

Potomac Hills Community Church, PCA

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PSALM 8: THE GLORY OF GOD IN MAN

INTRODUCTION: *The Irony of Being Human*¹

In the beginning of his excellent book, *Designed for Dignity*, Richard Pratt relates the following story ...

“A few years ago I came across a newspaper article entitled “The Irony of Being Human.” The column reported two events that have haunted me to this day.

In the first story, a young woman was sitting alone in her hotel room. She had left her husband and two children to live with another man, but that evening her new partner had deserted her. Everything was lost – her husband, her children, and now her lover. In utter despair, she shoved the barrel of a .38 caliber pistol into her mouth and pulled the trigger. The police found a desperate note left on the nightstand. “Don’t cry for me,” the wrinkled paper said. “I’m not even human anymore.”

Another event occurred that same evening in the same hotel. Just a few floors below, advocates of the New Age Movement gathered in the convention center. After several rousing talks, a well-known celebrity led the crowd in a unison chant, “I am God! ... I am God! ... I am God!”

“The irony of being human,” the article concluded, “is that people in the same time and place can have such contradictory views of themselves.”

The columnist was right. These two events dramatically illustrate one of the greatest ironies of human existence.

We don’t know what to think of ourselves.

Some of us feel so worthless that we can hardly stand to live another minute.

Others are so full of self-importance that they lift hands in praise of their own divinity.

One says, “I am nothing.”

Another say, “I am God.”

Which is true? What does it mean to be human?

We find it hard to keep a balanced self-image.

Can we have confidence in our value without falling into arrogance?

¹ Introduction is adapted from *Designed for Dignity* by Richard Pratt, pages 1-3. Other excellent works on the Doctrine of Man are *Created in God’s Image* by Anthony Hoekema, *Beyond Identity* by Dick Keyes, *Being Human* by Randal Macauley and Jerram Barrs, and *The Christian View of Man* by J. Gresham Machen. Derek Kidner quotes comes from his book, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, Psalms 1-72*, pages 65-66.

Can we be humble without losing all sense of dignity?

The only way to find a balanced self-image is to turn to the revelation of the One who made us. We must look at ourselves in the mirror of Scripture.

In the opening chapter of the Bible, God put a label on the human race. If we look carefully at this label, we can learn a lot about ourselves. Moses recorded God's first words about humanity in this way, **Genesis 1:26**, "*Then God said, "Let us make man **in our image**, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

In the very beginning, our Creator gave us a remarkable label. He called us "**the image of God.**" This label, "**the image of God,**" highlights both sides of human existence: our humility and our dignity.

We are humble "**images of God,**" but we are also dignified "**images of God.**" And, for the most part, that is the simple answer to the profound question asked in Psalm 8, our text for this morning.

And that question is, "**What is man?**"

Turn with me to Psalm 8 ...

Psalm 8:1-9, To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

"O LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set Your glory above the heavens.

[2] Out of the mouth of babes and infants,

*You have established strength because of Your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.*

*[3] When I look at Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which You have set in place,*

*[4] **what is man** that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

*[5] Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.*

*[6] You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,*

*[7] all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,*

*[8] the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

[9] O LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"

Derek Kidner, in his excellent two-volume study of the Psalms, says, "This

Psalm is an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who He is and what He has done, and relating us and our world to Him, all with a masterly economy of words, and in a spirit of mingled joy and awe.”

He rightly adds, “the range of thought takes us not only ‘*above the heavens*’ and back to the beginning of creation but, as the New Testament points out, on to the very end.

The Psalm’s theme is the Glory and greatness of God and the place of man within God’s creation. The Psalm starts off by letting us know ...

v. 1-2: THE GLORY OF GOD CAN BE SEEN²

The most striking feature of Psalm 8 – and its dominant theme, if we just counted verses – is its description of man and his place in the created order. But the Psalm does not begin by talking about man. It begins with a celebration of the surpassing majesty of God, and this places men and women under the sovereignty and authority of God. It’s a way of saying that we will never understand human beings unless we see them as God’s creatures and recognize that they have special responsibilities to their Creator.

