

Psalm 104

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[0 : 00] Turn back to Psalm 104, it's on page 502. Human beings have a mixed relationship with the world.

! If you weren't here with us this morning, or if you were and you've forgotten, we're in Psalm 104 today, which comes as the second of two sermon songs that the psalmist writes for himself, really, for his own soul, to warm himself up, to worship.

And he writes within earshot of the people of God so that they can join in. And we thought this morning about the way the world reflects the majesty of God, and it helps him to worship God. As he looks at the variety and the homeliness of the world as it is for all kinds of creatures. But this evening I want to focus on what he says about man in the world, mankind, and how that helps him to worship God.

And this psalm, it brings these two characteristics of humanity, that are all over the Bible actually, but not often put together in one passage like this.

[1 : 34] It is the headship and the simultaneous neediness of human beings on and in the world. And he says to his soul, worship the Lord, as he has made us, first of all, leaders of creation.

We are leaders of creation. You may have noticed this morning the way he presents human beings as very, very special creatures.

Look at some of the unique things we do. We thought about with the children, didn't we? Verse 14. We cultivate. No other animal, as far as I know, is said to do that.

To harvest. And to bring food from the earth. To do it in the way that we do it. Like no other creature can. That we can modify materials for fun and beauty.

Wine and oil to make the face shine. We can make cosmetics. There is an intelligence there, isn't there? And an ability to take the raw materials of the earth and to master them.

[2 : 49] We can extract life and resources from the ground. And we are really, really good at it. We are kings of the earth.

We can irrigate and farm and mechanise. We can quarry and refine and use. We can harness energy and apply it for different things.

And as technology gets better, we, like God, have learnt to do what he does. And subdue the assertive forces of nature, haven't we? Dangerous forces of the earth and water.

Do you remember how God did that back in verse 7? God rebuked the water. He rebuked the dangerous and chaotic presence that water was.

But man can do that as well. Just look at verse 26. He notices flying over the earth, the ocean, there are the ships. The ships that man has created to turn what was once a barrier into a shipping lane.

[3 : 54] We are chiefs over the elements in gathering and building and creating. Verse 15. We can get the base materials and we can make oil.

We can make things that are fun as well as functional. We've learned to make wine to make the heart glad. Human beings are the life and soul of creation, aren't they?

Of the party, of God's house. Man goes out to his work in verse 23 and to his labour. And the world he sees as a place of enterprise.

And of business and of endeavour and careers and of vocations. And of pursuits and of work. The world is a hive of industry for creatures.

But particularly for mankind. The psalm pictures human beings in all of their giftedness. And no other animal that God has made can quite do what we do in the way that we do it.

[5 : 00] I've never heard of anyone say of an ape or of a monkey. He's a really gifted monkey. He's really gifted, you know, with music. And with painting and with cookery.

The Debusses and the Leonardos. The Neil Armstrongs. The creatives. The Bill Gates. The novelists. The scientists. The geologists.

The farmers. Are members of one species and one species alone. It is mankind. And it's the intention of God, isn't it? We see in Genesis 1.

That man will rule. Rule. You will have dominion over the fish of the sea. And the birds of the air. And every living thing that moves over the air. He says.

To man and woman. You will work the garden and keep it. You will rule. God says to man. And God places timely little man in charge.

[6 : 01] Doesn't he? As we hear in Psalm 8. What is man that you're mindful of him? But you've put all things under his feet. We lead the pack. In creation.

And yet. There is something else here, isn't there? Which we'll spend a bit more time on now. Not only do we lead in creation. And that is cause for praising God, isn't it? For the privilege that he's given to us in that.

Not only do we lead. But we need. God's creation. The thing is. In this psalm. I think particularly. We might rule over the creation.

But clearly. We also rely upon it. And that is the contrast that the psalm teaches us. Because whilst we are gifted. To do all of those things.

With the skills to rule over God's earth. At the same time. We are inevitably subject. To God's earth. We may cultivate the fields.

[7 : 02] But as Jesus says. The sower sows his seed. His seed. Sows his seed. And it grows. But he knows not how. And God gives the water.

And God gives the growth. God gives us the skills. And God puts the potential of life in the ground. And in the seeds. And it's God.

Verse 14. Who causes the grass to grow. It's our intelligence. And our technology. But it's God who places the materials there.

In the first place. To be modified and refined. It is God who gives us the intelligence. And then. We remember from this morning. The rhythms of time. In verse 23.

And in that section. In. We go to work. Man goes out to his work. But only until the evening. Since the psalmist there.

[8 : 00] He's setting a limit. Isn't he? Showing that the evening. And the night time. Is the limit. For most work. For man. And God. In setting the times.

