

King of Creation

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: 19 September 2021

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 0 0] Amen. Well, tonight we are emerging into Psalm 8 and coming out of what we saw last week was a kind of valley through which the King, King David, has walked. If Psalms 1 and 2 together show us God's promise to bless the King who loves his word and to crown him as the King of the whole world, then Psalms 3 to 7 shows the King's confidence in the Lord to deliver on those promises.

And we saw last week how even through his tears, even in the heat of hostility, the King can still say, I know this won't last forever because the God who has promised has heard my prayers. So if the King has come through this dark, dark valley here, Psalm 8 is like stepping out into the sunlight. It's a breath of fresh air. It feels very different, doesn't it, from Psalm 6. If Psalm 6 was crying out in tears, then Psalm 8 is shouting out in gladness.

Look at the thought that both begins and ends this Psalm. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. The majesty of Yahweh, the Lord in capitals, God's name, who is King, that is Lord in lowercase over all things. That is what David is captivated by and celebrating in this Psalm. The Lord reigns. Let the earth be glad. And as David celebrates God's kingdom, he wonders at how God demonstrates his rule in all the earth. And his answer is surprising, even as Christians. God displays his glorious rule in the world through weak humanity.

And we're going to see that firstly in miniature form, and then we're going to zoom out and see it in the widest possible lens. Firstly, then we see God shows his rule in the world through the praise of the weakest. Through the praise of the weakest. Read with me, if you would, again from verse one.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You've set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants, you've established a stronghold against your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger. God is King. His kingdom is over all. David says his majesty covers all the earth. His glory fills the heavens. If you like, by contrast, all the kingdoms of this world can be drawn on maps. Where a politician or ruler has power depends on physical boundaries and borders. Where a country's territory ends, well, there the ruler's authority ends.

[3 : 1 8] And so much of our lives is tied up in that fact, whether we realize it or not. I'm reading a great book, a biography just now, about a man called Alexander Hamilton. He was one of the founding fathers of the United States of America and had a big part in the American Revolution.

And so much of that war and so much of the passion of guys like Hamilton and others who fought the other revolutionaries came from the belief that the King of England no longer had a right to rule in the American colonies. In the words of the hit musical, why should a tiny island across the sea regulate the price of tea? Now, whatever you think of that, right or wrong, it shows how invested human life is in who has a right to rule. We go to war over it. We debate. We fall out over it.

And so in that context, listen to what David says about God here. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens. Where does God have a right to rule?

Everywhere. Everywhere. He is king without equal, powerful beyond imagining. And his global rule has real consequences for our lives and the lives of everyone on our planet.

It was wonderful to see this earlier in the week in a Bible study in Psalm 145. There, David writes, your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Your dominion endures through all generations.

[5 : 18] You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. God as king. God as king constantly upholds and sustains and provides for his world.

It's an awesome thing to think that we sit here tonight and breathe and listen and speak because God is king. And because he is a kind and loving and faithful king. He is truly the king of creation. But the irony that David picks up on is that God has planted his flag in the world, so to speak, through tiny hearts, little lips, the praise of children and infants.

See that in verse 2, through the praise of children and infants. You have established a stronghold against your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger. Picture, if you can, COP 21. Okay, the United Nations meeting in Glasgow in a couple of months. Ambassadors and translators and dignitaries and aides and suits and ties under the flags of their nations discussing and defining and ruling.

And then imagine the doors of the conference center open and in walk children and babies and toddlers and babies and toddlers. A gasp, a whisper. Silence fills the room.

For it turns out this is the delegation sent from a faraway kingdom to state their case to the world. It would seem strange, perhaps a kind of stunt. But what would it say about that kingdom?

[7 : 23] We are not here to debate on the same terms. Here is a kingdom so powerful in its own right that its ambassadors can be babies.

And yet what these ambassadors say, the message that they bring, stops the party. Silences the opposition, advances the kingdom.

This, says David, is how God demonstrates his great rule in the world. Through the worship of the very weakest. Represented here by children and infants.

