

“GOD’S GLORY IN MAN’S DIGNITY”

Psalm 8

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INTRODUCTION

Which of you has never had the experience of staring into the night sky and being overwhelmed with the sense of the vastness of the universe and your own insignificance in light of that? As one commentator has expressed this thought:

“The vault of the sky arched at a vast and unknown distance over our heads; the stars apparently infinite in number, each keeping its appointed place and course, and seeming to belong to a wide system of things which has no relation to the earth; while man is but one among many millions of the earth’s inhabitants;—all this makes the contemplative spectator feel how exceedingly small a portion of the universe he is; how little he must be in the eyes of an Intelligence which can embrace the whole” (Perowne, p. 154).

This revelation made to man in darkness and in silence when he is alone, “the stir and noise of his own works, which in the light of day filled and absorbed him, are hushed and buried in darkness; his importance is gone.” (Perowne, p. 154) All of this supports the position that this is a night composition—or at least reflects back upon a night scene.

Modern technology can only deepen the awe and wonder as we peer further and further into space. What possible value can a single individual (or the entire race) have in such a context?

According to Psalm 8, the answer is: A great deal of value! Man is the most significant object of God’s earthly creation. But, man merely helps to reflect the **Glory of God**.

YOUR LIFE MUST REFLECT THE GLORY OF GOD. (I Cor. 10:31)

I. HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD (1-2)

A. As Considered In the Entire Earth (1a)

It is His handiwork. **“The sun and the moon are His witnesses and heralds, the light is His robe, the clouds are His chariot, the thunder is His voice, the flashes of the lightning are His arrows and His spear. Apart from Him the universe is void and waste; He gives it its life and meaning”** (Perowne, 149).

The subject speaking in the psalm is **plural** for the first time in the psalms—represents the people of God: **“our Lord”**. But, what they have “become by grace” they are “called to be for the good of the whole earth”

This adoration of the Lord is reverent, ardent, and intimate—“our” Lord.

The God who is adored: **Yahweh**, the God who has revealed Himself to Israel, is **Lord**—*Adonai*, and is Creator of Heaven and Earth.

“Name” as usual expresses God’s nature as revealed “in His works of creation and His acts of salvation.” The aspect of His “name” here given that is so known throughout the earth is “majestic”—esp. by believers.

B. As Celebrated in the Heavens (1b)

- The rendering of “who hast displayed Thy splendor above the heavens” may well mean: “Whose glory is celebrated in song [chanted] above the heavens.” This reading necessitates only the change of one vowel from the Hebrew text, turning the apparent imperative of the verb “to give” or “put” to the verb “celebrate in song.” Thus we see both Earth and Heaven celebrate the glory of God.
- The imperative would command God to put His glory there. David already sees God’s glory there and does not need to command Him to do so!
- The traditional reading “**who** has displayed thy splendor above the heavens” assumes that the form is “corrupted” and that it should be a perfect from “to give” and would represent the typical phrase “give glory upon”.
- If the above conclusion is correct, then this verse expresses a similar thought to Isaiah 6:3—the cry of the Seraphim to one another. Note the “startling contrast” of vv. 1 when compared with v. 2—the praise from the mouth of **infants** and **nursing babes**.

C. AS Recognized by Small Children (2)

Verse 1 has “all the earth” and “heaven” proclaiming God’s glory; now we see the “rising discord of *adversaries*, *enemy*, and *vengeful* that can be silenced by the words from the mouths of “infants and nursing babes.” God meets these powerful foes with what the world regards as “weak”, what seems “immaterial”—“from the mouth of”, and what seems “immature”—small ones.

1. God Uses the Weak Ones of this World

- “As Palm Sunday was to show (Mt. 21:15f), the free confession of love and trust from these children is a devastating answer to the accuser and his arsenal of doubts and slanders” (Kidner, pp. 66-67).
- “It is by obscure and naturally feeble instruments that He makes His name glorious here below, and overcomes whatsoever is opposed to this glorifying” (Del. 943).

- The text does not even state specifically **what it is** that the infants state; “any and every utterance of theirs is apparently conceived of as constituting a part of the great defense that God has thus provided” (Leupold, p. 102).
Remember what Jesus said about the need for us to become like little children. “Dropping the hyperbole, unbiased and uncorrupted minds recognize God without difficulty from His creation” (Leupold, p. 102).
- “**Infants**”—“A child that is more mature and capable of spontaneous action.”
- “**Nursing babes**”—Hebrew women nursed their children for long periods (until 2 or 3); the term refers to a small child able to lisp and speak.
- KJV renders “thou hast ordained strength”—the Hebrew word can mean “built a bulwark” or “fortress”. [Note that the LXX rendering that is quoted by Jesus in Mt. 21 reads “perfected praise.” The outcome of such praise results in the defeat of the enemy—just as in the Hebrew text; therefore, the LXX rendering is likely designed as a paraphrase “to show what the psalm means by its unusual metaphor of an audible bulwark.”]
- As Perowne states, “Even the faith of a little child is bulwark enough against the folly of men of corrupt heart and perverted intellect, who can look upon the heavens and see there the glory of Newton or Laplace, but not the glory of God” (p. 154).

