

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 8

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 8

Overview

Many of the psalms we have studied this far have been psalms of lament, but Psalm 8 takes us to the opposite extreme is a psalm of praise. Particularly Psalm 8 is a praise psalm of Him who created everything. There are really three main ideas in the psalm all tied together by the main idea of God as Creator.

(1) The Lord's name because He is Creator is worthy of praise.

(2) The Creator God has shown His love to all "humankind".

(3) Humans have been made "vice-regents" or "stewards" of God's creation.

Additionally, the psalm causes Israel's understanding of creation to stand out from among the surrounding nations. Nations like Egypt, Phoenicia, and areas of Mesopotamia deify the creation itself. They see within the creation aspects of the divinity. Not that the creation points to a god, but that in some ways the creation is a manifestation of the god. Thus you end up with the idolatry of particular animals or places. Yet in Israel and in this psalm, the creation is distinguished from the Creator. It is His work and points to Him, but is not a part of Him or He of it.

Structure

The psalm is bookended with the praise of the majesty of the Lord. Between those bookend praises are three strophes¹ that allow the contemplation of the power of the Creator and yet His love for mankind. The structure then would look like this:

1. *Inclusio* – Majesty of the Lord (8:1)
2. Praise from children versus attacks of the enemies(8:2)
3. Comparison of the wonders of God's creation and mankind (8:3-4)
4. God's perspective on humanity (8:5-8)
5. *Inclusio* – Majesty of the Lord (8:9)

¹ Remember that a strophe is a "verse" or "collection of lines" reflecting a particular idea.

Title

Once again the psalm is addressed to the “choir director” as a “psalm of David”. Whether the psalm was written by David or dedicated to David is unclear. Yet the unique aspect of the title is the notation “on the Gittith”. There are two possibilities for what this refers to. On one hand, it may refer to a particular instrument that came from Gath; something like a lyre. On the other hand, the word also comes up in reference to a winepress. Thus the psalm may be one of the “vintage” songs sung during the time when grapes were made into wine. Given the focus of the psalm on God’s creation, this second notion has some plausibility. This notation is also found in the title of Psalms 81 and 84.

Inclusio – Majesty of the Lord (8:1,9)

:1 - “O Lord, our Lord” – This is a worshipful title and way to address God. It doesn’t come across as easy in the English, but the Hebrew doesn’t merely repeat the word, but the second “Lord” is a more humble address. The first “Lord” is the Hebrew “Yahweh”, which is seen as God’s proper name. The second “Lord” is “Adonai”, which is more of a title and maintains a worshipful distance to the “other”.

How do we maintain a balance between addressing God in a comfortable way while recognizing His complete “otherness” and “overness”?

- “name” – We pray in the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer that God’s name would be hallowed among us. We can’t make God’s name holy, but we pray that He would equip us to use it in a holy way. We pray that God would equip us to keep the Second Commandment in regards to His name.

Praise from Children Versus Attacks of Enemies (8:2)

:2 - Jesus applies this verse to Himself. **Read Matthew 21:14-17**

What had Jesus just done that upset the Jewish leaders?

What were the children singing to Jesus? Where had they learned that?

What does Matthew 21 then teach us about how our children learn to worship?

- **Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

Children are often seen as silly or foolish, but Paul reminds us that God often chooses those very things for His purposes.

Why according to these verses does God deliberately choose the foolish things to work through?

Comparison of the Wonders of Creation and Mankind (8:3-4)

:3-4 - The psalmist deliberately sets the grandiose creation of the stars and the moon against the seemingly lower creation of humanity to set up the question of verse 4, “What is man that you take thought of him?”. This question appears in two other places in the Old Testament.

1. **Psalm 144:3-4** – Here the question is juxtaposed against the shortness of a person’s life. In other words, isn’t it amazing that the *eternal* God cares so much for us although our lives are so short!
 2. **Job 7:17-18** – Job’s use of the question is more personal and proceeds from a place of pain. More like, “why does God cast His punishing eyes on humanity since we are so insignificant”.
- The very familiar and well liked hymn, “How Great Thou Art”, takes the idea of what happened here in Psalm 8 and casts it to music. The comparison between the creative work of God in the heavens and His sending of His Son to die for my sins is humbling singing indeed!

God’s Perspective on Humanity (8:5-8)

:5-8 - God has done two things in these verses which elevates humanity. First, God has crowned humanity with glory and majesty. Second, God has given humanity the stewardship of the remainder of creation.

- “crown” – God crowns humanity in two ways. First, by being the foremost of God’s creation. We are a distinct creation of God from the rest of creation. **Read Genesis 2:7**

What distinguishes the creation of humanity from the rest of creation?

What does it mean that we bear the image of God? (Genesis 1:27)

- The second way in which God crowns us is that he gives us eternal life. **Read James 1:12.**

When do we receive the crown of life according to James?

Read Revelation 4:9-11

- God also elevates humanity and makes him steward of all creation. In Genesis 1 and 2, God not only brings all of creation before man to name, but also he commands “*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.*”

How did the Fall affect our abilities in subduing the earth and ruling over the animals?

Read Romans 8:18-25

What according to these verses makes what God commanded in Genesis difficult these days?

What do we wait for?

Summary

God has created us to praise Him and to be good stewards of His creation. Every encounter with creation should remind us of those two things. We should be filled with awe and therefore praise as we examine the beauty of creation. Also such awe of what God has created should move us to proper stewardship of it that we are not wasteful nor neglectful of it.

Closing Prayers