

Psalms for a Summer Season (2): Psalm 8

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[0 : 00] There are some songs that never go out of fashion. I've noticed that young folk are increasingly listening to 1980s music.

! You're more likely to be listening to 1980s music. You're more likely to be listening to 1980s music. You're more likely to be listening to 1980s music. When you're in your 20s than when you're in your 50s now. 40-year-old songs are back in vogue.

The Psalms of the Bible may be far older, but as long as earth lasts, they're always going to be relevant to folk either in their 20s or in their 90s.

Psalm 8 is one of the most popular of them all. Perhaps it's because of its opening line, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Or perhaps it's because it's just so full of praise to God.

So this psalm is the second of our psalms for a summer evening. Psalms for a summer season, rather. There are three themes in this timeless psalm to which I wish to draw your attention this morning.

[1 : 05] The world we live in, the one we trust in, and the worship we owe Him. The great reformer John Calvin wrote of the psalm, David, reflecting on God's fatherly goodness toward mankind, is not content with giving thanks for it, but is enraptured by the contemplation of it.

He is enraptured by the contemplation of it. May we too, as we study Psalm 8, be enraptured by the contemplation of the goodness of our Father to us this summer.

First of all then, the world we live in, the world we live in, it's something we've all done at one stage in our lives at another. On a dark night, we've looked up into a cloudless sky, at the starry host.

As our eyes focus on the stars, we see more and more of them until we realize that there are millions of them. The only limitation to their number being the acuity of our eyesight.

The nearest star to Earth is Proxima Centauri, at a distance of 9.5 trillion kilometers. Sirius, the star we're probably more familiar with, is double that distance again.

[2 : 30] The North Star, even though it's brighter still, is nearly 450 light-years from Earth. So it takes light 450 years to travel from the North Star to Earth.

So the North Star that we'll see in our skies tonight is actually the North Star as it was in the days of the Scottish Reformation. It is really humbling to look up into the night sky and see the vast complexity of the constellations, the great cloud to Orion.

And every one of these stars is at the center of its own solar system. Each has its own planetary system, and each planet has its own moon or moons.

There are billions upon billions of stars in the sky. The vast majority is yet unseen and undiscovered. Beautiful, but very humbling, because it puts humanity in our place.

In verse 3, David calls these magnificent heavenly bodies the work of your fingers. With the same industry and skill, a joiner constructs a wooden box in which to hold his tools.

[3 : 47] God constructs a universe in which to hold the drama of his redemption. On a clear night closer to the equator, the moon seems so much larger than it does here.

David, I wonder, must have looked up at the moon, and although it wasn't known as such back then, wondered whether the Sea of Tranquility held water, or whether anything lived there.

He moves on to talk about humanity, the pinnacle of God's creative effort. Compared with the stars and the moon, the creation of mankind, was the highest point of God's poetic construction of the universe.

How complex the human race. For all our scientific advances, we had barely scratched the surface of what it means to be human. We could talk about it scientifically, and refer to all the biochemical processes which distinguish us from the lower levels of life.

We could talk about it sociologically or culturally, to refer to all of humanity's achievements. Or we could talk about it philosophically and religiously, and describe the great moral high points of humanity's progress.

[5 : 05] There's so much here that a single point in a short sermon doesn't do justice even to the shell of God's creative achievement in blowing breath into the dust of the earth.

It lives, and it's human. One doesn't need to study in university to appreciate its depth. The human hand is a miracle of physiology and biochemistry.

Our ability to flex our fingers, to cut our own nails, to wash ourselves. It's a lot to take in. The very act by which we see our hands is miraculous.

The hand I'm holding up is capable of painting the magnificent fresco of Michelangelo's David in the Sistine Chapel, of writing Milton's Paradise Lost, or of composing Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on a theme of Thomas Tallis.

Later in the psalm, David moves on to talk of the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea, the birds of the air. He's reflecting on how the entirety of the living ecosystem is a product of God's creative genius, power, and skill.

[6 : 28] On our recent holiday in Tenerife, Catherine and I took a boat excursion to see dolphins swimming in their natural environment. It was a wonderful thing to see these very intelligent creatures swimming together and playing with our boat.

Every so often, the biggest among them would swim underneath our boat and surface just a few feet away. Magnificently elegant swimmers. God made the dolphins.

Yes, and their cousins, the giant sperm whales. He made the birds with all their bewildering array of colors. From the tiny hummingbirds to the giant albatross. From the colorful birds of paradise to the darkness of the mountaintop raven.

They're all the works of his hands. Going deeper still, he made those microscopic creatures the eyes of David could not see. A single gram of soil can contain as many microscopic organisms as there are human beings on planet earth.

That's just one gram of soil. God created everything with its own anatomy and physiology. The earth is swimming with life.

