

Sermon 11, Officer in Yahweh's Kingdom, Psalm 8

Proposition: The glory of God has, in Christ, become the glory of man as well.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this evening to a universally beloved psalm. Psalm 8 is one of the best; according to the commentators, it is the only sustained hymn of praise formulated entirely in the second person in the entire OT. It praises God for the excellence of His name, and then describes the glory of man as the servant of God and ruler over all the works of God's hands. As we will see, this exalted posture of man is true by creation, but finds its fullest fulfillment in the mediatorial reign of the man Christ Jesus over all the works of God's hands, all without exception. This psalm, then, is protological and eschatological. That is, in English, it refers to how things were at the first, at creation, and how things will be at the end, at the consummation. It is saturated with glory, and in an age where man has been desecrated, it is a wholesome corrective. We live in an era where nothing is sacred. The word "sacred" was

deleted from the Declaration of Independence by the Enlightener Benjamin Franklin. But the eighth Psalm highlights just how glorious, just how noble, just how sacred man is — man in right relationship to God and thus to the earth and its creature and all the works of God's hands. Let me put the psalm's main point like this: The glory of God has, in the Son of Man, become the glory of man as well.

I. Context

We should begin this afternoon by looking at the context in which this psalm is set. This psalm is just after the halfway point through the first fourteen psalms, and the placement of these psalms is certainly significant.

A. Conflict Between the Righteous and the Wicked, Pss. 1-7

As we have seen across our last seven psalms sermons, the first poems in the psalter focus on the conflict between the righteous and the wicked. There is much rich meat here, both in the way that Psalm 1 contrasts the two groups with reference to the law of the Lord and that Ps 2 contrasts them with reference to their attitude to the Anointed of the Lord. Then Ps 3 particularizes that conflict into the conflict between David and Absalom, while Ps 4 speaks of how to evangelize the sons of men when they are attacking you. Ps 5 is a prayer against the wicked, while Ps 6 considers what to do when you, ostensibly the righteous, have been wrathfully rebuked by the Almighty. Then Psalm 7 speaks of trusting in God despite the slanderous assaults of the wicked. Now, in Psalm 8, the enemies almost disappear. They are only referenced one time and are certainly not the main point of the Psalm.

B. Men Universally Corrupt, Pss. 9-14

But let us hasten on to the psalms that follow. Since we have not looked at them in detail, I won't comment as much on each one. I will just quote the following statements.

- In pride the wicked hotly pursue the afflicted; (Psa 10:2 NAS)
- For, behold, the wicked bend the bow, They make ready their arrow upon the string, To shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. (Psa 11:2 NAS)
- The wicked strut about on every side, When vileness is exalted among the sons of men. (Psa 12:8 NAS)
- The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. . . They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one. (Psa 14:1, 3 NAS)

This is where the psalter is going. As the conflict between the righteous and wicked sharpens, the book reveals more and more just how prevalent the wicked are. You can't throw a dead cat without hitting one of the wicked. You can't toss an apple core out the window without bringing them down around your ears!

C. Men Crowned with Glory and Honor, Ps. 8

Yet into this sequence intrudes Ps 8 with its emphasis on the glory of man. Man is great, though he is vile. Yet the villainy of the sons of man is no match for the glory of God.

In our day, we continue to oscillate back and forth between “man is great” and “man is vile,” and the pendulum is firmly in the “vile” position right now. There is none who does good, no, not one! That could be the anthem of our civilization. But Ps 8 refuses to admit that such a description is the last and only word on the subject. The king insists on also seeing and celebrating the greatness, the glory, the majesty with which God has crowned His creature and vice-regent, Man. And that is precisely what the psalm before us will describe. Yes, no one seeks after God, but God seeks after us because He created us as officers in His kingdom, men who rule in perfect subordination to Him but in perfect dominion over everything else that He has made.

