

Psalm 8

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 February 2012

Preacher: Jonny Gibson

[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, could you please turn with me to Psalm chapter 8.

! This morning I want to look with you at the surprising majesty of God in Psalm chapter 8. And as we come to this psalm, let us pray.

Lord God, your name is majestic in all the earth. And we ask now that as we look at this psalm by your Holy Spirit, you would help us to see that for the glory of your great name.

And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. routine but rigorous questioning. They are told to expect the process will take up to at least a couple of hours. And inside the room the atmosphere is tense. There are sandbags piled up against each of the walls. Desk clerks break no smiles nor offer any warmth or welcome.

On every side of those waiting for visas there are machine gun clutching soldiers whose glare make everyone in the room feel that they are guilty of at least something. And unbeknown to Ravi Zacharias his little two year old Sarah has locked eyes with an Israeli soldier who is staring back at her in eye to eye combat. Ravi Zacharias writes that suddenly the silence in the room was broken by Sarah's little squeaky voice.

[2 : 25] Excuse me, do you have any bubble gum? All eyes are now on the soldier. He stares back at little Sarah, face blank, takes his gun, passes it to his colleague, comes over, picks little Sarah up and takes her off into the back room. Within a few minutes he came back with a tray in one hand with three drinks and little Sarah in the other hand. Ravi Zacharias explains that they were in and out in 25 minutes. And when they did get out of the building there was the soldier in his jeep ready to drive them to the border to the taxi stand so they could go on their way to Jericho. Ravi Zacharias concludes the incredible power of a child. For one fleeting moment in that room she brought war to a standstill. Excuse me, do you have any bubble gum? Such an incredible story, isn't it? Because of all the people in the room, the person with the least amount of power to do anything physically and diplomatically is little

Sarah. She's just a toddler, just less than two years of age. And in comparison to a gun-clutching soldier, she's a complete and utter weakling, vulnerable, powerless. Yet with the words, do you have any bubble gum? She brings hostility and war to a standstill. The story is so intriguing because it involves the element of surprise. It's the surprise of a two-year-old boldness or naivete. It's the surprise of a squeaky voice asking a question in the midst of silent tension. But it's surprise at a deeper level too. It's the surprise of a weak child's war-stopping strength. Out of the mouth of a child, hostility ceases. The story of little Sarah has great resonances with this psalm. I'm sure you've picked it up. Verse 2. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger. The story of Sarah is exactly what is at the heart of this psalm. Surprise. The element of surprise. It's a psalm about the unexpected. The surprising. And if we miss the surprise, then we miss the point of the psalm.

It's the element of surprise that causes David to extol God's greatness with the refrain, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. We get a hint of this surprise in verse 1 when we're told that the God who has set his glory above the heavens has also displayed his glory and 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. Verse 1. You have set your glory above the heavens. How majestic is your name in all the earth.

Now I don't know about you, but when I hear that God's majesty is displayed in all the earth, I think of God's creation. Don't you? I think of Mount Everest or Victoria waterfalls or the plains of the Serengeti teeming with animals.

I think of a star-studded night or a beautiful sunset over the Lake District. Isn't that what we think of? O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the works your hand has made.

[6 : 59] I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed. Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee, how great thou art.

Isn't that what we think of when we hear of God's majesty displayed in all the earth? Yet here's the unexpected thing in this psalm.

Here's the big surprise. When it comes to talking about God's majesty displayed in all the earth, the psalmist talks about babies and about mankind.

God's name is majestic in all the earth because weak little babies defeat God's enemies, verse 2. And puny little man rules God's world, verses 3 to 8. That's the logic of this psalm. The catalyst for praise from David is not cute little babies per se.

[8 : 08] It's not the creation of the world per se. It's not mankind per se. No, the catalyst of praise for David is the surprise that weak little babies defeat God's enemies.

And puny little man rules God's world. The first surprise is obvious enough, verse 2.

From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger. The word for infants here is literally sucklings.

