

Psalm 104

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Date: 02 August 2020

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- [0 : 00] Good morning. This is Jerry Shepard from Taylor Seminary, Old Testament professor there, and one of Kent's former professors.
- I'm with you again for the second consecutive Sunday while your pastor Kent is away and preaching this morning from Psalm 104.
- Now, last week I told you that both sermons that I would preach last week on Isaiah 40 and Psalm 104 this week would have a bit to do with God's creation.
- Well, last week I mentioned some things about God's creation, purely illustrative for pointing out some things in Isaiah 40.
- However, Psalm 104 is much more taken up with the idea of the creation of God and what that means for us and what it means for him.
- [0 : 56] And so we'll be focusing much more on the idea of creation in this particular message this morning on Psalm 104. So, again, I invite you, if you would like to, follow along in the reading of Psalm 104, to do so with your own Bibles.
- However, again, if you just want to listen, that is fine as well. I once had a colleague, a professor here at Taylor Seminary, who told me that he never took his Bible to church.
- Now, can you imagine that? A seminary professor who never took his Bible to church. However, he had a reason for that. And the reason was he wanted to recreate the experience of the saints in the ancient synagogues in the early church who would not have had a personal copy of the text to take to the synagogue service or the church service.
- They came literally to hear the word of God and not to read it while they were hearing it. So if you want to just listen, that's fine.
- You may want to have the text in front of you, though, when we actually go through the passage again in the course of the message. So, Psalm 104.
- [2 : 17] Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with splendor and majesty.
- He wraps himself in light as with a garment. He stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.
- He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.
- He set the earth on its foundations. It can never be moved. You covered it with the deep as with a garment. The waters stood above the mountains, but at your rebuke the waters fled.
- At the sound of your thunder, they took to flight. They flowed over the mountains. They went down into the valleys to the place you assigned for them.
- [3 : 22] You set a boundary they cannot cross. Never again will they cover the earth. He makes springs pour water into the ravines.

It flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field. The wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters.

They sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers. The earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for man to cultivate.

Bringing forth food from the earth. Wine that gladdens the heart of man. Oil to make his face shine. And bread that sustains his heart.

The trees of the Lord are well watered. The cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests. The stork has its home in the pine trees.

[4 : 29] The high mountains belong to the wild goats. The crags are a refuge for the conies. The moon marks off the seasons.

And the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness. It becomes night. And all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey.

And seek their food from God. The sun rises and they steal away. They return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work.

To his labor until evening. How many are your works, O Lord? In wisdom you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious.

Teeming with creatures beyond number. Living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro. And the leviathan. Which you formed to frolic there.

[5 : 35] These all look to you. To give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them. They gather it up. When you open your hand.

They are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face. They are terrified. When you take away their breath. They die and return to the dust.

When you send your spirit. They are created. And you renew the face of the earth. May the glory of the Lord endure forever.

May the Lord rejoice in his works. He who looks at the earth and it trembles. Who touches the mountains. And they smoke. I will sing to the Lord all my life.

I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him. As I rejoice in the Lord.

[6 : 35] But may sinners vanish from the earth. And the wicked be no more. Praise the Lord. Oh my soul. Praise the Lord.

Before we begin looking at the text of Psalm 104 and trying to explain it.

Let's commit this again to our God in prayer. Let's pray. God and Father and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We again pray that you would be pleased with my words. And that you would be pleased with the meditations of all our hearts.

Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. And we ask this to your son, Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Now, a bit of a warning here.

[7 : 38] Last week when I preached from Isaiah 40, it was, I'm going to say more ceremony. But this is going to be a little bit more lectury.

Now, don't let that scare you. Don't let that throw you off. But in some ways, as we go through this psalm verse by verse, it's going to have more the character of a Sunday school lesson.

But it will also have the preachy elements as well. So think of it as a glorified Sunday school lesson. This is what I might sometimes do, by the way, in my classes at school.

So think of yourself as sitting in a lecture in a seminary. You always wanted to go to a seminary, didn't you? But in any case, just keep that in mind.

But I will try to make sure that as we go through this whole thing, it's not just lectury, but it's also very meaningful, I hope, for our practical and our spiritual lives and our spiritual formation.

[8 : 47] Now, just a few things I want to mention before we get into the actual text of Psalm 104. I think I may have, I can't remember now, but I think I may have, in the introduction here, used the word nature.

