are accountable to Him. The LORD can do whatever He wants to all on earth.

Verse 1 is a synonymous parallelism with an emphasis on the domain in which the LORD says He is the Owner! The ones who can stand in the presence of the LORD and be accepted by Him will come from the earth.

Verse 2 (synonymous parallelism) – The basis for this ownership is that the LORD is the One who founded it, i.e. set it upon the seas. He established or erected it upon the floods. The manner in which the earth rose from the seas when God created the land mass on the third day reveals that stupendousness of God's creation. From that point onwards, the LORD began to fill the earth and it climaxed in the creation of man.

As Creator, the LORD can do whatever He wants to whatever He has made. He can destroy it or He can save it. This doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God is hated by sinful man. Sinful man has never ceased to deny this truth. They have tried in vain throughout thousands of years to obliterate God from this domain that He has founded and established. Man tried to replace God by worshipping gods made by the hands of man. However, God patiently endured this insult and gave man a "second chance" by destroying man with water in the days of Noah so that man could start all over again. This second new beginning was different from the first beginning. In the first beginning, when God created man's first parents Adam and Eve, they were created perfect and placed in a perfect environment. However, in the second new beginning after the flood, God said that man's heart was still evil from his youth even though the flood waters cleansed the earth of all idolatry and the wickedness of men. The LORD reduced the average age of man from 900 years to 80 years to reduce the opportunities of sin and the ruination of this earth. Sadly, man continued to replace God with

the worship of idols. In the so called age of "enlightenment" (17th and 18th Century AD) mankind improved their standards of living greatly. Modernity became the way of life. With technological advancement, man filled themselves with pride and sinned even more. Just when we thought that man's depravity could not get any worse, so-called science taught to remove God as Creator and substituted Him with a new god called "chance"! This alleged scientific truth (which is nothing more than mere speculation) has powerfully captured the imagination of mankind so much that many countries, which used to be immersed in God's truth, are now the greatest attackers of God's truth!

Yet the LORD did not destroy man but says here that out of this sin-filled earth, some will be allowed to stand in His holy presence. What a patient and gracious God!

II. THE CRITERIA DESCRIBED – vv 3-4 – Who from the earth can ascend up to the hill of the LORD, i.e. heaven? This is definitely a reference to salvation, for no one can approach God in their sins. Out of all God's creation in the earth, only man qualifies. The beasts of the field, the fowls of the air and the fish of the sea cannot sin as they do not have a will of their own. They will not go to heaven and are not the LORD's focus in Psalm 24. Only human beings can go to heaven. Using synonymous parallelism in verse 3, God asks if any man can stand in His presence in heaven. Heaven is a holy place. The hill of the LORD is a holy place. Only the holy ones can enter.

Man is in a state of sin the moment he begins to exist in his mother's womb. This is revealed to us in Psalm 51:5. This is evidenced in the fact that we all die. Babies die because they are also in sin. As long as man does not live eternally, he is a sinner; for the penalty of sin is death! Aging and sickness are part and parcel of this evidence that we are sinners. God could easily allow us to live healthy lives and then suddenly we drop dead where we are; but He is merciful. He allows us to fall sick to inform us that we are sinners. Therefore, those who acknowledge that they are sinners will humble themselves because they know they cannot save themselves. They will turn to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Sickness is a very effective tell-tale sign that all mankind are sinners. How can man stand in the presence of God in their sinful state? The holiness of God will not allow it. In order for sinful man to enter heaven and stand in God's holy place, they have to get rid of all their sins permanently. Not only must they get rid of all their sins, they must never sin again the moment they enter heaven or they would be cast out! Their good works or manmade righteousness will not suffice because they are considered as filthy rags in the sight of a holy God (cf. Isaiah 64:6). If God wants anyone to enter heaven and stand in His holy place, then God Himself has to provide a way! His standard is beyond man's ability.

Verse 4 (synthetic parallelism) – The one who has clean hands and a pure heart may enter. This means he is one who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, i.e. idolatry or anything worthless, nor sworn deceitfully. One who lifts up his soul to idolatry is one who serves idols or anything that is worthless. All things on this earth are worthless and are considered idols if the person serves them. He is serving them when he lives or dies for them. These would have to include his family. His children could also be his idols if he serves them. They would be part

of the term "vanity" because the parent child relationship does not last and family is not God! Anyone who lives only for family does not have clean hands and a pure heart and has a heart of sin and will not be good enough to enter heaven.

To swear deceitfully points to our words. He is a person whose words are filled with lies. He does not keep his word. He says one thing and does another. All of us are guilty of this heinous sin. Liars will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (Rev 21:8). This means that lying is not a small matter. Deceivers may even speak words in the name of God but their words cheat others and lead them to the path of death or destruction. Deceivers at the top of the list would include false pastors who preach the health and wealth gospel. They deceive their congregation by telling them that they will go to heaven and God is pleased with their lives when they love money and serve money. These false pastors cloak their evil of greed for filthy lucre with a garment of holiness and charm thousands to walk on the broad road till the day they die and enter into the broad gate which leads them to destruction. By then, it will be too late and these poor sinners will spend eternity in Hell.

The only ones who can have clean hands and pure hearts are the ones who have truly repented of their sins through Christ Jesus because they know that Jesus died for their sins and rose from the dead for their justification. Their only reason for believing in the Jesus Christ of the Bible is because of their sins and nothing else. They have bankruptcy of spirit in their soul. They come to Christ for no other reason than the fact that Jesus took their place and died on their behalf. By faith they confess their sins to God and unconditionally accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour and promise to serve Him all their days till they are called home to glory. They love the Word of God for they know in their hearts that the Word of God is the milk and meat to their hungry and thirsty souls. They meditate and obey the Word of God for it is a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path. They live a holy life like their God. They are holy not just when they arrive in heaven but they are already holy while they live on earth testifying of God's grace and mercy in their lives through Christ Jesus.

These are the ones who have clean hands and pure hearts. It is evidenced by their lives.

[to be continued]
