

“Our Majestic God”

27 June 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: Behold Our God

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Psalm 8

Sermon:

In the recent dry weather, I have been watering the garden. I can only keep a few plants healthy - some strawberries producing fruit, some rhubarb and a few flowers in pots and boxes. The rain arrived on Wednesday evening, and it watered everything constantly and gently; you could almost sense the plants breathe a sigh of relief (I know that I did). When you contemplate the water cycle and think of where that fresh water started, most likely from the salty sea many kilometers away, well you are full of praise. When you believe that God created this world, then you are full of praise for God.

The psalmist in Psalm 8 praises God. He starts and finishes the psalm with this wonderful exclamation of praise: *“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth.”* The psalmist David has written a song in praise of God, and he has given the music score to the director of music so that everyone can sing this song. Yet at the heart of the psalm is a question: what is man, and why do you care for him? You are majestic; what am I and why do you care? There is probably no more important and relevant question for our culture today, who are really struggling with identity and value. Let us look at David’s answer and why he praises God.

I. Our Majestic God (v.1-2)

O LORD, our Lord: The first LORD in our Bibles is in capitals because it is a translation of a proper noun, a name, Yahweh. The name reminds David of their history, of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and he recognises the deep, personal commitment of God in covenant promise to His people and he says with conviction and passion, “O LORD, our Lord.” They have many stories of the saving presence of God in their lives, particularly the Exodus, and we have the stories of Jesus and His salvation offered through His death on the cross and we have the new covenant in His blood.

How majestic is Your name in all the earth: The name of God refers to His character; He is regal, royalty, He reigns over the whole earth. God not only created the water cycle, He controls it. The rainbow is the sign of His promise that water will never destroy the earth again. He reigns.

You have set Your glory above the heavens: David goes on to say even the glory of the water cycle or the magnificence of the Milky Way galaxy does not contain all the glory of the LORD; indeed, His glory is set above everything in creation. He is greater than the created

world. He sits above it, He is separated from it. That is why we do not worship creation but the Creator.

From the lips of children, You have ordained praise (v.2): This verse is not easy to understand. David tells us God has His enemies, those who oppose Him, rebel against Him (everyone is included in this description), but to confound His enemies, God causes children (the very weak, the littlest) to praise Him. I think we are meant to contrast the God who is above the heavens and yet reaches down to little children, and their praise is a rebuke to God's enemies, the foe and the avenger. In the New Testament, Jesus uses this verse to rebuke the Jewish temple leaders and money changers who opposed Him when He arrived in Jerusalem but the children sang His praise (Matthew 21:12 ff, see v.16). The kingdom of God belongs to such as these - the humble, insignificant child. God chooses the weak things of the world and, in this, He shows His grace, His gentleness and His sovereign power. It reveals His wonderful, glorious majesty that He "*chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong*" (1st Corinthians 1:27). God is majestic, personal and full of grace and gentleness.

II. Consider Creation (v.3)

We know David was a shepherd and he spent many evenings looking at the night sky (v.3). As he gazes into the universe, he contemplates God, expertly placing every planet and star in their correct place, to make a fantastic sky and world, creating a wonderful, three-dimensional picture called the universe. He gives us a sense of the scale of God, imagining God delicately placing every planet and star with His fingers. He is not telling us that God did this literally - how God created the universe is another story - but he believes God did so!

III. Ask the Question (v.4)

His contemplation of God, the majesty of God, the Creator of the universe, causes questions to arise and principally, *What is man?* And, *why are you mindful of him, and care for him?* (v.4) It is an important question, a significant one and one asked by thinking people throughout the ages.

I once had to write an essay on Rene Descartes and on his maxim, "I think, therefore I am." Is that the answer to the question of what humanity is, our cognitive ability? The following are some of the answers given and given to us as the truth.

The atheist would answer, "*We are simply survival machines blindly programmed by our selfish genes to perpetuate ourselves*" (Richard Dawkins). The Nihilist would say you are nothing, just rubbish. The Irish playwright Samuel Beckett in his play *Breath* took an extreme view of atheism or nihilism by placing a pile of rubbish on stage which started in darkness, was briefly lit but never fully and then dimmed. A cry was heard at the start, and inhaled breath and exhaled breath and another cry which lasted 35 seconds. The humanist would say humanity is basically good and can be made better by education, healthcare, or improved social conditions, but such thoughts have not produced what is needed and the world continues to be a lonely and sad place for many.

Note that David's answer is based on the revelation given to him in the Scriptures, in particular Genesis 1:26-31, especially v.28. This is a vital point to grasp. We know God from the Scriptures; we know God and ourselves by revelation, from a source outside of ourselves, not from within. David starts his thinking from a believing or faith point of view (v.1). "*What is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him?*" Why God do You notice humanity at all? We are so small and insignificant contrasted to Your majesty and glory and the created world - why do you care Lord?

