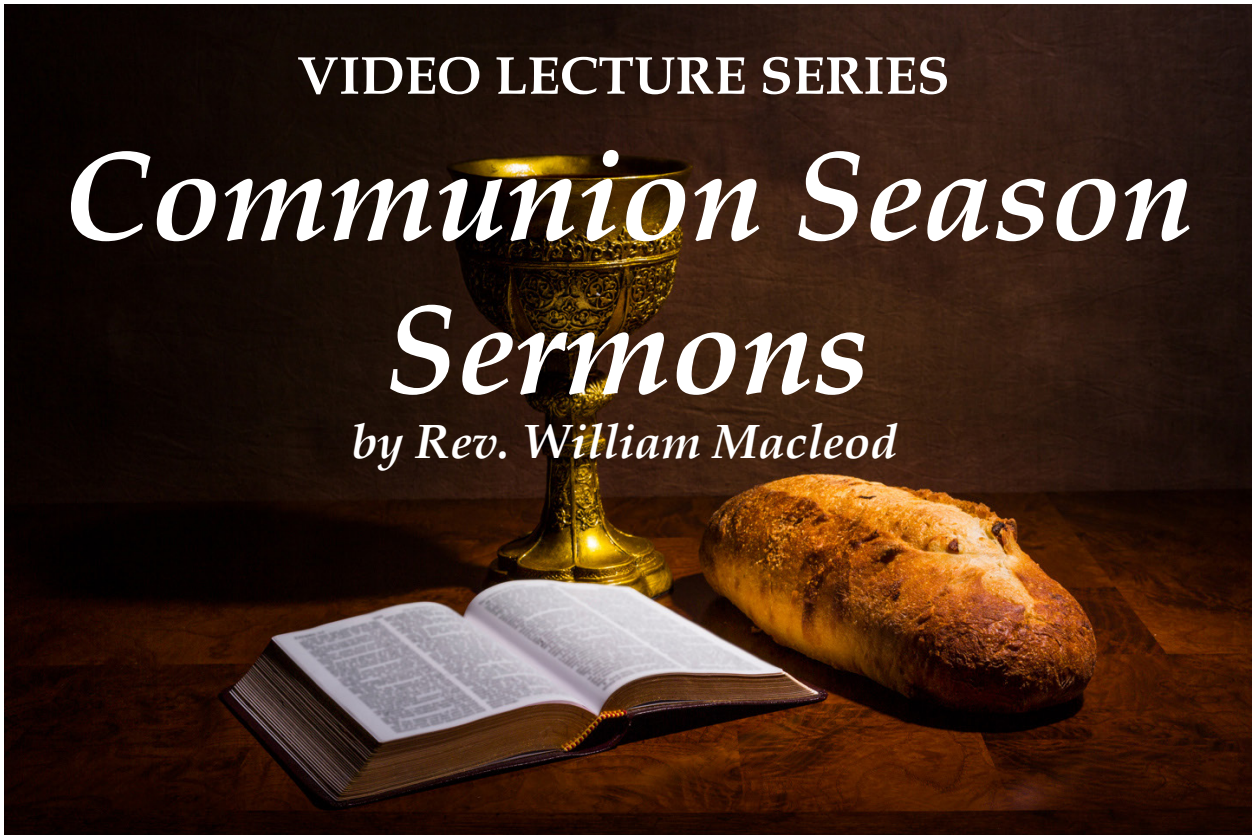


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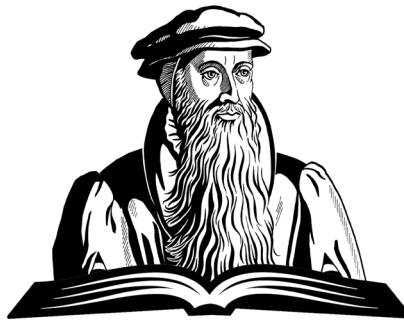
Communion Season
Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod



Sermon #2

Prepare Me for Thy Presence
Psalm 24:3-4



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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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Communion Season Sermons

*An Introduction and 7 Sermons
by Rev. William Macleod*

Introduction (Luke 22:14–20)

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Communion Season Sermons

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Sermon #2

Prepare Me for Thy Presence (Psalm 24:3-4)

Today I would like to speak to you from Psalm 24, and particularly, verses 3 and 4, but we'll read the whole Psalm:

"A Psalm of David.

