

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

Psalm 24
Clean Hands and a Pure Heart
(Audio is poor but audible)

Editorial Note: It is my belief that this series on Psalms was recorded while Sidney and Violet Cox resided in retirement at The Eventide residence in Detroit, Michigan. This was during the period 1962 through 1972. Sidney Cox was 75 years of age in 1962.

At various points in the recordings, he states that he is meeting with this group weekly to lead this series; however, when listening to the recordings, there does not seem to be a live congregation. At another spot in the series, he explains that he has also been taping these messages for further distribution.

During this period in his life, Sidney Cox often preached and taught in various churches around the Detroit area, but for a variety of reasons, including the declining health of his beloved wife, Violet, he was increasingly unable to travel extensively. As a result, he began to experiment with tape-recording his messages and lessons in order to send them to interested groups.

Thus, it is impossible to know if he delivered this series in person to a church group, or whether he recorded the series for them to listen to in their Sunday School or other meetings. It was likely both.

The order in which he presented the weekly series was: Psalm 24, Psalm 40, Psalm 46, Psalm 91 and Psalm 117. In addition, there are two recordings made in two different settings of Psalm 29, which do not seem to be part of the formal series.

The audio quality of these recordings varies a great deal. Some are quite good while others are poor.

J. Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. July 30, 2010.

...to a simple Bible story to give the background and the purpose for the writing of the psalm to which you just listened to moments ago. The 24th Psalm is one of David's finest psalms...they're all fine, but there are some of them that seem to be unusual and three of them are all gathered together - the 22nd, 23rd and 24th Psalms. There seems to be a particular meaning and solemnity and beauty and power about these three psalms. One of the things we need to do in the study of the Psalms, and I suppose that most of us, that's part of the scripture that we turn to instinctively; a good many Christians who don't get any further than that. There are a lot of them that don't get any further than the 23rd Psalm. There is more to the scripture than that. But there are a lot of Christians that don't discover that – tragedy for them and perhaps for others.

But one of the things we need to do in the study of the Psalms is to ascertain, if we can, why the psalm

was written. What was it that was in the mind of the writer when he wrote the psalm? What was he thinking about? What was he looking at? What was in the back of his mind? Was he simply writing a few beautiful lines with lovely thoughts in them? Was he just writing a poem? Was he just a poet? Or was he doing something else? And one of the most fascinating studies in connection with our reading and understanding of the psalms is to find out the background of them. Why they were written. What is in the mind of the man. What's he describing.

Now, we have such a psalm before us this morning. And I want us to look for a minute or two at the psalm and then you permit me to tell you the Bible story back of it and it's something that you are so familiar with that I almost hesitate about it. But we need to hear some of these lovely stories frequently. And so I'd like to tell you the story and remind you, rather, of the story that is back of the 24th Psalm.

I want you to notice one thing about it immediately. And that is, it is divided into two sections. There are two distinct parts to this psalm. Now, all you have to do in order to determine the dividing point is to pause and discover, and stop long enough to look at, the word, Selah. Now, that always marks the end of a Hebrew paragraph. Whenever you find the word, it has a meaning and it has a use. The use was to determine the end of a Hebrew paragraph. These old psalms were not written in verses, they were written in ...(dead spot)... paragraphs. And if she's a good secretary, she knows just exactly what to do so as to indicate there is a change, not only in the form of the letter, but in the sense of it. A new thought is now introduced.

So in this psalm we have two particular sections of it - the first part and the second part. And in the first part, there is a distinct purpose back of the writing of those words. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."¹ There is a distinct purpose in that. Just as there is in that final paragraph where we read those rather strange words, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory?"² And we wonder sometimes why that cry is repeated or it's found twice in that final paragraph. And in this psalm, David is describing something. And the two parts have a vital relationship to the thing that he is describing.

