



CELEBRATING THE MAJESTY OF GOD

PSALM 8

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SERMON MANUSCRIPT

Psalm 8 is the first song of praise in the PSALTER. Psalms 1 and 2, which read like wisdom literature, are the double-doors into the psalms. Psalms 3-7 are filled with lament, as David cries to the Lord for deliverance from his troubles. This sense of complaint resumes in Psalm 9 and following. But Psalm 8 is total praise. From start to finish, this psalm celebrates the majesty of God.

The heading of the psalm reads: “TO THE CHOIRMASTER. ACCORDING TO THE GITTITH. A PSALM OF DAVID.” DAVID wrote this song of praise. GITTITH may be the musical tune it was to be sung to. We are not sure. It is addressed to the CHOIRMASTER to be used in corporate worship. Here is the standard of what a hymn of praise should be. No wonder contemporary worship songs lift lines from this psalm. Yet they fall short of the depth, beauty, and eloquence of this psalm. C.S. LEWIS rightly called it “a short, exquisite lyric.”

Psalm 8 is a celebration of the majesty of God. But God’s majesty is seen here through the lens of creation. In fact, Psalm 8 is the first of five so-called “nature psalms,” which include Psalms 19, 29, 104, and 148. In verse 3 of this psalm, God’s majesty is put on display in the creation of the moon and stars. In verses 6-8, God’s majesty is put on display in the creation of the birds in the air, the animals on the earth, and the fish under the waters. But Psalm 8 does not limit the majesty of God to what you can see through a telescope. God’s majesty can also be seen when you look in the mirror. Psalm 8 is not just about the majesty of God. It is also about the dignity of man. But this psalm is no poetic selfie. The dignity of man is presented here as further evidence of the majesty of God.

This is the message of Psalm 8: All of creation is a call to worship the greatness and goodness of God. Verse 4 asks: “what is man?” This question has baffled the greatest scientists, philosophers, and theologians. But the simple truth is that you cannot answer the question “What is man?” until you first answer the question “Who is God?” And to know God is to worship his majesty. We celebrate the majesty of God because God is great and God is good.

I. GOD IS GREAT.

Psalm 8 begins and ends with a shout of praise in adoration to God: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all of the earth!” This doxology is more detailed in the opening of the psalm than at

the conclusion. Verses 1-2 declare the praise of God’s greatness and the paradox of God’s greatness.

A. THE PRAISE OF GOD’S GREATNESS.

Verse 1 declares that God is great on the earth and in the heavens. GOD IS GREAT ON THE EARTH. Verse 1 says: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” In scripture, one’s name is more than a means of identification. It reveals a person’s ways, nature, or character. So it is with God. No wonder Exodus 20:7 commands: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” David seeks to obey this command in how he addresses God in this psalm: “O Lord, our Lord.” The children of Israel avoided using the personal name of God, Yahweh – the self-existent one. So they called God Adonai – the sovereign one. But even that name was treated reverently. But David was so consumed by the greatness of God that he used both names: “O Yahweh, our Adonai.”

This invocation is a statement of faith. It acknowledged there is only one God: “O Lord.” And this true and living God is the God of Israel: “Our Lord.” But this is no tribal God whose worship is limited to a particular people group: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” The name of the Lord is majestic, excellent, splendid, brilliant, and magnificent. Majesty and glory are parallel terms with a subtle distinction. Glory is the greatness of God’s essential nature. Majesty is the open display of God’s essential nature. And the open display of God’s glory revealed in his name is so great that it cannot be limited or localized. God’s name is majestic in all the earth. Psalm 100:1-2 says, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!”

GOD IS GREAT IN THE HEAVENS. Verse 1b says: “You have set your glory above the heavens.” Glory is not an attribute of God. Glory is the sum total of all the attributes of God. It is the light of his nature. It is the weight of his character. We ascribe glory to God. But the glory of God is inherent. God is not glorious because you praise him. God is glorious because God is God. And to make sure we don’t confuse human greatness with divine glory, the Lord has

set his glory above the heavens. In 1 Kings 8:27, Solomon prayed over the temple he erected: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built.” Solomon rightly acknowledged that nothing we do is good enough for God. Some people object to joyful thanks, passionate praise, and uninhibited worship, claiming that it does not take all of that. But nothing we offer can be enough, much less too much, for the God who has set his glory above the heavens. JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE wrote: “If God has set his glory above the heavens, it is certain that nothing under the heavens can praise him adequately.” God is worthy of the best you have. Psalm 145:3 says, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.”

