

Crowned with glory & honour

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[0 : 0 0] Well, guys, I hope that you are finding our series looking at these first 12 psalms helpful. I hope you're finding it useful to grapple with a variety of different life situations and to consider how God's Word invites us to respond to them.

I hope you're finding it helpful, but some of it is heavy going, isn't it? Some of it is quite focused on pushing our way through the muck. It's important, isn't it, on a treacherous path.

It's important to watch where you're putting your feet. And you could say perhaps that in the last few psalms we've been looking down. We've been looking at our feet and thinking about difficult situations.

But as you slog along, it is sometimes good to pause and to look up and to see the world around you, not just the few yards immediately ahead.

And that is what we're invited to do here in Psalm 8. We're invited to stop and look up at the heavens and look at the world around us and cry, Yahweh our Lord, how magnificent is your name throughout the earth.

[1 : 0 6] Psalm 8 begins and ends with that call to praise God, to recognize the majesty of his name. This is another Davidic psalm like some of the ones we've looked at already.

And as you'll see in the superscription, it is for the director of music or for the choir master. In other words, it is intended for use in public worship. David is assuming that what he says here about Yahweh, you will also gladly say.

He assumes that praise of God will be our starting point and praise of God will be our end point. And sandwiched in between the two, he offers some reasons why that should be the case.

So the closing declaration, the closing joy of declaring, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. The closing version should be even more enthusiastic than the beginning one because we have those reasons in between.

So we're going to think about some of those reasons in order that when we close by singing this psalm together, you may indeed praise God with understanding infused by these words of David that point us to this majestic God.

[2 : 1 8] So having called for praise, in verse 2, David delights in an amazing contrast. On the one hand, you have the enemies, the foe, the avenger.

Picture this guy. And on the other hand, on the other hand, says David, through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies.

On the other hand, picture this. That's the contrast that we're drawing here. We're not just talking about babies. This verse is picked up by Jesus in the New Testament.

Here's Matthew 21. Clearly the children there in that incident in Matthew 21, and clearly they're old enough to be able to shout, to verbally rejoice in God, to worship Jesus with their lips.

But the phrase here in Psalm 8 is children and infants. Some translations even say babies. I think David has in mind not just the children old enough to jump and to shout.

[3 : 42] I think he's saying that even the baby, lying in his crib, making no sound more articulate than a cry, in some fashion, that baby is the means by which God has established a stronghold against that barbarian brute.

This is the tremendous contrast, one of many contrasts in this psalm. God, says David, God has used that which seems to be utterly ineffective, that which seems even almost inconsequential.

God has used the most unlikely of means to silence his enemies. Even the helpless baby is somehow God's means of defeating the mighty foe.

Of course, God often acts in such a way, doesn't he? Using the unlikely things. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

How is it that this comes about, that the praise of children and infants is the means of silencing the enemies? Well, the stronghold is established through praise, says David.

[4 : 53] There's something powerful, isn't there? There's something powerful about a willingness to praise God that is hard for God's enemies to answer. Think about Horatio Spafford, writing the hymn, It is well with my soul, even as he mourned the deaths of his son and his four daughters, never mind his financial ruin.

In his grief, he praised God. That is hard to answer, isn't it? There is a place for intellectual engagement.

There's a place for careful argumentation in engaging with God's enemies, of being able to offer a reason for the hope that we have. But there is also a place for the unanswerable testimony of the soul that is able to praise God even in those times of tragedy.

Folks, there should be something different about a Christian funeral. We've seen, looking at the last few psalms, how God equips us for the difficult situations of life, how knowing him enables to praise him even in the midst of those trials.

And here, says David, that praise silences God's enemies. Secondly, David looks up and considers the vastness of the universe.

[6 : 12] Maybe he thinks back on his days as a shepherd when he used to lie back on the hillside at night and look up at the sky. The myriad points of light beyond his ability to number, the clockwork precision of the movements of the heavenly bodies that mark out the months and the years of our existence.

David considers the heavens and he cannot help but be amazed. Oh, Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath made, then sings my soul.

Of course, if the night sky was wondrous to David, well, surely it is even more so to us. True, most of us don't spend our nights out on the hillside looking up at the stars. True, the streetlights somewhat diminish our view of the night sky.

