

Psalm 8

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[0 : 00] Now, we want to look at Psalm number 8. Psalm 8. Let's read the whole psalm.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants, you have ordained praise or strength, as the footnote says, because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider 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?

The son of man that you care for him. You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet, all flocks and herds and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

[1 : 20] O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Now, there's no doubt about the theme of this psalm.

The psalmist states it in the first verse and he repeats it in the last verse. And that's clearly a way of saying, look, this is what it's all about. How majestic is the Lord's name in all the earth!

It's a psalm that's designed to exalt God and to show how great he is. And that's strange because it says so much about man and the greatness of man.

And really, that's worth reflecting on because it shows this, that the greater we see man to be and understand his position, the greater we will see God to be.

And that's why God is exalted through this great description of the glory of man. So, God's greatness and man's greatness are tied together in the thinking of the psalmist here.

[2 : 39] I think that's probably a strange idea to most of us. But it's quite important. Someone viewing the increasing atheism of his day remarks something like this.

If people do not believe in God, then the day will come when they don't believe in man either. And of course, that's the situation that we're now in.

There are many people who don't believe in God. He just doesn't exist. And they don't believe that man exists either. He's not a distinctive being, a special creature.

He's just an ape, a higher form of ape or something of that nature. A mere animal brought into being by time and chance.

The one that denies God ends up denying the existence of man. And I think if we're in a situation of that nature, then a psalm of this nature can be of some significance to us.

[3 : 53] Because it ties the nature of man to the glory of God. And it shows how these two things come together. So I want to look at this.

To see what man is like, so that we can have a valid approach to what we are today, and how we have to view ourselves in this world in which we live, and in our relationship to God.

And in seeing what man is, we'll be able to see better what God is. And we'll end up seeing what the psalmist says, O Lord, how majestic is your name.

There are basically two ideas, as far as I can see, in this psalm, to illustrate this truth that he's trying to enlarge on. Now, we see God's majesty in his use of children.

We see God's majesty in the status that he has given to man. Now, in his use of children, we've got that in verse 2.

[4 : 59] From the lips of children and infants, you have ordained strength, because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

What on earth do these words mean? I don't think it's at all simple to grasp what he's saying here. Let's take it bit by bit. He's talking about children and infants.

These two words are often linked in the Old Testament, just to speak about all children of whatever age. And I think what is mentioned here, why they're mentioned here, is to take a stratum of society, if you like, that is not noted for being influential and powerful and important.

Children, to many, are relatively insignificant. They don't play affairs, a big part in public affairs and so on.

And what he's doing here is showing that this stratum of society, that is not noted for its contribution to things, God uses, he uses them to make a significant contribution in regard to his purposes.

[6 : 13] He does it through their lips, from the lips of children and infants. What children say, what children sing, these are the sort of things that he's speaking about.

And he says, that from the lips of children and infants, he has ordained something. He has ordained. That speaks of the purpose of God.

It speaks about his planning of things, how he works out things in the world. And it assures us of this, that what comes from the lips of children are woven into the plan and purpose of God.

They're not often woven into the plan and purpose of adults. They're not sometimes even woven into the plan and purpose of the church. But you can be sure of this. They're woven into the plan and purpose of God.

He's ordained something through this. And what is it that he's ordained? Well, our translation here says praise. I'm glad you noticed that the footnote says strength, because that's what I wanted to use, because I think that's the obvious meaning of the word actually.

[7 : 21] It's only because it's quoted in the New Testament as praise, that the Old Testament translates it as praise. There's no need to translate it. The word literally is strength. So, these weaklings, the children and the infants, that are considered the lowest in society in regard to helpfulness perhaps, they're helpful to God, and they provide strength for his work.

They provide strength for his kingdom. And in what circumstances do they do this? They do it in regard to the enemies of God, because of your enemies.

Here is the kingdom of God assaulted by those that deny the existence of God, derided by those that seek to set aside his laws and go their own ways.

And this kingdom that's threatened by these forces of evil, the enemies that are fighting, strength comes to this kingdom from the lips of children, because God has so appointed it.

The result of this is that they silence the foe and the avenger. These enemies are put to silence by the words that come from the children's lips.