2. God confounds the Strong Adversaries

- Adversaries
- Enemy
- Revengeful: this term refers to those “with a thirst for vengeance which expresses itself in curses”

II. HOW INSIGNIFICANT IS MAN (3-4)

Man is the only created being who can “look at” God’s creation and have the insight to ask such a question, even in doubt. Therefore, the answer is already alluded to.

A. When Compared to the Great God’s Creation (3)

Passages like Is. 45:18 and 51:16 show us that God’s intent in creation was not to remain remote and unintelligible, but to be **accessible**. The universe was a home for His family. He wants man to see His “eye for detail.”

1. The Work of His Fingers—the Heavens

2. What He “set in place”—the Moon and the Stars

“*Which you have ordained*”—“lit. “to place and set up, in the sense of existence and duration”

B. What is Man? (4) “Man” in his inherent weakness.

“Or the son of man?”-- The usual word for man as created, and the name of the first man, Adam. Yet, “son of man” is similar in thought to Job’s “man born of woman” in Job 14:1 and also conveys his inherent weakness. These terms also allude back to “infants” and “nursing babes” in v. 2. Man is not like the stars—directly created, but is born of human agency—born of a woman.

David speaks here with “grateful emotion and astonished adoration” about God’s amazing love and condescension that dared to reach down to lowly man! (Del. 944) God’s displayed glory shows Him to be so much greater than man; why does he bother with man? Yet:

1. God “remembers” him.

God “remembers” him in a positive way, remembers in order to bless him. When God remembers, He always moves “toward the object of his memory”; the term “has a compassionately purposeful ring.”

2. God “visits” him

Visit in a favorable sense in order to bless. He is more than concerned; **He acts** on their behalf.

III. HOW EXALTED IN MAN (5-8)

Now in v. 5 David glances back at the original creation and the *divine intent* for created man. Primordial man is in view here “in the fullness of his powers and attributes.”

A. Made slightly diminished from God (5a)

The verb here has the idea “to make or let one want, to leave deficient,” “caused to be short of from God,” or acc. to NASB, “a little lower than God.” Gen. 1:27 shows that man was created in “the image of God,” therefore “nearly a divine being.” This verse asserts man’s rare dignity **with almost breath-taking emphasis: “Thou didst make him lack but little of God.”**

How then the quotation in Hebrews 2:7—“a little lower than the angels”?

“Because in the biblical mode of conception the angels are so closely connected with God as the nearest creaturely effulgence of His nature, it is really possible that in David may have thought of God including the angels. Since man is in the image of God, he is at the same time in the likeness of an angel, and since he is only a little less than divine, he is also only a little less than angelic.”

Also, the word “*elohim*” can at times refer to “godlike beings”—even human judges (Ps. 82).

B. Crowned with Divine Glory and Majesty

1. Glory: "Glory" refers to the "weightiness and fullness" of the manifestation of divine glory in man.
2. Majesty: "Majesty" speaks of divine glory "from the side of its brilliancy, majesty, and beauty" (Del. p. 944).

C. Given Dominion over all of God's Creation on Earth (6-8)

1. "Rule" over the "works of God's hands."
 2. Dominance over "all things"—"under his feet."
- Note the areas of man's dominion in verses 7-8:

a. Land Animals

- Cattle—sheep, goats, oxen (7a)
- "Beasts of the field"—wild animals (7b)

b. Sky animals—"birds of the heavens" (8a)

c. Aquatic animals (8b)

- "Fish of the sea"
- "Whatever passes through the paths of the sea"

IV. INDEED: HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD (9)

- Now that the psalm is complete, "the refrain will be sung with fresh understanding." [Kidner, 68]
- Also, the primary emphasis of the psalm is reinforced: **God and His Grace.**
- Man's dominion—as great as it is—takes a very distant second place.
- Man is called to be servant to God and to be His worshipper.

CONCLUSION

Hebrews 2 shows that man's fall into sin brought the ruin of his dominion over the Earth. Now, man is what he is because the Son of God has taken upon Himself man's nature. Man is very near to God, higher than the angels, because the Christ is both God and Man (Hebrews 2). What Jesus obtained for man is fuller and more perfect than what man originally had. Jesus now possesses such transcendent power and will one day manifest it. He will subject not merely **animal life** and the **world itself**, but also the universe with all the ruling powers in it, whether they be in subjection or in hostility to God, yea even the power of death (I Cor. 15:27; cf. Ephes. 1:22).

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