And yet, on the other hand, our increased scientific understanding, it should be driving us to greater praise. If you haven't seen some of the imageries that's available on NASA's website, you're missing out.

I was going to put some up on the screen, but I didn't want to spoil it with the peeling paint and the dripping water. So you'll have to go and look on it on the website yourselves. But you could do better. Sorry, you could do worse than spend an hour browsing through some of those pictures and marveling at the creator who made that kind of grandeur almost as an afterthought.

[7 : 35] And we know some of the distances involved, don't we? Billions of years for light moving at speeds that we can barely wrap our heads around. Billions of years it takes for that light to get here from the more distant reaches of our universe.

David considers the heavens, verse 3, and he reflects that all of this, this grandeur, the vast array, it wasn't even difficult for God.

It's but the work of his fingers. The picture here is of a God who is so unimaginably vast that he can prod the galaxies into shape the way Zechariah plays with his Play-Doh.

And looking at the vastness of the universe, considering those distances, considering the number of stars and galaxies, don't you feel utterly insignificant?

If the universe is like a blob of Play-Doh to God being prodded into shape, then what am I? What is humanity on that kind of a scale?

[8 : 40] What are we? The tiniest speck of dust? Not even that. I don't know, a single atom maybe? The mind boggles. Faced with such a universe, how can we imagine that we have any significance at all?

And on one level, the Bible affirms that we are of little significance. The words that David uses here to refer to humanity, they emphasize that insignificance. The second would be literally something like sun of the ground, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Adam was made from the earth, and to it we all return. Ecclesiastes says, generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them. We do not have any great significance, on one level at least.

And yet, yet David's question here is not, are you mindful of humanity? He's not wondering whether or not God cares. He's not questioning his significance.

[9 : 50] Actually, David has no doubt at all that he does matter. He's making an exclamation. This isn't really a comment about humanity, it's a comment about God. What a God!

How amazing that the God who kindles the stars into light should choose to know my name, should number the hairs on my head, should graciously care for me, and not just me, but each and every person in the whole human race, down through the ages of history, for thousands of years, each of us known, subject of God's gracious remembrance.

Folks, the peasant in the distant corner of the empire is nothing to the emperor on his throne. He probably doesn't know that she exists. He doesn't even know anything about her.

And yet, to the God of the universe, he knows her every need. He cares for her. He cares for you and for me. I saw this tweet this week.

Christianity. Belief that one God created a universe 13.79 billion years old, 93 billion light years in diameter, consisting of over 200 billion galaxies, only to have a personal relationship with you.

[11 : 09] I wonder who you would imagine sent that tweet. Maybe it was the Free Church Twitter account, Tim Keller. No. No, it was the Atheist Forum. Folks, do you see how utterly bizarre it is that this is what we believe?

If you don't find this mind-blowing, I'm not sure you've understood it, that the God who made that kind of universe wants a relationship with you. It is baffling.

And yet, at this point where the atheist pokes fun and sees only the ridicule, what we see is the heart of our faith, isn't it? Here's how Donald MacLeod, an ETS student, here's how he responded.

Pretty much, yeah. That is what we believe. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him.

Folks, do you see how different our faith is to any other? Think about how different the Genesis narrative is to any other creation account. For the ancient Mesopotamian, well, the junior Mesopotamian gods, they rebelled at the hard work of digging out the river valleys and they demanded replacement laborers.

[12 : 28] And so, human beings, human beings are made to relieve the gods of their drudgery. And frankly, the answers today are even less hopeful than those ones thousands of years ago.

There is no sense today of any purpose of any kind. The idea of human dignity is laughable. Human beings exist because of blind chance and to ask why we exist is almost a nonsense question.

But David's answer is very different. What is mankind? Well, David reflects on Genesis and he concludes, you have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet. David concludes, reflecting on Genesis, that human beings are not an afterthought, not slaves to the gods.

No, we are royal. Made to be rulers. How do we know this? Well, because God has told us. He told us in Genesis and he tells us here in Psalm 8.

[13 : 37] This isn't that we've kind of applied our brains and somehow reasoned it out and concluded, oh yes, I think I must be the most important form of life. Hurrah for me.

Now, why do we believe this? Because the God who made us declares it to be so. Dale Ralph Davis points us to Luke chapter 12. Consider the ravens.