And in the Old Testament that word was used in the context of oppression where babies are vulnerable victims of war and death. Yet verse 2 says, From the mouth of babes suckling on their mother's breasts, God has ordained strength.

Have you ever heard of strength coming out of a weak, little, dependent, vulnerable, two-month-old baby?

[9 : 24] It's strength going in the wrong direction, isn't it? Isn't a baby's mouth supposed to receive nourishment and strength, not give it out? Yet God reverses the direction.

From the mouths of children and babies comes strength. But the surprise factor continues with the purpose given for the strength.

It is to silence, or better, to still, to bring to nothing the foe and the avenger. This word to silence, it comes from the word for which we get Sabbath, to cease, to stop working.

It's used in Psalm 46 to describe God causing wars to cease. Now look who's doing the ceasing. Weak, little babies. How humbling for God's enemies.

[10 : 35] In fact, that's probably why there's the phrase, because of your enemies. God ordained strength from the mouths of sucklings because of his enemies in order to humble them.

These great and mighty enemies are defeated by what comes out of a little child's mouth in order to humble them. Now what exactly this verse is referring to will have to wait another time.

I think, as you will remember in the Gospels, Jesus is praised by the little children. And Jesus quotes Psalm 8. So I think that's the fulfillment of this.

But how that is played out in the rest of the Bible will have to wait another time. I want to focus this morning on the biggest surprise in this psalm.

And that is verses 3 to 8. God's name is majestic in all the earth because puny little man rules God's world.

[11 : 38] Verses 3 to 8. If you just cast your eye down to verse 3, you'll notice that it's comparatively longer than verses 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

There's no parallelism like there is in those other verses. The verse sort of just draws things out, underlining the sense of awe. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

There's no doubt in David's mind here whose heavens these are. It's not mother heaven or mother earth. It is God's heavens. The work of his fingers.

And I think the mention of God's fingers is the most intriguing and interesting thing in the verse. This is what I was saying to the boys and girls in Sunday school this morning.

What does that picture convey to you? That God made the heavens with his fingers. I know God's a spirit.

[12 : 46] He's not like us, a physical being. It's a metaphor. But let us meditate on the metaphor. God used his fingers to create the heavens and the moon and the stars.

What does that say to you about God? He's an artist. He's a painter. He's a sculptor.

It speaks of delicate, intricate, detailed care with which God made the world. But I think the metaphor suggests something else as well.

I'm sure most of us here this morning have been on an airplane. We've got up above the clouds. You're sitting there at the window seat. And the planes got up above all the cloud level.

And you look out of the window and there is that endless expanse of blue sky in front of you. Or if you've never been in an airplane, you can picture yourself on a pitch dark night away from city lights.

[13:54] And you look up and there is that wonderful star-studded night above your head. Astrologers say on a clear night by the human eye you can see about 2,500 stars.

But in reality there are hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy and there are billions of galaxies. Now think about the metaphor in verse 3.

That endless blue sky that you see from the airplane. That star-studded night. God fashioned it. He shaped it in intricate detail.

With the tips of his fingers. God is big.

God is big. And this world is small. So much so that all he had to do was mold it with the divine digits.

[14:56] Now if you're like me, you'd expect the refrain to kick in at this point, wouldn't you? Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

When I consider the heavens and consider that you made them with your fingers. When I consider of how big you are. Oh Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

But that's not the logic of the sound. David doesn't make an exclamation of praise at this point. He asks a question. Verse 4.

When I consider the heavens that you made with your fingers. What is man that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him.

When I consider that endless blue sky. That star-entrancing night. And the fact that you made them in such intricate detail. And that in comparison to you they are so small.

[15:55] And man in comparison to them is even smaller. What is man that you are mindful of him? The word for man here and the phrase son of man.

It speaks of man's fragility. Our human weakness. Our man-ness. We are mere minuscule specks of dust.

On one rock. That is revolving around one of thousands of stars. In but one of billions of galaxies. So why do you bother with us God?

