

Psalm 8

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[0:00] If you have a Bible, please turn with me to Psalm 8. While you do that, let me just explain! what we're going to be looking at this weekend. I've called the series Glorious Dust, the Christian! Doctrine of Humanity. Glorious Dust, the Christian! Doctrine of Humanity. Our talk tonight is looking at man as ruler. Tomorrow morning we'll look at man as ruined. Then we'll look at the true man, Jesus Christ. And then on the Lord's Day in the morning, we'll look at man renewed.

And in the evening, man resurrected. So ruler, ruined, true man, Jesus, renewed, resurrected. Tonight, we're looking at man created to rule. Surprise. That's what's at the heart of this psalm. It's a psalm about the unexpected, the surprising. But if we miss the surprise factor, then we miss the whole point of the psalm. Because the element of surprise causes David to extol God's greatness in the refrain, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. We get the hint of surprise in verse 1, where we're told that the God who has set his glory in the heavens has also displayed his glory, his majesty in all the earth. The God whose glory cannot be contained by the heaven of heavens has displayed his majesty in all the earth.

Now when you hear that, when you hear that God's majesty has been displayed in all the earth, what do you think of? Think of creation, don't we? We think of Mount Everest or Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe or the plains of the Serengeti teeming with wild animals. We think of the Amazon rainforest or the Grand Canyon. We think of a beautiful star-studded night in the Lake District or a beautiful sunset.

Isn't that what we think of when we hear of God's majesty displayed in all the earth? Here's the unexpected thing. Here's the big surprise in this psalm. When it comes to talking about God's majesty in all the earth, David talks about babies and mankind. God's name is majestic in all the earth because weak little babies defeat God's enemies, verse 2, and because puny little man rules God's world, verses 3 to 8.

[3:05] That's the logic of this psalm. The catalyst for praise for David is not cute little babies, verse 2. It's not creation, verse 3. It's not even mankind, verse 4.

No, the catalyst for praise in this psalm is the surprise that weak little babies defeat God's enemies and that puny little man rules God's world.

The first surprise in verse 2 is obvious enough. Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger. The word here for babes is literally sucklings.

In the Old Testament, or for infants, sorry, is literally sucklings. In the Old Testament, it's used in the context of oppression where babies are vulnerable victims of war and death.

And yet, verse 2 says literally, from the mouth of babes suckling on their mother's breasts, God has established praise or strength, literally.

[4:13] I mean, David, are you having a laugh? If he would ever speak of strength coming out of a baby's mouth, out of a weak, vulnerable, dependent baby.

It's strength going in the wrong direction, isn't it? I mean, isn't a baby's mouth supposed to receive nourishment and strength, not give it out? Yet God reverses the direction.

From, out of the mouth of babes and infants comes strength. The surprise factor continues in the purpose given for this strength.

To still the enemy and the avenger. The great and mighty enemies of God that rise up proud and arrogant against him are defeated not by armies of men, not by chariots and horses, not by tanks and fighter planes, but by weak, vulnerable children.

How humbling for God's enemies. Now, if we had time tonight, we could look at Matthew chapter 21 and see how Jesus applies this verse to his own day.

[5:29] The strength is the praise of God coming from little infants as they're running around and singing, Hosanna to the Son of David. Save us, Son of David, as he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey.

But I want to focus our attention on the bigger surprise in this psalm. And that is in verses 3 to 8. God's name is majestic in all the earth because puny little man rules God's world.

Verses 3 to 8. Weak little babies defeat God's enemies. Verse 2. And puny little man rules God's world. Verses 3 to 8.

We just glance down at verse 3 and compare it in length to verse 4 and 5 and 6. You'll notice that it's actually longer. It doesn't have the parallelism of verse 4.

Hebrew poetry has this structure of parallelism. It will say something on the first line and then it will repeat the same thing on the second line often with a wee bit of a surprise factor or it adds something.