Of the day. And of the seasons. Has set a limit. On what we can. And cannot do. And we know. Don't we. When we try and break. Those limits. That it's never good.

For us. You know. The most powerful. And most creative. Person that you know. They can. Arrange a kid's party.

Like nobody else. They can make birthday cakes. Like nobody else. They can do it all. And you just don't get. How they can do it all. A picture of that person now. That most high achieving.

Person you know. Even they. Have to sleep. We rule. But not limitlessly. Not independently.

[8 : 55] From either the creation. Or the creator himself. We rule over the dust. But we are still made. Of the dust.

And often. We home in. Don't we. On the dominion thing. We read. Genesis 1. Like we did earlier. This evening. We see. Man's purpose. To rule.

And to subdue. And to keep. The creation. That God has placed him in. But it's interesting. How the psalm. Takes the days of creation. But gets us to remember.

Perhaps the things. That we want to forget. But even with the dominion. Of man. There is a creatureliness. Of man. It's how the narrator. Really wants us.

To get our view. To view ourselves. Think about it. There is no hint here. Of domination. By human beings.

[9 : 52] Any more than there is. Of the lions. Searching for their prey. Or of the birds. Or of the badgers. In the psalm. This idea of subduing.

Is not here. Greatly. Is it? It's as if he's saying. You know. When all is said and done. You kings of the earth. You human beings. Don't forget.

That you are. Creatures. In some ways. Just like the rest. You have these areas. Of great giftedness. Of cooking.

And of painting. And writing. Of accounting. Of hairdressing. Whatever it is. But at the end of the day. Literally. You are a creature.

Just like the rest. And you might be creative. But you are not. The creator. And you have needs. And you have limits.

[10:48] And everything you do. Depends upon. God's giving it to you. In creation. And ongoing provision. Let's try to kind of pull this open.

A little bit more. The psalm I think. Has two lists. And it lists. It goes through all of creation. Doesn't it? And it lists all these animals. But it actually. It has two lists.

One of creators. And then of created things. And even though it's quite a long psalm. It's actually a very very short list.

Because under the creators column. There is only one entry. It's God. And under the created things column.

That is a much longer column. Because it is everything else. Including you and me. As man rules. He does it in reliance on the gifts of God.

[11:43] And he does it needing his assistance all the time. For the grass. And for the water. And for the soil. And so on. And look at verse 27.

These all look to you. To give them their food in due season. He's not just talking about badges there. Is he? These all look to you.

He's talking even about men and women. Who build great vessels. That go on the oceans. That includes you and me. We look to God. To make anything of anything at all.

He purposefully plays down the rule of man. To show the reliance of man. Upon God. We leave. But we still need him.

But just think about God. By way of contrast. Because he's not like that at all. Is he? Neither he nor his work. Has any other origin.

[12:42] Apart from himself. He is where life begins. Isn't it? And God doesn't look to anyone. To provide him with food. There's no one behind God.

Kind of giving him the building blocks. That he needs. To make creation. Or filling up his watering can. So that he can shower the earth. He builds. Out of nothing.

Posh kind of saying. Is ex nihilo. Out of nothing. And so all creation. And all creativity. And all ideas. Start with God.

God. And he has patented. The whole lot. So we see that. That all human work. Cultivation. And work. And labour.

And creativity. And even dominion. Is actually. Really. Just plagiarism. We are just hacks. We get food.

[13:35] From the ground. That he made. And gives potential to. Eve. We skillfully gather. The food that he's given. We build. Ships. On the water.

That are his beams. For his house. We fly. Planes. In the clouds. And think. Aren't we wonderful. But those clouds. Are the foundations. Of his house.

We use his. Building blocks. All of the time. We use colours. And paints. And ingredients. That he has made. Compared with God. Actually.

Amongst us. There are no real. Creatives. If you see what I mean. Only hacks. Only rip off merchants. We're only able to use the materials.

That we're given. We don't create from nothing. Do we? Even the Leonardo's. Even the Debussy's. Even that person. Who seems to be able to do everything.

[14:32] And sleep for three hours a night. Even that person. Is an arranger. Of someone else's work. Even Leonardo. Was an arranger.

Of someone else's palette. Even Mozart. Was an arranger. Of someone else's musical score. They were just hacks. We.

Have to take influence. Don't we? From all around us. In any artistic process. We take influence. From others. And from creation. God needs no influence.

We look at mood boards. And take things we found. Into wicks. To get the colour of paint. That we want. But God needs no colour palette. Palette reference.

Does he? He simply thinks. And it comes into being. Everything that we do. Is a pastiche. Of something that he's already done. And anything that we are.

[15 : 32] And can do. Is because he's already done. And is doing it. Only he can say. I am. Who I am.

And we say. With everything that we do. I am. Because he is. And the big issue. Is that we confuse. Stewardship.

