

What Is Man?

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 8, verses 1 to 9. To still the enemy and the avenger.

All sheep and oxen and also the beasts of the field. The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea. Whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. We're, I think, hardwired to ask the question why.

And we always ask what is the purpose? Why do we have to do these things? And, of course, the biggest question facing us is why are we here? Why do we live?

What's the purpose of humanity? And this psalm teaches us that the only way we can make sense of that is with reference to the God who created us. And the fact that we find our rightful place in creation only when we worship the God of heaven as his representatives on earth.

[1 : 5 4] And this psalm in verses 1 to 4 tell us about man's dominion over the earth. I mean, God's dominion above the heavens. And then secondly, in verses 5 to 9, it tells us about man's dominion over the earth.

And then through it all, it teaches us that we have to assume our rightful place in creation by worshiping God as it represented. And you read with me in verse 1. That's the kind of chorus of this psalm.

Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. And then it ends with the exact same frame in verse 9. And this psalm is unlike any other psalm in the whole Psalter in the sense that the whole entirety of the psalm is a praise to God.

So it's directed to God. Most, all the other psalms have at some point something directed to the people. They say, do this, praise God.

It's like call to worship. But this psalm through and through is actually a song of worship to God. It's directed directly to him. So, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. And then if you read the end of verse 1 and verse 2, it's kind of a difficult verse.

[3 : 0 7] It says, you have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babies and infants you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger. If I read that in a room full of people and ask them, what does that mean?

I think most people will be kind of clueless because it's kind of hard to understand. What does it mean to establish strength out of mouths of babies and infants and then also to steal the enemy and the avenger by doing the same?

But I think the confusion is largely due to a transcriptional error, translational error. Because in the old original Hebrew text, there's no punctuation marks.

And I think they misplaced the punctuation mark here. So, that's the period that's at the end of you have set your glory above the heavens really should be at the end of out of the mouths of babies and infants.

And then we have two parallel lines, metric lines as in the rest of the psalm, which fits really nicely. Which says, you have set your glory above the heavens out of the mouths of babies and infants, period.

[4 : 14] And then you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger. So, then God, and then it becomes kind of a really beautiful poetry where God establishes, he sets his glory above the heavens out of the mouths of babies and infants.

Referring to, metaphorically, people who are weak, people who are humble, who place their faith in him. Just like, you know, Jesus says in Matthew 18, 3-4.

Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So, he's talking about people like that.

It's out of those people's praises that God establishes heavenly glory, his heavenly dwelling. That's where his glory dwells. And then, but in contrast, he established strength.

So, the word strength could also be translated as a stronghold or a fortress. And that's exactly how it's translated in Psalm 61, verse 3.

[5 : 16] It translates the same word as a strong tower against the enemy. And here, it's a strength. It refers to his fortress, his heavenly dwelling. But here, it's open to the babies and infants who praise him.

But it's closed to his foes. And the fortress is used to steal, the stronghold is used to steal the enemy and the avenger. So, then there's a beautiful parallelism where those who are humble and dependent on him have access to God's heavenly glory in heaven.

But those who oppose him are shut off from heaven. His fortress is set against him. He steals his enemies through that. And then, once you do that, that's also, that emendation fits better with how Jesus later quotes this verse as well in the gospel.

And then, also, it then fits the symmetrical structure of the psalm. Where in verse 1 and 9 is the refrain that begins and closes the psalm.

And then verse 2, at the end of verse 1 and verse 2, becomes about God's dominion in the heavens. And then verse 5 to 8 becomes man's dominion over the earth.

[6 : 26] And then verse 3 becomes about man's relative lowliness compared to God's highness, his greatness. And then verse 4 becomes about man's loftiness compared to the rest of earthly creation.

So, there's a beautiful symmetrical structure. And then, so then once you recognize that, then it goes to talk about the comparative lowliness of man compared to God who created the heavens.

Whose glory is above the heavens. It's not even in the heavens. It surpasses, transcends the heavens. It's above the heavens. And then verse 3 says, When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

And so, do you remember David's writing in the context, I mean, before the man invented how to fly, right? So, he looks above at the sky and it represents a limitless possibility.

It's vast, almost seemingly infinite. But even for us, who are in a generation that's, you know, traveled to outer space, the universe is bigger than we can imagine, right?

[7 : 33] Like, our galaxy, I mean, is smaller than most of the galaxies that are out there. Yet, even our galaxy, the Milky Way, is 100,000 light years in diameter.

And one light year is 6 trillion miles. So, I mean, and 100,000 light years. So, that's a number that we can't even fathom. So, that's how big this universe is.

And that's just one small galaxy in the whole, all the galaxies. And that's where we are. And yet, God created all of this with his fingers. The work of his fingers.

So, that really shows how big God is. And if that's how big this universe is, then how big is the God who created it with his fingers? And yet, when we consider that, then we can't help but ask the same question as the psalmist in verse 4.

What is man that you are mindful of him? And the son of man that you care for him? It's only when we appreciate the greatness of God that we can really feel the undeservingness of his care that we have.

[8 : 42] And I want you guys to really feel the emotional force of that question. When he says, what is man that you are mindful of him? And the son of man that you care for him? So, just think about that.