[6:36] But verse 3 has no parallelism. It sort of just keeps on going as if to underline the sense of awe of creation. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

The mention of God's fingers is perhaps the most striking thing in the verse. God made the heavens and the moon and the stars with his fingers.

Of course it's just a way of describing God in human terms which the Bible does often. But we know God is a spirit. He doesn't actually have a pair of fingers. But we mustn't rush to protect God too quickly here.

He's quite happy to be described symbolically as having fingers. We should let the metaphor wash over us. We should meditate on the metaphor. God used his fingers to create the heavens and the moon and the stars.

Now what does that communicate to you? He's an artist. He's a sculptor, a painter. The metaphor conveys the delicate, intricate, detailed care with which God made the world.

[7:52] But I think the metaphor suggests something else too. I'm sure most of us in this room have been on an aeroplane. You know as you sit at the window and the plane rises, takes off and rises up above the clouds and there out the window is that endless expanse of blue sky for thousands of miles.

Or if you've never been in an aeroplane, you go out in the countryside on a dark night and you stand there and you look up at that canopy of stars above your head.

Now think about the metaphor here. That endless blue sky, that star-studded night sky which God fashioned and shaped in such intricate detail, all of it is just at the tips of his fingers.

It's so tiny, so small that God only needs to push and prod it with the divine digits. It's as if God picked up the moon like a marble and rolled it between his thumb and first finger and then just placed it in the night sky.

Or like he picked up a star like a teacher does, those little gold stars for her child's homework and then just stuck it on the canvas of the night sky.

[9:16] God made the heavens with his fingers. He's an artist, but he is an incredibly big artist in comparison to his world.

He molded the endless skies with just the tips of his fingers. Now if you're like me, you would think that the refrain of the psalm would kick in here.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

But that's not how the psalm progresses. David doesn't make an exclamation of praise. He asks a question. When I consider the blue skies and the fact that you made them in such fine detail and in comparison to you they are so small at the tips of your fingers and man in comparison to them is even smaller, what is man that you are mindful of him?

There's no exclamation of praise. There's just a question of puzzlement. What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

[10:36] The word man here and the phrase human being if you have a NIV or son of man both speak of our fragility, our weakness, our humanness.

We are minuscule specks of dust on a rock revolving around one of billions of stars in but one of billions of galaxies. So why would God even bother with us?

I mean, did you bother with the ants on the pavement out there tonight as you walked in here? Didn't see them? Insignificant? Yet here is God.

We are even more insignificant compared to the ants. And here is God caring for us. Do you feel your puniness, your minuteness, your insignificance?

David wants you to feel it. He wants you to feel how insignificant you are. But he also wants you to feel something else and that is that though you are insignificant compared to this vast universe which is so small in comparison to God, God still cares for you.

[11:51] Puny little you are on the mind of the God who cast billions of stars into billions of galaxies with his fingers.

Now again, you'd expect the refrain to kick in here, wouldn't you? When I consider the 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 and the son of man that you care for him?

And since you do care for him, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. But again, that's not the logic of the psalm.

The refrain is withheld until verse 9. Which means that the catalyst for praise in this psalm is not creation, verse 3. It's not even God's care for us, verse 4.

No, the catalyst for praise in this psalm is seen in the contrast between verses 3 to 5, 3 to 4, and verses 5 to 8.

[12:55] There's a yet, a but, at the beginning of verse 5. The NIV, if you have an NIV, completely misses it. But the ESV does get it.

There's a yet, a but, at the beginning of verse 5. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

Yet, yet, insignificant though we are, yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands, and you have put all things under his feet. Psalm 8 is about the clash of man's insignificance and man's significance.

Man is utterly insignificant in comparison to God's world, verses 3 and 4. Yet, man is supremely significant as ruler over God's world, verses 5 to 8.

[13:59] Puny little man, verses 3 to 4, rules God's world, verses 5 to 8. And it's only when those two paradoxical truths are set side by side that David bursts into praise again.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Well, let's take a closer look at verses 3 to 5.