And sometimes we talk about getting back to nature. And many of you are going to try to deal with this COVID crisis by taking in some outdoor stuff, going to lakes and hills, and maybe you'll go to the Rockies.

That'd be a great thing to do, see more of God's creation. And I understand what we mean when we use the word nature in that sense.

We're thinking, getting back to what? God has made in the world. The rocks and the trees and the skies and the seas and the hills and the lakes and the ravines and the ponds and the rivers and all the animals that God created.

But what's important to remember, keep in mind here, is it is, in fact, God's creation. So it's not strictly nature. It's not just natural.

[9 : 57] It didn't come of its own accord. God created it. One Old Testament scholar, Helmer Ringgren, puts it this way. There are in the Psalter some psalms that deal with the magnificence and beauty of creation and nature.

But nature is never praised for its own sake. There are no nature lyrics in the psalms. Nature is referred to only to the extent that it points to him who made everything.

Creation is not mentioned for its own sake, but for the creator's sake. And then another Old Testament scholar, Hans Joachim Krauss, says this.

Israel was not familiar with the concept of nature. The term nature should be eliminated from our talk about the Psalms in the Bible.

To her, that is to Israel, the world was primarily much more an event than a being, and certainly much more a personal experience than a neutral subject for investigation.

[11 : 18] So, I just want to point that out, first of all. We're not talking about nature as in a natural world. And for sure, we're not talking about Mother Nature.

We're talking about the God who created the world, the universe, the skies, the seas, the heavens, the earth, and all that it contains, and all the space in between them.

He creates that as well. And he does it for his glory. He does it for our benefit as well. We'll say more about that later. But he does it primarily for his glory.

But then there's one more thing that I want to mention before we get into the text of Psalm 104. And that's that when we look at God's creation, when we look at God's nature, we have to recognize, or whenever we look at nature that God has created, if you want to call it nature, we have to keep in mind that creation is actually a bit of an accommodation on the part of God.

That is, we don't see God. He is invisible. He is not an entity that we can actually view, that we can actually see.

[12 : 43] Yet, he accommodates himself to our understanding by, as it were, kind of making himself visible in the creation that he has made.

We're going to see this as we go through the Psalms. Because it talks about certain aspects of creation as being clothing that God wears. But it's the invisible man wearing this clothing.

It's the invisible God wearing this clothing. So creation is an accommodation. So whenever you do go to the mountains, to the Rockies, wherever you go to commune with nature, as it were, remember that you are looking at an accommodation.

It is God stooping down to our level to reveal himself. And yet, he doesn't actually reveal himself as such.

He reveals his clothing. He reveals his universe that he has created to adorn himself. But God himself, we do not see.

[13 : 50] He is invisible to our eye. But he stoops down to our level to help us to envision him. So whenever you look at the sun, the moon, the stars, the animals, the magnificent Rocky Mountains, you're looking at something God has made to accommodate himself to our eyes.

And in doing so, he allows us to catch a glimpse, only a glimpse of his glory. Only a glimpse of how truly magnificent and marvelous and wonderful and awesome he really is.

Okay. Now, walk with me as we go through this psalm together. Look at verse 1. Praise the Lord, O my soul.

O Lord, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with splendor and majesty. And at least for this particular psalm, that clothing with splendor and majesty is this universe that God has made.

The sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the lightning, the storm. That is his clothing. And as Spurgeon tells us in one of his sermons, he says that God himself is not to be seen.

[15 : 21] But his works, which can be called God's garment, in some way reveal himself to us. And yet they stand as a kind of a buffer zone between God and us.

We don't see God as such we see his creation. But that creation should cause us to meditate on the person of God himself. Verse 2.

He wraps himself in light as with a garment. Catch that again? The light that we come into.

It's so wonderful to go outside on a sunny day. And especially if it's been raining for a few days. It's so wonderful to go outside and feel the warmth of the sun and see the daylight.

But Ecclesiastes talks about how wonderful it is to go out and see the light and dwell in the outdoors and the sun and the light that's there.

[16 : 27] But from the standpoint of Psalm 104, the light that we come into when we go outside, that light is a garment for God.

It is that which in some way conceals God and yet reveals him as being one who made that light. And if that light is glorious, how much greater must be the one who made that light?

How much more glorious he must be? Calvin says this. John Calvin. He says, Again, that light becomes a buffer zone that stands between God and us so that we can catch again a fleeting glimpse of his glory.

Verse 3. He lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.