They do not sow or reap. They have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than the birds. And so he asks, how does Jesus know that?

Because Psalm 8 and Genesis 1 say so. Does it matter? Yes. It assumes that if ravens get roadkill, the Father will see that you are sustained.

After all, there is no comparison between ravens and royalty. Friends, human beings are not an afterthought. But we are the special creation of the God of the universe in his image.

[14 : 42] And he is endlessly mindful of us. Endlessly caring for our needs. Most evolutionary biologists will be hard-pressed to give you a reason why human beings have an inherent value.

But God says we are crowned with glory and honor. Many around us seem to struggle to consider the life of a human being as more precious than that of any other animal.

But David declares, you put everything under their feet. Isaiah 45, verse 18, tells us this is what the Lord says. He who created the heavens, he is God.

He who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it. He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited. He says, I am the Lord and there is no other.

Do you see that? Isaiah tells us that the creator God has revealed his intention. His purpose for creation is that it be inhabited. It isn't designed to be empty.

[15 : 44] There isn't some kind of perfect version of the planet earth unspoiled by humanity. The purpose of creation is to be inhabited.

Maybe in a secondary sense he means by the rest of the animals, but this word is spoken to humanity. It is first and foremost us who are the inhabitants for which this world was intended.

We could talk about what good stewardship of creation looks like and the difference between stewardship and pillaging our way across the earth. We could have that discussion, but that's not where we are right now.

Okay? In the vastness of this universe, God proclaims humanity is unique in dignity. The only animal made in his image and so day by day, moment by moment, God is mindful of us.

God calls us to be rulers over creation, stewards on behalf, of our heavenly sovereign. So far, so good.

[16 : 50] But in large part, what we've considered thus far, there is little here to trouble the pious Jew. But we live in a different era, you and me. And there is one thing in what we've considered thus far, which is something of a problem for that Jew and for what we've said so far, and that's the word everything in verse 6.

You have put everything under their feet. David says, everything is under the authority of human beings. Now, I don't know about you, but I don't much feel like that's the case a lot of the time.

We don't see humanity ruling and controlling the whole created order. It looks a lot more like disease rules, like cancer rules, than like you and I do.

It looks like the earthquakes and the volcanoes and the tsunamis rule, not you and me. And to understand why there's this mismatch between what David proclaims and our daily experience, to understand that disconnect, we have to fast forward into the New Testament.

Here's Hebrews chapter 2, hopefully familiar if you were in our connect group studies before Christmas. The writer to the Hebrews says, it is not to angels that God has subjected the world to come about which we are speaking.

[18 : 14] But there is a place where someone has testified. What is mankind that you are mindful of them? A son of man that you care for him. You made them a little lower than the angels.

You crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet. In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present, we do not see everything subject to them.

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

When quoting there from Psalm 8, the writer to the Hebrews concludes, we don't see that happening. We don't see everything subject. But what do we see instead? We see Jesus.

Now, the eagle-eyed among you may have noticed a difference here in Hebrews compared to the same section of the psalm. Sorry, I'm one behind. You might have noticed a difference between the two.

[19 : 26] If you've got the older NIV or the ESV open in front of you, you won't see a difference between the two. But there is a difference in the newer NIV that we use here at Covenant Church. Folks, translation is difficult.

It's difficult, not least, because it's a moving target. Fortunately, the Hebrew and the Greek that the Bible was written in, that doesn't change. But English does. And back when the older edition of the NIV was translated, man was a sensible, generic term for humanity as a whole.

But that is not true today. A statistical survey now over 10 years old showed that use of man or mankind as a term for the human race accounts for just about 12% of the terms that are used to refer to the human race in a cross-section of writing in the English language.

And I suspect that that number has gone down since it was surveyed in 2009. people makes up the highest proportion at about 45%. And the others apart from that 12% are all gender neutral or whatever term you might want to use.

Now you might ask, what's the problem with sticking with man? We all know what it means, so let's just use it. But folks, that's because it's easy for you and me to be blind to this issue.

[20 : 48] Because that same statistical analysis that says it's 12% that use that term. It says that if you look at evangelical English then you see man or mankind used over 50% of the time.

So what that means is you and I are used to hearing man and mankind used as a reference to the whole of humanity. But the average person in the street is not used to that.

