

“God’s Majesty”

Lesson Text: Psalm 8:1-9

Background Scripture: Psalm 8:1-10

Devotional Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

Psalm 8:1-9

¹ Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.

² Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. ³ When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? ⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. ⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:

⁷ all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, ⁸ the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. ⁹ Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

LESSON AIMS:

- **Facts:** to tell how God is sovereign and sustains humankind and creation.
- **Principle:** to express appreciation for God’s sustaining roles.
- **Application:** to commit to stewardship over the work of God’s hand.

INTRODUCTION

"Ascending to the throne of France at age four to rule for the next seventy-two years, Louis XIV enjoyed the longest reign in modern European history. Intoxicated with his own power, this self-consumed emperor called himself the 'Great Monarch' and declared, 'I am the State!' But in 1715, King Louis XIV, like all other rulers, abdicated his throne to death.

"His funeral, just as had been prescribed, was nothing short of spectacular..... To dramatize the deceased ruler's greatness, a solitary candle burned above his jewel-laden casket. Thousands waited in hushed silence, gazing at the solitary flame. At the appointed time the funeral service began. Bishop Massillon, who presided over the state funeral, stood to address the mourners, which included the assembled clergy of France.

"When the bishop arose, he did something that stunned the nation. Bending down from the pulpit, he extinguished the lone candle that represented the greatness of Louis XIV. The people gasped. Then from the darkness echoed four gripping words, 'Only God is great!'" (Anders, gen. ed., *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, Broadman and Holman).

Many people in the worlds of entertainment, politics, education, business, and sports have highly inflated evaluations of themselves. Those who do have also determined to ignore spiritual truth. This week's text will explain reality.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Psalms contain some of the most-loved Scriptures in the entire Bible. Little children are taught to memorize Psalms 23 and 100 at an early age. Passages from Psalms are quoted approximately 80 times in the New Testament, more than any other Old Testament book. Today's worship and praise songs are filled with words taken from Psalms.

The Hebrew title of this book is "Praise," or the "Book of Praises," which indicates that the main contents of the book are praise, prayer and worship. The name "Psalms" comes from the Greek. We find that the early Christian fathers called it the "Psalter."

It is best, however, not to think of Psalms as a "book" like most other Bible books. It is actually a collection of material from many different authors and periods in the history of Israel. This collection is divided into five sub-books, each ending with a similar statement of praise to God (see Psalms 41:13; 72:18, 19; 89:52; 106:48; and 150:6). Many people think that King David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1), wrote the psalms. Indeed, we find his name attached to 72 psalms, but that is fewer than half of them. David is just 1 of 7 authors we can identify. In addition to him, we find psalms written by Asaph, the Sons of Korah, Solomon, Moses, Heman, and Ethan. Moreover, 51 psalms (about one-third) do not identify the author, thus remaining anonymous.

The Psalms is the national hymnbook of Israel. It contains 150 poems to be set to music for worship. Worship is the

central idea. The Psalms magnify and praise the Lord, exalt His attributes, His names, His word and His goodness. Every human experience is related to Him. We see the life of the believer pictured in all its experiences of joy and sorrow, victory and failure. The Psalms are full of Christ. They describe the whole program of His suffering and death.

Today's text, Psalm 8, is ascribed to David. Psalm 8 is sometimes designated as *acreation psalm*. Others in this category include Psalms 19, 29, 65, and 104. They all contain parallels to Genesis 1 and meditate on the marvel and power of God's creation. Many other passages present God as the Creator (see Job 38, 39; Isaiah 42:5; Amos 4:13; compare Colossians 1:15–17). Psalm 8 is the best-known creationpsalm, and it still serves to help us understand the mysteries of God's purposes in creating the universe.

DIVINE EXCELLENCY (Psalm 8:1, 2)

The psalmist addresses God, not as a national deity, but as Lord of the universe. Speaking in the name of the people, associating himself with his brethren, he says "our" instead of "my". David begins by marveling at the Lord's excellence. The word *excellent* conveys a sense of royal majesty. David distinguishes the Lord from earthly kings, though, by proclaiming that God's glory extends far beyond the human realm to be the permanent name in all the universe, higher than any created reality, even that of the heavens. The majestic name of God is over everything on the earth.

King David recognizes the glory of God that is seen throughout the heavens and earth. He sees and extols that God is excellent and amazing in the entire universe. David writes, "*O LORD, our Lord*" to praise and exalt God, who sits above the universe. God is most high and sovereign (in control of His universe and never out of control) over all. As God's children, we should praise God for His glory that is beyond expression and human comprehension. David addresses God as "LORD," which stands in for "YHWH" in Hebrew. The Hebrew language does not use vowels. The word "YHWH" was considered too holy to pronounce; therefore, David and others used "Adonai" or "LORD."

1. What about the Lord is above everything on the earth (Psalm 8:1)?

God has used as instruments of His power those who are otherwise as feeble as little children and babies. Through them God has shown His power in causing "the enemy and the avenger" to "still" or "desist" from His plans. Jesus quoted this passage (Matthew 21:16) to vindicate the hosannas of the children in the Temple against the objections of the scribes and Pharisees. Some interpreters see in this verse the key to the whole psalm. In their opinion, the sense is that puny little man is the babe of creation, yet God has given him strength to rule the world of which he is such an insignificant part, and thus conferred upon him dignity and honor far beyond that of the rest of the creation which He governs.

2. Where is this glory and this majesty spoken and what is the contrast between the witness for God and the enemies of God (v. 2)?

