

Psalm 8 PM

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[0 : 0 0] Folks, while you're standing, let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated. Welcome, everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers here.

Today, we're going to begin a short six-week series in the Book of Psalms. And when we do these series, what we do is we try and pick five or six psalms that share a common theme.

This year, we're focusing on theological anthropology. Theological anthropology. So what is that? It means we're talking about what it means to be human.

What it means to be human. So what do the psalms tell us about what it means to be human? It's a very pressing question in the world today. So six psalms, six weeks on being human.

So let's jump straight into Psalm 8 and see what it has to say to us about that question. All right. So straight away, let me just tell you the main point of the psalm. The main point is this. It's God, you are amazing.

[1 : 0 2] And we know that's the main idea because the whole thing is sort of enveloped by this line. So verse 1 and verse 9 say, Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name. So David, the writer of the psalm, is praising God.

Whilst praising God, it seems he experiences three emotions. Three emotions. First, wonder as he thinks about how amazing God is.

Two, he has this kind of like an existential crisis as he thinks about himself in the light of God's awesomeness. And third, he's astonished at the dignity that God ascribes to people.

So three emotions. Wonder, crisis, and astonishment. That's the journey of the psalm. Let's go through those three things. First, let's start with wonder.

And if you have your Bibles open, that would be probably really helpful to you. Verses 1 to 3. Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name. You have set your glory above the heavens.

[2 : 0 5] Out of the mouths of babies and infants, you've established strength because of your foes. Distill the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

So it begins by talking about the majesty of God. And I want to point out a few things here. You've set your glory above the heavens. God, he says, is above everything. Bigger, grander, wiser, more powerful, more purer than anything we can imagine.

And then the passage says, and God as he has enemies, which is remarkable. And the way that God silences these enemies is through the voices of children, it says there in voice 2.

So what does this mean? It's odd, isn't it? Well, we don't know specifically what David is talking about in terms of the noises that the children are making or saying.

The original Hebrew is a bit confusing to us now. But I know that the noises of babies can hurt people. I know that because my son, when he was little, was a screamer.

[3 : 06] He was a screaming baby. So 50 times a day, he would just scream so loudly. And I'm not joking. He damaged my brain. And when he would scream, I feel like I would just forget things about life.

Like, where is Antarctica? Like, Germany? Stuff like that. Things would just fall out of my brain. But I don't think this is what God is speaking about here.

God is not talking about hurting people or screaming kids. It's more likely he's talking about how children can say simple, truthful things about God. And that can silence the powerful. Now, if you don't believe me, this actually plays out in Matthew 21.

Jesus goes to a temple. And he kicks out all the people trying to make money out of religion. And then he starts to heal the beggars and the lame. And the religious leaders are getting really annoyed with him. And they get especially annoyed because the kids are saying, Hosanna, Hosanna to Jesus.

And they want Jesus to shut up the kids. And Jesus quotes Psalm 8. Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies, you're prepared praise. And after that, religious leaders don't say much more.

[4 : 09] The children silence the powerful. If we just stay on this idea just for a moment, it is a little window into the way that God deals with evil in the world. This is a big pattern in the Bible.

God deals with evil through weakness. The Old Testament, God often seems to work through the unwanted woman or the rejected son.

God chooses a tiny country to be a vehicle for his glory. God enters the world as a baby. Jesus, at his height of popularity, rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. God deals with sin and death on the cross.

Like it's this pattern in the Bible. God's way of sort of winning is through weakness. So I think maybe that's something to do with what's going on there.

It's a peculiar mark of God's awesomeness. And David wonders at this. He goes, wow. One more thing. Verse 3. I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars.

[5 : 09] How does David describe the universe? As the work of God's fingers. Not the work of God's arms or hands. It's not like a whole body effort.

God doesn't have to put his shoulder in really to make this happen. It's just fingers. Just like we would play with Lego. It's all God needing. David wonders at this.

Wow. Wonder. That leads to the second emotion. Crisis. He seems to have a bit of an existential crisis in the middle there. When I look at your heavens, what is man?

What are people that you are mindful of them? I'm a son of man that you care for him. So let's just put some perspective on our physical presence in the universe.

If the Milky Way was the size of North America, our solar system would be like the size of a coffee cup.

[6 : 05] And the earth would be one tiny speck in that cup. So if the Milky Way was the size of North America, our solar system would be a cup, and the earth like a tiny granule of coffee in that cup.

So that's something of what David was feeling. He stares at the vastness of the sky and he thinks, Who am I? That God would be slightly, remotely interested in my life and my struggles and the things I'm going through.

It's not a fun feeling. So David begins with wonder, and then he kind of has this bit of a crisis. And then lastly, surprise, astonishment.

