

Psalm 24: Antidote to Unworthiness

When we come to the topic of unworthiness—what are we talking about? **It's familiar.** It's the focus of movies: like *Thor*—after his failure, will he be worthy to wield the hammer? Or can *Rocky*, in spite of his weaknesses, really go the distance? **It's familiar.** We all feel some sense of unworthiness—even famous and successful people. The actress Mia Farrow said, “I’ve always had a sense of the unworthiness of myself,” and Madonna said, “all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy.” **It's familiar, but not always clear. So let's press in further to ask:** What makes us feel inadequate, unworthy, not enough—not smart enough, smooth enough, strong enough, successful enough, good enough. In essence, **unworthiness** is when (1) there's some yardstick, some standard and (2) we feel we do not measure up. Perhaps because we don't. Perhaps because we've been hurt and told we don't so many times we believe it deep down. Perhaps because we've set the standard so high that we—and no one!—could measure up. Perhaps because we compare ourselves with others and feel envious of what they own or what they've done. So—**some external standard and your internal assessment** of how you compare. What makes it difficult and confusing are relating these two things: am I *really* inadequate or do I just think that, or do *others* just think that? Is the standard normal or is it too high, too low? Feelings of unworthiness are real and really hard. That's one reason I love Psalm 24.

Few months ago—NYC trips; Jack to NY Yankees; Kenzie to Broadway show I had heard about: *Wicked*. I'd seen the classic movie: *The Wizard of Oz*, so I had the general idea; lot of the same elements. But this Broadway pulls back the curtain and allows you to see more of what might have been going on—and let's just say there are definitely surprises! And when the curtain opens and the story unfolds you start to see the elements in a brand-new light. And so while we know about feeling inadequate, when we turn to Psalm 24, we read about unworthiness, but it's like the curtain goes up and the story unfolds and the spot lights shine into our lives and we see more clearly about our feelings of inadequacy. And like a show, this psalm has a stage, a story, a cast, and a finale. Let's dive in.

1. The Stage (READ 24:1-2).

¹*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;*
²*for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.*

- Pretty straightforward. The LORD, Jehovah—the God of Israel—is also the God who created everything. He's not a regional deity—over part of Palestine, He's the Maker of Heaven and Earth, every bit of it and everything in them—including people.
- Then, because he made everything, he's also in control. He owns it. The “earth is the Lord's.” And we see that control in play from the very beginning—founded it on the sea and waters. =picture of turmoil/chaos, but creation brought stability and purpose and order.
- Here's the POINT: The stage of your life is bigger than you may think.
- You may feel unworthy, and wonder how that might relate to God at all. But there's no area of your life—not career, emotions, family, bank account that is outside the good and wise control of the God who made you. You may not even be a Christian—and it's still true for you: God made you, and he is the creator and owner of all your life.
- In this chapter on worthiness, God is creator. And here's more of what that means for us:

- You may feel inadequate, but God made you the way he did for a reason—with your skill set, your unique strengths, your weaknesses, your limitations.
- God controls your life and everything **around** you—he put you in the family he gave you for a reason, he gave you the job history you have, the conversations you’ve had, the things you love, the things you regret. He is Lord over all of it, not just some small part.
- And God is more than able to bring order and stability out of your chaos and turmoil. Your real-life feelings of unworthiness; this is in his wheelhouse.

2. The Story (READ 24:3-5).

³*Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?*

⁴*The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.* ⁵*They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior.*

- There’s a lot here, but let’s start w verse 5—the people in this verse are worthy—worthy to go into the temple of the Lord, the place of presence, and “they will receive [lit. carry] blessing from the LORD” back out into the world. This phrase tells the story, the drama, of what God is doing in the world. He is bringing a people to himself and blesses them, so through them he can to bring blessing to the world. But this is not a new/isolated idea.
 - Act 1: Humans to spread blessing (Gen 1-2)
 - Garden of Eden—like a temple (place of presence), God’s people are blessed there. They are to subdue creation and fill the earth—to fill they have to make room, to push out the boundaries of the garden. They are to expand the place of God’s presence and bring blessing to the whole earth.
 - Act 2: Unworthy to spread blessing (Gen 3)
 - First humans sin, and before too long what starts to spread around the world—sin and evil and violence. By Gen 11 all the nations of the world are definitely not living up to the standard that God had set for people.
 - Act 3: God’s people spread blessing (Gen 12)
 - So, in the next chapter, the Lord approaches Abram to be the head of a new nation. He promises to bless him. Not because God is turning away from all the rest of the sinful world, but because he wants them to turn back to him, he wants to bless them. And he’s going to do that—through Abram and his descendants. He has a people in this world in order to bless the world.
 - Act 4: Unworthy to spread blessing (OT)
 - The rest of the OT is the sad story of how God’s people failed to bring blessing to the world. They failed to measure up to God’s standards, just like the rest of the nations: they were proud; they were unworthy. But Act 4 is not the end of the story . . .
 - Act 5: [more to come; we get to the finale later], but here’s the point . . .
- POINT: The story of your life is deeper than you may have realized.
 - When we feel inadequate, our world is often shrinking down to our own concerns. The standard we’ve compared ourselves against and the performance of how we may have measured up. By talking about carrying blessing out to the world, the Lord is reminding us: Get your eyes up, see the bigger story. Your page of

worthiness/unworthiness is *not* the story. Your page is part of a larger story, and it's not about you.

