



Central Peninsula Church

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Psalm 8

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For What It's Worth

SERIES: *Songs for the Hungry Heart*

A few years ago, *Time* magazine featured a story about Peter Sellers. It told about him appearing on *The Muppet Show* being interviewed by Kermit the Frog. The interview began with Kermit saying, "Now, just relax and be yourself." Sellers responded, "I can't be myself. I don't know who I am. The real me doesn't exist." Now I suppose Sellers was just trying to be funny; after all, he was a comedian by trade. But on this occasion his words were anything but funny. In fact, they were pretty sad. Afterwards, one of his long-time friends said, "The real Peter disappeared a long time ago. What he is is an amalgamation of all the stage and screen characters he has ever played. And now he is frantically trying to unsnarl that mess and find out who he really is." Unfortunately we'll never know if Sellers found his true identity or not, for just six months later he died. But whether or not he ever sorted it out, he wasn't alone in his feelings. I'm convinced that the majority of us question, from time to time, who we are and where our true worth is found.

Well, this morning we are going to look at a Psalm of David, one that deals with these issues in a wonderful way. Turn with me to the 8th Psalm. And as we read it, we can imagine young David sitting on a hillside outside of Bethlehem, gazing up at the moon and stars, his heart filled with the wonder of it all. Then taking out his harp, David begins to sing: **"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, You have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength, because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained; what is man, that You take thought of him? And the son of man, that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and do crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"**

The theme of Psalm 8 is given to us in the first and last verses. David is expressing what he has discovered about God. What awes and inspires him. What only he can say through these beautiful words, **"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"** Recently a young woman came up to me at the end of a conference held in the midst of redwood country. We had been talking about the greatness of God, the glory of His creation and the depth of His compassion for all of mankind when she chimed in with all reverence, "Man, God really rocks, doesn't he?" This is what David is saying here. What a tremendous God! How majestic! How excellent is His name - his character - in all the earth!

God wants to be known by His creation. And in

particular to us, His children. David puts it this way: **"You have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! From the mouths of infants and nursing babes You have established strength, because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease."** David is impressed that the greatness of God, displayed far above the heavens, can still be grasped and expressed by a child. Evidently he had often struggled to put into words the depth of his thoughts towards his heavenly Father. And yet he characterizes God as being One who reveals Himself in such a way that even children can understand who He is. In the twenty-first chapter of Matthew, Jesus quotes the words of this psalm on a certain occasion. Matthew tells us, **"And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children crying out in the temple saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant, and said to Him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes, have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babes Thou has prepared praise for Thyself?'"**

You see, these priests and scribes expected that Jesus would be offended by these little ragamuffins praising Him. But instead He said, "They are the ones who have caught the truth. They are the ones who see. They are the ones who understand the healing power of God being manifested here." Isn't it amazing what some kids will say. I picked up a toddler the other day during Women's Bible Study. He didn't say anything. Just laid his head on my shoulder as if to fall asleep and proceeded to drool down the length of my back. But some kids have an uncanny sense of who God is. A little girl was sitting on her grandpa's lap one night while he read her a bedtime story. And from time to time, she would take her eyes off the book and touch his wrinkled cheek. Then she would stroke the smooth texture of her own cheek, then back to his again. Finally she said, "Grandpa did God make you?" "Yes, sweetheart," he answered, "God made me a long time ago." "Oh," she paused. "Grandpa, did God make me too?" "Yes, indeed, honey," he said, "God made you just a little while ago." She thought about that. Then she caressed both their faces again and uttered in prophetic manner, "God's getting better at it, isn't he?" Only from the mouths of babes!

In order to demonstrate His greatness, God often uses children to teach truths that sophisticated minds can't grasp. Now, in any society a child is the most dependent member. They have no inherent skills for survival or self-protection, no means to insure their lives will be safe, comfortable, or fulfilling. Little children are absolutely reliant on the love and care of others for their most basic needs. They must cry out even though they know not what they need. They must entrust their lives to someone bigger and

more powerful than themselves. And so must we! We are no more able to live our lives for God than children are able to avoid danger or care for themselves and others. They need to be taught, as do we. And David is drawing our attention, here, to a strange paradox - that it is on those who, humanly speaking, are regarded as weak and helpless that God lays a foundation of strength. It's in our weakness that His strength is perfected. Oftentimes what blocks us from receiving the blessings He longs to give is our self-reliance and pride. So if we happen to seek God through His word or in our prayer life and yet regard ourselves as above reproach it may be really difficult to hear His voice. But when we come as children, nursing at the bosom of our heavenly Father, then we will find His truth speaking to us, teaching us. So "unless we become as little children," as Jesus said - unless we become teachable, heaven may well be filled with five year olds. Now there's a scary thought!