"The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah."

So today, I would particularly like to direct your attention to verses 3 and 4: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

In a sense, there's no more suitable verse for the first day of the Communion Season than this verse here. It's talking about preparation, and who is fit to ascend the mountain—the mount of ordinance; the mount of the Communion feast, as it were. Who is fit to come and to take and eat the bread and the wine?—these symbols of the broken body of Christ and his shed blood. Who can approach God? We all need preparation. We need to humble ourselves, to confess, to repent, to claim the blood of Jesus.

We have here a Psalm of David. We're not told when this Psalm was written, but generally, it's regarded as a Psalm which he wrote in connection with taking the ark of God up to Jerusalem. The first attempt to do this was a failure. Remember, that the ark had been in the land of the Philistines. The Philistines couldn't keep it because God's judgment was upon them. They brought it to the house of Abinadab, and it had been there for some time. And then David decided to take the ark to the center of his kingdom, to Jerusalem. But he showed a lack of care in the way he went about it, and the first attempt proved a failure. They took the ark, and they put it upon a new cart pulled by oxen, and the sons of Abinadab were driving the oxen. And at a certain point, the oxen shook the cart, and it looked as if the ark might fall off. And Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, put out his hand to

hold the ark, to keep it. He was afraid, lest it should land up in the mud. But he was struck down dead. It's dangerous to approach God, to approach him without the proper preparation. And so, David was shocked, and all Israel was shocked at the sudden death of Uzzah, and the ark was left at the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite.

But then, David thought again about the law of God and the commandments of God, and the way that it should be done, and realized his error. And so, they went the second time to take the ark up to Jerusalem. And this time, instead of putting it upon a cart, they did what God required: "See you do all things according to the pattern shewn you on the mount," God said to David. So, the Levites had to carry it, and to carry it upon their shoulders. And in this way, it was carried all the way up to Jerusalem, and in through the gates of Zion. And there was great joy and gladness.

This Psalm, traditionally amongst the Jews, was a Psalm sung on the day after the Sabbath. And if we remember that the ark of God was a symbol of God's presence, the ark of God is a type of Christ. And we'll remember how, on the day after the Sabbath, Christ rose from the dead. And also, on the day after the Sabbath, he ascended up to heaven forty days later. And so, it's a very appropriate Psalm to sing in this context, and it directs our mind to the Lord Jesus Christ and his ascension into heaven.

So first of all, the Psalm begins by focusing our minds on *The Greatness of God*. He is the Creator: "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods" (verse 1). God made the world. We look around, we see water everywhere—the oceans. And it seems like the earth was founded upon the seas. The Lord has made all these things, and it all belongs to him. He has created the world for his own glory. He's the great Potter, and you and I are the clay (Romans 9:19–21). He shapes and forms us into vessels for himself, and we are to give glory to his name. He's the sovereign Lord, who made man in his own image, and entered into a covenant with him, promising to Adam and Eve eternal life, if they were obedient, but also threatening them with death if they were disobedient, if they ate the forbidden fruit. You'll remember how Satan came along, came into the garden, and said to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die. That won't happen to you. God is too loving to do that. He won't do that to you" (Genesis 3:4). And so, Eve ate the fruit, thinking that it would give to her some special knowledge, and then passed it on to Adam, who also ate. And at the moment they ate, they died. They died spiritually, died to God. They felt separated from God. Death means separation. They felt naked and ashamed in God's presence. And natural death began to work in them at that stage—natural death that would be followed, without conversion, by eternal death.

