

The Man of Glory

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening folks. Let me add my welcome to Jordan's. It's great to have you here, especially we've got a lot of visitors here this evening for the baptism. Fantastic. Lovely to see you.

I just want to acknowledge as well that it's Father's Day. Happy Father's Day. I guess I want to acknowledge as well that Father's Day is just fantastic for some people and quite difficult for others. So if this Father's Day is a difficult one for you, I hope the service is a comfort to you. So today we begin a short series and we're looking at the Psalms.

And around this time each year, what we do is we pick five or six Psalms that we haven't preached before that share a common theme and we preach through them. This year, the common theme is glory.

And we're beginning with Psalm 8, which is a cracker of a Psalm. It is brilliant and it's not very long. It's a Psalm of David. It's not very long.

[1 : 0 0] But what it covers thematically is enormous. And we're really going to kind of skip the surface here. So you can tell, you've just heard it read and just by looking at it, it's a song of praise, isn't it?

The main point is, God, you're amazing. You're amazing. And we know it's the main idea of the Psalm because the whole thing is enveloped, verse 1 and verse 9, with the same line.

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name. It's 1 and 9 and everything else in the middle. And in his praising of God, David experiences three emotions.

Three emotions. First, wonder. W-O-N-D-R. Wonder. As he thinks about how amazing God is. Next, he seems to experience something like an existential crisis as he considers humanity, as he considers himself in the light of God's awesomeness.

And then three, astonishment at the dignity that God attributes humanity. So three things. Those are three things I'll talk about. Wonder, crisis, astonishment.

[2 : 1 0] So let me start with wonder. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You've set your glory above the heavens, out of the mouths of babes and infants.

You've established your strength because of your foes. Distill the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, the stars. It's just great stuff. So David begins by talking about the majesty of God.

And it's wonderful. I want to point out just a couple of things about this first section here. Do you see there that immediately after saying you have set your glory above the heavens, immediately after that he starts talking about babies.

It's quite interesting. It's quite unusual, isn't it? It's quite a stark contrast. So we'll dig into it a little bit here. So God, who is above everything, has no beginning, no end, depends on nothing.

In fact, everything depends on God. This above everything God has enemies, which is remarkable in and of itself, right? Has enemies.

[3 : 1 7] And one of the ways that God silences his enemies is through the voice of children. It's quite peculiar, isn't it? It's a peculiar mark of God's majesty that David wonders at.

Now God, of course, is God. He could defeat or silence his enemies any way he wants. But he chooses the sounds of children. Now, we don't know specifically what David is talking about in terms of what's coming out of the mouths of these babies or infants.

The scholars sort of say that the Hebrew is a bit confusing or not clear exactly what's coming out. Now, we know the noises of children and babies specifically can hurt people. And I know this very well in my life.

I have a son called Ollie who's like, you know, sort of an indiscriminate toddler age. I'm looking at my, what, 20 months?

Is that right? 20 months. And he's a screamer. So no matter what's going on, like he could fall over and cut his face open.

[4 : 28] He'll scream. He could just brush against the slet turn. Screams his head off. No matter what the scenario is, the response is scream as loud as possible. And it's so loud that it hurts.

And the other day, I think I was in like the hall of our house, and he screamed because something minor happened. And he screamed, and it was so loud, I felt like it damaged my brain. And I felt like a part of my brain dissolved because afterwards, I couldn't remember anything about World War I. So he did something to me. He hurt me. Now, David, I am fairly sure is not talking about hurting people with screaming children.

What's more likely is that it's the, it's the, it's more likely the simple, truthful praise of children is what he's talking about.

And that how, and that how shames the site, quite sophisticated doubts of the more powerful. And this actually happens in the New Testament. This, this plays out, this example here.

[5 : 39] In Matthew 21, Jesus goes into the temple. You know the story. Jesus goes in the temple. He kicks out all the people that are trying to make money out of religion. You know, turns over the tables. And he heals beggars, and he heals the lame.

And it's fantastic stuff. And the religious leaders, who are the powerful, get really annoyed. And they get especially annoyed because the children are saying, Hosanna, Hosanna to Jesus.

And the religious leaders want Jesus to shut the kids up. But instead, Jesus says, well, he quotes the psalm. He quotes Psalm 8. Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise.

And after that, the religious leaders shut up. They don't say anymore. We don't hear from them in that story again. Now, what does this tell us? What does this tell us about how God deals with evil in the world?

It tells us that God deals with evil in the world through the weak things of the world. This is a huge pattern in the Bible. You read through the Old Testament, it seems that God very, very, very often works through the unwanted woman or the rejected son.

[6 : 43] He chooses the tiny country of Israel to be the light of the world. When God enters the world, it's as a baby, as a vulnerable infant, as a weak infant.

When Jesus, at the height of his kind of fame, enters Jerusalem, he's not riding on a war horse. He's riding on a donkey. The way God deals with death and sin is by dying himself, a criminal's death on a cross.

