

Westgate Church

*Walking with God in the Meantime:
The Christian Life through the Lens of the Psalms*

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The Glory of God and the Calling of Man

Psalm 8

A couple of weeks ago I got to see Cape Cod for the first time. We were there on our elders retreat, and standing on the beach at Craigsville, looking out over this vast ocean, you're just impressed with how huge the world is and how small you are. I'm no bigger than the grain of sand stuck between my toes. That sense of smallness is perhaps just a glimpse of what David is getting at in vv. 3-4 of our psalm: "When I consider your 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, the son of man that you care for him?"

There's something powerful and stirring about considering ourselves in light of God's creation. Far greater than the ocean is the picture David uses here—the entire universe. They say you've never seen the stars until you've seen them from the Sandhills of northern Nebraska where my mom grew up, where there's not a street light for 50 miles. You look up and the whole universe seems to open up to you. How insignificant, weak, and small we are compared to the glory of the heavens above.

And yet there's also something rather unsettling about realizing our insignificance. "Why should God care about me? Compared to all this, I'm nobody—I haven't done anything great. And that unsettling feeling grows when we consider the fact that we live in fallen world—in what we've been calling "the meantime"—the time between God's promise to deliver us and establish his full reign, and the realization of that promise. This fallen world exploits our weakness. Our frailty. The busyness of this world keeps us spinning our tires in place, wondering if there's any redeeming purpose to my frantic daily life of traffic, work, school, traffic, kids, spouse, more work, sleep, get up and do it again? The sin that pervades this fallen world takes advantage of our vulnerability, tempting us where we're most prone to wander. The religious cultures we're surrounded with indict us daily—you're not good enough, you haven't given enough, you're not doing enough, God's not pleased with you. And why should he be? I'm so small, I can't accomplish anything for him. I'm too young. Too old. I've sinned too much. I'm too out of touch with the world. Why keep trying? Why care? He's not going to miss me. I'm insignificant. And so there can be a discouragement and disenchantment that comes with realizing how weak and vulnerable we really are.

And for some, there's even something frustrating about our insignificance. Why should God even care? Hasn't he got better things to do? Listen to how Job asks a similar question in Job chapter 7, vv. 17-20:

What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention,¹⁸ that you examine him every morning and test him every moment?¹⁹ Will you never look away from

me, or let me alone even for an instant?²⁰ If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? . . .

In other words, if I'm really that insignificant, why can't you just leave me alone? As if God is some cosmic bully picking on the little guy.

But look again at how the psalmist responds to realizing his insignificance over against the glory of God. He doesn't respond in despair, or frustration, or disenchantment; he responds in praise. "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Why? Why should realizing how little we are move us to praise? I think that this psalm gives us two reasons: First, because realizing our insignificance allows us to see how magnificent and majestic God truly is—how worthy of glory and praise. And second, because God has chosen to display his glory through insignificant human beings. Though this world is fallen, his purpose for creating humanity still stands, and is in fact being accomplished not only despite our weakness, but through it—a privilege made possible through Jesus Christ.

Humility Fuels Praise

So first, humility fuels praise. When we see how small we are, we can finally see how big God is. And so humility fuels praise.

This is a psalm of praise. It's the first psalm of praise in the book. And praise in the psalms is describing what God is like and declaring what God has done. It's almost always vocal—spoken, sung, shouted. It's almost always public—telling others, declaring in the presence of the congregation. And its motivated by the desire is to make much of God. To celebrate him. To bring him glory. That's a phrase that Christians tend to use a lot—everything we do should *bring glory* to God. But what does that mean?

Think of God's glory as his worthy reputation. So to bring God glory is to make much of him—to magnify him, lift him up, make him big. Not artificially, like magnifying something small with a microscope. But more like a telescope—to take something that really is massive and enormous and to show others more clearly what it is like. So, to bring glory to God is to live and speak in such a way as to put his worthiness and greatness on display. And it's that desire that motivates our praise.