[7 : 44] And above it all, God's name is majestic. The word David uses here, which we translate as majestic, can also be translated as wonderful, marvelous.

Majesty carries along with it the idea of sovereignty and power. Wonderful and marvelous carry with him the idea of beauty. Oh, how much greater the glory of the creator than the creation, as Evan said.

How foolish are those who stop at God's creation and worship the created thing rather than the creator. Now, as Christians, we are to treat God's created universe with respect.

We are to experience those same feelings of awe when confronted by something amazing. On a dark night when she sees the Milky Way, she gasps in wonder. When she sees dolphins playfully swimming, she's filled with rapture.

When she discovers the geological profiles of the mountains of northwest Sutherland, she is awestruck. She experiences the same feelings as the atheist, but she experiences far more, for she knows that above all these magnificent natural phenomena is the supernatural God she loves and worships.

[9 : 09] Her amazement transforms into expressions of praise because she knows who made all these things. Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Science becomes theology and theology becomes doxology. Christian students in university have been here often struggle as they get deeper into their studies because they lose the bigger picture of what their subjects really mean.

And so they ask, am I doing this degree just so I can get a job when I leave university? Now, yes, that may be true, but to avoid disillusionment, may I suggest that the Christian student approaches their studies with the same reverence a theologian opens his Bible.

for here are the works of God, the mathematics, the human languages, the cultures you're studying in class.

These are the beauties of the God you love and worship, and over them and through them God's majesty shines brightly. Whether you're an Israelite king in the 9th century BC or a student in the 21st century AD, whoever you are, Psalm 8 is timelessly relevant because of what it teaches us about the world we live in, God's world, the theater of his majesty and of his redemption.

[10 : 46] We, like millions who have gone before us and will come after us, call out, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

The world we live in. Second, the one we trust in. The one we trust in. It's not the right spelling, but it does alliterate. Psalm 8 begins and ends with the words, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Now you will notice that the word Lord is written in two ways, the first in capitals, the second in smalls. The first name Lord in capitals refers to the covenant personal name of God, as it were, the name Yahweh or Jehovah.

This is the name God revealed himself to be on top of Mount Sinai to Moses. Tell them that Yahweh sent you, for I am who I am.

The God who has set his majesty above the heavens is the God of steadfast love, faithfulness, and salvation. The God who is everlastingly committed to his people and will never let them go.

[12 : 02] He revealed himself to be the Lord in the context of how he rescued his people from their slavery in Egypt. of how in love he saved his people.

Yahweh is not just the name of God, but the name of God in salvation. This is how much he loves his people, that from above the heavens he stooped down to save them from their enemies so that he might live among them.

So the Christian looks up into the night sky and though she may feel insignificant compared to the vastness of the universe, she knows that above it all is the majesty and tenderness of divine love.

The love of her Lord for her. The man who does not recognize God's authorship and sovereignty over the universe.

When he looks up into the night sky he's left helpless and alone. He looks up into the night and though he may be filled with wonder, is left with a sense of emptiness because there's no ultimate meaning, value, purpose in any of it.

[13 : 18] He really is just a speck of dust. Of no more value than any other speck of dust, he feels no security or value for he does not see loving sovereignty above it.

He sees nothing. For him the universe is all that is. There's nothing more. And when that man ceases to be, the moon and stars will neither notice nor care.

How unbearable, how pitiful, how hopeless a condition. But as Christians we look at the universe in a different way.

It is the theater of God's love and grace. It is the arena of his saving majesty. And as such, it's not filled with threat and emptiness, but hope and the fullness of God's divine sovereignty.

The God of salvation and rescue, the God who invites us to trust him. Later on in the Bible, Jesus expands the name of Yahweh, calling upon his disciples to baptize all who will believe in him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 37] Here then is the glorious name of the Lord whose majesty shines above all that he has made. He's not a faceless God whom we cannot know or understand, but the God who has revealed himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father who called all things into being. The Son who spoke all things into being. The Spirit who sustains all things in being. We may not know much about the world in which we live, but if we trust him as our Lord, we know enough.

But then in a stunning turn of events, the New Testament quotes Psalm 8 in the context of how through Jesus Christ, God has saved his people from death.

In Hebrews chapter 2, verse 9, quoting Psalm 8, verse 5, and this text, a man who was made a little lower than the angels, Hebrews 2, verse 9 calls that man Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews talks about how God himself for a little while was made lower than the angels so that by the grace of God he might taste best for everyone.

[15 : 59] Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became part of his own creation. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Lord, whose majestic name was gloriously set above the heavens, entered into the world of time and space in the man, Jesus.

And having become flesh, he suffered for us. He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

The Creator entered his creation and died for us. Christ. This evening we'll be talking more about this, Christ as the representative of God to us.

