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GOD'S MAJESTY AND OURS

Psalm 8

By

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God's Majesty and Ours Psalm 8

The older I get and the faster that the New Year seems to pop up on the calendar, the more I think about, "What is the significance of my life?" Life is so uncertain that none of us knows whether this will be our last *day* on this planet, much less our last year. And even if we live a long life, it all goes by so quickly. So I often ask myself, "What have I accomplished of any lasting value in light of eternity?" And, "If the Lord gives me ten or fifteen more years of health and strength, what should I seek to accomplish?"

My parents used to have a little plaque on the wall by our front door that read, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." That little couplet states it well. The significance of our lives can only be measured in the light of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As we seek to live in light of God's purpose for our lives, we will know where we fit into His plan and our lives will take on the significance that God intended.

Psalm 8 explores the theme of God's majestic splendor and our puny insignificance by way of comparison. And yet at the same time, God has created us in His image and graciously crowned us with glory and majesty. He has assigned us the role of ruling over His creation. All of these thoughts should lead us, as the psalm both begins and ends (Ps. 8:1, 9), to declare in worship, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"

Derek Kidner (*Psalms 1-72* [IVP], pp. 65-66) comments,

This psalm is an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who He is and what He has done, and relating us and our world to Him; all with a masterly economy of words, and in a spirit of mingled joy and awe...

The range of thought takes us not only "above the heavens" (1) and back to the beginning (3, 6-8) but, as the New Testament points out, on to the very end.

We don't know when David wrote this psalm. Obviously, it stemmed from his experience (which most of us have had) of gazing up at the night sky and marveling at its vastness compared to his own puniness on this speck in the universe called planet earth. We don't know for certain what the term "Gittith" in the title means. It refers to the Philistine town of Gath, which means winepress. Thus it may refer to a psalm for the grape harvest (such as the Feast of Tabernacles); to the ark's journey from the house of Obed-edom the Gittite to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:11); or to a tune or musical instrument named after the city. Two other psalms (81, 84) have the term in their titles. In Psalm 8, David is exhorting us to...

Worship the Lord because His name is majestic in all the earth and because He has graciously crowned us with glory and majesty.

1. Worship the Lord because His name is majestic in all the earth (8:1, 2).
 - A. The Lord has displayed His majesty in all the earth and in the splendor of the heavens (8:1).

To try to comment on verse 1 is kind of like commenting on the splendor of the Grand Canyon. Words really can't do it justice. You just need to get out of the way and let people see it! David begins with the exclamation, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!"

The first word translated "Lord" is the Hebrew word, Yahweh, God's personal covenant name. It stems from the Hebrew verb, "to be." God revealed it first to Moses at the burning bush when He said (Exod. 3:14), "I am who I am." It points to God's eternal self-existence. He is the only uncreated being in the universe! The second "Lord" is the Hebrew "Adonai," meaning sovereign or lord. We could paraphrase David's address, "O eternal covenant God, our personal Sovereign!" Although God is eternal and totally separate from His creation, He has graciously condescended to enter into a covenant relationship with His people as their Sovereign Lord.

The word "majestic" implies royalty, a concept which we as Americans do not properly appreciate. For a commoner to come

into the presence of a king on his throne was a frightening and awe-inspiring moment. When Israel celebrated God's mighty deliverance at the exodus, they sang (Exod. 15:11), "Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?"

David says further that it is God's *name* that is majestic. His name refers to the perfection of His attributes and the mightiness of His deeds. In other words, God's name refers to who He is and what He has done, as revealed in His Word. David also says that the majesty of God's name is seen in all the earth and above the heavens. It is similar to what Paul states when he indicts the human race for suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). He explains (Rom. 1:20), "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

When we consider God's majesty as seen in all the earth, I could cite enough examples to keep you here all day. There is enough evidence for the Creator in the human body alone to convince anyone willing to think about it that we are not the product of random chance over a long period of time.

The human brain has 10 billion nerve cells interacting in coordination to allow us to function as we do. Your eyes have about 100 million receptor cells in each retina, which also contains four other layers of nerve cells. The system makes billions of calculations per second, traveling through your optic nerve to the brain, which has more than a dozen separate vision centers to process it. Your skin has more than 2 million tiny sweat glands, about 3,000 per square inch, to regulate your temperature.

Your heart beats an average of 75 times per minute, 40 million times per year, or two and a half billion times in 70 years. It pumps about 3,000 gallons of blood per day. Your body is supported by more than 200 finely designed bones, connected to more than 500 muscles and many tendons and ligaments. Some muscles respond to your conscious will, whereas some react automatically. Your digestive system contains about 35 million glands that secrete juices to digest your food and sustain your life. I haven't even mentioned your lungs, your other senses (hearing, taste, smell, and touch),

your endocrine glands, your immune system, and much more. And it all works together!

And this is just the human body. When you consider the complex balance of the natural world, with the hydrologic cycle, the way that plants grow and process carbon dioxide to produce oxygen, the seasons, the balance between insects and birds and the other animals, it is simply absurd to suggest that it all came about by sheer chance over time without the Creator!