So, take a look at the first verse—see how it does this: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" And notice how v. 9 is identical—he begins and ends with a declaration of praise. The psalmist, David, is praising God, making much of him by describing what he is like—his name is majestic in all the earth. And again, his name is a way of talking about his reputation. Someone tries to "make a name for themselves"—they're trying to build their reputation. Well God has a name, too. And unlike any other name, his name is worthy of being made much of throughout his entire creation. His name, Yahweh, which is marked by the word "LORD" in all caps in v. 1. So the phrase is more like, "O Yahweh, our Lord; O Yahweh, our Sovereign! How majestic is your name in all the earth." The same name he revealed to Moses in Exodus 34, saying: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty . . ." (Exod. 34:6-7).

God's name is worthy of praise. The problem is that we would much rather make much of ourselves. To fill the earth with our glory, as though we were king. But consider the difference. As Jesus said in Matthew 6, you can't add a single hour to your lifespan (6:27). On the other hand, Yahweh is the God who tells us in Isaiah 40 to "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing" (Isa. 40:26). Realizing how small we are, that this world does not revolve around us, that we are not the center of the universe, allows us to see the fact that God *is* the center, and so to make much of him in praise.

There's a second reason that realizing our insignificance moves us to praise God, and this one takes up the bulk of the psalm: the fact that it is precisely through our frail humanity that God has chosen to display his glory in creation.

Divine Glory through Human Frailty

David captures this in two somewhat parallel pictures, both of which start with a description of God's glory relative to the heavens. The second half of v. 1: "You've set your glory above the heavens"; and v. 3: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers" and so on. But then both pictures surprise us by explaining how God's glory and power are actually displayed preeminently through frail humanity.

The first picture, as one author puts it, is of God using the prayers of the weak to destroy his enemies.¹ The recent revision of the NIV captures the sense here well: "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." So the picture is small, weak, seemingly insignificant and powerless children, and it's their prayers God answers in defeating his foes.

We are insignificant in comparison to God and his glory, but we are not insignificant when it comes to him accomplishing his purposes. None of us are. And children, I hope you hear what he's saying here. There is a mighty temptation to think that you are too young to be used by God, so you'll worry about that when you get older. In this psalm, God uses the prayers of children to break the back of his enemies. That's you! That's younger than you—infants and babes—that's your little brother down in the nursery. God wants to use all his people. He makes his glory known through what seems small, to show that it comes from God and not us (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7).

The second picture does something similar. We looked at vv. 3-4 earlier, how David marvels at the fact that God is actually mindful of us and cares for us, despite our insignificance. But then he takes us back to Genesis 1, where God chose not the stars to be the chief display of his glory, not the mountains, not the animals, but humans. Frail, weak, small humans. Again, seemingly insignificant, yet instrumental to God's plan.

¹ B. K. Waltke and J. M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 265.

Genesis 1:26-28 gives us God's design for humanity from the beginning, where humans, unlike any other part of creation, were made not according to their kind, but in the image of God. Now people have debated for centuries what precisely that means—to be made in God's image. But I think we can summarize it in two ways. First, it's relationship. In Genesis 5 Adam has a son *in his likeness, after his image*. It's a picture of relationship—father-child filial relationship. Second, it's representation. Royal representation, to be exact. The king in heaven has taken humanity, made just below those who belong to the heavenly realm (God and angels), and *crowned him* with glory and honor, and given him dominion over all creation.

You can hear Genesis 1 echoing in the background of Psalm 8 to remind us that to be human is to be in God's image—to relate to him as Father, and to rule the creation on his behalf, reflecting his character, and so fill the earth with his glory. So we might say the calling of humanity is to bring glory to God. This is God's vision from the beginning of time, from before the fall. To bring every corner of the earth under God's rule and blessing, to fill every sphere of life with his glory and reputation. To fill every cubicle, every conversation, every class project, every music lesson, every soccer game, every home with the worthy reputation of God. To be a faithful presence for God in this world, displaying his glory, and showing the world what God is like. And that vision still stands!