But Christ is God in the flesh becoming part of that which he made and even though he was worshipped by the angels, he was flogged, tortured, and put to death on a cross for us and for our sins.

The Lord, whose glory fills the earth, became one of us, experiencing everything common to the human condition except without sin.

[17 : 12] He held nothing back from us but emptied himself and became obedient to the death of the cross. We do not trust in the creation but in the Creator.

We do not trust in gold and silver mined from the depths of the earth but in the Lord whose majesty shines above the earth. That gold or silver does not love us. It has not died for us.

Its Creator loves us infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably and could not have done more to demonstrate his love for us. But now, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us, Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor as we read in verse 5.

He remains a man but he's a glorified man exalted beyond the angels and seated in the right hand of the Father on high. His nail-marked hands are still open wide to bless all who come to him in faith.

His arms outstretched to welcome his creation hope. His glorified face may shine like the sun but it's a face which smiles in his people and loves them dearly.

[18 : 27] This is the Lord in whom we trust. This is the Savior revealed to us in this psalm as having for a little while been made a little lower than the angels but now crowned with glory and honor.

This is the God in whom we trust. the God who's in sovereign and complete control of his creation and all for the good of his church. This is our Father's world.

It's the theater of his majesty and love and all because his Son is now part of it. in the summer we see the sun shining in the sky giving warmth to the earth and life to the ground.

This psalm for a summer evening summer season lifts up our eyes to the heavens where we see the Son of God shining upon us warm in our cold hearts giving life to our weary souls and for that we love him we worship him and we trust him.

The one we trust in. The world we live in the one we trust in then thirdly and briefly the worship we owe him the worship we owe him. Psalm 8 is an extraordinary psalm of praise.

[19 : 46] It begins and ends with these exclamations of joy O Lord, our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth. It's bracketed with praise and is filled with praise.

It's almost as if the entire universe is engaged in the worship of God. The stars sing to one another. They're silent songs directed to the God whose fingers formed them and set them in place.

The planets dance in their orbits silently rotating to the praise of God. The fish of the sea and the birds of the air are singing also.

They're worshipful songs heard not by men but by God. Babies and infants praise those weakest and most insignificant yet they praise God in the face of God's enemies.

It's all praise. Praise from the mouth of a king who looks up into the night sky and recognizes the value and worth God has set upon the heads of mortal men and women.

[20 : 50] This king looks up and worships not the stars but he worships his Lord. Now we're far advanced from the days of David for we have seen God himself entering into our own creation veiling his glory behind human flesh giving himself on the cross for us how much he loves us what worship and praise we owe him for all he is and for all he has done for us suppose every voice on planet earth should lift up itself in praise of God it would not be enough to pay the debt of praise we owe him perhaps better than the words of our mouths God takes pleasure in the devotion of our hearts we go back to that quote from John Calvin David reflecting on God's fatherly goodness toward mankind is not content with giving thanks for it but is enraptured by the contemplation of it this is a psalm all about

God's fatherly goodness toward mankind that mankind which is the pinnacle of God's creative genius we're not merely content with giving thanks to God for it we want to go deeper we want to be enraptured by the contemplation of God's fatherly goodness now that man John Calvin did not enjoy the best of health he was often struck down by painful physical afflictions including a nasty stomach ulcer he was persecuted by the authorities and forced at least once to leave Geneva at the point of death though outwardly he wasted away yet inwardly he was enraptured by the contemplation of God's fatherly goodness to him and to all mankind a heart on fire for Christ is the reasonable and spiritual response to this psalm the Christ who spoke this universe into being and by his blood shed on the cross redeemed it for his father as we leave this morning let me encourage you to form in your mind an image of a blood red rose blood red rose think of its petals think of its scent think of the depth of its color this is the beauty of God forming with infinite skill and delicate precision the glory of the blood red rose you can hold it up to your nose and you can let its scent fill you with joy see the blood of the son of God in its redness that blood shed in the cross for you and then let your heart be enraptured by the fatherly goodness of God toward you the intensity of his love and care for you some songs never go to fashion

David sang this psalm in 9th century BC Jesus sang it in 1st century AD John Calvin in the 16th century AD and we rejoice to sing it today as we will in a moment we sing it with joy and praise because it tells us of our Lord whose glory fills the sky and sea and by whose love we have been redeemed from our emptiness and our loneliness what a price he paid for us the crown of thorns encircling the brow of the divine rose on the cross his blood falling to the ground each drop sufficient to cleanse a whole world of its sin has psalm 8 ever been in fashion for you have you placed your faith and trust in the God whose majesty fills the heavens the God who became part of this creation and gave his life for us it's not such a hard thing to do today right now in the quietness of this moment and in the solitude of your heart commit yourself to him and move from saying

O Lord the Lord to O Lord my Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth Amen and that's and that's that's that's that's that's that's that's that's