
Ministry Memo

Who Shall Ascend?

(Meditations from Psalm 24)
by Richard A. Bennett

In Psalm twenty four verse three, King David poses two rhetorical questions: *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?* and *Who shall stand in His holy place?* We notice that the first of these questions did not conclude with the phrase, *Who shall ascend?*

In spite of his tumultuous life, King David continued with a nobler ambition than that of mere worldly success. He desired to ascend into the hill of the Lord and to stand in His holy place. However, in verse four, David must have recognized that, of himself, his noble desire was unobtainable. Such a person must have *clean hands, and a pure heart; someone who has not lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.* And by that very definition David had failed on all four counts!

Descend [honest confession]

CLEAN HANDS: What of David's hands when he sought to gain Michal as his bride?

When Michal, Saul's second daughter, fell in love with David, Saul again saw a way to have David killed. Borne out of deep-rooted jealousy of David—about whom the whole country was singing the latest pop song: *Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands* (1 SAMUEL 18:7), Saul devised a devious plan. To gain David's confidence for his intended proposal, Saul excused the usual dowry to give Michal to David for his wife.

However, the sting of this cunning proposition was in the tail! David must bring to Saul *a hundred foreskins of the Philistines* (see 1 SAMUEL 18:25). He reasoned that in David's attempt to meet this bloody demand, David would be killed by the Philistines. But, for the coveted prize of his desired bride to be—Michal; the mighty conqueror slew two hundred Philistines. Thereby David doubled Saul's inhumane demand for his daughter.

David — Do you have CLEAN HANDS? — Certainly not!

PURE HEART: How about David's encounter with Nabal?

When Nabal's men needed the right of passage through David's territory, David willingly obliged. Now, by way of return, David needed some of Nabal's super-abundance of sheep to feed his men. However, Nabal, a churlish man, refused his request with sarcastic insults and David became very angry!

So, in an act of revengeful aggression, David set his face to plunder Nabal's sheep on Mount Carmel. Thankfully, with great wisdom, Nabal's wife Abigail dissuaded David from his

intended plunder by saying, *but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God* 1 SAMUEL 25:29.

David — Is your HEART PURE? — Certainly not!

HAS NOT LIFTED UP HIS SOUL TO VANITY:

David, what about Bathsheba?

Saul was now dead. At Hebron the men of Judah *anointed king David over the house of Judah* (see 2 SAMUEL 2:4). Later *all the elders of Israel came to the King at Hebron before the Lord and they anointed David as king over Israel* 2 SAMUEL 5:3. What an honor God bestowed upon David. He was now king of both Judah and Israel.

When in exile, David the warrior prevailed. But when on the throne, David the monarch failed. Like David, in our day many believers find it is much easier to direct a battle from the palace than it is for them to go to the battlefield themselves! And so it was with David. No longer in the fray of battle, he bemused on his roof-top. As he gazed upon an indiscreet and unclad married woman he coveted this wife of another man. Soon the bubble of sin's pleasure burst. Now, as an adulterer, David plotted a denial of his relationship with Bathsheba. Accordingly, one sin led to another and, for cover-up, he murdered Bathsheba's husband—Uriah. *And the thing that David had done displeased the Lord* 2 SAMUEL 11:27.

Yes, David's soul had been lifted up to vanity. Now with secret sin hidden in his heart, further demonstrating his vain life-style, David proceeded to piously and hypocritically pose as a defender of the rights of the oppressed and poor (see 2 SAMUEL 12:1-6). His hypocrisy continued until Nathan—with a megawatt shock—cried to King David: *Thou art the man!*

David — Have you lifted your soul to VANITY? — Sadly, yes.

NOR SWORN DECEITFULLY? David, what about Ziklag?

Before Saul died he again sought to take David's life. For self-preservation David fled to the Philistine country, there to find shelter for himself and his 600 men. They deceived their enemies and deceptively claimed allegiance to the Philistines. This trickery worked for one year and four months as Achish provided refuge for all of them.

Today, we would call David a double agent! Living by his wits, he plundered and totally wiped out these Philistine settlements. When Achish later enquired of David as to where

he obtained his booty, David blatantly lied: *the south of Judah*, he said (see 1 SAMUEL 27:1-12).