You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. Charles Darwin said that as human beings we bear the image of our lowly origins.

The 20th century psychiatrist Murray Bowen said man is an evolving form of life. He is more related to lower forms of life than he is different from them.

Man is a biological, instinctual animal, an emotional, reactive product of nature. Look again at verse 5.

[15:04] Yet you made him a little lower than the heavenly beings. The word there could refer to angels, which I think it does, or to God.

Hebrews 2 picks up this verse and translates that as referring to angels. But whatever way you translate the word, Elohim, it could refer to God or to angels, we get the sense of our original state. We do not bear the image of our lowly origins as Darwin put it. We are not biological, instinctual animals, more related to the lower forms of life than we are different from them as Bowen put it. Rather, we bear the image of high and holy origins. We fall short only a little from the angels in God's presence.

Well, verse 4 spotlighted our humanness, how insignificant we are. Verse 5 spotlights our God-likeness. The words glory and honor are two descriptives that are only ever used of God in the Bible.

[16:18] And here we are being given those descriptions. And the significance continues in verse 6. You've given him dominion over the works of your hands. You've put all things under his feet.

We weren't just created with this high and glorious state. We were given a high and glorious job to do. Ruler over all things. And then David lists them.

All sheep and oxen, all the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. Do you hear the echo of Genesis 1 where God formed three realms, water, sky, land, in that order.

And then he filled each realm with fish, birds, animals, in that order. Well, this psalm captures all of those realms but in reverse order. First there are the beasts of the field, then there are the birds in the sky, then there are the fish in the sea, Genesis works from water to sky to land, Psalm 8 works from land to sky to water, man is given rule over every realm and over every creature and you'll see it's not just the pet pony or poodle, it's the alligator and the antelope, the lion and the cobra, the beasts of the field, it's not just budgies and parrots, it's eagles and hawks, it's not just goldfish and turtles, it's the blue whale, the great white shark, all that swim the paths of the sea, not all that swim the paths of your fishbowl in your living room.

Everything has been placed under the rule of man, all creatures and all realms. In fact, the phrase all things or everything in verse 6 may hint at even more than just planet earth.

[18:12] Do you notice the phrase there in verse 6 over the works of your hands? What does that recall? Verse 3, the works of your fingers. If this is just a case of stylistic variety and I think that's the only explanation, then we have a profound statement here.

Think about it. The very thing in verse 3 that made us feel so puny and so small, the works of God's fingers, is now the very thing in verse 6 that we've been given dominion over.

The stars and the moon make us feel so small, so insignificant. But they are ours to rule. And we've done it, haven't we?

We've been to the moon, we've stuck a flag in it, we've said ours, one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind. But I know technically speaking it was the Americans and we've never heard the end of it since, but the Irish settled America.

So it was really the Irish who ruled the moon. But you get the point. We were made to rule the moon. I remember a BBC series, The Wonders of the Solar System, Empire of the Sun, that explained that in the 1970s we sent, the Irish, we sent a probe out into space in the 1970s that was measuring the heat waves coming off, the winds that were coming off the sun, travelling billions of miles out into space.

[19:48] And that probe is still in space sending back signals to Earth. I mean, we rule the stars, don't we? Is it too much of an exaggeration to say that we were made to rule things that even David at this point in time couldn't have imagined?

Perhaps he was speaking better than he realised. But in any case, what Samet gives us is a magnificent picture of man. There is no sniff of Darwinian lowly origins here.

Not a sniff. We are the pinnacle of God's creation, the paragon of all creatures. We are his vice-regents, commissioned to rule the world and everything in it.

And it is this surprise, the surprise that puny little man rules God's world that causes the refrain in verse 9 to kick in. That's when David praises God again.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Weak little babies defeat God's enemies. Puny little man rules God's world.

[21:01] O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. And that's the psalm in a nutshell. Those are the two great surprises that are at the heart of this psalm.

The question is, what are we to do with it? Well, I want to suggest five points of application. Number one, be amazed at what you were made to be.

