

Psalm 24  
Ephesians 1:3-14  
July 14, 2024

## We Should Listen

“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.”

Thus begins the 24th psalm. The psalm previous is perhaps the most well known of them all. It begins, “the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” and ends, “surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein,” is also one of the great and memorable lines from the psalter, overshadowed a little bit by the greatness of the words that precede it, but memorable enough, and very powerful.

The lesson taught is not easily learned. It is submerged into the depths of human nature, especially in the present age of human accomplishment, to deny its truth; and to believe, in at least a de facto sort of way, that the earth belongs to humanity to do with as it pleases, and that there is no aspect of it that humanity cannot, will not one day master.

Even those such as we who believe that the bible is a sacred message from God, struggle to accept the

implications of God’s ownership over the world. It is an offense to human pride, to the indomitable belief that there is no unsolvable problem, no task beyond human strength and skill, no unscalable height.

The snow has temporarily melted on the world’s highest mountain to reveal that over the last 70 years of people scaling it, their garbage has been left, as well as the bodies of the deceased; even the heights are not beyond human disfiguring.

But the words of this psalm and the lessons taught are halting, they make us hesitate, and serve as a reminder that even the heights themselves belong to God, and are higher than the earth’s tallest peaks, and only those with pure hearts, only those who do not lift their souls to idols may ascend.

The immediate affect of such a proclamation is humility, a de-cleating of sorts, a bringing down a notch or two of human pride, perhaps even a humiliation where it is appropriate. There is also, however, a more long-term result. For once a person is taken off their pedestal in their own mind and heart, another truth is revealed, and that truth is that the person is loved, and accepted, in fact, chosen by the very God who is the Lord of life.

One of the best expressions of this latter truth has been read in our presence today, and comes from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. The theology represented here is high, and should be treated with reference, but can be the source of contention among

believers. Any time one hears the term, “predestination,” there are bound to be disagreements among the faithful. Yet the meaning is clear enough that one can be assured of *God’s* faithfulness.

“For God chose *us* in him (Jesus) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight . . . to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.”

The way the world is often viewed, from a human perspective, one would not easily reach, either the conclusion that it belongs to God, or that the faithful *believe* that it is the Lord’s domain. While the experience of many people, probably the majority of people by far, is good enough that humility and gratitude are forthcoming, there is enough trouble and disorder in the world to question the bold claim of this psalm and of this letter.

Along with the continued struggle among human beings against poverty, and war, and disease, and injustice, there is a great deal of trouble that comes from a seeming conflict with nature itself; heat waves and hurricanes, earthquakes and volcanoes, floods and droughts, pestilences and cyclones, and the suggestion that human behavior adds to the trouble.

And there is always the threat of either not being able to “attain the dream,” or losing what sense of order and goodness that we have. This vulnerability is at the center of the public discourse; and at the center of the unrest that seems so common.

As I try to mention often, we do well, when we read the bible, to remember that when these words were first written and read, it was into a world such as ours, with as much vulnerability and disorder and strife as we know, and as much violence.

So this message comes from a place and time as troubled as our own, and that is all the more reason to listen to it now. It is always on my mind, a question once asked by a young person, “why do we read the bible, a book written by people who thought the earth was flat?”

They also had no knowledge of Newtonian Calculus, Evolutionary Biology, or Einsteinian Physics, or for that matter binary code, digital technology, and artificial intelligence. They didn’t know how to make an internal combustion engine run or create machines that could fly. But her question has never been mine. Conversely, I have a bone to pick with her question. She overestimates the value of this knowledge.

Perhaps our bone to pick with all this latter day knowledge is not so much its correctness as its importance. Maybe the folks who under divine inspiration gave us these scriptures had been around the block enough times to know about the truly important things, enough to listen to the “still small voice.”

When they tell us that the most important commandment is the love of God with the whole being, and the love of neighbor as the self; when they

tell us that there is a rule for living that is golden, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” we should listen to them. They reveal that they know more than at first look seems apparent.

And when they characterize the rise and fall of kingdoms and civilizations as irrelevant to the work of God in the world, and not to put our trust in kings and princes, presidents and prime ministers, we should listen. When they tell us that there will be opposition and that even persecution is a part of the life of genuine faith, we should listen, and not be deterred.

And when, as Paul does in his beginning statements in Ephesians, they tell us about God’s decision, even before creation, to redeem the whole world by sheer grace, a free gift given in love, and that we are heirs of that gift . . . we should listen.

When Paul tells us not to worry about anything but to pray about everything and that the peace of Christ will reign in our hearts, and that we can rejoice greatly no matter what looks like it is happening in our lives or in the world because God has decided in *our* favor, and let me say, not just *our favor*, but when they tell us that God loves the world, the human race - - *we should listen*.

And when they tell us that all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the whole world and all the people in it, belong to the Lord; and the outcome of all that is confusing in our lives and in the world is established by the promise (the gift), and when they

tell us that we are not compelled to knowledge, but to *faith*, we *should listen*.

And let that listening do its work in us, transforming our anxiety into a strong faith, changing the way we see our neighbors, as God’s beloved rather than as adversaries to be threatened by and reckoned with, even the ones that frighten us most, because God’s power is greater than any human power we know, including the power of human knowledge.

In the next few weeks, the epistle readings will come from Ephesians, as it has today, but next week it is on to chapter 2, so today let me conclude by reading excerpts from a text that is skipped over, from the latter part of chapter 1, because it continues Paul’s train of thought, and exhorts us to keep faith, it is his prayer (1:17-23);

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” Amen.

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