- Even more, your worthiness/unworthiness is the same grammar that he's used to write all the rest of this amazing story.
- And so, your unworthiness is not the final word. God has you in this world for a reason. There's a story he is writing, and has been writing for thousands of years, and you're a part of it—you in all your feelings of unworthiness.

3. The Cast (READ 24:3-6).

- These verses also tell us who is allowed to enter the temple and carry our God's blessing. Who's on this roster? Let's find out.

³*Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?*

⁴*The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. ⁵They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior.*

⁶*Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.*

- This roster is described not by listing names, but by providing qualities. What are they?
- v 4: personally worthy (“clean hands”—worthy in action; “pure heart”—worthy in motives and attitudes)—personally worthy—inside and out.
- V 5—relationally worthy (“does not trust in idols”—toward God they are faithful, but also to others—“does not swear by [a false god]” more literally: “what is false”)—relationally worthy—faithful toward God and never take advantage of people.
- You might say, “That’s just like you Christians. All about living up to some high standard, conforming to some moral code. Enlightened people, modern people have moved beyond.” But the reality is that the Bible doesn’t give measurements like this so that you can strive to live up to the standard. The reality is that the Bible provides verses like this, in part, because it wants us to accept this reality: No one makes the cut.
- Or better, if we look at the whole Bible, only One. . . .
- That last book of the Bible asks who is worthy? The answer: Jesus. He makes the cut; he fully lives up to God’s standards. The cast of the Great Story is not a bunch of good people who work hard at being good (or at least hiding their flaws). Here’s the point:
- POINT: The cast of your life is different than you may have envisioned.
 - If you feel unworthy—these verses remind us that God 100% intends you to feel that way. He wants us to conclude that none of us make the cut, none of us are worthy to enter his presence and carry away the blessing for the world.
 - But our unworthiness is not a problem for our God. He says in v. 6—that this all applies to the generation, the group of people, who seek God. In other words, the One who is worthy, has a group with him who are less than worthy. How do I know that?
 - He calls himself the “God of Jacob”—the head of the OT people of God—not called by his new name, “Israel,” (prince with God) but Jacob—the trickster, the deceiver. God says “I see your unworthiness. You are with my Son, the only worthy One. I see your unworthiness, and I claim it: I am your God.” God of Jacob.

4. The Finale (READ 24:7-10).

- These verses are like a mighty procession, led by the king, returning from battle, seeking to enter the city—open the gates—as a victorious conqueror and king.

⁷Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. ⁹Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory.

- These verses are confusing. If the LORD is in the temple—inside the city, then why is he now outside the city wanting to get in?
- These verses point the true King, the only one who is worthy to enter the place of God's presence. The One who had left the place of His Father's presence in heaven to wage war against evil, and sin, and death—and one day, at the Finale, he's going to fix everything that's wrong with this broken world.
- Here's the point:
- POINT: The finale of your life is better than you may have imagined.
 - God didn't send Jesus to merely lift your feelings of inadequacy.
 - God didn't send Jesus to only cleanse away your sin.
 - God sent his Son to set everything right, to restore everything that sin had ruined!
 - Cosmic renewal, worldwide restoration. Body and soul. Heaven and earth.
 - One day, the sources of your feelings of unworthiness will all be fixed. Can you imagine? One day:
 - bodies without pain and without addictions
 - minds without regrets and without doubts
 - souls without temptations and without shame
 - All will be made new. Because the Son has waged war against evil and won, it's not that he will make all new things, but will make all things new. This finale is better than we could ever have imagined.

Conclusion: CSL, *The Last Battle*. Children had visited Narnia, and loved it, loved being there, loved being with Aslan, yet each time had been sent back home.

Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often." "No fear of that," said Aslan. "Have you not guessed?" Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them. "There *was* a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

This morning as our service ends, I want your eyes to see that the curtain is actually going up. The stage is set, the cast is ready, the story is real, and the Finale breathtaking. Leave your unworthiness in the row where you sit, for the Lord is inviting you—you!—into the Great Story that He is writing. (Prayer.)