

The Advent Invitation: Open Your Heart to the Lord.

Text: Psa 24

Suggested Hymns:

498, 1, 5, 18, 7

1) To Receive the King of Glory

2) To Benefit Through His Blessings

3) To Reconsecrate To His Service Invite King Jesus In

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 24:1-10, *The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. ² For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters. ³ Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?*

⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. ⁵ He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶ This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face. Selah

⁷ Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. ⁹ Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A Christians we deplore the crass commercialism that has been associated with Christmas. We are saddened because a good deal of popular sentiment connected with Christmas has become mere profit and sentimentality. It is so difficult to keep Christ in Christmas. But we do not at all regret that Christmas is given so much attention, nor do we deplore the fact that preparations for Christmas are made so far in advance.

The truth is that Old Testament believers waited for Christ's coming more than 4,000 years, and for more than 1,500 years the Christian church has been

observing at least a four-week preparation for the festival of the Nativity of our Lord, which we call Christmas.

In the four weeks of Advent the Christian world has for centuries been seeking to alert its total membership to the joy that is awaiting her in the Manger Child of Bethlehem and to let the whole world in on the joy that came to men with His coming.

Advent means coming, and during the Advent season the church in effect begins to inch forward, quietly and reverently and penitentially to approach the manger of the Christ of God.

Of course we know that Christ has come. Of course we are aware that He is even now with us, for *“in Him we live and move and have our being,”* as we are told in Acts 17:28. Of course we know that Jesus always blesses us with His presence in the Word and the sacraments.

Yet we wait and look and hope as the drama of redemption is unfolded before us and every avenue of approach to our soul is rightfully made into a proper entry for a message of the coming of Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

This happens through our ears, in the reading of the sacred texts of prophecy and fulfilment and in sacred poetry celebrating these Scriptures, just as the best of sacred music for Advent and the Christmas Season causes our hearts to sing.

This happens through our eyes, as we seek opportunity to show love to God by showing love to those who are closest and dearest to us.

This happens through our nose, as we smell the pine from an Advent wreath, or smell the odour of lighted candles, one additional candle lighted for each succeeding week in Advent.

This happens through our mouth, as the traditional Christmas goodies are baked to add festivity to the season ahead, and to keep alive traditions that were handed down from our parents and grandparents.

This happens through our hands, as we lay hold of numerous tasks, not the least of which are the works of love and service that we do to others because we are people who put their trust in a Lord who gave His all for us.

Penitential and reflective is this season of Advent. That is why it is associated with the sombre colour of violet, for we are sinners, sinners who are

desperately in need of a Saviour. To us as sinners, then, comes the admonition on this very first Sunday in Advent, the beginning of a new church year, to heed *The Advent Invitation: Open Your Heart to the Lord*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Open Your Heart to the Lord To Receive the King of Glory

The worship of ancient Israel had one purpose: to sense the presence of the Lord God. While there was much pageantry connected with their worship, while there was great music and much that appealed to the senses, it wasn't sentimental attachment that formed the core of the worship of God's people, nor was it beauty for beauty's sake — they longed for contact with God.

People were lifted up out of the routine of their daily life and brought into communion with God. There was a genuine experience of encounter with God in His majesty; the Lord of nature and the Controller of the universe and of all history consented to take up His abode in a temple that had been made by their hands.

Then their high priest, having made atoning sacrifices for his own sins, came into the Holy of Holies to intercede for them as blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat as expiation for their sins. The thick cloud hovering over the mercy seat was indication of Jehovah's presence.

Although the Jews prayed wherever they lived, and after the Exile they particularly established synagogues for their weekly worship and for the daily instruction of their children, Jerusalem and the temple remained as the concrete symbol of God's habitation on the earth. In a special way God dwelt in there.

In the temple is where the dispersed Israel sensed a unity that bound them together in the Lord. Here the past and the future met in an ever-reassuring present, and to them Moriah, the hill on which the temple was built, meant that their God was at hand.

There they planned to make their confession, there they hoped to receive forgiveness, there they paid their vows and made their resolutions, there life received meaning for them.

This intense longing for Jerusalem and for sensing the presence of the Lord is essential to an understanding of the psalm chosen today, and of its Advent invitation: *Open your heart to the Lord.*

The Lord is a sovereign Lord and a Creator God. He is not confined to the four walls of a Holy of Holies; why, the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, for as our text says, ***The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.***” This God fills all things, and there is no limit to His capacity to fill the universe with His glorious presence. Wherever there are people, they are under His sovereign power, for ***“The world and those who dwell therein”*** belong to God.

God presses His claim upon all people, for He is the Maker of them all. Our text says, ***For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters.*** By His word the masses of land were separated from the masses of water, and by His word the human form that He had shaped from the dust of the earth and into which He breathed an ever-living spirit became the crown of His creation, and by His word man was given dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowls of the air and the animals that inhabit the universe. God is man's Maker and therefore his sovereign Lord.