Notice that. This psalm invites us to look at all of creation, what we call nature, and view every piece of it in relation to who God is.

[18 : 16] So the light we're supposed to envision as a garment that God wears. When we look at the clouds, you know, we always like to lay back and look up at the clouds and figure out what kind of figures they make.

Well, the psalms tell us what kind of figure the cloud makes. It's not a dog or a cat or a bear. It's a chariot in which God rides.

And what empowers that chariot? What empowers those clouds to go through the sky? It's the wings of the wind. So the wind now has sprouted wings to carry God's chariot throughout the sky.

That's the way the psalm invites us to look at creation. Verse 4. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.

Now, this is very interesting here. And we're going to see some more of this as we go through the psalm. But the interesting thing is it talks about how that wind that carries that chariot along, those clouds in the sky, that wind is God's messenger.

[19 : 30] And then it talks about flames of fire as being his servants. Well, what is so interesting about that is that in the ancient Near Eastern civilization in which Israel lived, the civilizations around Israel deified all these things.

The wind was not just the wind. It was a deity. It was a God. And the flames of fire, maybe we're talking about lightning bolts here, actually.

Flames of fire, lightning bolts, they deified those as well. So wind and flame were, those things were deities to the ancient Canaanites.

But to the God of Israel and the psalmist here, he says the wind and the lightning, those aren't deities. Those are servants of God, which he orders around.

The wind is his servant, his messenger. The flame of fire, the lightning is what brings honor and glory to him.

[20 : 41] God uses it for his own purposes. Virgil Howard puts it this way. So great is God that phenomena at which mortals can only marvel, light, the heavens, clouds, wind, lightning, are things that God uses for clothing and shelter, transportation, and servants.

So if you want to use your imagination when you go to the Rockies in summer, take every part of that and think, in what way does that cloud, in what way does that mountain, in what way does that lake, that river, in what way does that mountain go?

In what way does that mountain go?

In what way does that mountain go?

Clashing up against one another, clashing up against one another, stuff like that. We know where the wind comes from. We know what causes it. But those causes, according to scripture, are always only secondary.

[22 : 42] So while there may indeed be a scientific explanation for why we have thunder and lightning, much more important for our purposes is this theological explanation.

The thunder is the sound of his voice. The lightning is the flash of his eyes. The wind is the breath of his mouth.

The wind is the breath of his mouth.

The seas are seen in some way as a garment for the earth to wear. So it's not just that God wears creation, but the earth wears creation.

The earth is a substance that wears, puts on the seas as a garment. But then also, in verse 6, there it says, the waters stood above the mountains.

[24 : 03] And interestingly, that then flows into verse 7, where it says, And notice what these two verses do here.

And this is not the only place where this occurs in the Psalms. But on the one hand, those waters that cover the mountains at the flood, at the great flood, when those waters, when they burst forth from the great deeps, and when the windows of heaven opened and all that water came down and created that great flood, they served God's purposes.

They served his purpose in visiting punishment upon the world that he had created upon the humans in the world because of all their sin, violence, wickedness.

But when they served their purpose, what did God do? It says in verse 7 again, at your rebuke, the waters fled. So God used them to execute his punishment against humankind, which had become so wicked and violent.

And yet, when they have done their duty, he rebukes them and tells them to go back to where they were to begin with. Interesting way to understand God's use of his creation.

[25 : 37] Verse 8, referring to those waters again. They flowed over the mountain. They went down into the valleys to the place you assigned for them.

You set a boundary they cannot cross. Never again will they cover the earth. He makes springs pour water into the ravine.

It flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field. The wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters.

They sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers. The earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

He makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth. Wine that gladdens the heart of man.

[26 : 33] Oil to make his face shine. And bread that sustains his heart. We've read a number of verses here. And I just want to call attention to the fact that we see here God controlling all aspects of creation and nourishment and life.

He gives water for the beasts of the field. He gives water for the wild donkeys to come along and quench their thirst. He makes trees for the birds of the air to nest in.

They sing on the branches. He also waters the mountains. And the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes the grass grow for the cattle.

In essence, he does everything. He waters all his creation. He feeds all his creation. He makes the grass grow.

He makes plants for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth. If there is going to be a harvest this fall, it's going to be because God gave the harvest.

[27 : 43] Humans have their role to play. They sow and they fertilize and they reap and they harvest. But God is the one who gives the growth.