II. The Majestic Name of Yahweh, Our Adonai, v. 1a

As with all of the psalms, this one sets the issue it discusses firmly in a religious context where the most important reality is the name and character of God Almighty. It is emphatically not an abstract or philosophic meditation on the dignity of man. It is a thoroughly religious poem that celebrates the connection between God and man.

It announces that theme with its opening statement addressed to Yahweh, our Adonai. That can be confusing to an English reader, because our translators typically render both words with the word “Lord.” Adonai does in fact mean “Lord,” one worthy to rule. But Yahweh is a personal name meaning “I am who I am.” Yahweh’s name is majestic. It is full of majesty, that attribute so perfectly fitting for a king. Majesty means being stately, impressive, glorious, and dignified in a really good way. The name of Yahweh is utterly majestic, not just in the halls of heaven, but in all of earth too. His name refers to His personal name, and more broadly to anything whereby He makes Himself known. The psalmist will reference the heavens as the works of God’s fingers in this regard, and he will also reference the Almighty’s greatest masterpiece: Man. Yahweh’s name, His reputation, His character, is utterly majestic and glorious throughout the whole earth.

This is the theme of the psalm: the majesty and glory of God’s character, particularly as seen in children, the heavens, and mankind as a whole when properly related to God.

III. The Glory of God, vv. 1b-2

The king then speaks of the glory of God. He has set His glory above the heavens. What does this sentence mean? That the glory of God is more glorious than the glory of the night sky, more glorious than the sun shining in its strength.

A. Higher than the Heavens, v. 1b

The heavens are the most glorious thing about the earth. We love our home planet, but we know that it is set against the most magnificent of black backdrops, pricked with the light of countless billions of galaxies blazing in their strength, “forever singing as they shine, ‘The hand that made us is divine!’” Montana is Big Sky Country, and the Big Sky up there is glorious and majestic beyond any creation of man. The Las Vegas Sphere creates a sick feeling that there’s only so much hyperreality a man can take. But the skies above Gillette induce a feeling of awe and worship that no human product can begin to match.

God's glory is higher than what you see in the sky. It is more glorious, more awe-inspiring, than anything that can be shown in the visible heavens. Men have worshiped the sun for millenia, for there is nothing greater than the sun anywhere around us. Nothing visibly greater, I should say. God is near us, and His glory surpasses all the glory of all the suns that He created.

Before we can postulate that man is great, we must see and acknowledge that God is great. The skies are one witness proclaiming this truth, for they are amazing and He is more glorious than they.

B. Proclaimed by Babies, v. 2a

Another witness to the greatness of God is babies and infants. How do they proclaim the greatness of God? We can say, just by existing — just by being so tiny and perfect, so fully alive and human and so utterly incommensurate with what their parents did to bring them forth. We can also say, by praising God and especially by praising Jesus Christ as they did at the triumphal entry. We can also add that though man does not regard the testimony of little children, God does. In fact, He considers that the words of babies are just as much part of His glory as the grandeur of galaxies. He moves straight from the heavens to the babies. The heavens show His glory, but the babies establish His strength. We can press further: the baby in the manger, the Son of God in human flesh, established the Father's strength and thereby conquered the enemy and avenger.

Do not be afraid to have children. If they are the strength of God Almighty, can they be a genuine source of weakness to you? I promise you that few things are better than hearing a child give thanks to God for her family and His good gifts. Especially do children love smaller children, their baby siblings and friends. The glory of God is seen here, the strength of God, who is strong enough to accept the love and worship of the weak and to delicately care for them in their weakness.

C. Conquering Enemies, v. 2b

The third way in which God displays His glory is by conquering His enemies, which He does through children and especially through the child, Jesus. He makes the enemies stop. That psalm says this and then promptly drops the topic. The enemies that strut on every side in the other psalms of these first fourteen vanish from the scene, for this psalm is not about them. God can destroy them in a moment, using nothing more powerful (in earthly terms) than a gaggle of children. They make the enemy and the avenger cease.