[8 : 32] That's the way that God has ordered it. These enemies can't say anything further once the children have spoken.

Now, that's the way that things are put here. And I think you can see that that's what the verse is saying. And we'll see in a moment that it's really quite a remarkable thing.

But you may well ask, well, come on now, give us an example please, because it's by no means obvious that this is the case. Well, I was thinking of examples, and I couldn't actually come up with one from daily life.

Not a specific one, but I know that I've heard of cases where there's a child that's gone to Sunday school from an unbelieving home, and the remark by the child has weakened the parents to conviction of sin.

I know a lady that was converted by trying to teach her child the shorter catechism, and talking about the catechism with the child.

[9 : 33] She was awakened. I would think that if we think back about things, we might well think of stories of that nature. A youngster that went to camp and came home with the gospel.

From the lips of children and infants, God has ordained that his kingdom be strengthened and people be converted and the enemies be silenced.

But if we want a proper example, of course, we only need to go to the New Testament scriptures, because there is a specific example of it in the story that we read.

Here are the scribes and Pharisees, and they're, as usual, complaining about things, and they're not happy with what Jesus has done. And the children are singing the praises, Hosanna in the highest, and so on, as we've been reading.

And they're annoyed and upset about this. Now, there's the enemies, there's the foes, and there's the words from the lips of children. And Jesus says, look, here's an example of what Sammy is talking about.

[10 : 41] Here are these children, and they are telling the truth when you folks don't know it in your hearts. They are telling the real meaning of things when you folks are blind and ignorant.

They're putting you to shame. They're showing up how stupid you are, how ignorant you are, how blind you are. These little children know more of the truth than you folks do, just as God said in Psalm 8.

That's the sort of thing that Jesus is saying. That's the way he's applying these words. They're not a prophecy about him. They're simply words from Scripture that he takes and applies aptly to his own circumstances.

There's a case in point. From the lips of children, strength was given to the kingdom of Christ in the face of these scribes and Pharisees, and they were put to silence and would say no more, because these children knew the truth better than they did.

But isn't it wonderful that God uses children in such a way as that? And we don't say, oh, isn't it great, these children, the contribution they make?

[11 : 49] At least we don't only say that. Surely what we see is, isn't it a wonderful God that has taken the weakest and used them to bring strength to his kingdom?

Isn't it a wonderful God that turns the simple words of simple children and makes them more powerful than all the voices of the atheists around them?

Isn't it wonderful? What a wonderful God we've got. Isn't it a God about whom we can say, he's majestic, he's beyond our understanding, he's worthy of praise. How majestic is your name in all the earth.

Then, the main point of this psalm is that the majesty of God is seen in the status that is given to man. Now this is much more difficult to open up because there's misunderstandings about it and it's really quite difficult just to get it right.

So we hope we'll manage to do something about it. Now, first of all, what we've got here in verse 3 and verse 4 is the background against which we must see this status that man enjoys.

[13 : 03] And they're sort of introductory words that are setting the scene. When I consider 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, the son of man that you care for him?

Here is the psalmist looking up at the night sky on a clear night without the lights of a city around seeing the sky in all its immensity and glory.

And it seems to me there are three waves of emotion that sweep over him as he contemplates the night sky. First of all, I think he's thinking about the immensity of the universe.

When I see the things you've made, he sees the immensity of God's creation in the night sky. It's an awe-inspiring sight when we look at it in the right way.

And that's what the psalmist does. Even in those days, the majesty of the night sky was impressive. And we feel it just as much today.

[14 : 18] And I really think that we should feel more of it today because we know more about the night sky than they did. And we know more about its immensity than the psalmist could ever have imagined.

With the advancements of science, they probe into the depths of space in a way that was never imaginable in the time of David if he was the writer of the psalm.

And therefore, the night skies become bigger, more immense, more majestic than it ever was before. I asked my computer how many stars there were. And this is the answer that it came up with on one website.

One source says, there are 3,000,000,000,000,000 stars. Now, if anybody can understand that, I can't. 3,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. What on earth does that mean?

It's unimaginably great. That's all that I can say. It's unimaginably great. I can't imagine a billion stars. I don't even know what 3,000,000,000,000,000 means, quite frank. It's just beyond the ability of man to think about.