Be amazed at what you were made to be. What this psalm says to us this evening is, do you have a high enough view of yourself? Because the world's your oyster.

It really is your oyster. There's not a square inch of the whole of this created universe over which God does not say to us, it's yours. It's all yours.

Now, of course, there's the danger that we take this too far and see our rule as independent, autonomous, from God, rulers of everything, apart from God.

[22:08] Our culture, our society preaches the gospel of self-sufficiency, autonomy. It's a blasphemous message. The only person in the universe who is self-sufficient and autonomous is God.

He alone is autonomos, a law unto himself. It reminds me of that famous story of Muhammad Ali. He's on an airplane.

They're coming into land and the captain comes over the intercom. Would all passengers please return to their seats and fasten their seatbelts? And as the air hostess is walking through the cabin, she lifts down and she sees that Muhammad Ali doesn't have a seatbelt on.

And she says, excuse me sir, the captain has asked all passengers to fasten their seatbelts and he said, Superman don't need no seatbelt. And she said, Superman don't need no airplane.

Now put your seatbelt on. See, the problem with Muhammad Ali is, he thinks he's completely self-sufficient, independent, autonomous, a law unto himself.

[23:17] But if he really was, then he'd need no airplane. And it's the exact same with man's dependence on God. It's an unavoidable fact. It cannot be escaped.

Did you notice how God is the subject of all the verbs in verses 5 and 6? Yet you God made him man a little lower than the heavenly beings. And you God crowned him with glory and honour. And you God gave him dominion. And you God put all things under his feet. I mean, you can't get a clearer statement of man's dependence on God.

Man in the Bible, man in the world, is man dependent on God, whether he likes it or not, believes it or not, acts like it or not.

Even atheists are dependent on God for their own worldview. I mean, where do you get the definition atheism from? You get it from theism and sticking an A on the front of it.

[24:16] They're dependent on theism for their very worldview. Theism is not defined by taking atheism and taking the A off it. It's like Cornelius Van Till who said atheists are like the little girl who wants to slap her father in the face, but she has to climb onto his lap to do so.

So, man in the Bible is dependent on God, that is clear, but keeping that perspective and that is the right perspective of ruling under the ruler, of lording over the world under the Lord, let's not miss the point, the jaw dropping point that David is making, the surprise that though we are mere specks in this vast universe, God made us to rule it.

I love that bit in C.S. Lewis's Prince Caspian where Badger is speaking of Narnia, it's not men's country, but it is a country for a man to be king of.

This world is not our world, it's God's world, but it is a world for man to be king of. It is a world for us, male and female, to rule it.

And there's a sense in which this evening we need to praise God for that. Sometimes we rush so quickly to the gospel that we forget this aspect of God's common grace. Puny little man really does rule God's world.

[25:48] We do. We photograph stars and determine when they'll appear and disappear. We send robots to planet Mars to take photographs and collect rock samples. We've mastered human language so that we write beautiful poems and great pieces of literature.

We've built bridges over the impasse of miles of water. We've blown holes into mountains to make tunnels. We've tamed the tiger. We swim with killer whales. We've created the internet which can send a photograph from London to Los Angeles in two seconds.

We've developed drugs that can cure Ebola. There's a sense in which tonight we say, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth because you have given us this world to rule.

You may be saying, yes, but I'm not so sure. Maybe this is David reflecting on Eden before the fall. Well, then why does he talk about enemies in verse 2?

And even after Noah comes out of the ark in a fallen world, what does God tell Noah to do? To rule it. And he says, it's all yours. I've placed everything into your hands. So even after the fall, this is still the structure of the world.

[27:08] Clearer still we see your hand in man whom you have made for the ruler of creation's glory, image of your majesty. Music, art, the fruitful garden, all the labor of his days are the calling of his maker to the harvest feast of praise.

The structure of creation was not ruined, by the fall. Be amazed at what you were made to be. Number two, but be aware of what you have become.