David also considers God's splendor above the heavens. Of course, he had no telescopes to show him how big the universe is. What would he have thought if he knew what we know! The sheer vastness of outer space and the coordination of it all is astounding. If you could travel at the speed of light, 186,000 miles per second, it would take you 8 minutes to get to the sun. To go from the sun to the center of the Milky Way would take about 33,000 years. The Milky Way belongs to a group of some 20 galaxies known as the Local Group. To cross that group, you'd have to travel for 2 million years. The Local Group belongs to the Virgo Cluster, part of an even larger Local Supercluster, which is a half-billion light years across. To cross the entire universe as we know it would take you 20 billion light years (*National Geographic World* [Jan., 1992], p. 15)!

And yet supposedly intelligent scientists see all of this and then attribute it to "nature" or random chance! Sir Isaac Newton had an exact replica of our solar system made in miniature. At its center was a large golden ball representing the sun. Revolving around it were small spheres representing the planets, attached at the ends of rods of varying lengths. They were all geared together by cogs and belts to make them move around the sun in harmony.

One day as Newton was studying the model, a friend who did not believe in the biblical account of creation stopped by. Marveling at the device and watching as Newton made the heavenly bodies move in their orbits, the man exclaimed, "My, Newton, what an exquisite thing! Who made it for you?"

Without looking up, Newton replied, "Nobody." "Nobody?" his friend asked. "That's right! I said nobody! All of these balls and cogs and belts and gears just happened to come together and wonder of wonders, by chance they began revolving in their set orbits

and with perfect timing!" His unbelieving friend got the message! (From "Our Daily Bread," 1977.) But Newton's model was nothing compared to the vastness and complexity of the universe! Truly, God has displayed His splendor above the heavens!

- B. The Lord has displayed His majesty and power in seemingly weak infants, through whom He triumphs over His enemies (8:2).

David knows that in spite of all of the evidence of God's glory in His creation, there are still adversaries that oppose Him. They have an *a priori* bias against God because they want to be the lords of their own lives. They begin by assuming materialism and so they have no place for God.

How does God deal with such enemies? David says that it is "from the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength" (8:2)! What does he mean? I think that John Calvin was right when he said that the process of the conception and birth of an infant displays God's splendor so clearly that even a nursing infant brings down to the ground the fury of God's enemies (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], on Psalms, p. 98). Calvin didn't know anything about the complex biological and chemical processes that take place in the mother and child at birth. He was just observing the wonder of a newborn baby. How can you look at a baby and say that it happened by sheer chance, apart from a Creator?

But the biological process of birth is amazing. At nine months after conception, the baby's brain sends a hormone through the placenta and into the mother's pituitary gland. Although it is a complicated chemical, its message is simple: "I'm ready! It's time!" All of the baby's complex systems—lungs, heart, gastrointestinal system, nervous system, brain—are ready to make it on their own. The baby's skull has not yet fused, so that it can be pliable enough to fit through the birth canal. As the process starts, the baby's adrenal glands add a shot of stress hormones to help the baby cope.

The child will not breathe until it has cleared the birth canal. If it breathed too soon, it would suffocate. But if it waited too long, it would suffer brain damage. Just before the mother and child separate, the newborn gets a last-minute blood transfusion through the umbilical cord. The placenta has stored the nutrients the baby

needs for this exact moment. There is far more going on that we don't understand. (The above synopsis of birth is from Geoffrey Simmons, *Billions of Missing Links*, pp. 11-12, in *The Summit Journal*, April, 2007.) But the cry of the newborn displays God's strength.

Beyond this, there is the fact that little children often praise God. The Septuagint (LXX, Greek translation of the OT) translated the word "strength" somewhat freely as "praise." God's strength as seen in creating children leads to His praise. On Palm Sunday, as Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem and then healed the blind and lame in the temple, little children saw these things and cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:15). Jesus' enemies, the chief priests and scribes, became indignant about what the children were saying. Jesus replied by quoting this verse (21:16), "Yes, have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?'" James Boice explains (*Psalms, Volume 1* [Baker], p. 68),

If these leaders of the people had been indignant before, they must have become nearly catatonic now. For by identifying the praise of the children of Jerusalem with Psalm 8, Jesus not only validated their words, showing them to be proper. (He was, indeed, the "son of David," the Messiah.) He also interpreted their praise as praise not of a mere man, which a mere "son of David" would be, but of God, since the psalm says that God has ordained praise for himself from children's lips.

Thus the Lord overcomes His enemies by the marvel of little children and the praise that they sing in their simple faith. So David's first and main point is that we should worship the Lord because His name is majestic in all the earth.

2. Worship the Lord because although we are puny and insignificant, He has graciously crowned us with glory and majesty (8:3-8).
 - A. Compared to the vastness of God's created universe, we are puny and insignificant (8:3-4).

David looked up into the vastness of the night sky and saw the moon and the stars, the work of God's fingers. He has somehow set them all in their appointed places and orbits. Then David thinks of how small he is and marvels (8:4), "What is man that You

take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?" The Hebrew word used for "man" emphasizes man in his frail human existence (see Pss. 9:20; 90:3; 103:15). The second line referring to him as "the son of man" may hint at our fallen condition, since all of the sons of Adam were born after his likeness and image, in sin (Gen. 5:3ff.). Compared to the vastness of the universe, what is man that God thinks of us, much less that He cares for us!