Now, my dear, let's go back in the Word of God and take a good look at the thing that David is describing. You will find the story of it, for it is in two sections - one in 1st Samuel 5, 6 & 7. And the other one, 23 or 4 years afterwards in 2nd Samuel 5, 6 & 7. And the moment that you mention that, we are reminded, of course, of one of the most interesting periods in the history of the children of Israel. It is that transition from the judges to the kings. Now, that is one of the most important and one of the most interesting periods of time when the old judges who had been in evidence for 400 hundred years or so are now fading out of the picture. And where, in demand from the children of Israel, a king is to be crowned and to become the reigning monarch in that land where they coined the phrase, "God save the King." Now, if you want to know where that comes from, you will find it right there. And a number of other of these phrases.

Now, at the end of that period, when Samuel is getting to be an old man, when the king has not yet ascended to the throne, at the end of that period you will find the story of Israel with their traditional

1 Psalm 24:1

2 Psalm 24:9

and ancient enemy, the Philistines, locked in battle. Now, that's an old story. Every once in a while, every few pages, you find exactly the same thing. Here they are, locked in battle. And the battle in this instance is going against the children of Israel. They are losing the battle.

And in the midst of their distress, some of the older folks got the idea that if they could bring into the battle the Ark of the Covenant that was resting over there in the tabernacle at Shiloh, not far away. If they could bring this Ark of the Covenant which was the visible sign of the presence of God, the visible token of this presence. You will remember that God had declared that through Moses that it was his throne in the midst of Israel – Exodus 25. And they had the idea that if they could bring this Ark of the Covenant, bring God as they thought, into the midst of the battle, that this would turn the tide of the battle against the Philistines and in favor of Israel. And so that is exactly what they did.

Headed up by the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, they brought the Ark of the Covenant into the midst of the battle. And when it arrived, there was a great shout of triumph that went up from Israel, so much so, that the Philistines a little way away there, heard this cry of triumph and then some of them caught on to what it was that had happened. And they began to say to themselves, “They've brought their god. They've brought their god into the midst of the battle. They brought their god. What are we going to do now?” But instead of taking to their heels and running, they stiffened their backbones and said, “We've got to fight a little harder. Let's fight all the harder.”

And they coined the phrase that is quite familiar to most of us. They coined the phrase, “Quit you like men, and be strong.”³ Now, you hear that quite frequently, but that's where it originated. And they said to themselves, “Let's be men. Let's be strong. Let's quit ourselves like men.” And they did. And the battle still went against the children of Israel and, tragedy of tragedies, the Ark of the Covenant was captured.

Now, the Philistines carried this precious thing to their religious city of Ashdod. And there, you will remember, that they put it into their temple with their old god, Dagon. And they put the Ark of the Covenant into this place. And then again, you will remember, what happened to Dagon. For when they went the next morning, here was Dagon down on his face by the side of the Ark of the Covenant. And they propped this old monstrosity up again. But the next day when they went, here he was down again, and this time they didn't prop him up. For the Word of God tells us that his head and arms and everything else were all broken there and only the stump of Dagon remained.

And here was the Ark of the Covenant. And from that time on troubles came to the Philistines, physical troubles, domestic troubles, all kinds of problems. And they moved the Ark of the Covenant from one place to another, but still the trouble followed them. Until at last, after seven months, they said to themselves, “We're going to get rid of this thing. It spells trouble for us. Let's get rid of it. Let's send it back where it came from. Let's get rid of the thing.” And that was exactly what they did.

They built a new cart. They took two white milk cows and took their calves away from them, put these two animals, attached them to the cart and started it off with the Ark of the Covenant upon it down the road. It was not far away, down the road that led to Israel. And now, some of the Israelites are in the fields about their business and they looked up and saw this thing coming. And when they did and saw

3 I Samuel 4:9

what it was, there was a shout of triumph, “The Ark of the Covenant is coming back! The Ark of the Covenant is coming back!”