God is the one who gives the increase. And then verse 15, wine that gladdens the heart of man. The reformers were especially happy that this line was in the psalm.

It justified the drinking of beer and wine. And so, in fact, Calvin says, he says, As the psalmist in this account of the divine goodness and providence makes no reference to the excesses of men, we gather from his words that it is lawful to use wine, not only in cases of necessity, but also thereby to make us married.

So, there you go. Verse 16. The trees of the Lord are well watered. The cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

You know, way back in creation, way back in the creation story, who was it that made the Garden of Eden? That was God.

[29 : 06] God is the first gardener. He is the first tree planter. He is the first horticulturalist. He is the first arborist. He is the one who plants the trees.

The trees of the Lord are well watered. The cedars of Lebanon that he planted. And in particular here, what's being referred to is trees that no person planted.

There was no Johnny Appleseed going through and planting apple trees or other individuals planting oaks and myrtles and maples and pines.

God planted the trees. And there's something especially important to point out here. And this will be very relevant for us, I think.

Do you realize that there are trees in this world that no human eye has ever seen?

[30 : 08] There are animals in this world that no human eye has ever seen. There are lions and tigers and elephants and bears and mountain goats that live their entire lives and no human eye ever sees them.

But who does see them? Who does observe them in all their animal activities? God does.

They are his trees. They are his animals. They are his pets. And he delights in them. I think about what we do when we go to the Rockies.

We go there and we marvel at the majesty of a mountain. We marvel at the mountain goats that we get to see. And I know several times when you go to Jasper at the park gate there, the mountain goats there, they come down and they want to interact with humans.

And we take pictures. We take photographs. We go ooh and ah. And then we drive on.

[31 : 30] And eventually, in a day or two, we forget about those mountain goats. We forget about those mountains. We forget about the trees we just saw. And in some ways, it's almost as if after just a couple of days, all that stuff that we marveled in and took so much delight in observing, we've forgotten.

But that doesn't mean it's forgotten. Because God didn't necessarily make all those things for us. He made them for himself.

And he glories in them. He is always watching over his trees. He always observes his mountains. He is always looking at his creation.

And all those animals that he has made. And all their movements and all their development and what they do. It brings glory to him.

He delights in them. He observes them. And because he observes them, even though we forget about them, they still exist.

[32 : 41] I want to read a poem to you. This was written by Ronald Knox. And in this poem, he is responding to a kind of agnostic slash atheist type person named George Berkeley.

And in the first half of this little poem, he's capturing the thought of George Berkeley. But in the second half, he's capturing his own thought.

But he's putting it in the words, as it were, the imagined words of God. So listen to this first half of this limerick.

There was a young man who said, God must think it exceedingly odd if he finds that this tree continues to be when there's no one about in the quad.

And the quad here being referred to the quadrangle at various universities in England, like Oxford and Cambridge. And so in capturing the thought of Berkeley here, he's saying Berkeley has this understanding that, you know, if something grows, an animal or a tree, and no one ever sees it, does it actually exist?

[33 : 59] It's that old line, you know, if you make a noise, if you shout out and no one hears it, has your shout actually, does it actually exist?

Or if a tree falls in the forest and no one's around to see it, did it actually fall? Did that tree ever actually exist? And so Ronald Knox answers George Berkeley's question like this.

Dear sir, your astonishment's odd. I am always about in the quad. And that's why the tree will continue to be since observed by yours faithfully, God.

Now, I want you to just think about that for a bit. Several years ago, I went to a, I took my young son.

He was about maybe 10 years old at the time. I took him to a cemetery. We were away on vacation and we happened to drive by this cemetery. And so after we got set up in the place where we were staying, I said, you know, I'd like to go back to that cemetery and just look around a little bit.

[35 : 23] And I took my son with me. And we went to the cemetery. And when we got there, it was kind of depressing. We went into the cemetery and there were tombstones in there.

And it was awfully, awfully hard to make out the writing on the tombstone. Weather and wind and all kinds of things had caused erosion of the inscriptions on the tombstone.

And there were some graves that were only marked by a piece of wood. And it was impossible to make out the name on that piece of wood that marked the grave.

Not only that, but the cemetery was hugely overgrown with grass and weeds. And sometimes the grass and the weeds covered up the inscriptions on the tombstones and the wooden markers.

Well, that was kind of depressing. But then, as my young son and I began to leave the graveyard, there was this entrance that we hadn't paid much attention to when we went in.