Be aware of what you have become. Think if you're honest tonight as I was giving you that list of our accomplishments, was there a niggler in your mind saying yeah but I mean really?

Yes we've sent probes into space, yes we've planted a flag on the moon but in Larry Norman's words I say you starved your children to do it. Yes we've mastered human language but we also know how to twist words to tell a lie.

Yes we've blown holes in mountains but we've also blown holes in buildings and killed people deliberately. Yes we swim with killer whales but sometimes they turn on us and kill us.

[28:25] Yes we've created the internet and can send photos to friends but we've also used it for the exploitation of women and children in pornography. Yes we've developed drugs that can cure diseases but we've also developed chemicals that can commit ethnic genocide.

Yes God has given us rule over our family relationships and work and university friendships but who of us tonight can say that any of us have lived perfectly in those relationships?

I mean let's be honest while we were made to fall only a little short from the angels we have fallen very far short from what God made us to be and why?

Because we tried to live independently. We tried to pretend there's no God. We tried to be like Muhammad Ali fly without a seat belt. But man left to himself man in rebellion against his creator is never a pretty picture.

I said earlier that this psalm asks us the question do you have a high enough view of yourself? But this psalm said in the context of the whole Bible asks us the question do you also have a realistic view of yourself?

[29:44] Because the reality is we've messed up and we've messed the world up. Just turn your TV on. The world's an absolute mess. I love that story of G.K.

Chesterton who was reading the newspaper one day and the editor in a column said what's wrong with the world? Please send in your answers. G.K. Chesterton wrote dear sir in regards to your question what is wrong with the world?

I am yours sincerely G.K. Chesterton. He hit the nail right in the head. What's wrong with the world? It's not your next door neighbour.

It's not the environment. It's you. It's me. Why? Because we have abandoned our creator. We have rebelled against him.

But though we have rebelled against God God has not abandoned his basic plan to rule the world through man. Just like I was saying the fall does not remove the creation, the created order.

[30:50] And God did not abandon his plan to rule the world through man or to be more precise to rule the world through one man. That has always been God's intention. To rule the world through one man.

He created Adam. He was to rule the world through one man and his bride. But Adam failed and we failed with him. Which brings us to the third point.

Be amazed at Jesus, the proper man. Be amazed at Jesus, the proper man. Now, before I unpack this point, I just want to step back a little. I've been speaking this evening quite a bit of ourselves.

Perhaps you've been a bit uneasy. What's all this man-centered talk, Johnny? I mean, isn't that the problem with modern-day Christianity? We are too people-centered, too self-centered instead of God-centered.

John Piper puts his finger on it when he says, we evangelicals are okay being God-centered so long as God is man-centered. And he's right. But I just want to tweak it a little.

[31:57] I know what he means, Piper, and he's right. There is a form of Christianity that's so preoccupied with ourselves that God is not God. He's just the servant who meets our needs. But I want to tweak that a little.

The reason I can speak tonight, and the reason Sam, it speaks so man-centeredly, if I can use that language, is because of the person of Jesus Christ.

See, in Christ, God is both God-centered and man-centered to the exact same extent. It has always been God's plan for a man to rule the world.

For one man to rule the world. Indeed, isn't it interesting that at no point in this, Sam, does David speak about man or mankind in the plural?

If you have an ESV, you'll see that it's followed that. The new NIV, sadly, has missed it. You have made him a little lower. You crowned him.

[32:59] You have given him. You have put all things under his feet. You see the singularity here? Of course, David is speaking about mankind, the generic mankind, but he speaks about generic mankind, in the singular.

And that allows this psalm to therefore be applied to a man, but not just any man, the one man who himself embodies mankind.

The last Adam, who is himself the embodiment of a new humanity. and when we read the New Testament, we see that this psalm is picked up and used and related and applied to Jesus.

You could, of course, think of what Jesus does in the Gospels. He walks on water, he calms the storm. He is showing in those miraculous acts that he himself is the man of Samia, who literally rules over everything.