Like, let that sink in for a second. Because the God who created the cosmos with his fingers, he cares what kind of a day you're having. And the God who created the cosmos, he is listening to us right now.

He's with us here. And the God who created the cosmos mourns over our every sin. And he rejoices over our obedience. That he cares about our thoughts, hears our faintest groans.

That's such a humbling reality when we think of how great God is. And so then we ask, like the cosmos, what am I? What is human being? What is man that you are mindful of him?

You're thinking of me. And the son of man that you actually care for me. That's when we realize our relative insignificance, lowliness before God, that we can truly appreciate his gracious condescension and care.

[9 : 46] So, this verse 1-4 is about God's dominion above the heavens and man's relative lowliness compared to him. And then verses 5-8 then is about man's dominion over the earth and his relative loftiness compared to the rest of creation.

It says in verse 5, Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. So, the heavenly beings can be literally translated as gods.

It's the same word for God used in Genesis, for example, for God. But it's used sometimes in the plural form like that to refer to angelic beings. And so he's saying that the man's created just a little lower than the angelic beings.

In fact, he's so lofty, he's been crowned with glory and honor. We are created in God's image and we are his, as his image bearers, we reign over the earth as his representative rulers.

So, we're the crown jewel of his creation. He has given us glory and honor and dominion, it says, over the works of your hands. So, this amazing cosmos, the work of God's fingers, has given dominion to us.

[11 : 02] The work of his hands has given us dominion. And so that's a staggering thing that we have. And that includes all creation. So, you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

So, that's livestock, fish, birds. So, that all three, you know, can make categories of the animal kingdoms to signify man's rule, the humanity's rule over all the earth.

So, that's how lofty we are. And I think C.S. Lewis captures this really well in his essay, Weight of Glory, talking about how, what a powerful, wonderful creature man is created by God.

So, he writes, It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all only the nightmare.

All day long, we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.

[12 : 31] There are no ordinary people. God bestowed on us such staggering glory and honor and dominion and authority.

And that's kind of, so this psalm really captures that paradox, right? So that our real insignificance compared to God, but warms as another psalm describes us.

Yet at the same time, compared to the rest of creation, we are significant lofty beings, just a little lower than the heavenly beings. And if we live every day with this truth in mind, I think it would radically change how we interact with each other, and especially in a culture where people protest the use of rats in laboratory experiments, yet don't bat an eye at the 40 million abortions that happen throughout the year, of human lives being terminated, right?

And so that's the kind of where we're so skewed. But if we had a proper perspective about our relative lowliness before God, our relative loftiness compared to the rest of creation, then we would truly rule as God's representatives, as faithful stewards of the resources God's given us in his environment, but also making sure that they are, all the creation is properly submitted to God and living in light of his design.

But unfortunately, we don't occupy this mediatory role very well. As you guys know, we sin, and instead of ruling as God's representative, we rebel against him and rule as tyrants, as sinners, tyrants over the earth.

[14 : 08] And that's the situation that this world is in. So this psalm really captures an ideal more than a reality. And that's why God sends his son, Jesus Christ, to make a way for the fulfillment of the psalm.

And in Matthew 21, 16, Jesus is entering Jerusalem, and the children are praising him, saying, you know, Hosanna to the son of David. And then Jesus quotes verse 2 of the psalm.

It says, Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise, right? So once again, that fits that anandation of the psalm. So he's appropriating the glory that's given to God in this psalm for himself.

And then Hebrews 2, 49, also quotes this psalm. It says, What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels.

You have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. So that's almost word for word quotation. And then the author of Hebrews takes a different turn and applies this not to humanity in general, but to Jesus.

[15 : 18] And he says in verse 9 of chapter 2 of Hebrews, But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

So then the author of Hebrews is describing Jesus as the ultimate son of man. We as sons of man, as sons of Adam, were supposed to fulfill this call and rule as his, occupy that rightful place of worshipping God as mediatory represented rulers.

But because we didn't, Jesus came and he makes atonement for us and experiences death on our behalf, the punishment that we deserved. And then finally, 1 Corinthians 15, 21 to 28, also quotes this song.

And it describes Jesus as the second Adam who fulfills what first Adam failed to do by failing to rule over the earth as God's representative. And he says of Christ in verse 25, chapter 15, For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for God has put all things in subjection under his feet. So Jesus is the ultimate son of man who fulfills Adam's unfulfilled commission to exercise dominion over the earth.

[16 : 39] And in doing so, he subjects even death and sin under his feet. So then this, Jesus then really is the key for us to living in light of that. How do we rightfully occupy that place of recognizing our relative lowliness before God, but our relative loftiness with the rest of creation, and then living as faithful stewards and represented rulers over this world.

The only way we can do that is when we are transformed and live in light of what Christ has done in dying for us and making what was wrong right and occupying that rightful place that we were supposed to be.

And so, I hope you feel, this is one of my favorite psalms in that I often use it in prayer when I thank God for the things that he has done for me, of the fact that he hears me about things, and this kind of rolls off my tongue.

This is, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him. And I think if we are in that place where we really live by that psalm, it will change the way we relate to everything else, to God and to the Creator and to creation.

So with that in mind, let's pray. Jimmy, maybe you want to lead us in song.