There was no appropriate place for it for the moment, so they sent it one of their larger cities, to the city of Kirjath-jearim, and there in the house of a man named Abinadab they put the Ark of the Covenant, and there it remained for twenty years. Now, my dear, in that period of twenty years, something was happening in Israel. The old regime of the old judges was ending, a new king had been crowned. Saul was upon the throne, and the beginning of those disastrous years of his reign commenced. After a while, 13 or 14 years afterwards, his reign ended in tragedy, as you know. And then David ascended to the throne, but not to united Israel. There were the two groups there, the north and the south. And David, king of the south with his old capital of Hebron, but after seven years the two fragments of Israel, the two sections came together. And David was king over all Israel.

Now, in the meantime, they had captured a very famous city. As a matter of fact, it was the most famous city on earth, and it still is. The most famous city on earth, my dear, is not Washington or New York or London. The most famous city on earth is Jerusalem. And they had captured this stronghold of the Jebusites and they had captured this city of Jerusalem. And it became the great and famous capital of all Israel. Now, isn't that a scene?

Here is a united Israel. Here is the king upon the throne. Here is a magnificent capital city. What more could they need? But there was one thing that was absent. The Ark of the Covenant was still down there in that city a few miles away in the house of Abinadab. Now, David was very much disturbed about this. And he said, “We've got to bring the Ark of the Covenant back. We can't have a united Israel until we bring the Ark and we put it into its resting place. We'll put a temporary resting place here for the time being, but if I had my way, I'm going to build an adequate temple in Jerusalem. You remember, that God didn't allow him to do that, but he did allow his son to do it. But that was the thought in the mind of David. We've got to bring the Ark of the Covenant back before we can have a completed Israel.

Now, if that is to be done, it was a thing of such importance that there must be a great ceremony and a great occasion. It must be a time of national rejoicing. Why, of course. And so that is exactly what David did. He planned a great ceremony to carry the Ark of the Covenant to its resting place in the city of Jerusalem, and he wrote a song about it. And a song for it. And in the first part of his song, it was to be sung by the great antiphonal choir - two thousand on the one side; two thousand on the other, singing backwards and forwards as this great procession moved towards the gates of Jerusalem. And the last part of it is the program of the ceremony that was to take place when, at last, Israel with the Ark of the Covenant in their midst arrives at the gates of Jerusalem. Now, with that thought in mind, let's picture that great procession.

Here are all the people of Israel; here are the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant; here are the singers on both sides; here is the great crowd moving toward the city of Jerusalem. They had prepared the city by taking all the inhabitants out of it and putting watchmen on the walls and closing the great gates of the city.

And the watchmen on the wall had instructions not to open those gates until he got the password. Now,

the password was the name of God. Now, notice what I said there. Not a name of God. There are several names of God, but it was the name of God. And, my dear, the name of God to the children of God was, the Lord of hosts. Now, let's look at it.

Here's the procession moving on toward the gates. Here they are getting near. Here are the closed gates of the city of Jerusalem. Here are the watchmen on the walls with their instructions. Here are the great choirs singing backwards and forwards to each other. And they're singing, "The earth is the Lord's and the forest thereof." And back comes the echoes. "The world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods."⁴ And so on there. Singing backwards and forwards to each other, and all the time they're getting nearer and nearer to the gates of the city of Jerusalem. Now, when they arrive there, the ceremony really begins, for the herald representing the people of Israel steps forward and challenges the watchmen on the walls. And he says, "Lift up your head, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in."⁵ Now, remember, that watchmen on the wall has instruction not to open those gates until he gets the password. And so he calls down in response to this, "Who is the King of glory?" And then the shout goes up. They don't get the name first of all. This must be prolonged. We must make this a real occasion. And so they call out, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."⁶ But nothing happens, because that's not the password he's looking for, or listening for. Not at all.

