

Psalm 8

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- [0 : 00] So, Psalm 8, for the director of music according to Gittith, a psalm of David. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
- You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants you have established stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.
- When I consider your heavens, 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?
- 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, all flocks and herds and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.
- Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Amen. I don't know if it's just because I'm from Northern Ireland and therefore a bit more on the glass-half-empty side of life, but I was reflecting that this morning we thought a lot about hopelessness and fear.
- [1 : 21] I've got a couple more, maybe less than cheery questions for us to chew on tonight. First of all, are you significant? Second of all, do you matter? Third of all, does life have any meaning?
- So, little tiny questions for us to think about on a cozy October evening in Aberdeen. But even if you didn't come to church wrestling with those questions, I'm sure that questions of significance and meaning and whether life matters are questions that we probably all grapple with at some point, and if we don't, we can be fairly certain that the world around us is asking those questions all the time.
- Am I significant? Do I matter? Does any of this mean anything at all? Well, as we've seen this evening, we're looking at Psalmist.
- It's a psalm which begins and ends with the Lord's name, Majestic in all the earth. Verse 1, verse 9, So it is a psalm which begins and ends with God's majesty, and therefore in between those two statements of God's majesty, we see how God has displayed his majesty.
- And so the surprise, the really delightful thing for us this evening, the thing which I hope and pray will send us all out rejoicing and sharing in the psalmist's awe, is that central to how the God of the universe displays his majesty, is how he deals with weak, frail, and finite human beings like you and like me.
- [3 : 06] It might seem counterintuitive, but if we ourselves or if people we know find themselves struggling with questions of significance and meaning, King David would say that the answer to those questions lies in seeing just how small we are compared to a majestic and all-powerful God.
- So the big idea will also be the thing which makes up the two headings under which we'll look at this psalm. The big idea in Psalmist is that God's majesty is displayed in how he is the cosmic creator who is mindful of mankind, and the cosmic creator who gives dominion.

And I realized over lunch this afternoon that because I was on holiday in the week leading up to now, I didn't even think to send through points for my sermons for little headings on your sheets.

If you're the kind of person who likes to have sermon headings that you like to write notes under, heading number one is the cosmic creator who is mindful of mankind. Heading number two is the cosmic creator who gives dominion.

So that's just a little taste of where we're going. So first heading then, God displays his majesty because he is the cosmic creator who is mindful of mankind. And if you look at verses one and two of this psalm, we see that in many ways the entire psalm's message is shown there in those first two verses in miniature.

[4 : 31] We read again, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens through the praise of children and infants. You have established a stronghold against your enemies.

To silence the foe and the avenger. That's the opening gambit here as the psalm kicks off. These two parallel and complementary truths.

God's majestic, all-encompassing, universal rule. And his intimate revelation of himself to his people.

King David addresses God as both the reigning, ruling king over all creation. He is our Lord. He is Adonai. And he's also the close, intimate God who has made himself known, revealed himself to his people.

He is Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. We see that in our English versions by the fact that the first Lord is all caps and the second Lord isn't. That means something.

[5 : 31] That's significant. Those are two different words for God. God, Adonai, Yahweh, the cosmic creator, the intimate covenant-keeping God. We also see, though, in verse 1, the sheer breadth of his power.

His majesty is something which fills the earth. His glory extends beyond the skies. And so, with that in mind, with the opening thing being that that is the God who David is addressing, the shift in verse 2 is almost jarring.

We make this move from the glory of God above the heavens to the mouths of infants and babies. God displays his majesty in being completely, cosmically glorious and yet so wonderfully gracious in how he chooses to work through the lowliest of the lowly.

We see enemies coming up quite a few times in the Psalms. If you read Psalms 1 to 7, you see enemies rearing their heads quite a lot. And generally, when David talks about his enemies, it's those who don't recognize God's majesty.

The proud, the arrogant, the foolish who reject God. So, what's God's response to these enemies? Through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger.

[6 : 59] David is almost certainly writing at a point in his life where his enemies seem anything but inconsequential. They seem very threatening indeed. His life could be snuffed out at any minute from his point of view.

Yet he takes great confidence in how God is able to use what's weak and insignificant in the eyes of the world, little children, to confound even the scariest of enemies.

I think some of you who were here this morning were able to meet Billy, my five-month-old. You'll know that Billy is many things. He's not a conversationalist yet. His favorite word is agoo, and he says it quite a lot. So, unfortunately, I've not yet had any of the truths from infants and babes from his mouth yet.