Human Insignificance (Psalm 8:3,4)

This psalm is the outgrowth of the psalmist's contemplation of the sky at night. The moon and stars shine out. David understands all this humbling magnificence to be the careful and delicate creation of his Creator. It is the work of God's fingers, an intimate act. David's ancestors understood "the finger of God" as having written words on stone tablets for Moses, giving Israel its law (Exodus 31:18). David is not saying that our God is a glorified human with a physical body, but that our Creator is personal and deliberate beyond our greater imaginings.

As the Psalm continues, David now narrows his focus to one of the great questions: *What is mankind?* By extension, why would the Creator of the marvelous universe care about human beings?

This central question occurs elsewhere in the Bible. Psalm 144:3 offers another example of David asking this question. There, the psalmist-king does not offer an answer to the question "What is man?" but uses it to show the profound contrast between frail humanity and mighty God.

We acknowledge that we are used to seeing the phrase *son of man* as a title for Jesus. However, the descriptor *son of man* occurs in the Old Testament over 100 times in reference to human beings—usually to the prophet Ezekiel.

3. What are the works of the fingers of God (vs. 3,4)?

Human Responsibility (Psalm 8:5-9)

David begins his answer to the question “*What is mankind...?*” by reflecting on the position of humanity in the creation order. He teaches us that there is a ceiling for us, and this can be defined in reference to the angels of God. “*You have made them a little lower than the angels.*” Angels are special creatures of God, designed to perform crucial tasks of ministry for the Almighty (Hebrews 1:14).

We should admit that we do not fully understand the exact nature and position of angels. In some ways, the Bible presents angels as extensions or representatives of God himself.

What we do know, however, is that angels are not glorified human beings. We do not become angels when we die, although we become “equal unto the angels” in certain respects (Luke 20:35,36). Angels are a created order of beings distinct from humans. They are not described as being made in God’s image, as humans are (Genesis 1:27). The fact that “*we shall judge angels*” (1 Corinthians 6:3) indicates that being *a little lower than the angels* is a temporary situation.

4. How are humans described in relationship to heavenly beings (vs. 6-8)?

David presents the true position and purpose of humanity. While on earth, we are created to function in a position below the angelic beings of God’s Heaven, but above all other created things. This is acknowledged to be a place of dominion, a position of power and control.

Dominion is not permission to exploit, however. Herein lies the stewardship responsibility of the human race. Genesis records that God created a man and placed him in a beautiful garden “to dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). God has given us a marvelous home in which to live. Will we treat the earth with respect or with contempt? We are to have dominion over all the works of God’s hands.

In verses 7 and 8 of today’s lesson David lists the three realms of living beings as understood by ancient people: land, air, and sea (compare Genesis 1:28). His description includes both domesticated and wild animals. What an incomprehensible variety of life God has included in His creation—and mankind has been given the privilege of dominion over all of them!

5. Over what things did David say God has given man dominion over (vs. 6-8)?

The final line of the psalm repeats the first line. Thus we have come to full circle. We are reminded that it is not about us. It is all about God. It is foolish to praise the glories of the universe without remembering the Lord (Romans 1:20). It is futile to worship the creation and not the Creator (1:21,22).

The final word of the psalm is a good reminder for us too. The earth is the home of the human race. We were created for the earth. The earth was created for us. It is our venue for appreciating and worshipping the Lord. There is a perfect match, provided by the wisdom of God. When we really understand this, we are naturally moved to proclaim, *how excellent is thy name!*

6. What is significant about the repetition of verse 1 at the end?

7. How can we declare the glory of God?

8. How do we honor God? Is it possible to dishonor Him?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Our goal should be to declare the glory that God already possesses (Psalm 8:1).
2. When we honor Him, God uses even the weakest of us (v. 2).
3. In view of God’s vast creation, we should be humbled by His concern for us (vs.3,4).
4. All people possess unique dignity as creatures made in God’s own image (Psalm 8:5; cf. Genesis 1:27).
5. As stewards of creation, we are to wisely use and preserve our resources but never worship them (Psalm 8:6-8).
6. The dignity and dominion of man should lead to the praise of God (v. 9).

CONCLUSION

Human Animals?

Why is human dignity important? Why do even secularists speak of the “sacredness” of human life? Is human life any more sacred than the life of, say, a cow or a salmon? These are important questions.

The consensus for many millennia that human beings are a distinct and higher order of earth’s life is now challenged. Some would reduce humanity to merely another branch of the animal kingdom. Others would elevate all animals to a position of sacred dignity that sees humanity without special privilege. Psalm 8 places human beings properly in relation to God, angels, and animals.

The book of Hebrews gives us a further implication of the high position of humans in God’s created order. To be a “little lower than the angels” was a position of dignity suitable for the incarnation (Hebrews 2:6–9). God became human in the person of Jesus. It was necessary for Jesus to be human for two primary reasons. First, as a man He was able to communicate God to us in a direct and credible way (John 1:18). God did not come as a talking monkey. He came as a man.

Second, it was important that Jesus be human in order for Him to die for our sins (Hebrews 2:9). Angels spoke to men and women in various places in the Bible (Luke 1:26–28; Hebrews 2:2; etc.). But no angel could die for human sins. Animal sacrifices for sin were good but inadequate. Only the sacrifice of the Son of God as the Son of Man was sufficient and “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

PRAYER

O Lord, how excellent is Your name! How majestic is Your creation. How marvelous is Your plan. May we come to You today as persons with whom You have provided great dignity, but who willingly submit ourselves to You. We pray this in the excellent name of Your Son, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God has granted us both authority and responsibility.

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