IV. The Glory of Heaven, v. 3

Well, with those preliminary observations on God's glory, and having disposed of His enemies, the king moves on to consider the heavens. The night sky, full of stars and presided over by the lovely Moon, is the work not just of God's hands — a metaphor used so often that we don't even notice it — but of His fingers — a metaphor used only four times in Scripture. The Egyptian magicians spoke of the finger of God; God carved the Ten Commandments with His finger; He made the moon and stars with His fingers; and Jesus cast out demons by the finger of God. The

same fingers that wrote the commandments and drove out the demons are at work on the night sky.

And it is glorious. I am not the kind of wordsmith who can describe to you an evening of stargazing. But I trust you all know the awe and wonder, the beauty and rich darkness of the night. One night, driving back from Sheridan with Seth Evans, I was so overwhelmed by the beauty of the stars that we got off I-90 onto a little side road, parked the car, and lay down in the middle of the street to stare at the stars and get a good look at the beauty of the heavens.

But the beauty of heaven, the glory of victorious babies — these things are almost incidental to the point of the psalm. The psalmist wishes to magnify the glory of God so that he can then magnify the glory of man. That glory, he says, is only a little lower than God's!

V. The Glory of Man, vv. 4-8

Yes, you heard me. Not at all translations say “God” here, but the word is “Elohim,” used throughout the Bible to refer both to the true God and to false gods. Even the plural can occasionally refer to false gods or, more generally, “heavenly beings” as the ESV has it. But I do think that the reference to the true God is completely appropriate here. Isn't it obvious from the whole of the psalm that this is the psalmist's main point? God is glorious, and the glory He has communicated to man by creation and through the Incarnation of His Son is only a little less than His own surpassing glory.

A. Man's Glory in Relationship to God, vv. 4-5

What is that glory? The psalmist lists five points of man's glory in relationship to God. Again, *in relationship*. None of these things are said of man absolutely, as such, but rather relatively — man as creature, man as God's. That's why they all refer right back to God.

1. God Remembers Man

The first point of greatness is that God remembers us. He remembers us! To ourselves, we are forgettable. Almost no one in this room can name all 8 of their great-grandparents, and certainly not all 16 of their double-great-grandparents. We forget, but God remembers. God remembered Noah; God remembers you!

2. God Visits Man

Whatever we may lack compared to the moon and stars, we are on God's mind. I may not be Alpha Centauri, but God Almighty comes to visit me!

Now, this is a major claim. “What is man?” Man is a creature that gets personal care and attention from the Almighty. God remembers us. God visits us. Surely it is not angels that He visits! He does not take hold of angels. But He does drop by and see us.

So whatever man is, he is certainly someone very important to God.

3. God Makes Man

You have made him! That in itself is amazing. God cares for us enough to create us. Notice how much attention is given to the creation of man in Gen. 1-2 versus any other sector of creation.

4. God Makes Man a Little Lower than Himself

Man is also a little lower than the angels, David says in some translations. In noting how much special attention we get from God, he also notes that in the order of being we are lower beings

than the angels. Traditionally, this has been regarded as a way of stating the truth that we are mixed beings, a living soul with a body of dust, while the angels are unmixed beings, pure spirits. Insofar as spirit is “higher” or closer to God’s way of being than matter is, angels are a little higher than us. We are like them, for we too are spiritual beings. But we are not only spiritual, as they are. We walk in flesh, dependent on earth, air, and water for our spiritual part’s continued existence as we know it.

But as I said, we should go beyond the “lower than angels,” for the psalm’s point is actually that, through the death and resurrection of the Son of Man, we are higher than angels. All things are under our feet — including angels. That’s because all things are under the feet of the man Christ Jesus. We are and will continue to be made of dust, but we will rule the purest spirits that stand before the Almighty’s throne.

