

Who is Worthy?

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.

What a statement. It's at the same time comforting, encouraging, challenging, inspiring, but ultimately it moves us to praise.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it and the world and all who live in it. Now, our world is full of strife over ownership, isn't it?

We see that on the world stage. Who owns Ukraine? Well, the tyrant sees ownership as there to be taken by force, of course. But it's God who has always and always will have ultimate ownership and control of Ukraine.

And anywhere else you like to think of. Who has power in the South China Sea? Big question at the moment. But it's the same answer.

[1 : 22] The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. Closer to home, we're encouraged by our world to be dissatisfied with what we own.

We're always told that we need something more, something better, something shinier.

Remembering that the earth is the Lord's helps us to put that into perspective. Helps us to be less anxious about such things.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. Even when we aren't thinking about ownership, it's a comforting statement.

When everything's going pear-shaped. When we or those we love are suffering losses or through ill health.

[2 : 35] When there are car crashes. When we lose our jobs. When floods or fires mean we lose some or all of everything we own.

When we're lonely. When we're excluded. It's good to remember. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

The world and all who live in it. We remember that God's bigger than all of those things. And that he is in ultimate control.

We are safe with him. And God's ownership of the world means that nowhere is off limits to him.

Every space is his. Every lonely place is his. Every space is his. Every space is his.

[3 : 39] Every space is his. Every space is his. On Wednesday, when we heard Colossians 1 expounded.

Peter Adam reminded us from Colossians 1, 16 and 17. That the creation and sustenance of the world is in Christ.

The owner and controller of the world is the one who comes so near to us. That we are in Christ as well.

The earth is the Lord's. And everything in it. The world and all who live in it. Paul echoes those words in 1 Corinthians to show that every created thing is good.

Even meat offered to idols. If God made and owns everything, then improper use by other people doesn't make it bad.

[4 : 42] We can still thank God for everything and use it as God intended. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all who live in it.

God is supreme. He owns us.

Now all of us. Doesn't say the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and 10% of all I earn. No. God has exclusive rights to us and all we have.

Worship of him entails us recognising that and living for him. So as we enter this new year, we can recognise that 2023 is the Lord's and everything in it.

We don't know what's going to be in 2023. Some things we'll enjoy and no doubt some things we won't.

[6 : 00] But we can be confident that it's in the hands of the great good God. We are in the hands of the great good God.

And we can be comforted and encouraged and challenged to live for him. Because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all who live in it.

But that's not the end of our psalm, of course. That's just the beginning. That's where our psalm starts. That's the introduction. All those great truths tied up in that first statement.

God is the one who has ultimate ownership of this world. He's established it. That's what verse 2 says.

He's put it all together. And yet, where does that leave us? Who are we to approach him?

[7 : 08] And that's the question of the next section of the psalm. Verse 3 says, Who may ascend to the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? What he's essentially saying is, Who can come before this God?

Now, when we're thinking of approaching God, the first thing we have to realize is that God is holy.

And therefore, those who come into his presence must be holy. And I think, when I think about that, what helps me is the statement in Deuteronomy 4, verse 24.

It says, The Lord your God is a consuming fire. Now, imagine you're going to a barbecue somewhere, and you have on a nice, clean shirt.

And just about as soon as you get there, you dribble meat juices all down your nice, clean shirt. Well, it stains it, doesn't it?

[8 : 18] It probably spoils the barbecue for you. But if you drop those same meat juices into the barbecue fire, they just get burned up.

They don't stain the fire at all. You see, sin stains us, but gets burned up by God.

So if we're covered in sin, and we enter the presence of God, who is an all-consuming fire, you can imagine what's going to happen to us.

Those who come into God's presence need to be holy for their own protection, as much as anything. We must be pure and clean to come before him, or his holiness will consume us in our sin.

So verse 4 of our psalm talks about the one who can come before the Lord, and it makes kind of uncomfortable reading when we think about it.

[9 : 40] Verse 4 says, Clean hands is the one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol, or swear by a false god. That's the one who can come into the presence of God.

Clean hands is the first thing. The one who has clean hands talks about our actions.

We can't come into God's presence stained by the things we have done. Now, you'll all be familiar with the story of Lady Macbeth, won't you?

She was the one who, according to the story written by Mr Shakespeare, helped her husband to murder King Duncan.

And then her conscience gets the better of her, and a servant finds her sleepwalking, convinced that her hands are stained with blood.

[10 : 51] And she's scrubbing at her hands, it's out, out, damn spot, out, I say. And then, what? Will these hands never be clean?

Well, her dream is our reality. Our hands are stained by everything we've ever stolen.

By the ink of every false or cruel thing we've ever written. The print of every doorknob we should never have opened is branded on our palms.

Every keystroke or mouse click is tattooed on our fingertips. Our hands are stained by a lifetime of sin.

And we can't scrub them clean. But even clean hands is not enough. Because verse 4, the one who has clean hands and a pure heart, we need to be clean on the inside as well.

[12 : 08] So, what we do is only part of our sinfulness. sinfulness also includes the things that we may not do.