David is saying that not only does a childlike heart display God's greatness but it also silences His enemies. Those who pride themselves on their wisdom are often routed by the insight of children. A store owner was tacking a sign above his door one day that read "Puppies For Sale." Signs like that have a way of attracting small children and sure enough, a little boy appeared under the owner's sign. "How much are you gonna sell the puppies for?" he asked. The owner replied, "Anywhere from \$30 to \$50." The boy reached into his pocket and pulled out some change. "I've got \$2.37," he said. "Can I take a look at 'em?" So the owner whistled and out came the mother followed by five tiny fur balls. One of the pups, however, was lagging behind the others. Immediately the boy focused on him and said, "What's wrong with that one?" The owner explained that this little pup didn't have a hip socket. It would always limp. It would always be lame. The little boy became excited. "That's the one I want." The owner replied, "You don't want that one. If you really want him, I'll just give him to you." The little boy began to get upset. He looked into the owner's eyes and said, "I don't want you to give him to me. That little dog is worth every bit as much as the others and I'll pay full price. In fact, I'll give you \$2.37 now, and 50 cents a month until he's paid for." The store owner countered, "But he will never run or jump or play with you like the others." To this, the little boy reached down and rolled up his pant leg to reveal a badly twisted and crippled leg supported by a metal brace. He looked up at the owner and said, "Well, I don't run so well myself, and this little guy is gonna need someone who understands!" What an impressive God who is able to express truth in such a simple manner through the words of a child.

Another mark of young children is that they respond to the world around them with a sense of wonder and awe. Have you ever noticed how wide-eyed and curious they are? That's why we put safety locks on all our cabinets and keep our medications out of their reach. But because of this quality they are often the strongest witnesses to a God whose majesty is written across all of creation. Sadly we often lose this sense of wonder as we grow older and the world closes in around us. But when we are able to carve space away from the distractions and look up at the stars on a crisp fall night, even the most

sophisticated among us have been known to hold our breaths. It's as though God is reminding us that our lives are not measured by the amount of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breaths away. Vincent Van Gogh once observed, "All nature seems to speak. For me, I can't understand why everybody doesn't see or feel it; nature or God does it for everyone who has eyes and ears and a heart to understand." In our search for God, nature is one of the places we look and one of the places He looks for us, speaks to us. So if nature is one of the languages of God, it seems only logical it would be one of the languages we should study. David observed, year after year, the stars and the moon traveling the paths God had appointed for them. His observations led him to conclude that with clockwork precision the heavenly bodies never deviate from God's design. And so, in verses 3 and 4, he asks the question that begs a response from every heart, **"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?"**

Have you ever taken your place beneath the night sky, as David does here, and felt dwarfed to insignificance by its immensity? Whenever the Hebrews wanted an expression for anything too vast to be counted or even comprehended this was the image to which they turned. In our modern day we are even more staggered as we have a greater capacity to observe the vast expanse of the universe. We may have left our footprints on the moon, but the deeper we probe through radio telescopes and orbiting satellites, the more we see galaxies millions of light years away. And it's at this point that we recognize, as David does, the incredible gulf which separates us from the creator. This leads us to ask questions concerning our own significance. So David uses two words here for "man." The first describes weakness and mortality. It stresses the gulf between the creator and His far less significant creature. And then he uses the term "son of man" to refer to our heritage in Adam. Of course, Christ later picked up this title for Himself in His earthly ministry. By adopting this term and connecting it with the suffering servant of Isaiah, Jesus Himself identified with the fragile weakness of mortal human beings who are dependent on the mercy of God for their very existence. So David, by using these two words, drives home the point of our frailty in comparison to the awesome power of God displayed across the heavens.