But come with me to Ephesians chapter 1 and see how Paul picks up this psalm and applies it directly to Jesus.

[34:14] Ephesians chapter 1. Reading from verse 20.

According to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come, and he put all things under his feet, there's the allusion to Samia, and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Do you notice what's going on here? This is an application of Samia, but it is also an unwrapping of what the all things really meant. It's not just this physical universe that is placed under Christ's feet. Now it is every rule and authority, every power and dominion in the universe, but notice not only in this age but also in the age to come.

Jesus is Lord not just of this world in this age, but he is Lord of that world in that age as well.

Hebrews 2 says something similar, God has subjected the world to come under Jesus' authority.

[35:46] 1 Corinthians 15 picks up Samia and says that death itself will be placed under his feet. I love that hymn of Francis of Assisi, all creatures of our God and King, you know the hymn, all creatures of our God and King.

And thou most kind and gentle death, waiting to hush our latest breath. Oh, praise him. Death, praise him, because you are now under his feet.

And so here we have the physical world, the spiritual world, the present world, the future world, all of it, all of it placed under the feet of Jesus Christ. God has left nothing that is not subject to him.

Doesn't the phrase Jesus is Lord now take on a whole new meaning when you read it in the light of Psalm 8 as it is applied in the New Testament. And so this should alleviate any concern with a man centeredness of Psalm 8.

God is as man centered as he is God centered because of Jesus Christ. He is, as Martin Luther called him, the proper man. But here's the surprise.

[37:01] Who is this proper man? Where did he come from? He was born in a manger in the dark streets of Bethlehem.

He grew up as a carpenter's son. He was despised in the town of Nazareth. During his ministry he had nowhere to lay his head and in the end his own people gave him a death befitting a criminal

and a murderer.

He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering like one from whom men had their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not.

He was puny, he was insignificant, he was despised, but it has always been God's plan for puny, insignificant little man to rule his world.

And it is that humble, frail, despised you that God has placed as king over the world to come. Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

[38:15] Number four, be amazed at what is now yours in Christ. Be amazed at what is now yours in Christ. When we become Christians, we bring ourselves back under the rule of God's new king.

We're no longer under the ancient King Adam from whom we descended. We are now under the present King Jesus to whom we are united.

And because we are now united to the proper man who reigns over all things, there's another surprise here. In Christ, all things have now become ours.

Come with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. 1 Corinthians chapter 3 in verse 22 Paul is speaking in the context of the celebrity pastor cult in Corinth but the point he makes is applicable not just to the celebrity pastor context but to all contexts so let no one boast in men for all things are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future all are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's do you see that the world life death the present the future is all yours why is it yours because you are in Christ and Christ belongs to God and God has exalted Christ over all things so be amazed at what is now yours in Christ what God says to us this evening is what he always what he intended us to be he still intends us to be as we are remade in the person of his son

Jesus Christ so whatever it is you do whether it's baking or ballet basketball or the Higgs Boas and particle theory whatever you do rule over it master it to God's glory why because it's yours under Christ the world is still your oyster because it's his oyster and you are connected to him all things are yours fifth and finally be amazed at what you will become in Christ be amazed at what you will become in Christ in Hebrews chapter 2 9 to 10 the writer says that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels so that he might taste death for every one of his family in order to bring many sons to glory in other words or in C.S. Lewis' words the son of man became a man in order that men might become sons of God the son of God became a man in order that men might become sons of God and that's the final surprise brothers and sisters when Jesus restores us to a new humanity and a new heavens and a new earth he will not take us back to Adam in the garden the story of the Bible is not from a garden to a garden it's from a garden to a garden in the middle of the Bible to a garden city there is a progression we will be co-heirs with Christ

[41:48] Adam was made a little lower than the angels but when Jesus takes us to that garden city we will rule angels isn't that what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 do you not know that the saints will judge the world do you not know that you will judge angels Adam never judged an angel but you puny little you one day will sit and judge angels oh Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth let us pray God