And in fact to use man to mean the human race frankly runs a serious risk of being confusing and or offensive. Now folks, I hope we agree that it's important for people to understand what the Bible is actually saying.

That it's important for women to know that Psalm 1 is telling women what righteousness looks like for them not just for men. It's important that we know that when Paul writes to Timothy that all scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

It's important we know that that is so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work as he says in verse 17 not just males. I hope we agree it's important that we understand what's being said and I hope we agree that it's important not to offend people unnecessarily.

[22 : 10] Folks, the gospel itself may well be offensive but I shouldn't be offensive and that includes the language that I use. This is a real issue.

So that's why the NIV translates it in Psalm 8 what is mankind that you are mindful of them human beings that you care for them not what is man that you are mindful of him the son of man that you care for him.

That's why the translation because it it makes sense. But why talk about it now? Well, because here the translation causes so much difficulty that the NIV translators have ended up using human beings in Psalm 8 and then son of man in Hebrews 2 that quotes Psalm 8 even though it's the same original language.

Why? Well, because Psalm 8 as originally understood is surely talking about humanity as a whole. Human beings makes the best sense as a modern English translation that there is no debate it is in the original Hebrew talking about the human race.

That's agreed by everybody. But that common Hebrew phrase a son of man that really just means human being that phrase the son of man takes on a new life in the New Testament doesn't it?

[23 : 30] When Jesus picks up that phrase the son of man and uses it to refer to himself he says he talks about himself he refers to himself in the third person as the son of man and suddenly suddenly passages like this one in Psalm 8 are transformed aren't they?

Suddenly it takes on a new dimension of meaning. Guys don't get worried about this okay? You do not need to immediately run out and replace all your Bibles and by the way you don't need me to come and interpret this for you either because it's there for you in the footnotes in your Bible.

If you've got a Bible with cross reference notes which is a very handy thing to have then it will refer between these passages. Psalm 8 will say go look at Hebrews chapter what were we to? Hebrews 2 and Hebrews 2 says this comes from Psalm 8 the cross references are there for you and if you're looking at a new NIV it's going to have a footnote that says things like or a man in various places okay?

So this is there for you in your Bibles this is not arcane special knowledge you don't need to go to ETS for three years to be able to work out what's going on here your Bible is fine. Why are we talking about this?

Because Jesus is the Son of Man folks because Jesus is the Son of Man because he is the quintessential human being the one true human being if you like because he is the second Adam because he is the true and better Adam then whilst we do not see everything subject to human beings generically we do see Jesus we see that because of Jesus suffering and death he has been crowned with glory and honour we see that Jesus has that glory and honour bestowed upon him he has not only the glory and honour that is bestowed upon human beings created in the image of God but he has also the glory and honour that he earns through his obedient sacrifice because he is as verse 10 of Hebrews 2 puts it because he is the pioneer of our salvation because we see Jesus therefore we have hope Michael Green has a helpful illustration he talks about the speculation in the middle ages about whether or not there was a sea route to India away to the land of spices round the southern tip of Africa around what was known then as the

[25 : 53] Cape of Storms because so many had been lost in the attempt to find that route to India is it there or not but one sailor was determined to try again and ever since I'm going to mispronounce this horribly ever since Vasco da Gama came back to Lisbon in triumph ever since he made that voyage and came back it's been impossible to doubt that a way exists we know the way is there and so now it is not the Cape of Storms it is the Cape of Good Hope that's what Hebrews 2 says about Psalm 8 it says we might not see Psalm 8 fully realized yet but the way is there it has begun it has been demonstrated one man is already reigning so David began this Psalm in exuberant praise calling people to join him to proclaim Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth and he expects people to say that all the more enthusiastically at the end having reflected on that glorious contrast as God establishes strength through the weak things of this world and as human beings the definition of weak things insignificant ants that we are on the scale of the universe yet objects of God's special care and attention a greater praise at the end of the Psalm than we began and so he concludes

Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth but folks you know you and I we can go still further can't we surely we are moved to more joyful praise even than David and his hearers were still greater acclamation of the majestic name of God as we see that plan further revealed as we see that hope held out because Jesus already reigns because of our confidence that we will one day see all things under our feet because they're already under his and so we proclaim Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth and for Him the earth is your name and so we came from to let us