Why do you even care for us? I mean when you walk out on the street. In the summer and you see a whole bunch of little ants. On the pavement.

Do you care for them? Do you think about them? As you are going to do your shopping? Why does God think about us? When we are so insignificant.

[17:07] Do you feel your insignificance? Your puniness? Your minuteness? David wants you to feel it. And he wants you to feel something else as well.

But he wants you to feel that God is mindful of you. That though you are so insignificant. Though you are so puny.

That he cares for you. David's question here. It's not a question of doubt. But one of faith. He's not doubting that God is mindful of him. In the question.

He's dumbfounded. He's not a question of doubt. But it's true. And it is true. We mere specks in this universe are cared for and are on the mind of the God who made it all.

Now again. You would expect the refrain to kick in here. Wouldn't you? I mean. Oh Lord. When I consider your heavens.

[18:10] And how big they are. And how small I am in comparison. And when I consider that you are mindful of me. Oh Lord. Our Lord. How majestic is your name in all the earth.

That's what I would expect. But again. That's not the logic of the psalm. The refrain is withheld until verse 9. Which means that the catalyst for praise.

Is not creation itself. It's not even God's care for us. Per se. Rather. It is something different. The catalyst for praise.

In this psalm. Is seen in the contrast. Between verses 3 to 5. And verses 5 to 8. There's a yet a but at the beginning of verse 5.

If you're reading the NIV like I am. It's not there. But if you have a more literal translation. Like the ESV. It's there. Let me read it. When I consider your heavens.

[19:11] 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.

Yet. Yet. You made him. A little lower than the heavenly beings. And crowned him with glory and honour.

Yet. You made him ruler. Over the works of your hands. That is the catalyst for praise.

Man's insignificance. Man's insignificance. Man's insignificance. Man's insignificance. Man is utterly insignificant.

In comparison to this created world. Verses 3 and 4. Yet man is supremely significant. As ruler over God's world.

[20 : 06] Verses 5 to 8. Puny little man. Verses 3 to 4. Rules God's world. Verses 5 to 8.

And it's only when you see those two paradoxical truths stand side by side. That the psalmist bursts into praise.

Oh Lord our Lord. How majestic. How great. Is your name in all the earth. Let's just take a look at verses 5 to 8.

Charles Darwin said that as human beings we bear the image of our lowly origins. But look at verse 5. Man is made only a little lower than the heavenly beings.

That word heavenly beings is probably a reference to the angels. We do not bear the image of our lowly origins as Darwin put it. Rather we bear the image of high and glorious origins.

[21 : 16] We fall short only a little from the angels. And therefore only a little from God himself. And the next line confirms this.

We are crowned with glory and honor. Qualities in the Bible that are attributed to God himself. If verse 4 spotlighted our humanness.

Our insignificance. Verse 5 spotlights our God likeness. And just how significant we are. And the significance increases in verse 6.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet. We were not just created into a high and glorious state.

We were given an amazing job promotion. Ruler of the world. In fact David lists the things that man is given rulership over. Verse 7.

[22 : 17] Flocks and herds and the beasts of the field. The birds of the air and the fish of the sea. And all that swim the paths of the sea. David is alluding here to Genesis chapter 1.

If you read Genesis chapter 1. You see that God makes three realms. Land, air and sea. And he fills each of those realms with animals.

With creatures. On the land he makes animals. In the air he makes birds. And in the sea he makes fish. And the great sea creatures. And do you see what David has done?

He has picked up all of those realms. And all of those creatures that live in all of those realms. And he said that man is given rule over all of them. Every realm and every creature.

And you'll see it's not just the pet poodle or the pony. It's the lion and the tiger. The beasts of the field. Not just the domestic pets. It's not just the budgies.

[23 : 18] It's the albatross. It's not just the goldfish. It's the blue whale and the shark. All that swim the paths of the sea. Do you get the picture?