Our God is a consuming fire, and we are to worship him with reverence and godly fear. Even the very angels veil their faces in his presence. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity (Habakkuk 1:13). We need to have more of a sense of God—his greatness, his holiness, his glory, his hatred for sin. This is something that's largely missing today in so many churches. Indeed, it's missing with us all. We need more reverence in the presence of God. Too many Christians have a god that's just a little bit bigger than themselves—a small god, with whom they can be chummy. But our God is a great, majestic, magnificent, holy God. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God of hosts: the whole earth is filled with his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The temple shook at the presence of God. The earth trembled before him, and we too must worship him with reverence and godly fear. Our God is glorious. He sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are as grasshoppers before him (Isaiah 40:22). Our God is the God who killed Uzzah, because he stretched out his hand and touched the ark. He wasn't a Levite; he wasn't a priest; and he had no right to touch the ark of God.

And we are to fear before him. So that's the first thing that we have here then, the greatness of God.

The second point I'd like to draw your attention to is, *Who Can Approach this God?* We're told, "He that hath clean hands." Do you have clean hands? Our hands are that with which we act. We do things with our hands. Have we sinned with our hands? Are we sinning with our hands? Sin clings to us, and the guilt of sin. Have we acted in anger, bad temper, resentment. Have we acted in lust? Have we been guilty of stealing? of Sabbath-breaking? of greed? All of us have sinned in different ways. Indeed, all of us have filthy hands. Sin is easy. It's natural. It's something that we do every day. And yet, it's abhorrent to God. Who can approach God?—the one who has clean hands.

And then the second thing that's mentioned here is "a pure heart." Jesus talks about purity of heart in the Sermon on the Mount. He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). But who is pure in heart? Are any of us pure in heart? Do we not have deceitful hearts? lustful hearts? proud hearts? unclean hearts? "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Do we not have idolatrous thoughts passing through our hearts? lustful daydreams? and even blasphemous thoughts at times? doubting God, and resentment? and covetousness and greed? Filthy hearts—who has a pure heart? None of us have clean hands or a pure heart. Jesus said, If you so much as look upon a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery already (Matthew 5:28). If you're angry with your brother without a cause, you're a murderer (Matthew 5:22). How ashamed we would be if our neighbor could see into our hearts and see the thoughts that are there. But what we have to remember is, that God sees into our hearts, and he knows what's there.

The third thing that's mentioned here is, "who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity." "Vanity" means emptiness. It means "an idol." And Israel so often lifted up their soul to vanity, so often they were guilty of idolatry. I remember, as a child, reading through the historical parts of the Scriptures. For example, the book of Judges, and the books of Kings, and reading there about Israel, how they prospered when they worshipped God; and how everything went wrong when they turned to idols. And yet, time and time again, they would turn to idols, and then the nations around them would invade them, and oppress them. And they had so much misery until they repented and turned to God. And I used to think how foolish they were, how they were so constantly turning to idols. Now I know that idolatry is very natural to us all. We're still idolaters today. An idol is anything that comes between us and God, anything that distracts us, takes away our attention from God, anything that's too important for us—a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a spouse, a child, our home, our job, a pleasure, our looks, our music, our film. Whatever it is that finds too big a place in our hearts, and our desires, and it becomes an idol. Do you have any idols? "Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity."

And then, the fourth thing is, "nor sworn deceitfully." To swear deceitfully refers to sins of the tongue, of the speech. It's so easy for us to make promises and not keep them. We promise to do this or that, and then we forget. We promise even to pray for somebody, and then we don't pray for them. How easy it is for us to make vows. How easy it is for us, in our worship, to say what we're going to do, and what we're not going to do, and to promise God in our sinning, that we're not going to do this, or we're not going to do that, and yet we don't do it. How easy it is for us to gossip, and to be guilty of backsliding, pretending to be loving and kind, and yet failing. Hypocrisy is so natural to us. We're all guilty of it, and it's horrible in God's sight. God hates deceitfulness and pretense, and sham. So this Psalm is saying, you approach God if your hands are clean, if your heart is pure, if your soul is not lifted up to idols, if you have not sworn deceitfully. But all of us are unworthy. We're all of us condemned by these words.