[36 : 38] But when we got, when we, so as we left the graveyard and got to the other side of that entrance, we turned around and looked back. And there was a sign on that entrance marker.

And it said, gone, but not forgotten. Well, that seemed like such a huge oxymoron. Because we were just in this cemetery where evidently no one was taking care of the grounds.

No one was cutting the grass. No one was taking care of the markers. Apparently, these people had relatives that were not taking any, or descendants who weren't taking any care to make sure that the, that the, who was buried there, that name was still visible and could be read.

And it was so ironic then to leave and gone but not forgotten. Well, it looks like they're forgotten. But here's what the psalmist wants us to know.

Even as there are trees and animals whom no human eye has ever seen but only God, the same thing is true of us.

[37 : 54] Maybe there is no human eye that has observed us or cares for us. But God always does. God is always about in the quad.

God is always about in his universe. And so, to use that old line again, if a tree falls in the forest and there's no one to hear it fall, does it make a sound?

Did it actually exist? We could ask the question about a human life. If a person lives. If a person lives. And he lives his entire life. And he dies.

And there is no one around to remember him. Did he ever live? And the question always gets a yes answer.

Because that person is always observed by God. That person matters to God. And that's why this psalm is so important here in causing us to recognize that God is intimately concerned with his creation.

[39 : 05] And that means he's also intimately concerned with us. With me. With you. Verse 17.

The birds make their nests. The stork has its home in the pine trees. The high mountains belong to the wild goats. There's those wild goats again. The crags are a refuge for the donkeys.

And then we come to verse 19. We're going to park here for a while as well. It says in verse 19. The moon marks off the seasons. And the sun knows when to go down.

Now, I'm going to read a poem to you here. It's an ancient Egyptian poem. And what it is, is a hymn to an Egyptian god.

Now, there's a convoluted kind of history to Egypt and what they worshipped at various times. At some points in Egypt's history, they had a whole pantheon, as it were, of gods which they worshipped.

[40 : 17] But sometimes in Egypt's history, one particular god had the preeminence. Or there was even, maybe at some point in Egypt's history, almost a kind of a monotheism where they only had one deity they worshipped.

And that deity was called Aton or Aton. The sun god. The sun was a god for the Egyptians to worship.

Now, I'm going to read to you a hymn to this sun god that comes to us from ancient Egypt. It's going to be a bit long. Bear with me as I read it because it has its purpose.

But what I want you to pay particular attention to is this hymn to the sun god and this verse that we just read, verse 19.

The moon marks off the seasons and the sun knows when to go down. Okay, here it is.

[41 : 18] I'm not going to read the entire thing. I'm going to skip around and read the best parts. But it's still going to take a little bit of time to go through it. So, here we go. In this sermon where we're trying to praise God, our God, the God of Israel, the God of Jesus, we're going to read this long hymn about the sun god.

Maybe it seems counterproductive, but there's method in the madness. Listen. This is the hymn to Aton, the Egyptian sun god. As you rise over the horizon, O Aton, first among the gods, your beauty is made manifest, O giver of life.

You rise in the east. You fill every land with beauty. Your glory shines high above every land. Your rays enrich all the lands you created.

Although you are far away, your rays touch the earth. Although you shine on every human face, no one sees you go. When you set upon the western horizon, the earth lies in darkness and death.

Sleepers lie beneath their covers, seeing no one around them. Their pillows could vanish. They would not even notice. The lion leaves his cave.

[42 : 39] The serpent strikes. The darkness blankets the land. The land lies silent. He who made them rests on the horizon. At daybreak, you rise again over the horizon.

You shine as the Aton, bringing day. Your rays chase away the darkness. The two lands of Egypt rejoice, awaken, standing on their feet. You raise them up, bathed and dressed.

They raise their hands in praise. The whole land goes to work. Cattle graze contented. Trees and plants turn green. Birds fly to their nests. They spread their wings to praise you.

The flocks skip on their feet. All things come to life when you are risen. Ships and barges sail up and down. Canals open at your rising. Fish swim in the river before you.

Your rays penetrate even the dark waters. You join a woman and a man. You form the fetus in its mother's womb. You soothe the crying child.

[43 : 44] You nurse the hungry infant in the womb. You breathe into its nostrils the breath of life. You open the newborn's mouth on the day of its birth. You meet every human need.

When the chick cheeps from inside its shell, you give it breath to sustain it. You have set the appointed time for it to break the shell, that it may emerge to cheep at the appointed time.