David — Have you SWORN DECEITFULLY? — Yes, you have.

IS THERE STILL HOPE?

Let us now read the next verse in Psalm 24. In spite of tragic personal failure, David humbly continued to seek his Lord. The Amplified Bible helpfully renders verse six: *This is the generation [description] of those who seek Him....who seek Your face [O, God of] Jacob. Selah [pause, and think about that!]* So let us do just that, and together with David, think about the God of Jacob. If we follow David's example, we too will find hope in spite of our failure.

The remembrance of any failures in our lives can do one of two things. They can lead us to despair and to a sense of hopelessness, or, they can lead us to rebound as we meditate upon the grace and mercy of the God of Jacob.

Consider JACOB:

After 20 years in exile, Jacob returned to his own land. At that time he was not in control of his life. Up to that point he had been a manipulative and tenacious man living by his wits. Now, during that memorable night at Peniel he met God in a new and life-transforming way.

Slowly and surely God brought Jacob to an end of himself. As he reflected upon his past manner of life he was *ashamed* and cried unto God: *I am not worthy of the least of Thy mercies* GENESIS 32:10. Now, *Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a Man with him until the breaking of day* GENESIS 32:24. And on that life-transforming night, facing a foreboding future, *Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed* GENESIS 32:7. Ashamed! Alone! Afraid! What a plight to be in. But from heaven's redemptive view point, God saw that this was to be Jacob's night of all nights—the night when at last he would become a broken man.

How about you? If past mistakes, failures, or sin leap to your memory when you are alone at night; and if with Jacob your future appears to be uncertain or even foreboding, remember Jacob—the heel catcher and how he became Israel—governed by God!

At Peniel, Jacob came to the end of everything that his name had implied—the end of living by his wits, by his human resourcefulness, and, by his manipulative ways. Now, for one long night he wrestled—whether it was with a man; or an angel; or a demon; or, with God Himself, he knew not. But by daybreak Jacob realized that he was wrestling with God Himself. This Christophany of the Lord Jesus exclaimed: *Let me go for the day breaketh*. But, with his usual self-will, Jacob retorted: *I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me* GENESIS 22:36.

That night, as Jacob came to the end of his resources and manipulative skills, God graciously: *touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank* GENESIS 32:32. And said: *Thy name shall be called no more Jacob* [heel catcher]

but Israel [governed by God] *for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men and hast prevailed* GENESIS 32:28. From then forth, Jacob *limped upon his thigh* (GENESIS 32:31) and with every step he took would learn to say to His Lord: “I can't” – “You can”: “I can't” – “You can.” Now, broken and blest, Jacob was to leave Peniel as a man of destiny with a new purpose and power.

The Genesis record of this wonderful event in Jacob's life might cause us to think that it was the determination and the tenacity of Jacob that God blessed in such a marvelous way. **But that was certainly not the case!** In the book of Hosea we find the key as to why God blessed Jacob at Peniel.

Quoting again from the Amplified Bible, we read Jacob *had power with the Angel [of the Lord] and prevailed; HE WEPT AND SOUGHT HIS FAVOR* HOSEA 12:4. Yes, Jacob wept and sought God's favor. **He did not prevail because of his determination but because of his brokenness.** As a desperate man he wept and, in effect, begged the Lord: “Please, please bless me. Without Your *favor* I have no hope.”

Therein is the secret for each of us. Not until, at the Cross of Christ, we become desperate at the futility of our self-life—of our own manipulative skills; our own personal resources or resourcefulness; and our own human schemes and programs—not until then will we enter into a step by step dependence upon our Risen Lord. And it is only **by His enabling** that we will experience: *power with God and power with men*. No wonder in Psalm 24 David found great comfort in reflecting upon “the God of Jacob”!

So let us return to Psalm 24. As with Jacob so with David. Yes, Jacob's God was David's God—Yahweh. And today David's God is our God. Wonderful!

In David's prayer of humble confession, he too recognized that the way to blessing was through the door of brokenness. In his prayer of confession he said: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise* PSALM 51:17. Like Jacob, David too became a broken man. Praise God, later, he was able to say: *For Thou has delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling* PSALM 116:9.