This is partly why we get the children involved and speak to them in the service on a Sunday. This is why we pray for them. This is why what happens downstairs on a Sunday morning is just as important as what happens up here.

Because kids have a big part in God's plan. Here's a church. We recognize that in Christ, in God's covenant, that he makes promises for us and for our children.

[8 : 33] God loves our children because he is faithful to his covenant promise to bless every family of the earth in and through Jesus. But he can care for our children like that because he is so great and powerful that he does not need to save his investment and care for the strongest or the cleverest or for the grown up and independent.

He is so great that he comes to the weakest and most dependent and most vulnerable among us. Because in the praise of the weakest, he shows off his power and glory to the watching world.

Now, we all know that children can be a handful. Perhaps what David says here sounds idyllic. Perhaps right now, if you have children, raising them to trust the Lord doesn't feel that powerful or impressive.

But persevere. Persevere, says David, because the Lord loves to put his praise in the mouths of little children.

Let the church family help you and uphold you in that. You think together, we can be so encouraged to see what the Lord is doing among the children of our church.

[9 : 58] It was funny, but it was also my favorite bit in the service of two weeks ago when a little voice shouted out, God, in answer to the question, who's in charge of the world?

What was so brilliant is that it was so obvious. It was so spontaneous, so natural. Of course, God is king. Isn't that what David's talking about here?

The recognition of God's glory and rule by little ones. That raises a flag for his kingdom in a hostile world. Your children can be defiant.

But that's not always a bad thing. Not, of course, when it's of the terrible twos variety, but certainly when it is of the childlike faith variety.

When in their simple trust and prayers and praise, they defy the world and its rebellion and proclaim God as king instead.

[11 : 03] So let's remember that the nativity is not only heat. It is courageous because God shows his powerful rule over our world through the praise of the very weakest.

And while I recognize that this isn't the main point of this psalm, let's remember all of us to take an interest in the children of our church.

Talk to them. Ask them about their day. Ask them about what they learned downstairs. Pray for them. Encourage them.

Love their parents. You back up what they hear at home with what they see and hear when they are here at church. You think of simple ways that you can care for them and show them that God cares for them.

You don't have to sign up to a rota to be part of this. But you would be amazed at what difference it makes to their little lives. Let's be to them a covenant community and a church family under whose roof they can gladly learn to love and follow the Lord Jesus.

[12 : 20] We know his words, don't we? Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

God shows his rule in the world through the praise of the weakest. But secondly, zooming right out into the wide lens, God shows his rule in the world through the reign of the greatest.

Through the reign of the greatest. Read with me if you would from verse 3. When I consider your heavens, says David, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

What is mankind that you are mindful of them? Human beings that you care for them. It's as if thinking of the strange way that God has set up his kingdom through the praise of the very littlest.

Well, it gets David thinking about a bigger question. What place do us as human beings generally have in the world? Where do we fit in the grand scheme of things?

[13 : 28] It's a huge question, isn't it? I don't intend to tackle all of it tonight. So much ink has been spilled trying to answer it. What are we worth? What's the value of a human life?

I think where we've got to as a culture with this question is probably summed up in a recent statement by Prince Harry. When he said, everything is good in the world apart from us humans.

Everything is good in the world apart from us humans. How depressing is that? Our 21st century society, I think, has a pretty bleak view of our place in the world.

Susie and I really enjoy watching the work of David Attenborough. But watching Planet Earth 2, you sometimes get the feeling that if we weren't here, the world would be a wonderful, pristine place full of life and beauty.

But we are here, so it's not. Or at least it's not as good as it used to be. Now, if that's what we're saying to ourselves in the year 2021, is it any wonder so many in our society struggle to keep hold of a sense of basic intrinsic value in their lives?

[14 : 49] Or that so many young people in particular carry a constant sense of guilt and pressure to put the world right and to undo the wrongs of the past?

Whatever you think of that, what is our place in the world? It's a huge question that has massive implications for the way that we live and view ourselves.