B. THE PARADOX OF GOD’S GREATNESS.

Verse 2 says: “Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.” This verse is often referenced will a little child says something insightful. But it is about more than precocious children. This verse declares the greatness of God as seen in the paradox between strength and weakness. This contrast between strength and weakness is presented against the backdrop of opposition against God.

THE FACT OF SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION. There is much talk about enemies in the psalms that precede and follow Psalm 8. And they show up in this psalm, but with a twist. David is concerned about God’s enemies here, rather than his own. Verse 2 says the Lord has foes. These foes are further described as “the enemy and the avenger.” This may refer to Satan and his demonic forces or to a human king whose armies attack the people of God on earth. But whether these foes are human or spirit beings, the strategy is the same. The enemies of God foolishly use their power, might, and strength to overthrow God. Psalm 2:1-2 says: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of

the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’”

THE FAILURE OF SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION. Verse 2 says: “Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength, because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.” God stills the enemy and avenger. But notice how God defeats his foes. God establishes strength out of the mouths of weak, vulnerable, helpless babies and infants. The week Jesus was crucified he cleansed the temple of the moneychangers and dove-sellers. Then the children came singing his praises. The religious leaders of were indignant. Matthew 21:16 says: “and they said to him, ‘Do you not hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?’” Quoting Psalm 8:2, Jesus declared himself to be the Lord God who establishes strength out of the mouths of little children when his religious foes refused to acknowledge him as the Messiah-King. This is how God always works. In 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, Paul writes, “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

II. GOD IS GOOD.

Verses 1-2 focus on God alone. It is not until verse 3 that we find the first and only first person statement in this psalm. David says, “I look at your heavens.” Yet this personal statement is still focused on God. As David celebrates the majesty of God, his focus shifts from what is above him to what is around him. Yet he still sees the majesty of God on display. Verses 1-2 praise the greatness of God. Verses 3-8 praise the goodness of God. The goodness of God is seen in God’s care for humanity and God’s creation of humanity.

A. GOD’S CARE FOR HUMANITY.

Verses 3 and 4 record one sentence. It is question that makes a statement about God’s care for humanity. The transcendence and immanence of God work together in loving concern for human beings

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD. Verse 3 says: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place...” For most of us, the lights of the city block out the light of the sky. And we miss the general revelation in the heavens above. Psalm 19:1 says: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” David looked up at the clear sky in the darkness of the night. And he saw God everywhere. He called the sky “your heavens.” It belongs to God because God created it. But creating the heavens was not laborious task for God. David calls the heavens “the work of your fingers.” In one sense, we cannot see as well as David saw. But in another sense, we can see better than David saw. We have telescopes, satellites, and space stations that enable us to see into the heavens infinitely more clearly than David. Yet he was right to call it the work of God’s fingers. The vast universe is divine finger paintings. The moon and the stars did not find their place by a big bang. Almighty God set them in their appointed places. This is the transcendence of God at work.

THE IMMANENCE OF GOD. Verse 4 asks the logical question the transcendence of God raises: “what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” The right answer to this question is nothing. God is so transcendent that the creation of the vast and mysterious universe is child’s play to him. We are rebellious little creatures that exist temporarily on a puny rock in a little galaxy on the far end of the universe. We are nothing. Less than nothing. But the right answer is the wrong answer. The goodness of God is seen in how God treats weak creatures of the moment like you and me.

First, God is mindful of us. Psalm 144:3-4 says: “O Lord, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.” We are a breath away from death. Like a passing shadow, we are here one moment and gone the next.

Yet God is mindful of us. In Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Likewise, God cares for us. Note the progression in verse 5 from God in thought to God at work. God cares for the son of man. The word “cares” is more than a feeling. It means God longs for us, seeks us out, and takes care of us. As Christians, we know this better than David did. In verse 5, David uses the term “son of man” to describe human weakness. But in the Gospels, Jesus used the term in reference to himself. In so doing, Jesus identified himself as God who put on human flesh to visit us with his redeeming love that died on the cross and rose from the dead.