But I do think of a time when I lived in Newcastle and I worked in a church down there. I ran the toddler Sunday school group. And I got to teach those kids the Bible, which was a great privilege and sometimes a great challenge.

I remember one week, I was just trying to keep them entertained before their parents came back to get them. We were singing Disney songs. I think Frozen had just come out. They were singing all the songs from Frozen. I was trying to get them to sing more of the classics.

[8 : 05] So, I sang to one of these kids that great classic from The Lion King, I just can't wait to be king. And the kid looked at me completely stony-faced and said, you can't be king.

Jesus is king. And if you have kids yourselves or if you've worked with toddlers, you'll know that they sometimes give you moments like that, where they're able to take the most profound truths about who God is and rehearse them to you in such simple, matter-of-fact and convicting and challenging ways.

It's truly staggering that the depths of God's character are impossible for even the most brainy theological buffins to mine the depths of.

And yet also so, so simple that toddlers can just get it like that. That's what David's getting at here as he considers what makes God so majestic.

David realizes that even the most fearsome of earthly enemies are utterly confounded by the truth about who God really is. A truth so simple that a baby could just blurt it out.

[9 : 17] And so I want to see right away that there's a tremendous comfort for us in these verses that when the world around us seems scary, seems stacked against God's people, the truth about who he is doesn't change.

It remains simple. It remains able to be known and understood by even the lowliest of the low. That's really comforting. But what's more is that I think these verses also serve as both a cure for despair and a foil for our pride.

God displays his majesty by working through weakness and seeming insignificance to achieve his purposes.

So let me ask you, do you ever feel weak in the Christian life? When you're faced maybe with trying to reach colleagues at work or family members or friends who are both more intelligent than you are and who also seem fairly hostile to the gospel, do you feel weak?

What about when you've slipped up again with a particular sin and it just feels like you'll never, ever be able to overcome it? Do you feel weak?

[10 : 33] What about when you think of all the people in your church family who are in need, in desperate need of encouragement and fellowship, but you find that you don't have anything to offer them?

You can't even begin to comprehend how you might help them with the finite time you have available. Do you feel weak then? Psalm 8 reminds us that actually feeling weak is quite a good place to start.

If God's majesty is displayed and how he works through weakness, well then surely that extends to even very weak people like me and you. God continues to grow his church wonderfully through the sharing of the gospel by weak people from a weak looking church to a world that looks very strong and very stacked against it.

He continues to grow his kingdom. How he grows needy and broken sinners more like Christ when that feels impossible from a human point of view.

How he uses people who feel frail and inarticulate to speak the truth in love in simple ways to brothers and sisters drawing their hearts and minds back towards him.

[11 : 53] Friends, God is infinite in majesty and yet he confounds the powerful of the world through seemingly very weak vessels. And those are things that we see coming to play again in verses 3 and 4.

David writes, I was sharing with some people over lunch again that I've got two sisters, one older, one younger.

I studied English Lit at university. My older sister is a speech and language therapist. My younger sister trained as a pharmacy technician. So that gives you a bit of a flavor as to what the dynamic is like in my family.

They've got proper jobs in science and I did an English degree and spend my time talking about the Bible. So it's no surprise that I'm the more kind of philosophical and reflective of the three siblings.

And I remember this hit home for me in a really vivid way when I just moved to St. Andrews about six years ago. And I'd been living in Glasgow before that. I hadn't seen a star in about a year.

[12 : 59] But I walked down on the beach one night in St. Andrews, a lovely clear night and the sky was full of stars and I was just blown away. And then my sister, my big sister came to visit me not long after that.

And we went for a walk into town along the beach. She said, oh, it's a nice beach. I said, yeah, it's great, isn't it? Actually, what I like to do is sometimes I come down here at night and I just sit on the beach and I look up at the stars.

And I just think to myself, wow. And my sister, quick as a flash, said, that's a bit hippie-ish, isn't it? So that's the kind of dynamic that we have. But I like to think that even if it's not in quite such a hippie-ish way as me, that most of us have had that kind of experience of looking out on a starry, clear night and just having this truly awe-inspiring realization of how small we are in comparison with the cosmos around us.

That's a realization that as well as being awe-inspiring, for some people can be really devastating. I think of a Calvin and Hobbes comic strip where the main character looks up on a starry night and shouts, I'm significant!

Before adding, cried the dust speck. But we see here that when King David considers the heavens, considers the moon and the stars which God himself set in place, he neither becomes a hippie nor does he become a pessimist or a nihilist.

[14 : 27] Such a sight naturally gives rise to the humble question of verse 4 compared to the wonder of the universe. What is mankind? That God is mindful of us.