Isn't it? With ownership. Over the world. We confuse. Dominion. That God has given us. In this creation. With domination. And with ownership.

Do you remember. King Nebuchadnezzar. In the book of Daniel. We've looked at him. In 24-7. Last term. And. Do you remember. King Nebuchadnezzar.

And. Let's turn there. Quickly. Daniel chapter 4. You can find it on page. 7-4-1. King Nebuchadnezzar.

[16 : 29] He is all over the place. Spiritually. One minute. He's humble. If you read the story. The next minute. He's proud. And there is a moment. In Nebuchadnezzar's life. Nebuchadnezzar is.

The king of Babylon. Isn't he? So he's a. He's not a believer. At this point. But there is a moment. In his life. Where God humbles him. Once and for all. Daniel chapter 4.

Verse 28. Page 7-4-1. All this came upon. King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of 12 months. He was walking. On the roof.

Of the royal palace. Of Babylon. And the king answered. And said. Is not this. Great Babylon. Which I have built. By my mighty power. As a royal residence.

And for the glory. Of my majesty. While the words. Were still in the king's mouth. There fell a voice. From heaven. O king Nebuchadnezzar. To you it is spoken. The kingdom has departed.

[17 : 24] From you. And you shall be driven. From among men. And your dwelling. Shall be with the beasts. Of the field. And you shall be made. To eat grass. Like an ox. And seven periods.

Of time. Shall pass over you. Until you know. That the most high. Rules. The kingdom of men. And gives it to whom. He will. Immediately.

The word was fulfilled. Against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven. From among men. And ate grass. Like an ox. And his body. Was wet. With the dew of heaven. Till his hair. Grew as long. As eagles feathers.

And his nails. Were like birds. Claws. And at the end of the days. I Nebuchadnezzar. Lifted my eyes. To heaven. And my reason. Returned to me. And I blessed.

The most high. And praised. And honoured him. Who lives forever. He looked at his kingdom. All around him. Didn't he? And he'd made that mistake.

[18 : 20] He thought. That he was the owner. Rather than the steward. He thought. That he was. The great creator. When he was merely. A copyist.

And God. Plunges him. Into insanity. To get him. To see reason. And it works. Doesn't it? He repents. And humbles himself. And praises God. The king of heaven. And we think of him.

We think. How ridiculous he was. What a sad character he was. But it is what we do. All of the time. We look around.

And we say to ourselves. Is not this my great career. That I've built. With my mighty hands. I've got here from scratch.

I deserve every penny. It is mine. But it's stewardship. Not ownership. Isn't it? Is this not my great church.

[19 : 14] That I've built. With my mighty hands. Or this language class. Or this kids club. Or this bible study. This church. Look at what I've done God. There was a gap.

In the service. That needed to be filled. And I filled it Lord. And without that sacrifice. It would have failed. But it's stewardship. Not ownership. Is this not my great family.

That I've built. With my mighty hands. I've poured everything. Into my kids. Now they owe me obedience. And even worship. But it's not ownership.

It is stewardship. And you realise actually. That Nebuchadnezzar. Was already insane. Before God drove him out. To eat food like an ox.

He was already mad. To think like he was thinking. As mad as we are. When we think like that. And so when we. When we look at each other.

[20 : 09] And when we look at ourselves. And we see. Where we are. And the successes. That we've maybe had. We've got to remember. Where that's come from. And when we look at each other. And we think.

I am so jealous of her. Or him. How can they do all of that stuff. We've got to remember. In a sense. We are only jealous. Of a rip off artist.

Aren't we? And even the most accomplished. Sorted person. You know. Has not created from nothing. They've merely used paints. From someone else's palette.

So what Paul says. To the Corinthians. What do you have. That you didn't receive. If then you've received it. Why do you boast. As if you didn't receive it.

Psalm 104. Shows us why the first verse. Of the Bible. Is utterly stunning. In the beginning.

[21 : 07] God created. The heavens and the earth. Out of nothing. And our own privileged position. In that heavens and earth.

Is matched by our neediness. And by our limits. That we might look to him for food. And to him. To open his hand. In all that we do.

To establish the work of our hands. And as we do that. Really it frees us. Doesn't it? It really frees us. Freed from. From having to reinvent the wheel.

From having to create things. From nothing. Free from the ultimate responsibility. And the weight of life itself. Free from. Creating new life.

In other people. In the gospel. We can't do that. And when we realise. That we are not. The creators. We begin to understand.

[22 : 03] What Jesus says. When he. He tells us. Don't be anxious about your life. What you'll eat. Or about your body. Or what you'll put on. For life is. More than food. In the body. More than clothing.

And we realise. That we're not. The creators. Of God's church. Do you think. That it's no coincidence. That a major moment.