One responsibility we have is to praise God. And that’s how David starts. In fact, he starts praising God in a grand fashion, beginning the Psalm with the great name of God: ***Yahweh***. And then he adds *Adonai*, which is the Hebrew word for Lord. It’s usually translated “*O LORD, our Lord,*” with the first LORD written with small caps, signifying it’s the English translation of ***Yahweh***.

When you see LORD spelled with small caps, it’s the translation of God’s name, ***Yahweh***. When you see Lord spelled with regular type, it’s the translation of the Hebrew word Lord, which is *Adonai*.

In later Jewish history, the Jewish people considered the name of God so sacred that they wouldn’t pronounce it. So when they came to it in the Old Testament, they would say *Adonai* instead. In fact, when the Masoretes came to provide vowels for the Hebrew written language, using a series of dots and dashes under the consonants, they used the vowels for *Adonai*. So when people were reading along, they would see the vowels for *Adonai* and be reminded to say *Adonai* instead of ***Yahweh***. However, they neglected to tell the first English translators of the Old Testament about this, so they translated it the way they saw it and came up with the word Jehovah ... which is really a nonsense word, being composed of the consonants for ***Yahweh*** and the vowels for *Adonai*.

But there is none of that belabored piety for David. ***Yahweh*** is his God. So

² The exposition of the text is adapted from [Psalms: Volume 1: An Expository Commentary](#) by James Montgomery Boice, pages 66-73; and [Favorite Psalms](#), by John R. W. Stott, pages 6-9.

he begins that name, maintaining that *Yahweh* is so majestic and His glory is so great that it is “*above the heavens.*”

As David’s son, Solomon, would say when he dedicated the first temple in **1 Kings 8:27**, “*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!*”

The reason that creation, as wonderful as it is, cannot fully explain, contain, or exhaust the glory of God, is that God is its maker. While creation expresses the glory of God, it is only a partial revelation of the surpassingly greater God who stands behind it. And so if God has set His glory “*above the heavens,*” then certainly nothing under the heavens can praise Him enough ... or adequately.

And yet, that’s exactly what we have the privilege of doing.

And according to verse 2, even children and infants can and do praise God. Psalm 8 is quoted numerous times in the New Testament ... and on one occasion by Christ Himself. He had entered Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday. While He was in the temple area, healing the blind and lame, the children continued to praise Him, crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” **Matthew 21:15-16**, “*But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to Him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, " 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise'?"*”

By identifying the praise of the children with Psalm 8, Jesus not only validated their words, He also interpreted their words as praise not of a mere man, but of God, since Psalm 8 says that God has ordained praise for Himself out of the mouths of children.

But the bulk of Psalm 8, while about the glory of God, is written about man. Why is that?

Simply because the glory of God can be seen ...

v. 3-4: IN HIS CREATING OF MAN³

[3] *When I look at Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which You have set in place,*

[4] *what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

The first thing that is asserted about man is his insignificance in the vast framework of creation. When David thinks of the glory of God exceeding the greatness of creation, and then he sees himself as just a small part of that creation,

³ Statistics about the earth and the solar system come from the email newsletter, Something to Think About, by Randy Culp, 1-17-03.

he's struck by just how small he really is in comparison.

I mean, think about it ...

The earth rotates on its axis once every 23 hr 56 min 4.1 sec (based on the solar year). A point on the equator therefore rotates at a rate of a little more than 1000 mph, and a point on the earth at the latitude of Portland, Oregon (45° north), rotates at about 667 mph.

The earth and its satellite, the moon, also move together in an elliptical orbit about the sun. The eccentricity of the orbit is slight, so that the orbit is virtually a circle. The approximate length of the earth's orbit is 583,400,000 miles, and the earth travels along it at a velocity of about 66,000 mph.

The entire solar system, including the earth, is moving through space at the rate of approximately 12.5 mi/sec or 45,000 mph toward the constellation of Hercules. The Milky Way galaxy as a whole, however, is moving toward the constellation Leo at about 375 mi/sec.

The Milky Way, is a large, disk-shaped aggregation of stars, whose center is about 25,000 light-years from the Sun (a light-year is the distance light travels in a year, about 5.88 trillion miles), that includes the Sun and its solar system. In addition to the Sun, the Milky Way contains about 400 billion other stars. There are hundreds of billions of other galaxies in the universe, some of which are much larger and contain many more stars than the Milky Way.