Yes, because of David's confession and brokenness, Solomon later testified of his father: *Thou hast shown great mercy unto my father David* 2 CHRONICLES 1:8. And when preaching at Antioch, the Apostle Paul declared: *And when [God] had removed [Saul] He raised up unto them David to be the king to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David, a man after Mine own heart* ACTS 13:22. Yes, in spite of David's failures God called him: **A MAN AFTER HIS OWN HEART.**

And still today we know—that although brokenness is not a popular theme in the pulpits—if we are to ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place, we must first descend to the foot of the Cross! And there, God does not look upon our sin and failure but upon the completed work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ascend [in Christ]

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

When David asked as to who could ascend and who could stand in God's holy place, he was about to accompany the Ark of the Covenant up the steep rugged hill into Jebus now known as Jerusalem or Mount Zion. There is incredible symbolism in that Ark of the Covenant.

Jebus had been a defiant little city on a 300 acre rugged piece of real estate that had long defied the advances of Joshua's armies. Now, through King David, God had fulfilled His promise to Moses: *And the Lord thy God, will put out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee* DEUTERONOMY 7:22,23. And so, Jebus was finally conquered by David's army!

Now, all that remained was for the Ark of the Covenant to be transported up the long steep hill to the place of God's appointment. Historians tell us, that before the exuberant procession ascended the hill to Jerusalem, David, awaiting the construction of the Temple, had already assembled the Tabernacle there. This Tabernacle, with its "Holy Place," was awaiting the glorious arrival of the Ark.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee commented: "If only those who are able to ascend the hill of the Lord are those who have 'clean hands' and 'a pure heart' and those 'who have not lifted up their souls unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully': then, I guess I will not be there. But I am going to be there because I am going to be there **in Christ!**"

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE ARK

Although the full significance of the Ark's typology goes far beyond the following brief comments, the Ark consisted of two golden cherubims; a golden mercy seat beneath which was a rectangular wooden box overlaid with gold and in it very significant artifacts (see EXODUS 25:10-22).

In Hebrews 9:4, we read: *and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant.* Let us briefly consider the contents which were carried under the mercy seat. Each was a beautiful type of the ministry and Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. They speak of the Provision of God; the Priest of God; and the Purity of God.

The PROVISION of God: *The golden pot that had manna.*

This manna anticipated the coming of the Lord Jesus—the true Bread of Life. With five barley loaves and two small fishes He miraculously fed 5,000 men plus women and children. Later He told His followers: *I am the bread of life . . . Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are*

dead . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat this bread he shall live for ever JOHN 6:31,49,51. The miracle manna given by God in the wilderness—a sample of which was in the Ark—foreshadowed the life-giving provision of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The PRIEST of God: *Aaron's rod that budded.*

This rod *was to be kept for a sign* NUMBERS 17:10.

God had chosen Aaron to: *minister unto Me in the priest's office* EXODUS 28:1. But the children of Israel murmured against Aaron. To vindicate that God called Aaron to his priestly ministry, the Lord commanded the prince of each tribe to inscribe their name upon a dead rod. These twelve dead rods were then left overnight in the Tabernacle of the Congregation. In the morning, the name on the rod that came to life verified God's appointed priest. It was: *the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi that budded* NUMBERS 17:8. This cherished rod was kept in the Ark of the Covenant. It spoke of life out of death!

This is an amazing picture of God's Great High Priest—the Lord Jesus Christ. He conquered death and rose triumphantly from the grave and *ever liveth to make intercession for us* HEBREWS 7:25.

The PURITY of God: *The tables of the covenant.*

These were the stone tablets that God *gave unto Moses . . . two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God* EXODUS 31:18. When Moses first came down from the presence of the LORD on Mount Sinai and saw the children of Israel engaged in an orgy of idolatry, opulence and moral abandon, he deliberately broke the first two stones tablets upon which the ten commandments were etched. But, in His great mercy, the LORD replaced them. The second tables of the covenant were to be kept in the Ark.

When the Lord Jesus Himself came down from heaven, He—the Law-giver—became the only Man who had ever been a law-keeper! It was of the perfect Man, Christ Jesus, that His Father declared: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him* MATTHEW 17:5. No, our blessed Savior never broke one jot or tittle of the Law! He said: *Think not that I am come to destroy the law . . . I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill* MATTHEW 5:17.