When Teddy Roosevelt entertained guests at the White House he often took them out to the back lawn at the end of the day. As he stood there gazing at the night sky, all eyes would eventually be drawn to the heavens, as his were. In his day, the stars weren't dimmed by city lights as they are today, and the magnificent display of God's creation would overcome the party. After a long pause Roosevelt would say, "Gentlemen, I believe we are small enough now. Let's go to bed." I believe the point he was making is that our concept of God will inevitably shape our concept of ourselves. It is only in the context of our relationship with the awesome majesty of God that human dignity finds its true meaning.

Now David's final thought is not, "How great and magnificent You are, O God, and how puny we are in contrast." On the contrary, his central thought is that in spite of the incredible chasm that separates us from Him, God is still mindful of us. He alone has the will, the purpose, and gifting to incredibly bless our lives. Out of sight is not out of God's mind as far as we

are concerned. In our day, however, it's not uncommon for someone to languish away in obscurity; being unknown and uncared for by others. But God remains mindful towards all whom He has created. And the two terms that David uses shows in what manner He attends to us. First he says, "You take thought of him." This means that God remembers us. He never forgets, but rather calls us to mind on a consistent basis. This has a compassionate and purposeful ring to it. It's the way I remember my older brother who lives in another county. The distance between us recedes as my mind connects with and dwells upon him. Then he says, "You care for him." This means that God longs for and seeks us out. It's as if God's calling to mind our humanity - our weakness and mortality - sparks such an incredible longing that he seeks us out in order to lavish His care upon us. What a great image of divine love and devotion!

A few weeks ago I was away from home all weekend in a remote area that was not cell phone accessible. So I went down to the camp center and used their phone to call my family. No one answered! Not being too concerned at that point, I left a number on the message machine at home for my wife to call and then went to bed. The next day came and still no call. And it wasn't until the woman at the camp center began to yawn whenever she saw me coming, only to say "No! I'm sorry, no one has called for you," that I started to get a little concerned. Now, most people don't sleep well unless they know their families are okay. Some of us, on the other hand, could probably sleep through another Loma Prieta earthquake. I probably fit in both categories. But rather than bug the poor lady at the center anymore, I decided to drive about 45 minutes to the nearest town where, hopefully, my cell phone would work. It was that important for me to connect with them. And I could not, would not, rest until that goal was accomplished.

Do you know that God looks upon us in the same way and with the same single-minded devotion to our care? He knows how frightened and insecure we get at times. But no matter how small or insignificant we may be feeling, we are no accident or afterthought to our God. In fact, He has gone - and continues to go - to enormous lengths to reassure us of just how special we are. This is David's point. In fact, centuries before David wrote this psalm, another ancient saw in the night sky a divine answer to his desire for a son. God told Abraham, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be." And there after, whenever the roaming Abraham slept under the stars, God's incredible promise was revisited to his wondering eyes. So the next time you are wondering, look up at the heavens and know that you have infinite value in His sight.

Man has been given special status by God. So in verses 5-8, David turns to define this more specifically: **"You have made him a little lower than God, and do crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas."**

The language David uses hints of Genesis 1 and the creation narrative. In fact, what is being pictured here is the original blueprint for mankind. Humanity, seemingly so powerless and small in the scheme of things has been given great worth and responsibility by the creator. This is a twofold relationship. First, David is saying that we were made to be a little less than God. Other versions translate this as, "a little lower than the angels."

But the Hebrew actually says "a little less than Elohim," i.e., a little lower than God. In other words, we were made to bear the image of God. Nothing else in all of creation has been so designed. Think about that! When we consider the vastness of the universe with its countless solar systems or the fineness of the atom with its subatomic particles. None of these were meant to carry the image of God like man. But what does it mean to be God's image bearer? Obviously, man was not created the same as God. To be His image bearer means that, unlike any other part of creation, we have been chosen to reflect who He is. Secondly, because man was created in the image of God we have been given the awesome responsibility to extend His rule and protective care over the rest of creation. We are entrusted guardians over everything on the land, air and sea. God has put all things under man's feet. Now, this is not an indication of human strength, power, or unlimited authority. All things are placed under human authority by God. And any authority we exercise is limited and ultimately responsible to Him.