[15 : 26] I mean, a scientist might wrap it up in a formula. But to understand it, no, we can't grasp it. It just isn't graspable if there's such a word as that. And the same if you think about distances.

Light years. How many light years? I didn't even ask my computer that one. But we know the answer. Unimaginably great. We just cannot begin to appreciate the distances involved.

And if we look up at the night sky from a more scientific perspective, I don't think we should say anything less than what David says here. I think we should say more than what David says here.

because to us the night sky is more majestic than it was to him because we understand it better. And that's the wave of emotion that sweeps over him.

A sense of wonder at the immensity of the night sky. That's immediately followed by another brief wave of feeling.

[16 : 24] And this is a sense of the littleness of man. He looks at all that then he looks at himself and he says what is man?

And what he's really feeling there I think is it's also great incomprehensibly great and here is me what am I in comparison to all that?

Just like a speck of dust in the midst of the immensity of the universe. And I think that we might well feel that as well. Indeed I think we ought to feel that as well.

And sometimes we stop there and that's the impression that the night sky leaves us with. What is man? So little and nothing a mere nothing as it were in comparison with all that stuff up there.

But the psalmist doesn't leave it there and he doesn't leave the impression that man is little. He goes on to speak of something else. And this is what overwhelms him is I can see it above everything else.

[17 : 29] He's the third wave of emotion. He's overwhelmed by a sense of the condescension of God. He says what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him.

Man isn't just a speck of dust in an immense universe. he's a speck of dust that God has thought about and he's cared for.

Literally he's visited him which is quite impressive because he did actually do that. But here it hasn't to be pressed meaning visit it just means he looked after a speck of dust in the immense universe and God cares.

God is interested. He doesn't say oh just a speck of dust to me. That's not the way that God looks on man. He doesn't say what is man just a speck of dust compared to the majesty of the stars.

God has cared for this speck of dust and he's been mindful of him. What a fantastic thought that God should stoop to do that.

[18 : 40] That he should be so merciful to consider the possibility of entering into relationships with us. what an act of grace. No wonder he says how majestic is your name that God looks on a speck of dust and is mindful and caring.

That's the background. Now we're told the extent to which God has been mindful we're told the way in which he has cared for us and we've got it first of all as a general statement a general idea and then we've got a specific case of that.

We'll deal with the general idea first. And that's what we've got here in verse 5. You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

This is fantastic. The status that is given to man here. It's as mind-boggling as the immensity of the universe. You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings Well there's a footnote there.

I'm glad there's a footnote because you might not believe it if I said it but the translation says you made him a little lower than God. The word translated he were the heavenly beings I'm not saying that that's a wrong translation it probably is a possible translation but it's by no means the only translation.

[20 : 05] This is the normal word for God. That the psalmist could use these words it's just fantastic. You made him a little lower than God this speck of dust you made him a little lower than God.

What a God we've got that would condescend and act so graciously as to do that and that's just the beginning. You crowned him with glory and honour glory and honour now whom do we associate with glory and honour and not exclusively but surely we think first of all of God these are words used about him the heavens declare the glory of God I will speak of the glorious honour of your majesty says the psalmist these are words that we commonly associate with God and here is God associating them with us crowned with glory and honour attributes of God attributed to man extraordinary extraordinary and he's crowned us with these things not just given us a little taste not just given us a wee drop of them but poured them out in us so that they are the crowning achievement of his creation something extreme that's the picture given here and that's the status that man has been given he is crowned with glory and honour made a little lower than God now this is man not in

Christ but in creation this is man as he came from the hands of the creator made in the image and likeness of God that's why the psalm can speak in this way crowned with glory and honour because they were made in the image of God now we've got to try and take that in and use it properly and wisely but I want to try and anticipate certain difficulties that people have about this so let's just look at these in a wee bit more detail not from the scriptures but just trying to set them in our minds in a proper perspective people have difficulties and the most obvious one is this how does this fit in with the fall yes man was created like that but surely we can't say that about man now because he fell into sin and he's now sinful in nature you cannot say that that sort of creature is now crowned with glory and honour made a little lower than