And so the cry goes out again, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in."⁷ Once more this challenge from the wall, "Who is the King of glory?" Then there's a mighty shout from the whole congregation as they cry out with one voice, "The Lord of hosts, he is the King glory!"⁸ And the great gates of Jerusalem swing open and the procession moves in, up the hill of the Lord, into the holy place, and the Ark of the Covenant, after more than twenty years, is brought back into its rightful place in the midst of the children of Israel, into the capital city, into its resting place. And God is now has His throne(?) once more in the midst of the children of Israel. Did you hear it? Did you hear it?

Now, we say, why should we spend time just telling an old story like that? Because I'm quite sure that some of you are saying, "Well, I've heard that before." I wouldn't be at all surprised if some of you are saying, "I heard you tell it before." I wouldn't be at all surprised. And some of you are saying, "Well, we knew that story." Well, if you did, why haven't you told it to your young folks? Why haven't you told it to them? Why don't you gather a few of them around and tell them about that? Why? I know that. You know the story. I didn't tell the story with the thought that it was bringing anything new to you. Not at all. But you know, when we tell an old story like that, it isn't just to pass the time away, is it?

I think that in the heart of it God has something to say to us. I think He has. And you know, out of the midst of that, out of the midst of that lovely first paragraph, there's something that sounds strangely like the voice of God, if you listen? What was David saying? What was the Holy Spirit saying?

4 Psalm 24:1

5 Psalm 24:7

6 Psalm 24:8

7 Psalm 24:9

8 Psalm 24:10

Correction, through David, to those bearers of the Ark of the Covenant that were to climb the hill of Zion and take the most precious thing Israel possessed to its resting place in Jerusalem. What was He saying to them? That if you are to ascend into the hill of the Lord, do you see the picture? And if you are to carry this precious thing to its resting place in the Holy of Holies, you'd better look at your hands, because God only allows certain kinds of hands to handle the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, He didn't say, "Your hands must be strong." And He didn't say, "Your hands must be skillful, or your hands must be super experienced. Or at the end of your fingers, you must have a string of letters." He didn't say anything about that. Now, there isn't anything wrong with any of the things that we just mentioned. They're just fine. But somehow, God doesn't say anything about that. He says, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.

And I think out of the midst of our little, brief period this morning that we call our Sunday School class, I think there's a voice saying to us that God still requires clean hands and a pure heart. I'm sure God is happy when he discovers, or perhaps makes, skillful hands. I'm sure He's glad about that. But He's more insistent upon cleanliness than He is upon cleverness. Did you hear it? Out of the midst of a little story like this, there suddenly appears like a voice from the mystery surrounding us, God's basic requirement for us is cleanliness, not cleverness. Now, God can use cleverness, and does. But God never uses cleverness without cleanliness.

It wasn't the strength of these bearers of this Ark that God was interested in and said so through old David. Not their skillful hands. Not their experienced hands. Not their separated hands, because remember, these men belonged to the priesthood. Not that. But clean hands and a pure heart.

You know, my dear, in a very real sense, everything we do is carrying the Ark of the Covenant. When you teach that Sunday School class, you very definitely put your hands on the Ark. And the great requirement is not cleverness, it's cleanliness.

When you are doing the thing that occupies your time there, the thing that we are so anxious to do with such perfection. And I know you, you know. I've known some of you here for a long time, and I know what a longing after perfection there is in your hearts. I know how eagerly some of you want to do the thing you're doing in the best possible way. But it isn't strength, and it isn't skill, that is the basic requirement. It's cleanliness. "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 blessings of the Lord."⁹

And I think it's well for us to remember in this brief moment when we gather together in our Sunday School session, before our morning session begins, when this place may, and we hope it will be, filled with Shekinah glory. We'd better look at our hands. We'd better look at our hearts and remember, that's what God looks at. Not the skillful hand that knows how to do so much. Not the clever hand that can lift so many burdens. That's wonderful. But the clean hand and the clean heart. And don't forget, my dear, that God's detergent for our cleanliness is always available - the cleansing of the blood and the washing of the water of the Word. (audio ends)

9 Psalm 24:4,5