Years ago, there was a famous explorer named William Beebe. He was a good friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Often when he visited the President at Sagamore Hill, the two men would go outdoors at night to see who could first locate the Andromeda galaxy. Then, as they gazed at the tiny smudge of distant starlight, one of them would recite, "That is the spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of 100 billion suns, each larger than our sun." Then Roosevelt would grin and say, "Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed." (*7,700 Illustrations*, Paul Tan [Assurance Publishers], #2213.)

- B. Yet in spite of our insignificance, God has crowned us with glory and majesty and assigned us to rule over His creation (8:5-8).

David probably intended the Hebrew *Elohim* to refer to God, not to the angels (on rare occasions, it can mean "angels" or "human leaders," 1 Sam. 28:13; Ps. 82:1, 6). David is referring back to Genesis 1:26, where God created man in His image and likeness. In the same context, God assigned to man the task of ruling over the rest of creation, as David here enumerates. David could have said that we were made just a little higher than the other animals, but instead, he says that we were made a little lower than God to reflect the wonder that we are created in His image. As H. C. Leupold states, "Nowhere is man's dignity asserted more clearly and boldly than in this passage. But we again remind the reader that the reference is to man before the fall" (*Exposition of Psalms* [Baker], p. 104).

But the LXX translators took the rarer meaning and translated that we were created a little lower than the angels. The author of Hebrews followed that translation (Heb. 2:7) because he wanted to make the point that Jesus for a short while had been made lower

than the angels, so that through His death He could accomplish our salvation. Thus,

- C. Psalm 8 is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who restores what Adam lost.

Man since the fall has accomplished some remarkable feats in gaining dominion over creation. Think of all of the wonders of modern science, including the advances in medical science. And yet, all of these accomplishments are tainted by sin. Proud man boasts in them and does not acknowledge that the ability to discover scientific facts has been given to him by God. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel, proud modern man uses his scientific breakthroughs to proclaim his independence from God. With a few more breakthroughs, we can cure all our diseases and live forever!

But science cannot reconcile us to God. So what did God do? He sent His own Son, the Son of Man, to provide the sacrifice for our sins and to fulfill Psalm 8 in a way that we cannot. Hebrews 2 cites Psalm 8:4-6 and then applies it to Jesus (Heb. 2:9): "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." Leupold summarizes (p. 101), "man as created reflects God's glory. But the Son of man, in whom the original pattern is more fully realized, reflects this same glory far more perfectly."

So David tells us to worship the Lord because although we are puny and insignificant, He has graciously thought of us and cared for us. Although we marred God's image through sin, God has restored it in Jesus Christ. In Him, we are again crowned with glory and majesty. Thus,

- 3. Worship the Lord because His name is majestic in all the earth (8:9).

David comes full circle and closes the wreath of praise: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"

Conclusion

How can we apply this psalm? I could elaborate extensively on each of these points, but I can only list them and trust that you will think through the applications more fully:

1. We should bow in awe before our majestic Creator!

This psalm should humble us and cause us to marvel at God's grace and love in caring for us by sending His Son as our Savior.

2. We should treat each person with value and respect as beings created in God's image.

John Piper has said, "You cannot worship and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt." (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/1/860_What_Is_Man/) Christians must oppose all racism. We must treat all people with respect.

3. We should stand firmly against the horrors of abortion, which treats God's majestic creation as trash.

From the point of conception, the only difference between the baby in the mother's womb and you and I is time and nurture. To kill children simply because it is inconvenient to care for them, is a horrible sin that we must confront.

4. We should stand firmly against the absurdity of evolution, which denies that we are created in God's image.

Evolution is simply a way for sinful people to attempt to avoid their Creator. It is one of the greatest scientific frauds that the enemy of our souls has ever foisted on the human race!

5. We should rear our children to love, fear, and serve God as the only way to make life count.

When we are rightly related to God through Jesus Christ, our lives take on eternal significance.

6. We should be good stewards of God's creation.

While modern man worships the creation rather than the Creator, we should not neglect the fact that we are the stewards over God's creation. We should oppose the greed that often destroys creation with no regard for its beauty and preservation.

7. We should take pleasure in whatever work God gives us to do, doing it heartily as unto Him.

As the Puritans emphasized, every legitimate occupation is a God-given vocation. No matter what you do to earn a living, you can do it for the Lord (Col. 3:22-24).

8. We should enjoy God through His creation.

Forget the mall or the movies. Take a hike and enjoy God through the wonders that He has made!

Application Questions

1. Is it futile or potentially useful to debate an atheist about the existence of God? Is the atheist's problem intellectual or moral?
2. Clearly, the Bible condemns racism. Does it prohibit interracial marriage? How would you counsel someone on this matter?
3. Should Christians be at the forefront of the environmental movement? Where is the biblical balance?
4. Some jobs seem tedious and boring. How should a believer in such a job view it? (See Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-24.)

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