God surely well the psalmist seems to so let's look at that for a minute I think we've got a wee bit out of perspective our talk about the sinful nature of man I don't think that we're talking any longer in accordance with what was the traditional pattern of Scottish theology which I also believe to be biblical theology now just think about this for a moment and I'm going to start with an illustration we're in Africa we're in King Williamstown and we're driving out on a Sunday morning the streets are quite quiet but I see a car a Mercedes a big car a beautiful car clean absolutely spotless as if it had just come straight from the factory and I say to my wife look at that car we go out the town we go along the main road we leave the main road and bump over the side roads to get to the village and on the outskirts of the village there is an area where they've been quarrying stone and it's now used as a bit of a rubbish dump and in this rubbish dump there's a car it's upside down its wheels are off its body is rusted everything that can be removed from it has been removed from it pretty well and I say to my wife look at that car it's the same thing as the other thing the car the beautiful

Mercedes what is different is not that it's no longer a car what is different is its condition one car was in immaculate condition spotless the other car was in a ruinous condition but they're both cars here's Adam before the fall he's spotless pure sinless and I can say look at that man in admiration and here's a poor fellow in the gutter he's drunk and incapable he's obviously had hard problems in life he's worn out he looks terrible he's a terrible specimen of humanity but I say look at that man he's not less than a man though he's in that condition he's still a man like Adam it's their condition that's different

[25 : 23] Adam is in perfect condition that sinner in the gutter is in a ruined condition but I say look at that man look at that man they haven't changed their nature they've changed their condition and that's the way it used to be in Scottish theological tradition there was a book that was often held in godly homes in Scotland it probably came after the Bible and the pilgrim's progress at one stage and it was commonly known as Boston's fourfold state which doesn't tell you very much about it unless you happen to know it it was a famous book written by Thomas Boston and its full title was human nature in its fourfold state human nature in its fourfold state that's Scottish theology the way we expressed it we should express it still there's only one human nature but it's found in different states there are four states according to

Boston there's the state of innocence Adam there's the state of sin us before conversion there's the state of salvation us after conversion and there's the state of glory us in the world to come four states one nature we're not sinful by nature we're sinful in our condition that's the general traditional teaching of our church and I think it's useful here because we can say man what is man a speck of dust in the immensity of the universe but one whom God was pleased to make in his own image and crown him with glory and honour it's very sad that he's now in a ruined condition it's terrible it's grace that he's now in a ruined condition but that's what he is and that's the way the Bible speaks about it here's this reference from James now with the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness we curse men who have been made in God's likeness he doesn't say we curse men who are now sinful by nature he says these people who are cursed made in the image of God he's talking about sinners but they remain with their original nature however ruined their condition might be and that means we can say

I'm a sinner I'm absolutely ruined I'm a disgrace to humanity and at the same time we can say but my original constitution is this basically this is what man is made in the image of God crowned with honour and glory so we can hold to a doctrine of original sin we can hold to a doctrine of total depravity we can be faithful to our theology we can be faithful to our scriptures and still at the same time say made in the image of God crowned with glory and honour that's the status that we enjoy in the mind and purpose of God I'll miss out the next point and I'll go to another one this does not fill us with pride some people might say and the answer is yes it can but it needn't there's a terrible theology abroad even especially perhaps in the evangelical world the gospel about self-esteem we have been made to think too badly of ourselves and we must think positively about ourselves and build up our self-esteem and see what we really are and that's a way of putting this doctrine in a way that exalts man there's a way of putting this over that makes a person proud and that makes him think an awful lot of himself and that leads to salvation by works and that downgrades the work of our

Lord there is a use of this doctrine even in the evangelical world that is detrimental and that leads to pride and we must never go down that path when accepting this doctrine but that's not the way that the writer uses it what the writer is doing here is not exalting man by saying this he's exalting God by saying this he's not saying you folks out there you must really think a lot of yourselves and build yourselves up in your self-esteem and that will enable you to do something much more than what you're doing at the moment when you're always thinking about your ruined condition the psalmist isn't saying that at all he's saying look at what we are wasn't that a wonderful God that did that we were just a speck of dust but God made us that now that's not a doctrine that exalts us that's a doctrine that exalts God and that's what the psalmist is teaching here we must use this wonderful status that we enjoy not to glory as if it was natural but to recognize it was a remarkable act of condescension that God should choose this little speck of dust as it were and make us what he made us this is what contributes to our understanding of God as the