So, just as the bread in the Ark speaks of our Savior's life-giving **provision**; and just as Aaron's rod that budded speaks of our Great High **Priest**; so, the second set of tablets of stone that were carried in the Ark, speak of God's imputed and imparted righteousness—the **purity** that can alone be found in JESUS.

Yes, it was because of JESUS, who was to be born later at Bethlehem [and typified by the Ark] that David could hilariously ascend the hill to Mount Zion with praise and joy. And so today, because of the Finished Work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross—typified by the mercy seat on the Ark—we can now enter *His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise* PSALM 100:4.

For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God

COLOSSIANS 3:3. Yes, *IN CHRIST*: His death became our death; His resurrection became our resurrection; and, His ascension is our ascension into the heavenlies. For *God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love by which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath [made us alive] together with Christ (by grace are ye saved). And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus* EPHESIANS 2:4-6.

**In Christ, I died,
In Christ, I rose,
In Christ, I triumphed o'er my foes,
In Christ, in heaven, I took my seat
And heaven rejoice at hell's defeat.**

The King of Glory Shall Come In

(VERSE 7)

It was a dark dismal day. Long before dawn an old yellow Volkswagen Beetle pulled up to our door. I was to be taken to the local satellite airport in Bellingham. As the wind-shield wipers clicked back and forth to keep visibility clear I thought to myself: "What a nasty day this is!"

At the Airport, the loud speaker system told those of us who were waiting to go to Seattle that the plane was boarding. Dashing through the wind and rain, we passengers clambered into the ten seat airplane. Soon the pilot announced: "This is a British built plane and is very fuel efficient—but I have to warn you, it is also very noisy!" With a roar of the engines, and with clothes still soggy from the mad dash to the plane, we roared down the runway. As the rain pelted upon the window pane, I thought to myself, "The pilot was certainly right about the noise of this engine—what a nasty day it is!"

But, as we penetrated the cloud ceiling the morning sun was just peeping over the eastern horizon. Slowly God's great ball of fire came into full orb. In so doing, the pillowy white clouds beneath us were bathed in the splendor of golden and silver rays. "What a lovely day to be alive," I thought. Now I was viewing the day from a totally different perspective!

Two thousand years ago, the gates of heaven joyfully welcomed the Man, Christ Jesus as He arrived back HOME. *He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight* ACTS 1:9. And because of His triumphant victory, we have been *delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son* COLOSSIANS 1:13. Hallelujah!

Who is the King of glory? asked David and the answer came: *The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle . . . the Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah* PSALM 24:8,10. So let us again stop and think about that. Yes, the risen Lord is *Mighty in battle!*

The Lord Jesus entered heaven's gates having conquered Satan. It was through death that He *destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil* HEBREWS 2:14. But now the conquering Christ has also taken up His abode in the believer's heart. Wonderful!

Because in Christ we have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son, God has promised: *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly* ROMANS 16:20.

So ours is not to fight a fight that is lost. Ours is to enjoy a victory that is irrevocably won! That victory was won on the Cross when the Lord Jesus Christ shouted: *IT IS FINISHED*.

Although our physical body still places its feet on planet earth, the fact is, that in the Body of Christ, we have already been transported into the heavenlies. And, by His Spirit, the Lord Jesus has already come to live in the believer's heart. So where do you direct your affections and thoughts? Are they directed below the clouds to this world's system and the problems of life, or, are they directed above the clouds to Him who has won the victory and now sits upon His throne?

When Peter stepped out of the boat on the sea of Galilee, and the waves threatened to drown him. These were the very waves that were already under the Savior's feet. So when Peter lifted his eyes away from the threatening waters and looked to the face of his Master, the waves that were under the Savior's feet were also under his feet! When stormy clouds and threatening waves surround your life, you too can look to the Savior and triumph in Christ. Yes, we are alive in Him and, wonder of wonder, He is also alive in us! As Paul testified to the Galatians: *I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*

For Jacob: It was his brokenness that led to a life of dependent faith that opened the way to incredible blessings.

For David: It was brokenness and rebound that was his prelude to becoming a man after God's own heart.

For us: It is all of the above as He ministers through us to seek and save precious lives. **Amen!**