IV. The Answer (v.5-8)

He made us and crowned us with glory and honour (v.5): David accepts the revelation of Genesis, that God made us. When you make something, particularly something which is very good, then you are rightly proud of it and care for it. My spell checker does not like the idea of very good and it suggests "particularly good", "incredibly good" and "exceptionally good". You get the idea.

Not only were we created and very good we were made in the likeness of God. What does that mean? The Bible doesn't specifically answer the question, but I once heard John Stott outline these five characteristics we possess because we are created in the image of God and reflect His character. We are moral, creative, social, communicative, and gifted beings. God made us, He made us very good, and He made us in His image. So where do we fit in relation to God? Are you simply a superior created animal? Desmond Morris, the zoologist, termed the phrase "the naked ape", because he believed we were one of the 193 living species of monkey or ape; 192 of them are covered with hair, the exception being Homo Sapiens, the naked ape. Clever, but we are much more than animals!

David, in Psalm 8, confirms this by placing us not primarily with the rest of creation but with the Creator. "*You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings*" (v.5). The footnote suggests heavenly beings could be "God". We are created below God and above the rest of creation. Therefore, we have incredible glory and honour. Whatever our gender, race, sexual orientation, age, or capacity either physically or mentally we matter to God. God has made us very good, in His image and like Him; we reflect His glory. That is why He is mindful of us and cares for us. This is your identity; this is who you are. What a glorious reality for each of us.

He made us rulers (v6-8)

Our majestic God, whose glory is above the heavens, has in v.6 "*put everything under His (humanity's) feet*". God has given us responsibility for, and authority over, the created world (v.7-8). Our majestic God, the Ruler, has made us rulers. He has made us rulers over everything, all flocks, beasts, and fish. What an incredible privilege that is! God has given us responsibility to care for His created world, a responsibility He has delegated to us, and because of that responsibility, He is mindful of us and cares for us. We are His servants and we rule on His behalf. This is our purpose on earth and we fulfil that when we follow and obey Him.

- A. The problem!** Sadly, we have not ruled the world well. I was dismayed and angry when I saw the destruction left by fans after a European soccer match - bottles, cans,

assorted litter - and they are not the only ones. A walk along the Dodder recently shows the same lack of careful stewardship. The animals of the world and its resources are under pressure: climate change, destruction of forests, desertification of large areas, pollution of our seas. Many of our animals have become extinct because of our treatment of them and the earth. We have great dignity, made by God and made rulers, but we have spoiled His creation. Every aspect is marred and affected by our sin. Our disastrous disobedience of God's rule, our greed and self-seeking, our tendency to take and destroy, has led us to destruction and death and the judgement of God. Our Christian world view and hope understands and acknowledges the wonder of our creation and our stewardship of the world and the terrible sin of humanity in our rebellion towards God.

B. The solution!

We have great hope in being made by God and being rulers and we have hope in the midst of our sin. We have that in the person of the Lord Jesus. In the psalm, David uses the phrase in v.4, "*the son of man*", which is Jesus' preferred title for Himself. In v.4b we are told that God cares for us. The word for care also means "to visit", which we fully appreciate. You care by your visiting, God cares enough to visit. Jesus visited us on earth because He cared, He came to make it better.

We also see in the New Testament where Jesus, as the son of man, completely fulfils and perfectly outworks the promise of v.6: "*you put everything under his feet*" or we see everything submit to him. The early chapters of Mark's gospel tell us that even the wind and waves obey Him, that sickness is completely healed, disability is fully overcome, evil spirits rendered powerless and expelled, sins are forgiven, and death is defeated. "*You put everything under His feet.*" The writer of Hebrews 2:5ff sees this promise fulfilled in Jesus through His death, resurrection, ascension and reign in heaven. One who was human now reigns in heaven. "*You put everything under His feet.*" Paul explains to the church in Corinth that Jesus is the new Adam, the sinless human, fully submitted to God, fully living for His glory, and totally obeying His will even to death on a cross. The result of His life is the fulfilment of verses 6-8. The vision of Isaiah's prophecy of the wolf and the lamb lying down together is fulfilled (11:6ff).

V. The Response (v.9)

David in Psalm 8 is blown away by the fact that God is mindful and cares for us. We should be as well, and we have further knowledge of Jesus and His personal visit to us to make the refrain of v.1 and 9 ring more clearly. David's response should be our response: "*O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth.*"

Praise: Above All

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: Majesty

Benediction

Discussion & Application:

Who are you? What is your identity?

Why does God care for you?

How does that encourage you to live?