God of condescension of amazing grace and wonderful power now that's the general principle let's briefly mention now the outworking of this because we've got an example of what this means in practice and it's from verse 6 we've got this because we have this glory and honor extended to us this is one thing that God has done for us you made him ruler over the works of your hands you put everything under his feet now look at the inclusiveness of everything here the works of your hands no exceptions there the animals in the world the vegetation in the world the seas the minerals in the land the oil under the surface of the earth the coal similarly the iron oil as well all that that was coming from the hand of God all of that has been put into the hands of man because God endowed him with glory and honor in his grace and this is worked out more specifically again notice the inclusiveness of it there's flocks and herds and beasts of the field so he's talking here about land animals and he's talking about domesticated ones like flocks and herds and he's talking about wild animals the beasts of the field and he's talking about the birds of the air and the fish of the sea so again it's an attempt to draw this in broad sweeps everything's included here the whole of him of animal life the whole of the material resources that God has made all these are put into man's hands and all these are given him in order that he might rule over them now what are we to make of that well again you see people say well that's alright but we've fallen to sin and I've heard it said the fall led to this being abolished after the fall things were different and that original command to rule the world no longer holds now I'm not prepared to accept that if you accept what I've already said about the fact that we're still crowned with glory and honour in some sense then we've got to accept this as an outworking of it we don't say marriage was instituted before the fall and the fall has changed everything so marriage doesn't count or the

[33 : 52] Sabbath was instituted before the fall now everything has changed because of the fall we say these things are more necessary now that sin has come into the world so why don't we say that about this as well here's something that's enduring something that's lasting I've more to say about that but time's going so I'll not say anything more about it so this is something for us it's not abrogated by the fall it's made more important through the fall that we should keep to the original mandate that was given that we should rule over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea and the animals of the land and use all the resources that God has given to us in the world now it's obvious that this you could deal with a course of lectures on this whole idea and we can only mention a couple of things by way of application but this says to us a lot about work if we are using animals if we're using minerals if we're working in industry if we're working in domestic work in almost any way of life we're talking about using the material resources of the world so this gives us a dignity gives a dignity to our work and it takes the drudgery away from the work knowing that it's something commanded by God or we could say there's a green agenda here and I would agree about that it's a kind of pale green agenda but it is a green agenda that there is here if anybody takes this seriously they must pay attention to environmental issues because God told us to use the world on his behalf we're responsible to him for its use we're not to empty the world we're to fill the world he said originally and we'll be responsible for our stewardship so this gives us a certain interest in environmental issues and it makes us green in our approach to things to some degree at least

I'm not saying we take over the whole green agenda but we do have an interest in that area because we've been made stewards of these things by the command of God and this is us today with the whole world in our hands and we could make applications of that nature about work about the environment and so on and so on but you see here the psalmist doesn't do anything of that he just stands back and marvels marvels not that we have such power that we have such authority but that God was pleased to do that for the poor creatures that we are for the little specks of dust that we really are and that is the essential message of this once again we don't boast that we are the rulers of this world that we can do with the animals what we want to do we simply stand back and are amazed that such a responsibility and that such an honour and that such an authority should be given to us and all that's left for us to do is to see what the psalmist says how excellent is your name oh lord in all the earth so hope we'll do this that we'll look afresh at the way that God does things in the world he takes the words of children and he uses them to give strength to his kingdom in the face of his enemies he takes a speck of dust that's minute in comparison with the immensity of the universe and he elevates it to a place of honour and crowns him with glory and gives him authority over his creation what a God we've got we must bow in worship be filled with praise not with pride but with a sense of humility and acknowledge how great

God is to see the greatness of man in this context does not exalt man but exalts the God who made him great if we believe in man we'll believe in God if we see the greatness of man's position in the world we'll see what a God we've got and that's the whole purpose of this psalm may God bless to us this meditation in his word and that was so what a whole thing against