

# What is Man

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[ 0 : 00 ] As the younger ones make their way out, if you want to turn to Psalm 8, which we are reading this morning, that is on page 450 of the Pew Bibles if you have one.

Psalm 8.

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O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. I find it interesting sometimes to ponder how differently we as human beings can view our own worth.

From men like Moses, who we just heard about, who didn't consider himself to have much value at all, particularly evident in God's call to Moses.

[ 1 : 54 ] To men like the Swedish footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who, when asked what he had got his wife for her birthday one year, answered, nothing. Why?

Because she already has Zlatan. I'm sure we've all met people who fall into both categories and everywhere in between. Some people struggle to value themselves.

Some struggle to value others. And some overvalue the same. On a similar note, I was amused, as I always am, at the new year by the myriad of ways that people are encouraged to increase their self-worth and their value by making changes in their lives to add meaning and purpose.

You know, things like joining the gym, starting a diet, going vegan or renouncing plastic or whatever else it may be. I'd be very interested to know what the statistics are for how many make it to February.

Now, the truth is that none of us really should be measuring the value of ourselves or of anyone else. And actually, none of us need to, because God tells us in Scripture the value of humanity.

[ 3 : 11 ] And he shows our value in the work of Christ. And this morning, I'd like to explore the theme of human value, focusing on Psalm 8, which we just read. And I'd like us to see that God is the one who both bestows and affirms human value, that we are guilty of corrupting that value, but that God has made a way for our true value to be realized again.

And there are four questions I have this morning. And the first one is, who is God? Now, David begins his psalm with an exhortation of praise to the Lord, recognizing his greatness and majesty. He says, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger.

The Lord's name is great in all the earth, not just in Israel, where he was worshipped at the time of the writing of the psalm, but he's the God who created everything and all creation testifies to his glory.

Even those who do not subject themselves to his authority are subject to his sovereign authority. And God is the God who is glorified in weakness.

[ 4 : 38 ] Jesus himself, in Matthew's gospel account, quotes verse 2, when the Pharisees clearly expect him to rebuke the children who are praising him in the temple courts. But instead of doing so, he uses scripture to show them that God's purpose is in fact being fulfilled in these young children's words.

Christ's power is made perfect in weakness, Paul writes the Corinthians. And even if David had missed out verses 1 and 2 and launched straight into his question of what is man, we wouldn't have to look very far to discover what God is like, who he is, because all of scripture shouts aloud to who God is and what he has done.

David recognises the Lord not just as a title, but as a declaration of who God is and everything he has done is doing and will do. And it's always helpful, I think, to know a person in order to truly appreciate their evaluation of you.

So when my wife tells me that she values me, then I feel valued. And I treasure that as a true expression of her feelings. But if a stranger were to come up to me in the street and say something similar, then I'd probably find it a bit weird.

And I don't think I'd consider very highly their evaluation of me, because I don't know them and they don't know me. I mean, perhaps if that stranger was somebody well-known, a well-known judge of character, I might consider it a little more.

[ 6 : 10 ] But when the psalmist considers what is man, he's considering the opinion of the creator God, the one above whom there is none, the Almighty.

And David knows the Lord and he loves the Lord. And so what the Lord has to say of him is meaningful to him. And what the Lord has to say on anything is of infinite value.

And that is vital to know if we are to grasp the full value of mankind and ourselves individually. So then we're going to consider the second question, which the psalmist himself asks, which is, what is man?

In verse 3, the psalmist considers what to him are the grandest of God's works, the moon and the stars. Indeed, the stars were not only a source of humility to David.

Years ago, there was a famous explorer. His name was William Beebe. And he was a good friend of President Theodore Teddy Roosevelt. And often when he visited the president at Sagamore Hill, the two men would go outdoors at night stargazing and they would see who could first locate the Andromeda galaxy.

[ 7 : 23 ] And then as they gazed up at this tiny smudge of distant starlight, one of them would recite, that is the spiral galaxy of Andromeda.

It's as large as our Milky Way. It is one of 100 million galaxies. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of 100 billion suns.

Each of them is larger than our sun. And President Roosevelt would grin and say, now I think we are small enough. Let's go to bed. So David understandably wonders then that seeing all the greatness and majesty in creation, that he asks, what is mankind that you are mindful of them? And it's a question we're asking ourselves, I think. I expect it's possibly a question that we ask within ourselves fairly often if we're Christians, but perhaps not one that we're very good at answering.