We have been given rule over everything. Everything. In fact the word everything here may hint at more than just planet earth.

Did you notice in verse 6 the phrase. The works of your hands. What does that remind you of earlier in the psalm? Verse 3. The works of your fingers.

If this is just a case of stylistic variety. And I think it is. Then we have a profound statement here. The very thing that in verse 3.

Made us feel so puny and small. The works of God's fingers. Is the very thing. That puny little man. In verse 6. Is now given dominion over.

[24 : 19] The stars and the moons. And the moon make us feel so small. So insignificant. Yet haven't we been to the moon? Haven't we stuck a flag in it?

And said ours? One small step for man? One giant leap for mankind? I know it wasn't the Brits who did it.

But you know. There's a few Americans here. We acknowledge it. But don't we as humankind rule the world? I don't know if you ever saw the BBC series.

Wonders of the solar system. Empire of the sun. And it explained that the sun gives off solar winds. That travel 16 billion kilometers into space.

And in the mid 1970s. We sent a probe. Into space. To measure how far those solar winds are traveling. And to this day. That probe is still in space.

[25 : 18] And it is still sending messages back to us. To tell us how far those winds are blowing. Is it too much of an exaggeration to say.

That we were made to rule the stars. As well as this earth. God has placed everything under our feet.

And though David at the time when he said everything. Wouldn't have had in his mind. Spaceships going to the moon. And probes going to measure the winds of the sun.

Yet it would come to mean that. Later in history. But in any case. What Psalm 8 gives us. Is a magnificent picture.

Of the human being. No Darwinian lowly origins. Rather we are made as the pinnacle of God's creation.

[26 : 12] His vice regent. Commissioned to rule everything. And that is the surprise of the psalm. Puny little man.

Rules God's universe. And that's when verse 9 kicks in with the refrain. Oh Lord our Lord. How majestic is your name in all the earth.

That you would give the earth to us. To rule. And that's the psalm in a nutshell. Those are the two great surprises.

Weak little babies. Defeat God's enemies. And puny little man. Rules God's world. But the question is. What do we do with it? Well I want to give you five points of application.

Number one. Be amazed at what you were made to be. Be amazed at what you were made to be.

[27 : 16] What this psalm asks us this morning. Is do you have a high enough view of yourself? Because what it says is.

The world's your oyster. The world really is your oyster. There is not a realm. In all of this created world.

Over which God does not say to you. Yours. It's yours. He made you and me to be rulers of it.

Now of course. Don't get me wrong. There's the danger. That we would take this too far. Haven't you often heard in church. That we have too high a view of ourselves.

And I'll come to that in a minute. But this psalm actually is saying. Do you have a high enough view of yourself. As a person. As a human being. And of course we can't take it too far.

[28 : 13] We can think that we then. Are independent of God. We are autonomous. We can rule the world ourselves. Ourselves. Apart from God.

There's that great story of Muhammad Ali. The great boxer. As he's flying on an airplane. And the captain comes over the intercom. And says. Ladies and gentlemen.

We're arriving at our destination soon. We'll soon be landing. Can you please fasten your seatbelts. In preparation for landing. And as the air hostess. Is walking through the cabin.

She notices that Muhammad Ali. Doesn't have a seatbelt on. And she says to him. Excuse me sir.

The captain has asked. For all passengers. To fasten their seatbelts. And he says.

Superman. Don't need no seatbelt. And she said. Superman. Don't need no airplane. Now put your seatbelt on.

[29 : 12] See the problem with Muhammad Ali is. He thinks he's completely independent.

Autonomous. A law to himself. But if he really was.

He'd need no airplane. And it's the exact same. Man is dependent on God. That is the unavoidable fact.

Of the universe. You cannot escape it. Like you cannot escape gravity. If you live here. Did you notice. How God is the subject. Of all of the verbs.

In verses 5 to 6. You God made him. Man. A little lower than the angels. You crowned him. With glory and honor. You made him.