Probably. The greatest moment. Of church growth. Is at a time. When God's people. Had to give. The first fruits. Of their harvest. It's Pentecost.

Wasn't it? It was a time. When people. Were recognising. That all things. Come physically. From God. And as they were doing that. What happened. The church.

Exploded. As God. Not only. Poured down rain. But he poured down. His Holy Spirit. And the church. Grew. It was. Harvest festival. And so.

[22 : 57] We lead. In work. At home. In school. And even in church. With different things. That we do. But we are so needy. So.

As we draw to a close. We are then. In a very. Very unique. Position. To do what the psalmist. Calls his soul. To do. Humanity. Is uniquely.

Positioned. To be worshippers. Of the wonderful God. And that is because. We are both. Creatures. And his agents. Of rule. Who are in total.

Dependence. Upon him. There are both. Things aren't there. We rule. And yet we rely. We rule. With privilege. And intelligence. And a consciousness.

That God has given to us. To understand. And perceive. The glory. Of God in the world. Like no other animal can. We are beings.

[23 : 53] Not animals. And so we. As little kings. As privileged kings. Who rule over the world. Can appreciate. Being.

His creatures. In his creation. Like no other creature can. It takes a little bit. Of kingliness. To recognise. Great kingliness.

Doesn't it? It takes one. To know one. As well as being creatures. We are elevated. As rulers. To be able to understand. Real kingship.

When we see it. And we see it. In God. And we are able. With. The dignity. That he has given to us. As human beings. To perceive.

True majesty. When we see it. It takes one king. To know another king. And so it's why. In verse 33. If you look there. This is his response.

[24 : 47] Isn't it? I will sing to the Lord. As long as I live. He's already mentioned singing. In the psalm. It's the singing of birds. In verse 12. But his singing.

Is going to be very different. From the singing of. The other creatures. Of the birds. It is a singing. Of praise. Not just for what creation is.

Like the BBC nature shows. Might do. But it's a singing. That has content. And is meant for the creator. And is offered to him.

And that kind of singing. Takes a very gifted creature. To be able to do it. To be able to sing. In that way. It takes a dignified creature.

A ruling creature. One who can recognise. Great kingliness. When they see it. So that fusion.

[25 : 47] Of creatureliness. Of dependence. And prestige. Fits human beings. Uniquely for worship. Like no other. And the Lord Jesus. Shows us this perfectly.

Actually. Jesus. In his humanity. When you look through the gospels. It's really interesting. Jesus.

Never speaks of himself. As creator. It's really interesting.

There is a grasp. In Jesus. Of the limitation. Of his humanity. And even of his creatureliness. Now of course. Jesus shows actions.

That show the creator's authority. And he is. The agent. Through whom. The father creates. But he doesn't speak.

Of himself. As creator. Instead. He addresses. His father. Lord. Of heaven. And earth. In his humanity.

[26 : 44] He offers up. Prayers. And petitions. To the one. Who could save him. From death. Now. Remember. As we talk about Jesus. This is God. We're talking about.

Isn't it? But we're talking about. This aspect. Of his human nature. Where he. Recognizes. That while he. Rules as a man. He still.

Relies upon. His heavenly father. For all life. He lives. In reliance. On the holy spirit. He's very. Reluctant. To think of himself.

As creator. So. Jesus. Is the one. Who leads us. In this psalm. Where we failed. To think like this. Where we've thought.

Of ourselves. Too greatly. And we've thought. Of God. Too little. He leads us. In the praises. Of his father. Particularly. And he shows us. What it is.

[27 : 36] To worship. As a man. Or as a woman. Having taken on flesh. Having experienced. Dependency. On God. As a ruler. And yet still. Relying on him. He of all people.

Deserves to say. Didn't he. Is this. Not my great world. That I have made. With my mighty hands. My great church. My great life. But he prays.

To the father. And entrusts his life. To him. And he seeks his glory. He's lived in the way. That we should have. So. This week. Let us create.

Let's work. Let's go to bed at night. If we can. Let's do that. Gleefully. And joyfully. Let's get into it. Let us be.

Let us be. Who we're meant to be. As. Creatures of great prestige. As rulers. Over God's world. With dominion. Over the world. Let us subdue.

[28 : 34] And serve. With the building blocks. That he gives. Let us run to it. With all of our might. Because we rule. But let us never say.

That I have made this. From nothing. From scratch. We can only say. I am. And I do. And I create. Because God. Is. And so. We. With our privileges. And our creatureliness. We. We sing. Don't we. With Jesus. Led by Jesus. The true man.

To the Lord. As long as we live. Bless the Lord. Oh my soul. Oh. Lord. My God. You are very great. Let's pray. Amen. Thank you.