

EXPERIENCING THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE (Vol. 1 - Psalms 1-10)

Psalm 8: Whatever Happened to Amazement?

(Session 9 - May 10, 2015)

Introductory Remarks:

- Psalm 8 is a Hymn of Praise. More specifically, it is a Hymn of Praise to God for his glory and majesty as revealed in creation. This is a common theme in the Psalms (see Psalms 19, 29, 104) as well as the rest of Scripture (Job 38-42; Isaiah 40:12-31; Romans 1:18-32).
- The creation account in Genesis 1-2 provides the foundation for this psalm. We can easily imagine David on a hillside with his sheep gazing up at the night sky as he contemplates the God who created everything from the glorious night lights to a tiny baby in her mother's arms. His thought then proceeds to the fact that God uses the weak things of the world to confound the wise and powerful. And his consideration of weakness continues as he wonders why God would care so much about us in this vast universe he has created. Yet he chose to make human beings the pinnacle of his creation and to give us the special privilege of being made in his image. A part of that prominent place he has given to us is the role he has assigned to us that we would rule over his creation. Here is yet another example of God graciously using that which is weak and seemingly insignificant to carry out his purposes. Thus the psalm does not go where we might go when we consider the prominent place we have in creation. It does not puff us up with our importance and grandeur. It focuses clearly on the glory and majesty of the One who made it all. The chorus of this glorious hymn from beginning to end is "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth?"
- "This psalm is an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who he is and what he has done, and relating us and our world to him, all with a masterly economy of words, and in a spirit of mingled joy and awe...The range of thought takes us not only 'above the heavens' (v.1) and back to the beginning (vv. 3, 6-8) but, as the New Testament points out, on to the very end." (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, TOTC)
- "Having wended our way in five consecutive psalms (Pss. 3-7) through the dark valleys of lament and pleas for deliverance, we hear the strains of a joyful melody rising from just beyond the steep hill represented by Psalm 7, and we arrive at the crest to discover a welcome prospect of breathtaking beauty and awesome delight. Psalm 8 introduces us to the first experience of joyful praise and adoration in the Psalter. After this brief but

brilliant chorus of praise, we will return again in the following psalms to the darkness of pain and the anguish of brokenness. But here in Psalm 8, if just for a moment, darkness and suffering are driven away by the commanding vision of the sovereign God of the created universe and his unfathomable care for humanity." (Gerald H. Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms Volume 1*)

Outline of Psalm 8:

- I. Celebrating the majesty of God as revealed in his creation (v. 1a).
- II. The majestic God displays his glory in the heavens and in using the weak things of the world to accomplish his purposes (vv. 1b-8).
 - A. The use of children to silence the might of God's enemies (vv. 1b-2).
 - B. The use of human beings to rule over his glorious creation (vv. 3-8).
 1. God's majesty clearly displayed in his personal work of creation (v. 3).
 2. Amazement that God even care for human beings (v. 4).
 3. God's grace in granting human beings the privilege of being made in his glorious image and given the prominent place among his creation (vv. 5-8).
- III. Celebrating the majesty of God as revealed in his creation (v. 9).

Celebrating the majesty of God as revealed in his creation (v. 1a, 9):

- This psalm, like the rest of Scripture is not about the glory and honor of human beings. It is about the majesty and glory of God, our Creator. He is addressed by the exclamation "O LORD (YAHWEH, the personal covenant keeping "I Am" of Exodus 3:13-15) our Lord (Adonai, the sovereign Lord who reigns over all)." The majesty/greatness of God fill the earth he has personally created (Isaiah 6).
- The glory and majesty of God is central to our lives as Christians. We must never forget this. This psalm is a great example of how we should view ourselves in light of God and his creation. While we have been given a very special place in creation and the amazing privilege of being made in God's image, we must still view everything we are and have with amazement. We are to be in awe of the fact that God has graciously determined that he would crown us with glory and honor among his creation. If we are not totally amazed that this is true, we will both misunderstand and misuse our privilege and responsibilities before our Creator.