Ruler over the works of his hand. You put everything under his feet. I mean you can't get a clearer statement. Of man's dependence on God. Man in this psalm.

[30 : 06] And man in the bible. Is man dependent on God. So let us keep the right perspective. We are rulers of this world. But we are rulers under the one true ruler.

Not independent. But dependent. So let's keep that perspective. But then let's not miss the jaw dropping point. That David wants us to see.

That as mere specks in this universe. God made us to rule it. And there is a sense this morning.

That we should be amazed. At what God made us to be. Puny little us. Rules God's world. And we do rule it.

Don't we? We take photographs of stars. And determine when they will appear. And disappear. We send cameras to planet Mars. To take photographs.

[31 : 06] We've mastered the human language. And written beautiful poems. And great pieces of literature. We've built bridges over long impasses of water. We've driven tunnels through mountains.

So that we can drive our car through them. We've tamed tigers. We swim with orcas. We've created the internet. So you can send a photograph from Ealing to Auckland in two seconds.

We've developed drugs that can kill some cancers. We've done it haven't we? O Lord our Lord. How majestic is your name in all the earth.

Puny little man. Really does rule your world. So often we're so quick to move to the gospel. That we miss God's common grace here.

And I want to say this morning. That there's a sense in which we need to praise God. For giving us the marvelous privilege of ruling his world. After all Genesis 9 still stands.

[32 : 12] Post fall Noah is told to go and rule the world. After the fall. And David here is not reminiscing about Eden.

Before the fall when Adam and Eve lived perfectly and ruled the world. Nor is he dreaming of the future. Of some ideological dream of one day we'll rule the world again.

No. David is speaking here in verse 2 of God's enemies. He knows it's a fallen world. But he is still thanking God. For giving man the rule over it.

Clearer still we see thy hand in man whom thou hast made for thee. Ruler of creation's glory. Image of thy majesty. Music. Art. The fruitful garden. All the labor of his days. Are the calling of his maker. To the harvest feast of praise.

[33 : 11] So be amazed at what you were made to be. Number two. Be aware of what you have become. Be aware of what you have become.

As I was going through that list of things that we have done. Ruling the world. Did it sit completely easy with you? Was there a niggle?

Something saying. Yes we rule the world. But not quite. Yes we have ownership of it. We rule over it. But something's not sitting right.

Yes we've sent probes into space. And planted a flag on the moon. But in the words of Larry Norman. I say you starve your children to do it. Yes we've mastered human language.

But sometimes we use human language to make racist comments. Or tell lies. Yes we've blown holes in mountains. So we can put tunnels through them. But we've also blown holes in buildings.

[34 : 18] And killed people deliberately. Yes we swim with orcas. But sometimes orcas turn on us. And kill us. 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 deadly diseases.

But we've also developed chemicals. That can commit ethnic genocide. Yes God's given us rule over relationships.

Family. University friendships. But who of us in the room this morning. Would ever say. We've lived in those relationships perfectly. Let's be honest.

We were made to fall short. Only a little from God. But in reality. We have fallen very far short. From the glory. With which we were first made.

[35 : 19] And that's the reason the world's a mess. Because we have chosen to live independently from God. We've tried to be like Muhammad Ali.

And live without dependence on anyone. And when man lives in rebellion against God. It can only create a mess.

So earlier the psalm challenged us. Do you have a high enough view of yourself? Well this psalm said in the context of the whole Bible.

Says do you have a realistic view of yourself? Because the reality is we've messed up. And we've messed up badly. And we have rebelled against the God who made us.

But the amazing good news of the Bible. Is that despite our rebellion. And despite us messing up God's world. God did not abandon his rule.

[36 : 18] Or his plan. For man to rule the world. Let me be more accurate. God did not abandon his plan for one man. To rule the world.

God created Adam. To rule the world. And he failed. But God did not abandon. That plan. He sent his son. Jesus Christ.

To be the true. And proper ruler. Of the world. And that's our third point. Be amazed at Jesus. The proper man.