I think we should share in David's awestruck and thankful wonder. That wonder of who God is and yet what he's done for us. But I guess the real wonder of these words is implied in the question itself.

God who, yes, did make the sun and the moon and the stars. God who, yes, did set his glory above the heavens. God who, yes, his name is majestic in all the earth, truly does care for mankind.

Completely glorious and majestic in creation and yet so wonderfully gracious and generous in being intimately concerned with frail and finite humanity.

I guess that's something that King David must have been more painfully aware of than most people. He was the least of seven sons from a no-name family in a small tribe based in a backwater town and yet he finds himself as King of Israel.

[15 : 42] David must have had this really acute awareness that the only thing that sets him apart, the only thing that qualifies him for the role of King is God's completely undeserved favor towards him.

He is weak. David is weak. The weakest of a weak family. And yet God who made the universe displays his majesty by using weak old King David to rule his people and to defeat their enemies.

Ultimately, of course, we know that David points forward toward an even greater king. It's in the person and work of Jesus where we see God sending his own son, not in obvious earthly splendor or majesty, but in weakness, taking on frail and finite humanity for himself.

And God displays his majesty most chiefly of all by achieving his purposes, even his ultimate purpose of the redemption of mankind through means which look weak in the face of the world's strength, through a suffering and dying savior on a Roman cross.

That's surely something to rejoice in. That's surely something to be on the front foot with telling people all about. We do live in a world where many people, many of our friends and family, I'm sure, are constantly searching for meaning and significance.

[17 : 20] And more often than not, what the world tells them is that these things are found in what we can do, in achieving greatness in our field of work or study, in excelling in sports or the arts, in leaving behind a legacy of great charitable work that we've done or having a big and loving family.

And those things are all good things. But the constant striving towards them as a means of knowing that we matter can be exhausting and ultimately can leave us feeling hollow and empty.

It's really good news then at Psalm, it helps us to see that true significance comes not from what we do, but from who we are. Created by the God and King of the universe.

And if our trust is in Jesus, known intimately by the covenant God who loves and cares for his people. It's something that we can rejoice in this evening.

And if you don't yet know Jesus, it's something that maybe you need to consider more. If you do find yourself striving and longing for significance and meaning, again, it might seem counterintuitive, but consider the God of the universe who displays his majesty through very weak-looking means.

[18 : 45] Well, the fact that God is a God who displays his majesty in weak vessels is fleshed out even more in the next few verses. I mean, consider them in our second heading.

God is the cosmic creator who gives dominion. David carries on the thought of verses three and four by answering the question. In verse five, 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, all flocks and herds and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, all that swim in the paths of the seas.

So we've established that man is weak, feeble and finite, and therefore undeserving of any consideration from a majestic God. And yet, wonderfully, God doesn't just stop being mindful of and caring for mankind.

As David says, he has actually given humanity a central role in his creation. Now, there are two ways in which these verses are fulfilled. The partial and surface level fulfillment is in mankind's dominion.

[19 : 58] That's the surface level reading. God has given mankind dominion over the earth. Now, that's surely what was going on in David's mind. He's surely thinking in his head of Genesis, where humanity is placed by God at the heart of his creation to rule and to care for it.

That's very much in line with what we've seen so far in the psalm. How does God display his majesty by taking weak and feeble mankind and dealing with them in generous care, in this case, setting them up to have dominion over the whole earth?

But of course, while we know that that's true, we also know that we, as people, don't really have true dominion, do we? Creation is completely frustrated and mankind is completely marred by sin.

And that means that created things don't always readily submit to mankind's dominion. I'm reading a book at the minute. I saw it in a charity shop once. As a preacher, you can't see a book with the title *The Shepherd's Life* and not buy it right away.

It's about a fell shepherd in the Lake District. And he describes the yearly task of bringing the sheep down from the fells for shearing. And it's a huge, huge operation. It takes a whole day of his work.

[21 : 19] It takes a carefully orchestrated move of multiple farmers on quad bikes and some very well-trained dogs to pull off even a simple transfer of sheep from one field to the next.

And that's because sin in the world has disrupted the created order, which means that mankind's dominion over the beasts of the earth isn't a given.

Mankind's dominion over the world is not a given thing anymore. Sin has also marred mankind at heart so that we ourselves don't choose to rule with the diligence and care that we ought to, either in how we care for the world around us or indeed how we use any power or dominion which God has given us to protect and to build up and care for his people.

Haven't we seen time and time again in the history of our nation, sadly even within the Christian church, people who use power given by God rather than to build up and to care, to abuse and to be greedy and to hold on to for themselves.