There is one problem however. In these verses we see a wonderful description of man, made in God's image, given the calling to steward His creation with the utmost of care. But don't we fall short of this job description? I mean, all we have to do is take a look around us. Instead of running God's creation man is ruining it. The earth is being raped of its natural resources. Its atmosphere is being polluted. Much of wildlife is threatened by extinction. We can't even buy a can of tuna without being concerned about its mercury content. In the early '70's I was living in Tokyo for a period of time while attending college there. Boy, does that make me feel ancient! And one day, while driving towards the center of town, I saw something in my rearview mirror I had never seen before. It startled me! There in majestic and brilliant clarity, rising some 13,000 feet behind me was Mt. Fuji. In all the months of living in Tokyo, this beautiful volcano with its almost perfect symmetry had been hidden behind a dark, dingy veil of pollution. It could only be seen on the clearest of days. For Japan, with its emphasis on industrial growth, those days are rare indeed. And the point is - the original image has been tarnished, polluted, stripped of its majesty and dignity by the Fall. David is writing of man in his ideal state, before sin entered the world. Much of what he describes here about man's worth and dignity was lost and all of mankind has been affected with the consequences ever since.

Do you ever stop to think what it must have been like before the Fall? Adam and Eve could wander through the world feeling the grass between their toes and the breeze on every part of their bodies. They lived authentically, exposed to God, His creation and to each other. There was no sense of separation. No need to cover up in shame. And because they were God- rather than self-centered, there were no issues around self worth or identity. Their entire humanity was anchored in relationship to a holy God who walked amongst them in a delightful garden paradise. Can you imagine? And then sin entered the world. The created order became reversed. Man decayed as death became an enemy he couldn't reckon with. And from that moment on, all of history led to a single hill outside of Jerusalem. In Hebrews

chapter 2, the writer quotes this psalm and then says two really significant things. First he says, **“But now we do not see all things subjected to man.”** That much we’ve covered! But then he says in verse 9, **“But we see Jesus, who has been made a little lower than the angels, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”**

What this means is that because of Calvary, God has crowned Jesus with the glory and honor He had intended for man in the beginning. And in seeing Jesus we see that God yet intends to fulfill his original creation. Jesus, as the second Adam, is man as he was intended to be. So this psalm not only looks back to God’s blueprint for mankind but forward as well to its ultimate consummation in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:27-29, Paul likewise takes the concluding words of verse 6, **“You have put all things under his feet,”** as looking forward to the time when everything, even death the last enemy, will come under the rule of Christ, and God will once again be all in all. So for us as Christians, the glory and honor of human life only comes truly into focus in Jesus. It is in Him that our worth issues are settled before the Father.

Well, David has taken us from the heights of glory to the depths of human weakness. From the garden paradise of Eden to Calvary’s Hill. We’ve looked back, we’ve looked forward. But where does this psalm intersect our lives today? Somewhere in between most probably. In J. R. Tolkien’s, *The Hobbits*, the magician Gandalf tells the reluctant and unlikely hero Bilbo Baggins, “There is more to you than you know.” He said this, knowing that within the hobbit’s veins coursed blood not only from the passive Baggins side of the family but also from the swashbuckling Took side. We have a similar mingling of blood within us from a lineage that is both human and divine. Within us the dust of the earth and the breath of heaven are simultaneously joined. We are like trees torn between two worlds; a part of us rooted in the soil on earth, another part reaching for the heavens - for a fullness of glory that is never quite within our grasp.

But in Christ, God is fashioning a new humanity, a new creation. In Him, our inherent dignity is continuously being reshaped into His image. Our true identity, once forfeited in Adam *is* being restored to us in Christ. The disastrous effects of the Fall *are* passing; the new *is* coming. And we are not without significance or purpose within its scheme. This means that every spark of beauty and worth we experience glimmers as a relic of a world still bearing the marks of its original design. It means we are spiritually empowered to look beyond ourselves and relate appropriately to the rest of creation, no matter how fallen it is. It also means we are able to participate in the restoration of the divine image that has been our purpose since the creation of the world. And every expression of pure worship, love and care is a movement towards its ultimate redemption. The day when, in Paul’s words, “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” On that day all of creation will sing, together with David, the last verse of this psalm - **“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth!”**

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