So what's David's answer? Well, first, he puts our lives into perspective. Lots of you will know the feeling of looking up into the night sky and feeling very, very small indeed.

There are three or four times that I'll never forget. One was on our honeymoon in Sky. And the Milky Way looked as if somebody had just spilled a million tiny diamonds across a black cloth.

It was so close that you felt like you could reach up and sweep them up. There were so many stars. There were more stars than there were sky. That's how it felt.

[15 : 55] Day to day, our lives feel very big, don't they? But when we catch a glimpse of the vastness of the universe, when we see our own galaxy spread across the night sky, or even just our small corner of it, it puts our lives into perspective.

As far as we know, in the whole universe, there is just one planet's worth of living things. And this is it. And we are those living things.

That's perspective, isn't it? We are so small. We are so small. But also so significant. For one planet's worth of living things, we are not the product of one in several trillion, trillion, trillions chance of anything life existing anywhere.

But we are significant because for all the things that God has made, and for all the corners of the universe that we will never see, and galaxies that God brought into being for his eyes only, we are significant because this God thinks of us.

And because of the place that he has given us, and because of the place that he has given our small, small lives in his great plan and creation. What is mankind that you are mindful of them?

[17 : 14] Human beings that you care for them. We are small. We are small. But in God's loving care, we are also royal, says David.

Look at verse 5. You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet.

What is humanity's place in the world? Well, look at those words. Crown, glory, honor, rulers.

Humanity is earth's royalty, says David. These ideas are at the heart of what the Bible calls the image of God. Listen to how God describes his image in Genesis 1, verse 26.

Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[18 : 25] What does God say that it would mean that these creatures of dust would bear his image? Well, there's lots that could be said, but at heart we see it means being created to govern under God.

God was creating vice regents, little kings and queens who would rule over his world, serving him as the king of kings and the lord of lords.

That's what David is reflecting on here. The wonder that God has taken the dust of the earth, something so small in his universe, and has raised us up to royal dignity and set us over his world.

This is how God loves to display his world, isn't it? By taking what is small and weak and giving us glory, putting his worship in our hearts, his praise in our mouths, his work in our hands.

But, but does this role description in verses 6, 7, and 8 sound like your life? That's a big but, isn't it?

[19 : 37] To give a ridiculous example, the morning I sat down to work on this talk, I just spent half an hour chasing our dog through the woods, shouting his name, and had to drag him home because he had been running off with all the other dogs.

And that's one dog. So what on earth does David mean that all flocks and herds and all the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, are under a human scepter?

More seriously, there is some truth in what Harry said, isn't there? That we have behaved sometimes in selfish and careless ways towards our planet and its creatures.

As rulers, we have not always ruled wisely. So where is this glorious rule of humanity over the world? Where is the unscarred and untarnished and undefaced image of God?

Well, we read earlier, didn't we, in Hebrews, how the New Testament deals with this question. You have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet, quoting Psalm 8.

[20 : 49] At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, 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.

We don't yet see glorious human rule here, do we, says the author of Hebrews, but we do see him. The one human being who is God's perfect image and the exact imprint of his nature now crowned with glory and honor, the risen Lord Jesus.

See, seeing that Jesus fulfills this psalm keeps us from trying to do too much too soon. Sometimes this psalm is taken as a call to what's known as creation care.

If our place in God's world is as kings and rulers, then we had jolly well better do better at looking after it. So the thinking goes.

Now, it's not a bad thing to take care of our world and its creatures. It's not my place to tell you how or how not to do that. But if we think we must go and do that because of our part in God's plan, then we have read the plan wrong.

[22 : 14] We can take care of the world because it's God's world and not ours. Because we share it with other people that we're called to love as our neighbors, because we have a duty of care to the place that we live.

But we don't take care of the world to build God's kingdom. Because we forfeited our kingship long ago. When Adam sinned against God and humanity fell in him, we gave up the right to rule.

Yes, we still bear God's image, but it's a broken image. In the words of Blaise Pascal, the philosopher and mathematician, humans are both the glory and the garbage of the universe.