So there's a partial fulfillment of these verses in mankind, but the true fulfillment is found in Christ's dominion. A more literal translation of verses four and five would be what is man that you're mindful of him yet you have made him a little lower, the son of man that you care for him.

[22 : 49] And you'll see in the footnotes in our Bibles that all the pronouns following could also be him or he. And so maybe it's easier for us on this side of Christ's life, death and resurrection that when we read the words son of man, our minds are instantly drawn towards Christ.

And if we read verses five to eight in that light, they make a lot of sense. How has God displayed his majesty? Well, by giving Christ dominion over all things.

In that passage from Hebrews we had read out for us earlier, the writer to Hebrews really helpfully draws the line from this psalm to the Lord Jesus. He is the one who for a short time became a little lower than the heavenly beings by taking on frail humanity.

And he has therefore truly been crowned with glory and honor because he tasted death on behalf of sinful mankind. And so Jesus, the Lord Jesus is the only one currently enjoying unspoiled dominion over everything.

And he's the one whom God has highly exalted and who one day will have a perfectly, fully realized rule over all when every knee bows before him and every tongue confesses that he is Lord.

[24 : 10] in his mercy, God has displayed his majesty by putting all things under Christ's rule, including sin and death, the things which rob mankind of worth and dignity and significance.

So the wonder of this psalm is that God cares so much for mankind that he's made a way for us to regain a share in the dominion that we have lost and abused.

If we are in Christ, that's what we have, this invitation to share in his risen rule and reign, to share in his dominion forever. And so as we think about how to apply these verses again, I suppose we could read Psalm 8 and feel pretty low about our state.

It is a psalm which in many ways does reveal our weakness and our frailty compared to God's majesty. As I said at the start, I think realizing those things is actually the key to understanding the true meaning and significance of mankind.

As we've seen already, we can rejoice in knowing God's care for us. How he displays his majesty by achieving his purposes even through weakness.

[25 : 29] And here again, we see the great truth that although we fall so, so far short of what we were created to be, Christ doesn't and never, ever will.

We don't have dominion. The world is fallen and so are we. Christ, however, has been given perfect dominion over all things.

And that should give us real, real confidence that as we serve God in the here and now, as the writer to the Hebrews points out, the all things of verse 6 doesn't just extend to the natural world, the beasts of the earth and the sea and all those things.

No, it extends to all things. All things have been put under Christ's feet. So even as we read these words in a world where it doesn't look like Christ is ruling over all, we can have great confidence that he is.

And that's true even when God's enemies seem to be flourishing. And it's true even in the midst of a time when everything suddenly looks a bit uncertain, whether because of war in Europe or cost of living crises or political shenanigans.

[26 : 49] There's a big question brewing right at the minute, isn't there, down in Westminster about who's in charge, who should be in charge. It's never a question that troubles the Bible. Christ has dominion.

Christ rules. Sin, death, and Satan have been defeated and squashed under his feet. And so as we see the ongoing presence of sin in our lives and in the world, and in the world as it scoffs at God and his people, we can take great heart in knowing that Christ rules and reigns.

And we can also rejoice in the final fulfillment of these verses. Samet draws our hearts to that glorious truth that Christ will come again and his rule will be perfectly realized.

And on that day, if we trust in him, we will be invited to share in his rule and reign because of what he has done for us. And that's the thought with which we close.

Samet has taken us on a bit of a journey from the heights of the heavens above to the earthbound realities of humanity. But as we said up top, it begins and ends with God's majesty displayed in using what looks weak in the world to achieve his purposes.

[28 : 11] He did it in the life of David. He did it supremely in the sending of the Lord Jesus. He does it for us today. And he draws our hearts and minds to knowing that he has under the feet of his most beloved son set all things.

And so because of what he's done, there will come a day when all will stand before him and with the psalmists all will sing, Lord, our Lord, majestic is your name in all the earth.

With that in mind, let me lead us as we pray. Father, we thank you for how majestic your name is. We thank you for how you've displayed your majesty in the most surprising of ways by intimately caring for free and finite human beings, supremely by allowing your most beloved son to take the form of a feeble and finite human, to die the death that we deserve.

That you've risen him from the dead and exalted him and given him the name that is above every name. And so we pray that you would lift our hearts and our minds towards him, that you would help us to have great confidence that Christ does indeed reign and that as we consider what you've done for us in him, you would cause us to cry out, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

And we pray that you would be using us to draw many more, to know your majesty, to know and to love the Lord Jesus. In whose name we pray. Amen.