It says, What is man that you are mindful of him? Yet, verse 5, you have made him a little lower than heavenly beings. Crown him with glory and honor. You've given him, her dominion over the works of your hands, and you've put all things under his feet.

So the astonishment is that despite the fact that we're a speck, and a speck, despite that, God places enormous value on people. These tiny fragments of the universe, but he's made us a little lower than heavenly beings.

[7 : 20] That word heavenly beings in Hebrew is Elohim. That means God. So the translation there is not quite right.

It's like, and I think what's happened is the early translators, when they realized it, were like, we can't say that. We can't say a little lower than God. We've got to soften this up a little bit. And so some translations have angels.

Here it's heavenly beings. It means God. A little lower than God. That's like the best thing you can say about a created thing, I think. He goes on. We're crowned with honor and glory. These are the words that he used to describe royalty.

And then he says we have divine purpose in life. Verse six, dominion over all creation. That's God-like responsibility. So we're made in God's image. We're the pinnacle of his creation.

We're given enormous worth and huge responsibility. This is what it means to be human. So that is pretty much the passage. That's pretty much what it means.

[8 : 18] So what I want to do now is just kind of draw out the implications of this. Like it's kind of a so what. So I'm going to give you 10 minutes of so what.

So why is it important to know this? Well, there are a million reasons. Here are a few. First of all, it tells us who matters in the world.

Like who matters? How do you know? How do you know you matter? It tells us who matters. The answer is, of course, everyone matters. Because we have this innate worth that God has given us.

The early Christians knew this. And it had a profound effect on their community. I'll give you a few examples. In the ancient Near East, if you didn't want a baby, you could just dump a baby on the rubbish dump.

It was common. It was legal. Mostly girl babies. Just left to die. It was called death by exposure. So in the early church, there were two groups of people who would scour the rubbish dumps looking for abandoned babies.

[9 : 24] If you could guess those groups, one were slave traders. And the other group were Christians. So they would take these infants and they would raise them. Why? Because their lives mattered.

They had innate value. They bore the image of God. They were crowned with honor and glory. Also back in the days in the early church, there's no social welfare. It was the Christians who were caring for widows and orphans and the people on the margins.

We have some of the writings of Emperor Julian the Apostate. Way, way back in the days. Here's a great quote from him. So he's writing to pagan priests here concerning Christian charity, which had become quite well known.

Julian the Apostate says this, It had got us to the point where Christian love and charity for those on the margins was so widespread and so well known that it had become an embarrassment to the Roman state.

Why were they doing it? Because people matter. Because people, all people have been made a little lower than the heavenly beings crowned with honor and glory. So that's 2,000 years ago.

[10 : 50] Now today, we can all agree. Look after people. Let's look after people. Let's all look after people. We're looking after people. Right? We're looking after people. Human rights and all that. Okay. But of course, this wasn't always the case.

We take human rights for granted. Like legal human rights is like a modern innovation. It's like 70 years old. And I think it would be good for you to know where all this valuing of human life actually came from.

What's the source of all of this? I remember a professor at seminary explaining it. He said, you can't tell the story of modern human rights without the Christian story.

Modern human rights are rooted in passages like this. Now, again, it's just the Christians. Christians saying that, making a Christian look good. But here's Tom Holland wrote a book called Dominion.

It's quite a well-known book recently. Tom Holland is, as far as I know, he's an agnostic. He wrote this, a quote from his book. The Christian story shapes our basic view of the human person.

[11 : 54] Liberal democracy and freedom of thought. Human rights don't just hang in the ether waiting to be discovered, he says. They are fruit grown on the tree of Christian faith.

And he goes on to say, in this cultural moment, society is living off the fruit of the Christian story while simultaneously chopping down the tree. Living off the fruit of the Christian story while simultaneously chopping down the tree.

Which is a shame. Let's just spend a couple of minutes thinking about that. What happens to a society that got its idea of human rights from the belief that all people were created in the image of God?

What happens to that society when it puts aside the God part of that? When the relationship between human dignity and God is unhooked, what happens?

Like, on what basis do we value people? On what basis do we value ourselves? What fills the gap when God is removed? Well, you just kind of have to, you have to choose a way of valuing people then, don't you?

[13 : 04] You kind of have to make up a rubric. You have to come up with criteria. And for the average person, they might say, well, I am valuable because I'm attractive. I'm attractive.

I didn't point it myself then. I'm attractive. Powerful. You know. You could say, I value myself because I'm sexually active. I'm young.

I'm smart. I'm cool. My daughter, Sadie, who's in the production room right now, working the cameras, she said to me the other day, she goes, dad, you've got no riz.

Go back to Ohio. What does that mean? Yeah, great question. So, I'm not 100% sure.