The majestic God displays his glory in the heavens and in using the weak things of the world to accomplish his purposes (vv. 1b-8):

- *"You have set your glory above the heavens." (v.1b)* - We are reminded of Psalm 19:1-6 and its emphasis on how the heavens declare the glory of God and proclaims his amazing handiwork. This celebration of God's majesty as displayed in creation is something that flows from the believer's heart. The expression of an unbelieving heart is quite different as we see in places like Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 and Romans 1:18-32. What a sad commentary it is when we don't pause to appreciate the grandeur and vastness of God's creative work. This leads us to small images of God and far to great images of ourselves (see Isaiah 6 and 40).
- *"Out of the mouths of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger." (v. 2)* - Here is where this psalm becomes so intimately connected with the previous psalms of lament (Psalms 3-7). The enemies that figure so prominently in those psalms are really no threat to God. He can use the words of babies and infants to silence their foolishness. There is no cause for worry when God is for us (Romans 8:18-39). The weakest of human beings with the praise of God on their lips is mightier than the most powerful enemy. Jesus uses these words when confronted by the chief priests and scribes in the temple shortly before his crucifixion (Matthew 21:14-17).
- *"When I look at 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?" (vv. 3-4)* - As David gazes up into the night sky, he is overwhelmed by the creative work of God. This work is said to have been done by God's fingers. This emphasizes the personal nature of God's creative work. He created and sculpted his work just as he wanted it. He set these massive stars and the moon in place. David's recognition of the detailed creative work of God as displayed in the heavens and earth makes him wonder at the great care God has for something as small and seemingly insignificant as himself. What David is experiencing in this psalm is something that every human being should experience. All thoughts of ourselves must begin with such awe and reverence before God. If we are never amazed at God and by the way God cares for us and uses us to accomplish his purposes, we will never have the right attitude toward ourselves (or God!). It will always be skewed toward a grander view of ourselves and a smaller view of God. Notice that the Bible always emphasizes the need not to think too highly of ourselves, but never says the same thing about thinking too lowly of ourselves (Romans 12:3).

- *"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; you have put all things under his feet..." (v. 5-6)* - The psalmist's amazement at God's gracious care for him is increased by the fact that God is not only mindful of human beings, but has actually given them the prominent place among his creation. Here we are described as having been created "a little lower than the heavenly beings." The debate here is whether the word translated here as "heavenly beings" (Elohim) is speaking of angelic beings or of God himself. The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates it with the Greek word for "angels." Hebrews 2:6-9 quotes this verse from the Septuagint and also renders it as "angels." The word by itself is not normally used of angels. For this reason, many have insisted that the best way to take the word in this context is clearly to use the word "God" and not "heavenly beings." It is a tough decision to make and while there is certainly a difference between the word meaning God versus angels, it doesn't change the main emphasis of the verse. What is being emphasized here is that men are not divine (or as Hebrews 2 clearly emphasizes men are not angelic beings either). Even so, God has crowned us with a glory and honor among his creation. We are mere humans, but God's special design and purpose for human beings is graciously much more than being another part of his creation.
- When Hebrews 2:5-18 uses these verses it is emphasizing Jesus becoming a human being and bringing the ultimate fulfillment of the one who has everything placed in subjection to him (see 1 Corinthians 15:27 and Matthew 28:18). This has happened not just because he became a human, but because he has provided salvation for those who have so horribly distorted God's original purpose for them through their sinful rebellion against their Creator.
- *"...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. (vv. 7-8)* - The task given to human beings in Genesis 1-2 has not been removed because of our sin. We still are called to this responsibility of ruling and caring for God's creation. Even though the whole creation now groans because of our sin (Romans 8:18-25), we are called to this high privilege and responsibility. While we must never go to the extremes of worshipping the creation (Romans 1:18-25), we must still care for it within the bounds of keeping our eyes fixed on the new heavens and the new earth that we will one day enjoy (2 Peter 3:1-13).

Whatever happened to Amazement? - The real question is whether or not we are truly amazed that God thinks of us. Is it something we are overwhelmed by? We sing of God's "amazing" grace and his "amazing" love, but is it really true? We have become so skilled in our modern

world at looking for ways to celebrate ourselves that we have lost the true attitude of amazement that should characterize our entire lives before God and other people. I want to encourage you to look for God in his Word. Seek him and the true nature of his majesty and holiness. Like Moses, seek to see as much of God's glory as you can take. It is this pursuit of God that gives everything in life its proper place and priority.