This is God's pattern. The idea that God wins through weakness is God's pattern in the Bible. And 1 Corinthians 1 talks about this. God uses the weak things of the world to confound the wise.

So it makes complete sense that God would use the voices of children to silence his enemies.

Again, it's a peculiar sort of mark of God's majesty. And David wonders at it.

He goes, this is amazing. It's filled with wonder. I'll say one more thing about this first section, just quickly. Verse 3. How does David describe the universe?

[7 : 49] As the work of God's fingers. Not the work of God's arms. It didn't require a whole body effort or a team of engineers. Fingers.

That's what you make a model with, isn't it? Fingers. David wonders at this. So that's the first emotion, wonder.

The second one, that leads to sort of a crisis for David. Following on from this, I'll just read it to you. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, the stars which you've set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him? Put this in perspective.

If the Milky Way was the size of North America, our solar system would be the size of a coffee cup. And the earth would be a speck in that coffee cup.

[8 : 48] And you, I mean, you can't even, this doesn't even work for a human. It's just how tiny the earth is. There's a guy called William Beebe. He's dead now. But he was a good friend with, he was a scientist, a good friend with Teddy Roosevelt.

And so he used to go to Teddy Roosevelt's house. And they were both very smart men. They would sit around trying to solve the world's problems. And think quite grand thoughts about themselves, I think.

And then what they would do is after dinner, they had a regular habit of they'd go out, out the back of the house, and then look up at the stars, the two of them. And after thinking they can solve the world's problems.

And then there was a particular constellation that they would try and find. And when they'd find it, Roosevelt would say these words every time. He would say, That is the spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It's as large as our Milky Way.

It is one of 100 million galaxies. It consists of 100 billion suns, each larger than our sun. And then Roosevelt would smile and say, Now I think we're small enough.

[9 : 51] Let's go to bed. Back to the psalm. So David's words read like a bit of a kind of an existential crisis. Like he's staring at the vastness of the night sky, knowing that it's the work of God.

And he thinks, Who am I? Who am I that God would be even slightly interested in me? What is man? What are we humans that God would take any notice of us?

What am I? Why do I matter? Do I have any value at all? That's the crisis. It moves from wonder to crisis, and then surprise.

It's astonishment. That's the last section. What is man? You're mindful of him, and the son of man you care for him. Yet you've made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor.

You've given him dominion over the works of your hands, and you have put all things under his feet. And then some examples. So us, us folks, these tiny fragments of the universe, it would seem that God places enormous value on us.

[11 : 06] David wonders at that. I mean, these are tremendous things that David says about us. You've made us a little lower than heavenly beings, literally a little lower than God.

I mean, that's got to be the highest honor you can attribute to a creative thing, surely. And then you're crowned with honor and glory. I mean, these are words you reserve to describe royalty. And then the job that God gives us, dominion over creation, that's God-like responsibility. Now, I'll say something you know.

David's reflecting the Genesis sort of creation story here, that we're made in God's image. We're the pinnacle of God's creation, and we have enormous worth and enormous responsibility.

Now, why does this all matter? Like, you know, why does this matter for us? The Bible grounds our dignity and worth in the fact that we are these created image bearers of God.

[12 : 13] Now, the early Christians knew this, and it had a profound effect on their community, how they interacted with their community. A few examples. In the ancient Near East, if you didn't want a baby, you could throw the baby away.

You could literally just leave it on a rubbish dump, and it would die of exposure. So that was particularly girl babies that they didn't want. After Jesus, there was these groups of Christians would scour the rubbish dumps, looking for abandoned babies, and take them in.

In a society in the ancient Near East that had no social welfare sort of safety net, it was the Christians, it was the church that looked after the widows and orphans.

In a society that treated women as second-class citizens, there was one place during the week that women were treated as equals. And where was this? It was in the small house churches that were popping up all over Rome.

I mean, these are a few examples. You go forward a few hundred years. It was Augustine, one of the early, early church fathers, who started talking about putting limits on war because of the value of people.

[13 : 15] Putting limits on war and saying things like, we can't have civilians involved, and he must be a just cause. I mean, there's like tons of examples here. Basically, what I'm trying to get at is you can't explain, or you can't tell the story of modern human rights without the Christian story.

And it's rooted in passages like this. So, if that's the case, what happens in a society that got its idea of human rights from the belief that all people are created in the image of God?

What happens to that society when that society loses the idea of God? When the relationship between human dignity and God is unhooked, what happens? How do we value people?

How do you ground human rights in the worth of the individual human being? What do you ground that on? What fills the gap when God is removed from that? Well, it's going to depend on who you ask.

Your average punter, your average person here is going to say, well, I'm valuable because, and they'll fill in things like, I'm valuable because, or I have worth because I'm attractive, or I am young, or because I know stuff, because I'm sexually active, because I'm smart, because I'm wealthy, because I have friends, because I have family.