Because I think a twisted sort of humility leads us to the path of we're worthless. Because the alternative would seem to be vanity.

[ 8 : 35 ] But Psalm 8 doesn't tell that story. And the same is true in Genesis 1. In the beginning, when God created mankind, he conferred upon them a special status above everything else he created.

He created us in a special way. Everything else he created out of nothing. Us he created out of the dust of the earth. And Eve he created from Adam. And he breathed life into Adam.

And, if that wasn't enough, he created us in his own image. And as much as I'd love to consider more of what that means, it's definitely a subject that requires its own treatment.

But suffice to say, what an honour it is to be made in the image of God. Now that's surely enough honour for a thousand lifetimes. But God gives blessing upon blessing.

I want to read to you from Genesis 1, 27, 31 as well. Where it says, So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created them.

[ 9 : 43 ] Male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. And have dominion over the fish of the sea.

And over the birds of the heavens. And over every living thing that moves on the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth.

And every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth. And to every bird of the heavens. And to everything that creeps on the earth. Everything that has the breath of life.

I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made. And behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning.

The sixth day. When God created mankind. He gave them the rule of everything else in creation.

[ 10 : 40 ] The whole of nature. He made them stewards of. And all that God had made. He graciously put under mankind. Adam as our representative head.

Was placed in Eden. To fulfill both the priestly duties to the Lord. God. And the kingly duties. Over the earth. And under God. The psalmist says that.

Man was made a little lower. Than the heavenly beings. In the Hebrew. That's Elohim. A name often used. Of God. Or as the Septuagint says in the Greek.

The angels. But either way. It's plain that Adam existed. In an exalted position. Not merely above all it is earthly. But actually only a little below.

That which is heavenly. And if that sounds a little. Like I'm repeating myself. Then that's for good reason. Because I believe that. Generally. When we look at ourselves as human beings.

[ 11 : 39 ] What we see is only the post-fall edition. If you like. Forgetting that. When we were made. God said that. It was very good. So.

Apologies for this. Illustration perhaps. But it's sort of like. When young people watch. The musical Les Miserables. For the first time. Only. They make the mistake.

Of not going to the theatre. To see it. They watch the 2012 film. Starring Hugh Jackman. And Russell Crowe. And by the end of the film. They think. Oh. Javert was a bit lackluster.

Thanks to Russell Crowe's. Complete lack of singing ability. What they won't know. Is that if they went and saw the stage play. They would be amazed.

Because he's a great character. And a commanding presence. On the stage. But now when they think of him. They see the film version. And it's ruined. Not that I'm bitter.

[ 12 : 35 ] About Russell Crowe ruining Les Mis of course. And it's the same with us sometimes. We're so busy. Telling people of our utter depravity. Which is right.

But we forget to tell them. That this is not. The first version of humanity. And it's not the final version either. We forget to tell them. That part of the reason. That man's current state.

Is so awful. Is because of. The exalted position. We fell from. Watching Russell Crowe. Butcher stars. Is so awful.

Because. I've heard it done well before. It might not have seemed so bad otherwise. Adam walked with God. And he threw it all away. And poured his.

Blood sweat and tears into the earth. To make it grow food for him. Because of what he'd done. But David in Psalm 8. Isn't writing exclusively about Adam.

[ 13 : 31 ] So when he wonders. At man's favored position. With God. He isn't idealizing about Adam. And he isn't even just looking forward to Christ.

Who would truly fulfill man's purpose. Though it isn't less than that. He is recognizing the innate worth. Of every human being. That has been bestowed by God.

Because we still retain a shadow of that. Despite our fallen nature. And I think. We can be guilty of disregarding that. In favor of focusing entirely on our depravity.

As fallen beings. As if that made us of no value to our creator. Because actually. It's even more incredible that God still values us. Because he does so.

In spite of that fall from grace. Which brings me to my third question. This morning. Which is. What have we done. To ourselves. See the fall of man.

[ 14 : 36 ] Is not something to be ignored. Or underplayed. Of course not. It's a pivotal moment. In redemptive history. You know. Having been given dominion. Over all living things.

And blessed with. Many blessings. Adam chose to doubt God's character. Father. And effectively renounced. His priestly responsibility. In order that he might become like God.