B. GOD’S CREATION OF HUMANITY.

GOD CREATED MAN WITH DIGNITY. Verse 4 asks, “What is man?” Verse 5 answers in four words: “You have made him.” Human beings are not evolved beasts. God created us. Psalm 100:3 says: “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and thee sheep of his pasture.” But how did God make man? Verse 5 says: “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings.” This statement is difficult to translate but easy to interpret. The Hebrew word translated “heavenly beings” is Elohim. It can refer to the true God or false gods or angels. The SEPTUAGINT, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, renders it “angels.” But the most literal reading is that God made man a little lower than God himself. The ESV plays it safe and translates it “the heavenly beings.” But whatever way you translate it, the meaning is the same. God created man with divine dignity. We are not a little higher than the beasts of the field. We are a little lower than the heavenly beings.

Verse 5 says: “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor.” When God created humanity, God crowned humanity. But what is humanity’s crown? It is “glory and honor.” Glory and honor are both ascribed to God. In fact, verse 1 says, “You have set your glory above the heavens.” Yet the glory of God that is set above the heavens is also set on the earth. God has crowned humanity with his glory and honor. This does not

mean we are little gods. It is an affirmation of Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

GOD CREATED MAN FOR DOMINION. The Lord did not create mankind to merely reside on the earth with the other animals. God created man to preside over the earth. He made man have dominion over the earth. Note the stewardship of human dominion. Verse 6 says: “You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.” We do not have dominion by some evolutionary theory of the survival of the fittest. God gave us dominion over the works of his hands and put all things under our feet. We are stewards of the earth who are responsible and accountable to God. Likewise, think about the scope of human dominion. Verse 6 says: “you have put all things under his feet.” Verse 7-8 elaborate: “all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.” God has given humanity dominion over all animate life from the birds of the air to the fish of the sea to the beast of the field.

But considered the sign of human dominion. Psalm 8 is a beautiful song of praise. But it leaves out an important part of the story. Yes, God created man with dignity and for dominion. But our original design was marred by the Fall. The sin of Adam and Even introduced sin, guilt, shame, suffering, and death into the human experience. And each of us stands guilty before God as sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. The image of God in us is tainted, twisted, and tarnished. Birds escape us, fish elude us, and animals attack us, rather than submitting to our dominion. But the plan of God has not failed. The first Adam plummeted humanity into sin. But the Second Adam brings humanity to righteousness.

Hebrews 2:6-10 says: “It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while

lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.’ Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” We are sinful people. We live in a fallen world. We are weak creatures of the moment. We are always staring death in the face. We are doomed to eternal punishment if left to our own devices. But God intervened by sending the Lord Jesus Christ to taste death for us. His death on the cross paid our sin debt. His resurrection from the death gives us new life. WARREN WIERSBE wrote: “Christ’s work on the cross did not merely undo Adam’s sin and put us back where Adam was. Rather, it gave us much more: It made us like Christ.” How should we respond to this indescribable gift? Psalm 8 does not explain the dignity and dominion of man to boost our self-esteem. It seeks to boost our God-esteem. This is why the psalm ends right where it began: “O Lord, our Lord, how magnificent is your name in all the earth.”

O LORD MY GOD, WHEN I IN AWESOME WONDER
CONSIDER ALL THE WORLDS THY HANDS HAVE MADE
I SEE THE STARS, I HEAR THE ROLLING THUNDER
THY POWER THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE DISPLAYED

WHEN THROUGH THE WOODS AND FOREST GLADES I WONDER
AND HEAR THE BIRDS SING SWEETLY IN THE TREES
WHEN I LOOK DOWN FROM LOFTY MOUNTAINS GRANDEUR
AND HEAR THE BROOK AND FEEL THE GENTLE BREEZE

AND WHEN I THINK THAT GOD, HIS SON NOT SPARING
SENT HIM TO DIE, I SCARCE CAN TAKE IT IN
THAT ON THE CROSS, MY BURDEN GLADLY BEARING
HE BLED AND DIED TO TAKE AWAY MY SIN

WHEN CHRIST SHALL COME WITH SHOUT OF ACCLAMATION
AND TAKE ME HOME, WHAT JOY SHALL FILL MY HEART

CELEBRATING THE MAJESTY OF GOD / PSALM 8

THEN I SHALL BOW IN HUMBLE ADORATION
AND THERE PROCLAIM, MY GOD, HOW GREAT THOU ART

THEN SINGS MY SOUL, MY SAVIOR GOD, TO THEE
HOW GREAT THOU ART, HOW GREAT THOU ART