That it may walk with its feet when it emerges. How numerous are the things which you have made, hidden from you. You alone are God. There is no other like you.

You created the earth according to your pleasure, by yourself, humankind, cattle, and all flocks. Everything on earth which walks with its feet, and whatever is on high flying with their wings.

How excellent are your plans, O Lord of eternity! Your rays suckle every meadow. When you rise, they live and thrive for you.

[44 : 47] You made the seasons to nourish all that you have made. The winter to cool them in the heat. They might taste you. You made the heavens in which to rise, that you might observe all things.

You alone are the autumn. You alone are the source of life. You alone are so far away and yet so near. You make millions of forms from yourself alone.

Your hand made the earth. You created it. When you rise, the earth lives. When you set, the earth dies.

Now, I skipped around to this poem, so you can find this yourself if you want to Google it on the internet there. But what I want you to notice here is how a lot of the things that we have read in Psalm 104 are said about the Egyptian god.

Atom. Their god. The Egyptians' god. And Psalm 104 says many similar things about the Israelite god.

[46 : 01] Well, the question then comes to the front. Which one's right? Was it Egypt? Were they right that Atom was the great god? Or was Israel right that their god, Yahweh, was the great god of the universe who created all things?

Well, that's an interesting question. And in fact, most likely this hymn to the Egyptian god Atom is actually earlier than Psalm 104 in our Bibles.

But there's a good reason for that. Now, there are a lot of commentators in the Psalms who have argued that in some way, Psalm 104 is an imitation of this hymn to Atom.

It's almost as if in some way, this is simplistic to say it this way, but it's almost as if the psalmist has copied this Egyptian hymn to Atom and done a find and replace.

Find the word Atom replaced with Yahweh, the god of Israel. Again, that's way too simplistic. But here is what is so interesting.

[47 : 10] In this 19th verse of Psalm 104, the psalmist says, The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.

What is so interesting here is that there is a huge statement being made in this psalm about the god of Israel.

In the ancient Near East, every nation, every civilization had its own deity. And when those two nations went to war against each other, for example, it wasn't simply a matter of saying, okay, we're the bigger nation.

We're going to beat you up. It was also a way of saying, we're the bigger nation. We're going to beat you up. And we're going to do that because our god is bigger than your god.

Or to put it in modern parlance, you know, my dad can beat up your dad, that kind of thing. Well, interestingly, in this 104th psalm, in the 19th verse, it says, The sun knows when to go down.

[48 : 25] In that hymn to Aton, Aton is the great god who made everything. But in Psalm 104, the sun is simply one of God's creations.

God made the sun. And the sun knows his proper place. He knows when he's supposed to rise. And he knows when he's supposed to go down.

After all, in Israelite religion, Aton couldn't be the god because Aton is visible.

Aton is the sun. But the god of Israel is the one who is invisible. The sun is simply an accommodation on God's part to give us just a glimpse of his glory.

So when you marvel in the brightness and the magnificence and the radiance of the sun, remember, you're only catching a glimpse of the radiance of God himself.

[49 : 41] Let's keep reading. Verse 20. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.

That's very interesting here. There are other places where it talks about the animals praising their maker. There are even passages that suggest that animals pray to God and ask him to give them food.

Well, the psalmist does something very similar here. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. Even the animals in some way acknowledge who God is.

And how is that? Remember I said before, when God makes things, he does it for his glory. When God made the lion, when God made the tiger, when God made the mountain goat, when God made all these magnificent creatures, he did so because he delights in them.

He delighted in them. And in some way, when they do what they do, they're giving glory to God.

[50 : 57] When a lion roars in the forest, he's doing what lions are supposed to do. He's doing what God designed lions to do.

And in this way, they glorify God. Verse 22. The sun rises and they steal away. They return and lie down in their dens.

Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening. How many are your works, O Lord? In wisdom, you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures.

There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number, living things, both large and small.

And then we come to verse 26. I'm going to stop there for just a few minutes. There's two lines there. One line talks about things that humans have made.

[52 : 01] The other line talks about something that God made without any human assistance. So the first line says that on this sea, the ships go to and fro.

That's what humans have made. They've made the great ships. And the Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there. Let me read to you a poem written by Richard Granville Jones about human things that we have in our universe.