And so God's plan for his world is not that we will get our acts together and start taking our job seriously. What good news that is.

His plan for his world is raising up one human being. One great king to rule, to redeem, to restore. To bring his kingdom.

[23 : 23] And one day to bring a whole new creation. If that sounds like a bit of a stretch from this psalm, one thing to point out is that where it says human beings in verse 4, it literally reads son of man, singular.

Jesus' favorite title for himself. And all of the them in verses 5 and 6 are actually hymns, singular. The NIV does lots of things well, but it struggles with gender.

Because the one that Psalm 8 is talking about is literally one man. One king of creation. That's why when Hebrews takes us to Jesus, it's not a huge leap in the dark from the text.

It's actually just what the psalm says. We do not see everything under our feet. But we see him, the risen Lord Jesus. Who through his death on the cross took the curse for our rebellion.

And our misrule. And our fractured relationship with God. And by his resurrection was raised to the supreme place of power and authority.

[24 : 39] With all things under his feet. So then what is our role in his kingdom? Where do we fit into this as human beings and Christians today?

I read a great book last year where the author described this vision of humanity as rulers under God. And I was getting a bit nervous actually thinking, where is this all going?

But then the author, well she theologically sucker punched me with her conclusion. How do we participate in the rule of Christ over his world today?

Her answer was prayer. Prayer. What an anticlimax. But she's absolutely right. Listen to what Paul says in Romans chapter 8.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves. Who have the first fruits of the spirit.

[25 : 42] We groan inwardly. As we wait eagerly for adoption. As sons. The redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

Creation groans for that day. So what do we do? Well we Christians who have the spirit.

We also groan as we wait for that day. For the day when we are raised bodily from the dead by the risen Lord Jesus. And enter into his new creation.

A restored humanity. Our part in that story is praying then for that day. When Christ's kingdom comes in full.

And we are restored to rule without sin under Christ. Our king. And heaven and earth rejoice. Because they will have been set free from the curse of our sin upon it.

[26 : 39] And so until that day. We wait. And while we wait. We pray and sing. Praise to the Lord the Almighty. The king of creation.

Oh my soul. Praise him. For he is your help. And salvation. What good news that is for us in our weakness.

And in our struggles. In our need. That God doesn't ask us to fix the world. But to pray for the day when he will fix it. What good news it is.

Brothers and sisters. That our hope isn't in me or you. Being a righteous king. But our hope is in the truly righteous king. Who God has raised from the dead.

And who reigns over his world. This very moment. In the words of John Rabbi Duncan. The dust of the earth sits. On the throne of heaven. This evening.

[27 : 36] Perhaps you look at the world. And you don't know what to do. Or what to think. Well let me invite you. Whoever you are.

To put your hope in Jesus. To say sorry for your misrule of his world. And to pray for him. To come and put it right.

Because it's as we do that. In our weakness. In our need. That God displays his glorious rule. Through our praise of his glorious king.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord. How majestic is your name. In all the earth. Let's pray together.

God our Father. We praise you. And thank you.

[28 : 33] That when all humanity turned against you. You were gracious. And faithful to your world. And faithful to the fallen and sinful creatures.

That you had created. And that turned away from you. You. We thank you Lord. That even on that day. You made the promise of one. Who would come and crush the head of the serpent.

And put right. All that had gone wrong. Through our sin. And we thank you dear Lord. That we see him. The Lord Jesus today.

He who was crucified. For our sins. And he who is risen. And seated at your right hand. We see him crowned with glory and honor. For he died to take away our curse.

And he is raised to bring blessing. The blessing of a new creation. The blessing of lives restored.

[29 : 36] The blessing of a new relationship with you. We thank you our Father. For we do not deserve the least of your kindness to us. We do not deserve any part of your new creation.

We are not worthy of your kingdom. And yet. You have looked kindly on us in love. We thank you for your grace.

Your forgiveness. Your mercy. Your love. Your faithfulness Lord. By which we stand this evening. For we are yours.

By grace. And not by works. So help us we pray. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.