But I have discovered that I think riz is short for charisma, I think. It's like an insult. But the Ohio thing was interesting because I've never been to Ohio. I have no connection to Ohio at all.

[14 : 11] Yeah. So, it's like, what do you, like, is that, you know, I'm of value because I'm cool because I've got riz, you know, and I don't live in Ohio or something. You know, like, I matter because I'm wealthy, like I'm financially secure.

I have lots of friends and family. Is that why I matter? Well, here's a really big one. I have skills. I have skills that people need. I'm useful. I think this is a big one for us.

I think we often value ourselves based on our usefulness, don't we? What does it mean when you're not useful? Years ago, I bumped into a woman at VGH hospital when I was taking one of my kids to the hospital.

And I'll say this quite obliquely for obvious reasons. I chatted to a woman. She had a baby. The baby had trisomy 21. We were on the same page. They had trisomy 21. And I'm chatting to her in the elevator and started chatting because she was, you know, she was a young kid and she was still wrapping her head around it.

And she told me, she said the week before she came to hospital and an older couple came up to her and said, you shouldn't have brought this baby into the world. There'll be a burden on the economy.

[15 : 25] Which is just brutal, isn't it? Absolutely brutal. So this little girl, who the older couple said is a burden, bears the image of God. Has been made just a little lower than the heavenly beings.

Is crowned with honour and glory. See, when you take the God piece out of it, we can get really wobbly, can't we? Really wobbly. And that's quite an extreme example, valuing people based on their usefulness.

It's called utilitarianism. Peter Singer is quite interesting in this. Peter Singer is an Australian professor. I like him because he's just honest. And he's at Princeton.

He's the director for the University's Centre of Human Values. And he says, when people are no longer useful, we should euthanise them. And he says, babies should be able to be killed up until 28 days after birth.

Because they don't really have much consciousness or agency. And I mean, it's horrifying what he's saying. But it's just the logical conclusion of the idea of, if you're useful, you're valuable.

[16 : 34] I mean, we think about this about ourselves. This is just the logical conclusion. I matter because I'm useful. Side note, Singer's mother developed Alzheimer's.

And in his own writings, he said, when that happens, we should euthanise people. But he couldn't do it to his own mother. And in the interviews, he said, well, it's different when it's your own mum.

So the story, I mean, fair enough. Like, you know. But the story he'd based his life on, it could not bear the weight of what was happening to his mother. So the God story says, your worth is never based on your usefulness.

Stop doing it. I'm going to try and stop doing it. Let's stop doing this. We're divine image bearers. We carry God's likeness. We matter. We see this in Jesus' life.

You know, read the Gospels. Jesus is always reaching out to those on the margins, those at the bottom of the food chain. Let me say one more thing about this. A lot of people, they're not utilitarianism.

[17 : 36] They kind of, they don't measure value by usefulness, which I think is good. But they're not looking to God either. So what do they do? Rather than looking to God outside of themselves, they look inside.

And this is a big thing as well. People look inside. They create their own worth and meaning. They construct their own value, identity, and things can get a bit wobbly around gender, I think, as well here.

You look inside yourself to find your true self. It leads to all sorts of confusion. It puts just a lot of pressure on us, doesn't it? It's no wonder that this narrative doesn't produce, produces anxiety rather than life, I think.

So Christians believe we don't look inside and find our true self. We look outside of ourselves. We look to God. So what is our value? Because that will sustain us.

Now, God has given us abilities and talents. It's okay to acknowledge that stuff. That's fine. I'm not talking about that. But if that's all you've got, you're going to struggle, you think?

[18 : 39] The sustaining narrative is God has given me value. That can carry us through illness. It can carry us through times of feeling useless. It can carry us through job loss, retirement, loneliness. Just before I finish here.

You might think, God says really nice things about us. Yeah. God is saying really nice things about us. I don't feel like we deserve all this just as I think about my life and the way I act sometimes.

How can we know that God thinks about this about me? Does he God like us? You know? I think the best answer is the kindergarten answer.

It's Jesus. I just want to remind you of verse 4. What is man? What is people that you're mindful of him or her? And the son of man that you care for him? That care for him word in Hebrew could also be translated visited.

What is the son of man that you... And son of man just means people. What is the son of man that you visit them? Which is a lovely pointing to Jesus, isn't it? So the best evidence we have that God loves us and values us and values our humanity is that he sent Jesus.

[19 : 57] He visited us in body to show us how much he loves us. How much he values humanity by becoming human. It's at the heart of the gospel. It's so wild, isn't it? And I think we wrap our head around all of those things.

We can sort of enter into David's space here in Psalm 8. And we can join him in saying, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Amen. .

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