Hundreds of billions of galaxies containing hundreds of billions stars?

And yet **Psalm 147:4** says, "*He determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names.*"

And **Isaiah 40:26**, "*Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out one after another, calling each by its name. And He counts them to see that none are lost or have strayed away.*" (NLT)

He created each of those stars; He placed them in the universe as a farmer sows seed, and calls each by name. He is Yahweh Adonai, the Creator God, maker of Heaven and Earth and all that is in them.

Can you understand how David can then say ... "*When I look at 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, and the son of man that you care for him?*"

If you really think about it, it's amazing that the glory of God is seen in the creation of man. But it doesn't stop there, because the glory of God can be seen ...

v. 5: IN HIS CROWNING OF MAN

[5] Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

This verse simply says that God "*crowned*" man "*with glory and honor.*"

This means that He has given people, men and women like you and me, as we have just seen ... mere specks in this vast universe, a significance and honor above everything else He has created.

David makes this point in two striking ways ...

First, he uses the word “*glory*,” which he just used of God, except now he’s using it for man. This is an effective way of identifying man with God, saying that he’s been made in God’s image and reflects God’s glory in a way other parts of the creation do not.

It’s interesting, because verse 4 says God made man “*lower than the heavenly beings*”, some versions say “*angels*,” which I think is incorrect, because the Hebrew word used here is *Elohim*, the plural name for God.

Man has been placed below God, and temporarily below the angels, according to Hebrews 2, which was our responsive reading this morning, but above the animals, as we’ll see in verses 7 and 8. But I think the real point here is that David, like Moses did in Genesis, is connecting men and women to God, in whose image they are made.

The second way David emphasizes man’s special significance is by speaking of his role as ruler over the rest of the world.

And he does this because the glory of God can be seen ...

v. 6-8: IN HIS COMMISSIONING OF MAN⁴

[6] You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands;

You have put all things under his feet,

[7] all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,

[8] the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,

whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Again this is significant because David has taken a word normally used to describe God and applied it to man. God is the real ruler, **1 Timothy 6:15**, “*God, the blessed and only **Ruler**, the King of kings and Lord of lords.*” (NIV)

But now David, in Psalm 8, says that God has shared this rule with man, making him ruler over creation, particularly with respect to all other living things here on earth – cattle, beasts, birds, and fish.

And man has taken on the world with a vengeance. We have subdued the earth beyond all recognition. At some point in antiquity, man took a round stone, stuck a stake through it, sat his wife on top of it, and the first Cadillac was born. Man began to build roads and bridges and dams and houses and cities and ships and cars. He explored the wilderness and discovered coal and oil and iron and salt.

⁴ Part of this section is adapted from [What Works When Life Doesn't](#), by Stuart Briscoe, pages 40-41.

He made contact lenses and laser beams and high-definition televisions and thermo-nuclear weapons. He found cures for polio and TB. He opened hearts and transplanted kidneys, made music and painted pictures. In fact, man has subdued just about everything in the world except for what was most important. He has never subdued himself. And therein lies the root of the human dilemma.

We like this idea of rule and dominion, but we **only** have it as it is given to us by the ultimate ruler, the One who has all dominion, power, and authority, the Sovereign God, *Yahweh Adonai*. He gets the glory ...

v. 9: THE GLORY IS NOT MAN'S⁵

We have the glory of God in man. Not the glory of man. Any glory we have is reflected glory. The glory is God's alone.

But we want it. We want the glory. And although we're made in God's image and ordained to rule under His authority, men and women have increasingly turned their backs on God. And since we won't look upward towards God, which is both our privilege and duty, we wind up looking downward toward the beasts and so become increasingly like them instead.

Does anyone really doubt that people today are becoming more like the animals than we are becoming more like Christ? You only have to read one day's newspaper to get a list of horror stories on man's behavior. And it's becoming so common we don't even see it or react to much anymore.

The classic example of this is King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whose story is told in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar turned his back on God, despite having been warned by Daniel, and as he looked out over his empire, spoke against God by exalting himself. Listen to what happens, **Daniel 4:30-33**, "*... the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"*"

It's the classic statement of secular humanism, describing creation and dominion as **of** man, **by** man, and **for** man's glory. God need not apply.