5. God Crowns Man with Glory and Majesty

Man has been crowned with glory and honor. Now, to state the obvious, a crown is something a king wears. Ps. 110 mentions Christ as priest; Ps. 8 implies that the son of man is a king. His crown is not physically made of gold and gems. It is a metaphorical crown, a crown consisting of glory and honor. Man is visited by God. That implies that God honors us. But man is also crowned with glory and honor by God. This is a direct statement that God gives us royal honor, the honor of kings (to use the name of the world’s most popular video game), and divine glory — the weightiness that characterizes Him as God. The God of glory thunders. The God of glory says that He will not share His glory with another. And yet a man has been given God’s own glory.

What is man? The maddest maniac, the most high-minded humanist, would hardly dare to say that man is a king resplendent with the glory of the uncreated Almighty. Protagoras of old declared that man is the measure of all things. He defined man as the canon, the rule and measure of all that exists. David rejects that skeptical vision, defining man relationally in terms of our connection to God. God remembers us, visits us, crowns us, gives us honor, and shares His own uncreated glory with us.

This is the vision that built the cathedrals and wrote the shattering climaxes of Western sacred music. But there is more.

B. Man’s Glory in Relationship to Creation, vv. 6-8

Man is also glorious in relation to creation. We are defined by our connection to God, on the one side — and by our connection to God’s creation, on the other. We stand between God and His works; we mediate His kingly rule.

1. Man Has Dominion Over God’s Works.

That’s what the king says here. Man has dominion. Oh, there is much to say on this topic. We see an absolute panic around us every day thanks to a misunderstanding of what dominion means. No one questions that man has dominion over the earth. We know that we cannot live like animals, nor they like us. We are a different kind of being. We may be physically like them, but psychically we are not like them. We rule this planet, and have the capacity to rule this universe. Some commentators speak of the present era as “The Anthropocene,” as though our dominion

has matured to its climactic point. Personally, I think that's ridiculous. The reason for climate panic and all the rest of it is that we have kept the knowledge of dominion while omitting to think about who we are ruling for. In the minds of most powerful people, we the human race don't have a boss; there is no one with more power than us, no one to keep the whole system on the rails. And so we determine that the climate is changing, that we have wrecked it, and all kinds of panic-mongers come out of the woodwork to tell us that the planet is dying and that we are past the point of no return and all the post-apocalyptic films are going to come true.

That's ridiculous, because though all creation is under our feet, God is not. He is in charge, and He is the one who will decide when the climate is too toasty. He is the one who has set bounds for the sea and the sun and who guarantees that "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease" (Gen 8:22 NAS).

So don't buy the climate hysteria. Are we mismanaging the planet? Sure. But it's mainly through the hubris of thinking that we are the top dogs, the ultimate boss. It's not true. We have dominion over all creation, but God has dominion over us and through us, and especially through Christ our champion.

2. Man Has All Things Under His Feet

Man has all things under his feet. We don't see that dominion perfected.

a) Animals

Yes, many of you have pets and livestock. You can purchase meat cheaply at the grocery store because we have gotten pretty good at taking dominion over animals.

b) Angels, Heb. 2:8-9

Hebrews 2 adds that when it says "All things," it also means angels. Angels serve us, not vice-versa. The demons hate that, and they are constantly trying to get us to worship them. But all things are under the feet of Adam's Son — even Beelzebub and his crew.

What should we take away? Take dominion! Don't fear those whose distorted understanding of the human person and of godly dominion leads them to walk in fear. Don't buy their terrors. And on the other side, do not allow evil to flourish anywhere where you have dominion. Ultimately this dominion is a project for the whole human race under the leadership of the Son of Man. That means you need to follow His leadership and take dominion now.

VI. The Majestic Name of Yahweh, Who Does All These Things, v. 9

You also need to love and adore the majestic name of Yahweh our Lord. He does all these things. He rules the whole earth, and drafts us as officers in His kingdom to bring the whole thing into subjection to Him.

Your king is doing what He was made to do. He is ruling. Submit to Him, and rule with Him, under His blessing, in His place. Amen.