[14:28] I'm valuable because people say that I'm valuable. That's kind of your average kind of person would say that. Maybe that's along the lines of what maybe some of us think. Now, if you kind of ratchet it up a little bit and go into the academic world in the West where people are paid to think about this kind of thing here, they have sort of more sophisticated response.

And, I mean, you might look at that and go, oh, that's silly, that's terrible. It just becomes a horror show. Shortly, let me explain. The secular approach at an academic level to the question of what gives humanity worth revolves around the idea of preferences.

Let me explain that. So the argument goes like this, and I'll sort of quote something I read which I thought was helpful. Because humans can reason and have the ability to make choices, they have preferences.

They prefer this over this, right? They are moral agents and therefore are capable and worthy of protection and rights. Okay, you might think that sounds quite reasonable.

Well, let's take that to its logical end. If you take that idea to its logical end, you have the ideology of somebody like Dr. Peter Singer, who, Singer's probably one of the most well-known sort of ethicists around.

[15:45] He's a professor at Princeton. I'll read a quote from you to give you a bit of a feel for what happens when you unhook God from the worth of human beings and you say it's all about preferences and it's all about the ability to make choices and you take that to its logical conclusion, you get Peter Singer's ideology and let me just give you an example of his ideology.

A quote from him. I suggest a period of 28 days after birth might be allowed before an infant is accepted as having the same rights to life as others.

Singer goes on to argue that pigs and chickens and fish have more signs of consciousness and rationality than newborn infants and people with mental disabilities.

So, in his ideology, a chicken has more right to life than a disabled person or the newborn. This is, of course, not what Christians believe.

The Western world's sort of belief in human rights was grounded in the idea of the imago Dei and we're made in the image of God.

[16:55] We're crowned with glory and honor with the pinnacle of God's creation, given great responsibility. But that grounding's been discarded. And when that happens, when you only believe that incapacities or some other trumped up approach to why we believe humans have worth, if that's all you've got to go on, what's going to happen?

It's very simple. The circle of who is valued will continually contract. It will get smaller and smaller and there will be fewer and fewer people protected.

This is a very drawn out example, I know. I'm just trying to get at this one idea and I hope you see how important the teaching of Psalm 8 is. Let me try and wrap this up.

There are three major applications here. First, going right to the start of our psalm. This God who created the heavens, how should you regard this God?

If the God moves galaxies with his fingers, and this is obviously a picture, it's not a scientific document, it's a picture to talk about how amazing God is, but let's go with the picture.

[18:04] If there is a God that can move galaxies with his fingers, do you ask that God to come into your life as your assistant? Do you ask him to come into your life as your on-call super friend?

Do you ask him to come into your life as your sort of moral, philosophical dialogue partner? You bounce off ideas but basically form your own thing in the end? No, there's only one way you can ask him into your life and that is a Lord of all.

Second application. If we are made in God's image, crowned with glory and honor, the pillow of his creation, made a little lower than the heavenly beings, if that is true, that means our worth is not found inside of ourselves, it's a derived value.

It is a gift from God that God keeps giving to us. God gives us worth. That means we can only receive it from him, which means any attempt to get it from something else other than God, if you're trying to get your worth from anything else apart from God, that will fail.

For example, we can't give other people worth. We can give them a shallow form of it, but not real worth. Only God can do that for somebody.

[19 : 21] That means you can't get worth of any real substance from another person and just, if you just knew that, if you just got that really deep into your heart, what is that an antidote for?

A million things? One example? Two examples? It's an antidote from the person who moves from one disastrous relationship to the next disastrous relationship to the next disastrous relationship or from one bed to another bed to another bed, trying to find worth, trying to feel valued.

You're trying to make bread out of breadcrumbs that you find on the floor. Third, if we are the pinnacle of his creation, you can't glorify God and treat another person his best work.

These people sitting around you are God's best work. You can't treat another person with contempt. And how do we do that? Racism. Example.

Classism. Abortion. These are examples of treating God's supreme creation with contempt. Another example.

[20 : 40] There's communities in the world that you know of where education is withheld from women because they're women. That's all.

This is treating God's supreme creation with contempt. Marginalizing the disabled, the elderly. This is treating God's supreme creation with contempt.

Christians should be actively involved and working against any attempt to devalue people. Lastly, you might think, well, I sure don't act like God's supreme creation.

I'm not only a speck, I'm a very naughty speck, I'm a very disobedient speck, I'm a hopeless speck. How can God really love and care for me?

And if that's going through your mind, the best answer I can give you is Jesus to prove that God does care for you and that he loves you profoundly and deeply.

[21 : 49] Verse 4 is very interesting. I'll remind you of it. What is man, I mean, it's talking about humanity. What is a human being that you are mindful of him, God? The son of man that you care for him.

You know, this care for him. In the Hebrew, it's sometimes translated that you would visit him. What does man that you would visit him? The best evidence we have that God values you, that thinks you are worthy, is that he sent Jesus.

That God visited us in body to live the perfect life that we couldn't live, to suffer death that we deserved and that's the heart of the gospel.

And when you understand that, well, we can join David and say, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Amen.