And yet, what do those human made things indicate? What do they signify? God of concrete, God of steel, God of piston and of wheel, God of pylon, God of steam, God of girder and of beam, God of atom, God of mine, all the world of power is thine.

Lord of cable, Lord of cable, Lord of rail, Lord of freeway and of mail, Lord of rocket, Lord of flight, Lord of roaring satellite, Lord of lightning's flashing line, all the world of speed is thine.

Lord of science, Lord of science, Lord of art, Lord of map and graph and chart, Lord of physics and research, word of Bible, faith and of church, Lord of sequence and design, all the world of truth is thine.

[53 : 38] God whose glory fills the earth gave the universe its birth. Loosed the Christ with Easter's might, saves the world from evil's blight. Claim us all by grace divine, all the world of love is thine.

Did you catch all that? All this human made stuff, cable, rail, freeway, rockets, satellites, science, maps, graphs, charts, all these things that humans have made bring glory to God.

They glorify him. And so God glorifies himself in what in the things that human beings who are made in the image of God themselves make.

And God gets glory from that. But then the second line of this verse then goes on to say that in that sea, there is the Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

Very interesting because there's a bit of a debate on how you should translate that second line. Now, in most of our Bibles, as it reads pretty much what what like NIV has, the Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

[54 : 59] But there are many Old Testament commentators and commentators in the Psalms who believe that a better translation would be and the Leviathan, which you formed to play with.

Now, that gives us a bit of a bit of a different picture, doesn't it? On the one hand, Leviathan is this fearsome creature. Later on today, if you have a chance, turn to Job 41.

Read the read most of that 41st chapter. And it describes Leviathan there. Leviathan is this fearsome monster. His tail drags up the mud in the seas.

He breathes out lightning and flames of fire. His breath sets coals ablaze. He is a fearsome monster.

You don't want to mess with this thing. And yet. And by the way, Leviathan is indeed a monster in Job 41. And yet, in some way, even though this Leviathan monster is in some passages pictured as an enemy of God, in this passage, it talks about God making the Leviathan to frolic the seas.

[56 : 24] And possibly, and I believe it is correct, the better way to translate that last line is the Leviathan, which you, God, formed to play with.

John Levinson, in one of his books, the fantastic Jewish Old Testament scholar, refers to Leviathan as God's rubber ducky.

It's what God formed to play with. But what is so important for us to notice here is that, again, the Leviathan, whatever that thing is, and the whales in the sea, and the sharks, and the dolphins, some of whom no human eye will ever see, bring praise and glory to God.

It delights him as he sees his creatures doing what he created them to do. Verse 27. These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.

When you give it to them, they gather it up. When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified.

[57 : 47] When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. The same kinds of things that were said about Aton in that hymn that we read are said about God here.

When he hides his face, there's darkness. But when he gives his light and gives his breath, they are created.

They renew the face of the earth. Verse 31. May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in his works.

So again, what is so interesting to see here is that in some ways, I think it's right for us to understand that God made the world for us.

God made the universe for us. He made it for us to examine. He made it for us to take delight in, to glory in, to rejoice in, to go to the Rockies or to the ocean and go, ooh and ah, how marvelous that is.

[58 : 56] But in some way, before he made it for us, he made it for himself. And he is the one who takes the major delight in his creation.

So the psalmist says, may that continue. May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord always rejoice in his works.

May he delight always in the things which he has created. God made creation for himself. He delights in his creation. And when we also take the light in the creation, you know what we're doing?

We are exhibiting our image-bearing character as those who are made in God's image. In other words, as we go to the mountains, as we go to the seas and observe and delight in all that magnificent power and beauty, we too are doing what God does.

And in doing that, we image him. We fulfill our role in the universe as being image-bearing characters who bear the image of God.

[60 : 19] However, we can also mess that up if we don't completely and fully realize that we indeed are doing this in God's image.

If we go to the Rockies, if we go to the mountains, if we go to the seas and wonder and delight in all that beauty, and fail to give God the glory for it, we don't fulfill our role as those who are made in the image of God.

Verse 32, God is the one who looks at the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. And then the psalm begins to come to a close.

Verse 33, I will sing to the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. He declares that this is going to be a lifetime occupation for him, giving God glory for what he has done.

And then we come to the last two verses of the psalm where the psalmist takes all that he has said and puts it into a prayer and he prays two different things.

[61 : 40] First of all, in verse 34, he prays, may my meditation be pleasing to him as I rejoice in the Lord.