And we've craved satisfaction. For our desires. Ever since. My irony of course. Is that we were probably more like God. In our first state.

Than we are now. Even with all our advancements. And all our civilizing. Endeavors. And there's a price to be paid.

For our sin. The corruption of God's creation ordinances. The wages of sin is death. Another consequence is that. Now we don't feel.

[ 15 : 32 ] Fulfill God's purpose for Adam. Because we do not have dominion. Over the beasts. Or the plants. Of the earth. But there is one of whom those words are true. The new.

And better Adam. And if we take a look at how. Psalm 8 is applied to Christ. In the New Testament. In the book of Hebrews. Then we discover an incredible new dimension. To how God loves and values us.

In Hebrews 2.6.9. 2.9. Sorry. The author says. It has been testified somewhere. What is man that you are mindful of him. For 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 see everything in subjection to him. But we see him. Who for a little while. Was made lower than the angels.

[16:32] 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. Where applied to us.

Verse 5 of Psalm 8. Is a statement of mankind's. Exalted position in creation. When it's applied to Jesus. Is a statement of humility. And condescension.

Which brings me to my. Final question this morning. Which is. What did Jesus. Do about it. Jesus. The son of God.

Was made lower than the angels. For a little while. He suffered death. And tasted death for everyone. Jesus assumed the form and position of a man.

For our sakes. Jesus. And that is the value of man. To God. Christ became a man. He lived a perfect life without sin. And yet he died in humiliation on the cross.

[17:32] At Calvary. Bearing the sin of mankind. That is the value. Of man to God. God. In doing so. He took the punishment. That should have been ours.

That. Is the value. Of man to God. When he arose on the third day. As the triumphant victor over death. The price of man's sin was paid.

That. Is the value. Of man. To God. God. And when he ascended into heaven. It was to sit at the right hand of the father. To mediate on behalf.

Of sinners like us. That is the value. Of man. To God. And on account of his actions. We can be adopted. As God's children.

That. Is the value. Of man. To God. Christ. Truly fulfills. Both the creation ordinances. Of Genesis 1 and 2.

[18:30] And he fulfills the words. Of Sam 8. All things. Are. Truly. Subject to him. He reigns over all. And one day. Every knee. Will bow to him.

When he returns. In triumph. Though. As the writer to the Hebrews says. We do not see. Everything in subjection. To him now. One day. Every knee will bow.

Now. By God's grace. If we put our faith. In Christ. We can be saved. From sin and death. The divide. Between us and God. Can be healed.

And by the power of the Holy Spirit. That Jesus pours out. Upon his believers. We can finally be free. To obey God. And glorify him. By doing the good works.

That he has set out. For us to do. You know. We will never be able to. Return. To Eden. But we can look something. Sorry. We can look forward. To something even greater.

[19:28] When we are raised. With Christ on high. And we will glorify God. Forever. As Adam was supposed to. We will miss an actual crisis. If you see a man. ■cing a man. And that's enough.

I wonder. Do you ever find yourself. Having the same existential crisis. Of the unfortunate whale in Douglas Adams. Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Asking yourself.

Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? As you plummet helplessly. Towards death. So to speak. The same questions have played man for centuries as we struggle to come to terms with the source of our identity and value.

And while I can't speak for every generation, I know in mine certainly, a lot of people look for their identity and value in themselves, from their sexuality or their gender, their money or their imagined freedom.

And it's really sad to see that so many people try and take their value from all these empty places instead of from Christ.

[20:39] And I really wish that they could see that the reason that they remain unsatisfied in all their searching in their lives is because they place their faith in something temporary, something created instead of in the one who is eternal and uncreated.

If they could see themselves as God sees them, if they could see all he has given for them, if they could see that they are destroying their true identity by taking it from somewhere undeserving, then they might be not just content with themselves, but joyful because God loved them in spite of who they are, because they're the work of his hands and his potter's wheel spins no seconds.

How can we live in defiance of one such as that? When we're saved, we gain something greater than just being human.

If we're saved, then it means God looks on us and sees Christ in all his righteousness. It means that when Christ returns, we will be like him, body and soul, the whole of our being completely redeemed from the curses of sin.

And God made this possible because he loved us, because he does love us. And he doesn't start loving us only when we're saved. That would be a logical fallacy. Romans 5, 8 tells us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[ 22 : 10 ] Finally, then, let me encourage you this morning. If you're saved and you know your true value, don't live as if you're not and do not.