In the New Testament. This psalm is picked up. And applied directly to Jesus. But with one major difference. In Psalm 8. The everything that is put in subjection to man.

Is now expanded. Is now expanded. In the New Testament. In Psalm 8. It is the physical world. And all its realms. And creatures. And I suggested. It includes even the heavens.

[37 : 15] And the moon. And the stars. Placed under man's rule. But in the New Testament. When Psalm 8. Is applied to Jesus. The everything. Gets taken to a whole new level.

No longer is it just this created universe. That is placed under his feet. But Ephesians 1 says that it is every rule and authority. Every power and dominion.

In this universe. And more again. Not just everything in this world. But in also everything in the world to come. Hebrews 2 says. God has subjected the world to come.

Under Jesus' authority. 1 Corinthians 15 says that in the future. Even death will be placed. Under the feet of Jesus. So here we have.

The physical world. The spiritual world. The present world. And the future world. All of it is placed. Under the feet. Of Jesus. God has left nothing.

[38 : 15] That is not subject. To him. And there is the surprise too. Who is this Jesus? And where did he come from?

He was born in a stable. Raised. In the town of Nazareth. Despised town. In Palestine. And during his public ministry.

He had nowhere to lay his head. And in the end. His 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 hid their faces. He was despised. And we esteemed him not.

Yet to this humble. Frail. Frail. Despised. Crucified Jew. God.

[39 : 14] Has made him. The ruler. Of the universe. O Lord. Our Lord. How majestic.

Is your name. In all the earth. Jesus. Is the son of man. Is the son of man. Par excellence. The true man.

Or as Martin Luther called him. The proper man. And what Martin Luther. The German reformer. Was referring to. Was here. Finally. On planet earth.

Was a human being. Who lived. As God intended. Here. Finally. Was someone. Who lived. The perfect life. That we couldn't. And because of his death.

For us. And his perfect life. He is called. The proper man. The perfect man. And therefore. The one. Who rules.

[40 : 13] The universe. So be amazed. At Jesus. The proper man. Number four. Be amazed. At what you have become. In Christ.

The proper man. There is another surprise here. In Christ. All things. All things. Become ours.

That's what Paul says. In 1 Corinthians 3. All things are yours.

Whether the world. Or life. Or death. Or the present. Or the future. All are yours. And you are of Christ. And Christ. Is of God. This means that Psalm 8.

Does not just have relevance. For Jesus. Yes it does first. But it also has relevance. For us. When God saves us. He doesn't remove us. From this world.

We don't become. Sort of ethereal spirits. Floating around. When God saves us. He keeps us. In this world. And he keeps us. In spheres. Of influence.

[41 : 07] And rule. Your families. Your friendships. Your work. Your study. And what Psalm 8. It says to us. Is rule over those things.

Master them. To the glory of God. Under Christ. The true ruler. Of the world. What God intended humanity to be.

He still intends us to be. Now in Christ. So be amazed. At what you have become in Christ. And finally. Be amazed.

At what you will become. In Christ. In Hebrews chapter 2. Verse 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 sons. To glory. In the words of C.S. Lewis.

[42 : 07] 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. In the new heavens. In the new earth. In the future. He will not just take us back. To the same state.

Adam and Eve were made. In the garden. Adam and Eve in the garden. Were made. In a state. Lower than the angels. Psalm 8 says.

We were made. In a state. Lower than the angels. But in the world. To come. We will be. Co-heirs. With Christ.

The end of Romans. Paul says. To the church. That God. Will soon. Crush Satan. Under our feet. Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6.

[43 : 05] Paul states. That in the future. We. Will judge the world. And get this. He says. We. Will judge. Angels. In the beginning.

We were made. A little lower. Than the angels. And in the end. We. Will judge. Angels. Now that really is. A surprise. Puny.

Little you. Will judge. Angels. Because of Christ. Oh. Lord. Our Lord. How. Majestic. Is your name. In all the earth. Let us pray.