But God hears our blasphemy, picking up in verse 31, "*While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, [32] and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will." [33] Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass*

⁵ Parts of this section is adapted from Pratt, pages 124-125 and a small part is taken from the article, "Little Leaders," by Louie Giglio, found at www.worship.com

like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws."

And so Nebuchadnezzar went insane – because it's insanity to take the glory of God for yourself, putting yourself in the place of God. Many people today think western civilization is going crazy, because it has eliminated God from its collective conscience. And we do things the animals wouldn't even dream of.

Romans 1 makes it clear, **Romans 1:19-25**, *"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. **So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."***

And no one has an excuse, as **Romans 3:23** says, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

You believe that, don't you?

If I asked each one of you this question ... Was last week a good week or a bad week? I'd probably get mixed responses. Some of you would say it was great; others would say it was terrible.

But let me ask you another question.

How did you decide what to say?

Whether we realize it or not, we answer with only one thought in mind.

Last week was good if it was good **for me**.

It was bad if it was bad **for me**.

Step back and take another look at last week. It may have been good for you, but it wasn't good for the parents spending each night by their daughter's deathbed. The young person suffering from leukemia didn't have a good week. It wasn't positive for your Christian brothers and sisters suffering persecution in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Yet, when evaluating last week, we ignore what happened to others and simply consider what happened in our own lives.

We all live as if the whole world revolved around us.

As a result of the fall we all have a deadly preoccupation with ourselves.

We are self-aware, self-focused, self-conscious, self-made, self-protecting, self-promoting, self-centered and selfish. Yet from my experience **self** does not go quietly. Instead, it stubbornly rears its head and demands its way, looking for any opportunity to stand in the lime light and receive the glory. If left unchecked, self will stand in the light of God and somehow try to take credit for it.

So what does God do?

He has made us to reflect His glory and exercise His dominion.

And we've tried to grab it all for ourselves.

Well, we know what God does, because He has already done it.

And thus we can see ...

CONCLUSION: *The Glory of God in The Man*⁶

God sends His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to save us from our willful ignorance and rebellion, and to fulfill Psalm 8 as we have not.

Hebrews 1:3-4 says, "**He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.**"

And then in Hebrews 2 we read, quoting from Psalm 8, **Hebrews 2:6-10**, "*It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? [7] You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, [8] putting everything in subjection under his feet."* Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. [9] **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, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.**"

Conversion to Christ is nothing less than **getting over ourselves**. That's why there is more than a subtle change that must happen at the foot of the cross. A death takes place there. For Christianity is not about self-help, rather self-death. New life begins when we abandon "me" and fall on the mercy of a God who loved us in spite of ourselves and a Christ who gave Himself in our place. In that moment, we embrace freedom from the perpetual doom of the flesh and take up the cause of living solely for the One who frees us. Such is the way of the Savior,

⁶ Small parts of the conclusion are adapted from Giglio, and the sermon, "Psalm 8," by Aaron Menikoff, Capital Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC, 2-20-02.

calling any would be recipient of new life to, *"Deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me."*

This is the son of man. Don't ignore the salvation that is offered through Christ. He hung on a cross as salvation for those who repent and believe in Him. He stands where we should have stood. He serves where we should have served. He worships as we should have worshipped. Jesus always lived under God's rule. We don't. He did. This is not a plea for humility—this is a plea for Christ. Humility is found in Him.

When you persist in your sins—that's independence. When you attempt to live life without the Holy Spirit or prayer—that's independence. When you attempt to satisfy yourselves with anything but Christ—that's independence. Only clothed in the righteousness of Christ can we find dependence on God.

And so we close the thought with **Hebrews 3:1**, *"Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession."* The NIV says, *"fix your thoughts on Jesus."*

And what happens when we do that? The answer is obvious. When we look to Jesus, we are looking up again – by the grace of God – and the grace of God, which has saved us and redirected our affections, now begins the work once again of conforming us to the image of His Son. As **2 Corinthians 3:18** says, *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."*

And so we end Psalm 8, where David himself ended it, crying out, ***"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"*** Amen, and Amen.