Part of the beauty of Psalm 8 is that in a book that is so honest about the brokenness and trouble of this world, here we have a voice directing our hearts upward in praise to God and backward to his vision of creation, reminding us that his plan is still in tact, that this fallen world with all its temptations and frustrations has not derailed God's vision for us, and that he will in fact be faithful to complete it. There will come a day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). What Psalm 8 lays before us is both a reality and a hope. And so we praise God because he is still at work, and at the same time we realize that we still have work to do. Even in the meantime, we have a purpose.

And yet, if we're honest, we wearied at the prospect. Our insignificance catches up to us. We see the world and it's not at all in subjection to God's rule through humanity. God's glory is not on everybody's lips—it's barely on mine. I spend most of my days and more of my thoughts acting like a rebel from Psalm 2 than a royal representative from Psalm 8. God's plan to fill the earth with his glory through frail humanity seems to be compromised by our weakness and sin. The image is distorted. The rule is corrupted. The relationship is broken.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament picks up on the tension that we feel when we look at our calling in Psalm 8 and the brokenness and sin that persists in this fallen world. In Hebrews chapter 2, the author quotes Psalm 8:3-4 and the royal representation of humanity according to God's design, and then explains in v. 8: "In putting everything under him [humanity], God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him [humanity]." Though God has given humans this authority on his behalf, the world is still fallen in sin, and God's vision seems stalled. We can't accomplish what we were made to do.

But the author of Hebrews continues in v. 9: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of

God he might taste death for everyone.” Where Adam has failed, and all humanity in him, Jesus has succeeded. Psalm 8 is both a hope and a reality because there was and is a faithful human: the eternal Son of God took on flesh and became a new and true Adam, who did what the rest of humanity couldn’t do in bringing uncompromised glory to God. And he did it through his weakness. It was through his violent murder, his crucifixion, that he conquered the evil powers of this world and rescued our souls from hell. He was crowned with glory because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone, and we might be reclaimed for God’s purposes.

We have a purpose. God’s vision for humanity still stands. And in Christ, it’s now possible for us to actually participate in it. Therefore we praise God. We praise him for the gospel—that he is at work in the midst of our weakness. He has rescued us from sin and is transforming us back into his glorious image that he might use us to fill this world with his glory and bring all creation under his rightful rule and blessing.

So as we look ahead and move forward as Westgate Church, I want to ask us, do we really believe this? Do we really believe that God can use us to magnify his name and fill Metro West and New England with his worthy reputation? Are we small enough in our own eyes that God is big enough to accomplish his purposes in and through us? Are we okay with being small, weak, insignificant and thus able to die to ourselves and lay down our lives to love and serve our neighbors? Do we see ourselves as redeemed, royal representatives called to fill our different spheres with God’s worthy reputation, even through our weakness? Do we believe Jesus and his cross are really sufficient to accomplish God’s vision in the strength of the Holy Spirit?

As we come to the Lord’s table, let us consider anew what it means to be human, and how through the gospel God makes us fully. He restores our Father-child relationship with God, and revives our mission as his royal representatives. All through the grace of God available to us in the gospel—the message that God became human, a new Adam, to rescue humanity. That Christ’s human flesh was broken (represented by the bread), and his human blood poured out (represented by the cup) that through faith we might become what we were created to be. This meal is a visible picture of the gospel. It’s a celebration of God’s grace. And it invites us to examine our lives—how they line up with the gospel, and to repent where necessary, taking hold once again of God’s sufficient grace.

And this table is a family meal, for the children of God in Christ. So if you have placed your faith in Christ and your hope is fully in him, I invite you to join in this celebration with us. If you are not a Christian, or you’re not sure, then I encourage you to let the elements pass this morning, and instead of receiving the sign, I urge you to receive him to whom the sign points—Jesus Christ.

And so as the ushers come forward, let us praise God together in prayer, though we are little, making much of him for who he is and what he’s done.