In other words, and I've already said this in other ways, but the psalmist here, having gone through a litany of reciting all these things about God's creation, then says, I do hope that my meditation is pleasing to you, God, as I rejoice in the Lord.

We always have a responsibility to God to make sure that our rejoicing in God's creation is always rejoicing in the person of God himself.

The purpose of singing, the purpose of playing, the purpose of working, the purpose of all that we do, and the purpose of taking delight in God's creation is to please God, to please our Lord.

But then, interestingly, in verse 35, the psalm takes a bit of a different turn. And you might think, having read these first 34 verses in the psalm, that it would have been awfully nice if verse 34 was the last verse.

[63 : 13] But then, we get this more negative note in verse 35, and you wonder, how in the world does this work? The psalmist says in verse 35, but may sinners vanish from the earth, and the wicked be no more.

And other than two more lines where it says, praise the Lord of my soul, praise the Lord, that's the last thought in the psalm. And you wonder, after such a long psalm that's been so positive, why all of a sudden now do we have this negative verse?

Why do that? What's the purpose in taking this negative turn at the end? May sinners vanish from the earth. May the wicked be no more. And yet, there's a very definite reason for this.

The whole psalm has been about praising God for his creation, and then making sure that you turn that praise of, that delight in creation to the praise of Yahweh.

And if you do not do that, then you have not fulfilled your image bearing character as images of God.

[64 : 34] And if you are not fulfilling God's purpose for your life, if you are not doing what you were created to do, then why should you even exist anymore?

sinner who does not give God the glory, may they vanish from the earth.

May those wicked ones be no more. And it is sinful, and it is wicked, not to give God the glory and the praise that he deserves for what he has done.

Virgil Howard puts it this way, and he also references John Calvin. Howard says, the joy of the believer is the ultimate response to the joy of God upon which the state of the world is based.

And the believer's poems of praise are appropriate responses to the glory of God. But then he captures the thought of verse 34 and says it well.

[65 : 41] He says, indeed, to fail to respond to the glory and joy of God in this way constitutes sin and wickedness.

And since such non-response can only threaten to mar and distort the contradictions and to mar and distort the creation, it has no right to exist.

So even this negative turn at the end of the psalm captures something important. And it captures this idea that in some way, if part of God's creation is not fulfilling its purpose as part of God's creation, it should no longer exist.

Elizabeth Octemeyer, great Presbyterian Old Testament scholar and preacher of yesteryear, was talking about the passages in the Psalms where the psalmist prays that God will destroy his enemies.

and we get that same kind of we get very similar statements, not just in the Psalms, we get them also in the New Testament where there is a prayer for the destruction of all those who would rise up against God and against his glory and against his authority and power and greatness and goodness.

[67 : 19] us. And it may sound like a very negative note for us, but indeed it actually is a very positive note. And Octomir reminds us that every time you pray the Lord's prayer, every time you say, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done in heaven as on earth.

Every time you do that, you are asking God in some way to judge those who have refused to give him glory.

Let me read what she says. She says, the church can learn from the psalmists that it is proper to pray for the destruction of the enemies of God.

We finally desire that the kingdom of God will come on the earth, do we not? But that means that God will put down every opposition to his rule, and the church should pray earnestly for the elimination of such opposition.

So even though this psalm takes this negative turn at the end, it's a note that needed to be sounded, because in the end, God carries out that last great final judgment, there will be a divide made between those who have given God glory and those who have not.

[69 : 02] And the ones who have not will exist no more, because they have refused to display the image of God. They have rebelled against him, and they lose their right to exist.

So this should be a warning to us. And that warning would be, when you go to the Rockies, when you go to the oceans, when you glory in God's creation, make sure you always make that glory, that reflection, that praise, that exaltation, make sure you see it all as reflecting back on the creator, and give him the glory.

Brothers and sisters, I pray this will be a help for you, as you either reflect back on trips you've already made this summer, or are going to make.

May God give you the light in his creation, but even more than that, may God give you the light in himself. So there is no better way, I think, to close this off than by praying the last two verses of this song.

May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the Lord, but may sinners vanish from the earth, and the wicked be no more.

[70 : 35] Praise the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord. It's been a delight, though I couldn't see you, you had to see me, but it's been a delight for me to be with you these past couple of weeks.

May the Lord use our words and our meditations and our thoughts to bring him great glory. Thanks again for allowing me to come into your service these two weeks.

May the Lord's richest blessings be on you.