God is Redeemer. All this would be most frightening, for even as the angels which did not keep their first estate, but rose in rebellion against their Maker, so man, too, has heard the voice of an offended God say, ***“Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”***¹

Not one person on earth has the clean hands that God requires, nor the pure heart that God demands — ***“For there is no difference; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”***² — and unless God makes a way into our presence, there is just no possibility of coming before the Lord, our God.

Unholy man cannot come into the presence of the holy God. But the holy God has provided a way whereby unholy man becomes holy, and this holiness and righteousness that He provides is the strong encouragement to heed the Advent invitation: *Open your heart to the Lord.*

God is Protector. That invitation, says the psalmist, is pertinent because the Lord is the Protector of the church. ***The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle*** is there to encompass His church, His redeemed people, with His almighty power.

Only the Lord Jesus could enter the battle on behalf of man and as man's Substitute, for Jesus Christ is our Brother Man; and only the Lord Jesus could win the battle against sin and Satan, for Jesus is the Son of God.

We can trust the Lord Jesus to the fullest extent, because He alone could and did respond fully to our need in our lost condition, coming to earth to give His life as the all-sufficient ransom to free us from the chains of sin, and because He alone can and will respond fully to our need in life's daily battles against temptation.

Then Receive Christ. If the King of Glory is our Creator, if He is the Redeemer of the world and the Protector of the church, we can see immediately why it will be important during this season of Advent to be sure that we by repentance and faith have received Christ into our life and why living for Him should be our constant concern.

Would it not be a tragedy to celebrate Christmas and not worship the Christ Child? A worthwhile celebration of Advent will safeguard us from this tragedy, for if we give proper attention to Advent, we can be sure that we shall be striking just the right note of joy and happiness when the angel hosts announce the birth of our Lord.

When the shepherds say, *"Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us,"*³ we can be confident that we shall be included so long as we heed the Advent invitation: *Open your heart to the Lord.*

2. Open Your Heart To The Lord To Benefit Through His Blessings

That invitation has special meaning because of the particular benefits which the King of Glory provides for His subjects. A twin blessing is in store for all who accept His invitation: the blessing of forgiveness and the blessing of a cleansed life.

Forgiveness is assured, for our text says of the believer in the King of Glory, *⁵ He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation.* Could the assurance be plainer, could God speak in more definite terms? Could He be a saving God and not offer salvation to His people?

And as for a cleansed life, that, too, must be a blessing of God. Pure hands, pure speech, pure heart — these things alone are possible after God comes into our life.

No person can possess an immaculate mind or unsullied speech or an undivided heart unless the Spirit of God has taken over in his life. As long as any of us are unsure of our loyalty and as long as our allegiance to God is indefinite, we are in constant danger of making moral compromises that only add to our guilt.

The worship of one God, and the worship of that one God as the Triune Lord, is more than a belief of the intellect; it is a complete dedication of the will and an adamant refusal to worship any projections of self, regardless of how they are represented or disguised. God invites us to the very purity that He demands, and therefore we heed the Advent invitation: *Open your heart to the Lord.*

3. Open Your Heart To The Lord To Reconsecrate To His Service And Invite King Jesus In

The Advent invitation has significance for us all because it is an invitation to reconsecrate ourselves to His service.

It is a paradox, the paradox of the love God has for us that He desires to make His presence known to us and to transform our lives by the assurance that He is with us.

After all, the incarnation of Jesus Christ will forever remain a mystery, and always it will be an article of faith, but the company of Christ will always be a power that transforms and changes us.

One of two things has to go —either our sins or Christ. We cannot walk hand in hand with the Lord Jesus and live like the devil. Either we will lose our grip on Christ, or we must lose our grip on the evil world around us. We simply must give ourselves to the service of our Lord, and reconsecrating ourselves to His service is a part of heeding the Advent invitation: *Open your heart to the Lord.*

When the gates of the holy city need to be lifted up and the doors of the temple need to be pushed back and still further back because the King of Glory is making His entry, there can be only one reaction: *We must welcome the King to*

our heart and life, and He must take over so completely that not a single area of our life is unoccupied.

King Jesus is the King of Glory, and we invite Him in to transform us and make us His own. We simply must enter His service and show Him our love.

Love begins at home. Love is outgoing and extending into ever wider circles, love is always looking for new avenues of service to others — love is always sacrificing itself for the well-being of others — we cannot but show love when Christ has come into our life, for the Advent invitation: *Open your heart to the Lord* is an invitation to show Him our love.

Has the King come to live within your heart? Have you received the King of Glory? Are you the benefactor of His blessings? And are you consecrated to His service?

By opening your heart to the Lord you are starting your Christmas preparations on the right note. Begin by adoring the Christ of God, and end by adoring the Christ of God — you need Him so greatly, and He alone can supply your utmost need. Then, as our text says, ***Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.*** Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Genesis 3:11

² Romans 3:22

³ Luke 2:15