But then, in the third place, we see the provision that God makes, in verse 5: “He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” Our God is the God of salvation. He could so easily condemn us, and there’s so many reasons why he should condemn us. But instead, he’s the God who saves us; who gives us a blessing; who gives us the greatest blessing of all, and that blessing is *Righteousness*—something we all need, to be righteous—on a right standing with God. We all need a Savior—a Savior to bear away our sin, and to give us his righteousness. And that’s what God gave us. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). And the Son of God came into this world, and took our sins upon himself, and suffered the punishment due to us for sin. He suffered it on the cross. “Behold, the Lamb of God,” said John the Baptist, the forerunner. “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). How wonderful! Jesus, the sacrificial lamb—he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He suffered and died—“Wounded for our transgressions...bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). “What must I do to be saved?...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30). We are justified by faith.

So none of us have clean hands or a pure heart, and yet, when we put our trust in Jesus, our hands are clean, and our heart is purified. God gives clean hands to us and a pure heart. He imputes to us the righteousness of Christ, so that although our sins be as scarlet, they are as white as snow. He is the one that blotteth out, as a thick cloud, our transgressions, and as a cloud our sins. He pardons our iniquity, and we’re washed in the blood. At a very high cost, he gives to us righteousness, salvation. He gives to us the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, to equip us and prepare us, to impart to us the righteousness of Christ, not just to impute it to us, but to change us, and transform us, and sanctify us. And we need that. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands”—Lord, clean my hands! Work in me by thy Holy Spirit—“clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”

But then, finally, we find here our duty, in verse 6: “This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob”—O God of Jacob. This is the generation that seek him. You and I must seek the Lord. “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, for he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6–7). “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Seek to be reconciled to God. Seek the face of God, the smile of God upon you, so that God will look upon you, not in wrath, not in anger and judgment, but in mercy.

“This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob.” Why is he called “Jacob”? Well, “Jacob” means “the deceiver.” Jacob was the one who told lies. In order to get the blessing of his father, he pretended to be Esau. He told lies. Then you’ll remember, he left home. He had to flee from the face of Esau. He came to Bethel, and there, a Bethel, he met with God. Later on, you’ll remember Peniel, how he wrestled with God: “I will not let thee go except thou bless me” (Genesis 32:26), and he was blessed. Jacob, the God of Jacob, the God who is merciful and gracious, even to the one who tells lies; even to those who are supplanters and deceivers. Those who seek him shall find him.

Remember David, how he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51:10). We need that clean heart, and not just the imputed righteousness of Christ. But we need holiness of

life as well, to keep on repenting of our sin, keep on turning to the Lord. “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners...purify your hearts, ye double minded” (James 4:8). Paul said, “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13). But if you don’t mortify the deeds of the body, you shall die.

So we are to take this as a positive encouragement to us to repent, as we seek to prepare ourselves for the Lord’s Supper. If you, through the Spirit, through the help of the Spirit, depending upon the Spirit, seeking the blessing of the Spirit, mortify, put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live. Put away your idols from you. Turn away from your sins. Wash in that fountain that was opened for sin and for uncleanness. Remember how the Lord Jesus washed the disciples’ feet before they partook of the Passover and of the first Lord’s Supper. Peter said, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus said to him, “If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with me.” And then, Peter said, “Well, don’t just wash my feet, wash my hands and my head!” And Jesus said, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet and is clean every whit” (John 13:9–10). We have been washed when we were converted, and we were born again, when we were washed with the washing of regeneration, but we still need our feet to be washed. We need that ongoing washing. And so, in coming to the Lord’s Table, let us seek again to wash ourselves, to cleanse our hands, to purify our hearts, to seek the God of Jacob, so that we will be able to approach the Lord and his Table, and do it in a way that is glorifying to God, and not bringing judgment upon ourselves.

Let’s pray.

Gracious God, we thank thee that there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. And we pray that we would come to that fountain—the fountain of the blood of Christ—and that we would be washed there. Give to us a greater hatred for sin. Help us to turn from it with full purpose of, and endeavor after new obedience, determined to follow thee, to serve thee, and to love thee. Keep us, O Lord, from offending thee and whatever is offensive in us, in our thoughts, in our words, in our deeds, help us to turn from these things, and to approach thee in sincerity and in truth. Bless us then, O Lord, and help us to come humbly to thy Table, rejoicing in Christ Jesus our Savior, in the one who loved us and gave himself for us. in Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.