The shepherd came to search for us and take us back. So don't go trying to jump the wall and gamble with the strays outside. When Christ died for us, he didn't do so so that being saved, we would go back to our old sinful ways.

He died so that having been saved, we would go out and glorify God's name in all the earth. We want everyone to sing with us, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

And that requires us to be a witness to people in our words and in our actions. In union with Christ, we can take up our proper position under his lordship, knowing that everything is his.

In his writings on the letter to the Romans, John Stott records a little anecdote about Edward VIII. It says on, on the 28th of May 1972, the Duke of Windsor, the uncrowned King Edward VIII, died in Paris.

[ 23 : 26 ] The same evening, a television program rehearsed the main events of his life. Extracts from earlier films were shown, in which he answered questions about his upbringing, brief reign, and abdication.

Recalling his boyhood as the Prince of Wales, he said, My father, King George V, was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me by saying, My dear boy, you must always remember who you are.

And it's my conviction, Wright Stott, that our Heavenly Father says the same to us every day. My dear child, remember who you are. As a child of God, you must also remember who you are.

You were redeemed and adopted at a great price. You are one with Christ Jesus. Living in union with Christ means that we should be like him. But not that we should practice Christ-likeness out of a feeling of obligation or debt.

But because we've been united with Christ and that we are free to do so. We're free to obey God, joyfully, as Christ did. And if you're here today, and you're not yet a believer, then allow me to just say something to you just now.

[ 24 : 48 ] What is it that holds you back? Do you see all that God has done for you in Christ? How much he loves you?

And just in case you have a Zlatan-like opinion of yourself, then let me assure you, you do not deserve any of what God has done for you. Any more than I do, or anyone else does.

And yet Christ died while we were still sinners. So that you could be saved. And we all need saving. Don't continue to reject him. Because the stray sheep outside of the shepherd's care, they're only food for the wolf or the lion in the end.

As we come to our prayers of intercession this morning, we're going to be focusing on the situation in Ukraine.

And we're then going to sing Psalm 6, which is a psalm of supplication in distress. And it might not be a psalm which speaks into your situation this morning.

[ 26 : 07 ] I know it doesn't really speak into mine. But it speaks into the situation of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine who are suffering. And Paul reminds us in Corinthians, that when one member suffers, all of us suffer.

So let us come before God just now. In prayer. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for all that you have done for us in Christ.

Lord, we truly do not deserve it. Lord, we thank you that you are the one who is sovereign over all creation, over all that happens.

And Lord, when we look at the Ukraine and see the situation there, we are grieved for all those people.

But particularly for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are dispossessed of their homes, whose fellowships have been broken up by the war, who have lost family and friends.

[ 27 : 35 ] Lord, we cannot comprehend of such a situation, I'm sure many of us. But Lord, although we cannot understand what they are going through, Lord, we know that you are with them.

Lord, we pray that you would be with them and sustain them in their hardship. Lord, may they be able to return once more to their homes in the near future.

Lord, we ask that you would bring peace to that region. Lord, work in the hearts of the leaders of Europe and America and of Russia.

Lord, bring peace. Lord, may they be subject to your will and not to their desires. Lord, we pray too that as the people of Ukraine, as our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, are spread across Europe, Lord, we pray that as they go into, particularly into countries where there's a very small evangelical presence, Lord, we pray that your people from Ukraine would be a bright light and a great witness to your faithfulness, to your faithfulness, to your love, to your mercy, to your justice in those places where they go.

And Lord, we pray that this, that something, that something good can come of such a terrible situation.

[ 29 : 33 ] Lord, we do pray that where they are placed in your sovereign will. Lord, that the people that they end up living with and among would see that despite all that has happened to them, that they can still rejoice and praise you and know that that you know what you're doing even when we cannot see it.

And Lord, we pray that in this country, Lord, give us give us hearts like you to to do all that we can to help those who are who are the victims and the the refugees of the conflict.

Lord, help us to know where to where to give our time, our resources, our money. Help us to be wise because there are many who would take advantage of the situation.

And Lord, we pray protect your people. And Lord, we just want to thank you once more that we are able still to meet here in safety this morning.

And Lord, we pray that that would once again be the case of your people in Ukraine, that one day soon they will gather together again where they once did to praise you together.

[ 31 : 18 ] We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.