Maybe the things that we should have done. Well, our thoughts, our intentions, our motives. Gets much more tricky, doesn't it?

Because I don't know about you, but mine aren't always good. imagine how terrible it would be if everyone could see and read every thought that you have had in the last day, even.

We'd all have things we'd be ashamed of, I'm sure. Well, God reads and sees every thought that passes through our minds all the time.

our hearts are not pure. Clean hands and a pure heart are vitally important to God and we know that we fall short.

[13 : 29] But like the steak knives, and yet there's more. Verse 4 keeps giving. Who does not, the one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false God.

Don't put trust in idols. Lift up our souls to what is false. What we live for, anything we live for, apart from God, is our idol.

people. That can be almost anything. Money, security, family, power, pleasure, status, sport, you name it.

There's all sorts of things. The list could go on and on. Anything. They're not bad things in themselves, but when they're the center of our existence, if they're the things that govern how we live and what we live for, then they're idols.

and they're a source of sinfulness to us. But it's not just trusting in idols, it's swearing by a false God, swearing falsely, telling lies.

[14 : 47] We trust lies to make us look good. I can even lie about my Bible reading to make me look good. We trust lies to get us out of consequences of our actions, to avoid embarrassment, to avoid shame.

We even think that somehow we can do good things by telling lies. Doing those things, trusting lies to do things for us, rather than worshipping God and trusting Him.

Now, I know this all sounds like really bad news, and in a way it is.

Sin will keep us from heaven, from the presence of the One who made us and owns the earth and everything in it. And here we are with our grubby hands, our impure hearts, our sordid worship, and our lying lips.

But the psalm, again, doesn't stop there. And God's story doesn't stop there. Obviously, we don't and can't measure up. But, there is one who can and does.

[16 : 20] Jesus Christ, the righteous. and that's the good news, that's the gospel. Because verse 4 is describing Jesus.

We read in the Bible that Jesus is the only one to have ever lived up to God's requirements. Did he have clean hands? Well, Hebrews 4, 15 says, he committed no sin. did he have a pure heart? He was full of grace and truth, John 1, 14 tells us. Did he trust God fully?

Well, 1 Peter chapter 2 tells us that he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. was he truthful?

Well, no deceit was found in his mouth, 1 Peter 2, again. So he is worthy. And that's what we read in Revelation 5, this scene from this vision of heaven that John has.

[17 : 33] And he weeps because nobody, nobody is worthy except the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the King, the Lamb who was slain, Jesus Christ the righteous.

He is worthy. Notice that verses 5 and 6 change from the singular to the plural.

Verse 4 is in the singular, the one who has a clean hands and a pure heart. It's talking about Jesus. But verses 5, they will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Saviour.

Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob. It's talking now about us. who trust in him.

The one person is righteous and the many get their vindication from their Saviour. Verse 5. Jesus doesn't just fulfil the requirements for himself.

[18 : 57] He does that for all of us. He gets the stain off our hands. He wipes our hearts clean. He makes it possible for us to live truthfully and with integrity before God.

We can now, in the words of verse 6, seek his face, the face of the God of Jacob, the one who owns the world and everything in it.

Isn't that great? it just fills me with worship. And may that be our story in 2023.

Well, we've just celebrated Christmas and one of the great, maybe the great truth of Christmas is Emmanuel.

God with us. And these last verses of our psalm are a celebration of the presence of God in our King.

[20 : 14] And it says, we are to lift up our heads because our King is here. Presence of our King, the Lord Yahweh, the victorious one in battle, the great warrior King, the King of glory.

And he's here. He's also coming in a much fuller way in the future, but he's here. So are we welcoming the great King?

And will we be ready to welcome him further when he comes in his full glory? Lift up your heads. the King of glory is here.

Worship him, praise him. That isn't just a nice thought for Christmas. That's a reality for the whole of this year and every year. A few chapters earlier in Revelation from the passage we've had read for us is Revelation 3.20.

It says, Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me.

[21 : 41] It's not a meek beggar not tapping at the door or a casual visitor dropping by. It's the King of glory.

who's asking to come in. He knocks for you today, this year, always.

If you've never opened the door to him, I would urge you to do so today. And if you have, he's still knocking. We're still, we're very good at keeping him out.

he's still knocking. He wants to be in your life this year, this day. Well, this psalm can be seen as the story of God's plan with the world.

It starts with creation. The God who is totally worthy has established the world. He owns it and he controls it. But who is worthy to approach him?

[22 : 52] And we see our own unworthiness. And Jesus is the worthy one making us worthy. And his presence is with us now.

And his ultimate coming in glory and the vision of the great King of heaven is there painted for us. He is worthy of all praise.

Jesus is worthy. God is worthy. This psalm is relevant to us this day and this year.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. Jesus Christ makes us worthy to enter the presence of the Lord, the King of glory, who comes to us now and will come to us in a fuller way and to take us home in due course.

Let's pray to him. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we so thank you that you are not just the King of the universe who owns the world and everything in it, but you are our Heavenly Father who loves us and knocks at our door and wants us to open up.

[24 : 30] We so thank you. Worthy is the Lamb who is slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise now and forever.

Amen. Thank you.