

Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates



“Lift Up Your Heads” is a hymn of entry and ascent.

In the first lines of the first stanza we sing a reference to the 24th Psalm: “Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in” (v. 7, TNIV). These words ask us to briefly look over our shoulder into history. More specifically, we turn to look in on the worship practices of the Hebrew people and their King.

First, this Psalm bears some striking resemblances to the Psalms of Ascent found in chapters 120–134 in the Psalter. In worship, the devout *went up* or ascended to the temple with these Psalms in their mouth. Second, those who ascended had purity of heart...“Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not put their trust in an idol or swear by a false god” Psalm 24:3–4 (TNIV). Third, the gates of the city and the doors of the temple were opened to receive the King.

In summary, the first portion of our hymn reminds us that the ancient people who followed Yahweh went up to Him in purity. But, George Weissel takes us a step further by bridging the gap from the old covenant to the new. He goes on in that same stanza to point us toward Christ and his triumphal entry – “the King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here!” As a result we have two depictions of ascent placed side-by-side and held in contrast: the people of Israel ascended the holy hill to their God, and the Christ ascended the Mount of Calvary for the sake of all people. In the first scene, humanity is reaching toward God, and in the second scene God is reaching toward humanity.

During the second stanza, we sing of another distinction between these two covenants; it is a distinction between the old temple to which the Hebrews ascended, and the new temple that Christ enters: “Fling wide the portals of your heart; Make it a temple, set apart.” The clear contrast is that of an inanimate temple and an animate temple; a temple made of stone, and a temple made of flesh. We sing a reflection of Paul’s words found in his letter to the church at Corinth: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price” 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (TNIV). Rather than ascending to the temple, it now exists within us.

One clarification: Our bodies have *potential* to become “temples of the Holy Spirit.” But, something must take place before that potential is realized. In the final stanza we sing, “Redeemer, come, we open wide our hearts to Thee.” It is important for us to understand that we are active agents in lifting up the gates of our hearts so that Christ may enter in. On the other hand, *our* activity must be preceded by Christ’s activity: “Here I am!” Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me” Revelation 3:20 (TNIV). In this new covenant, we are given the privilege of housing Christ and experiencing the transformation of our temples. So, “Lift up your heads, O you gates...that the King of glory may come in.” (Psalm 24:7)

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