

“Thy Majestic Name”

Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:509
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INTRODUCTION

I learned to love the great outdoors from my father and grandfather. My father, a forester, taught me that trees have categories and names. Thus I learned that the natural world could be studied and that the more you pay attention to flora and fauna, the more you see and hear. My grandfather took me fishing and hiking and showed me the adventure of entering the woods and appreciating all that lives in God’s created order.

So I learned to love nature and to wonder about it. Even today I thrill at the sight of an eagle or a soaring hawk or a leaping deer. And like David the psalmist I marvel at the vast sky of stars and sun and moon. I remember seeing the night sky for the first time in Belize (Central America) and marveling at the heavenly expanse in a rural setting (no city lights) and how the stars appeared in a configuration unlike any I had seen before.

Note: Creation vs. Nature.

David the psalmist translated his wonder at seeing the heavens into prayer and poetry—and at some point the psalm was set to music. Hence, the superscription, “*For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.*”

David’s **wonder** (When I consider your heavens) led him to pose a **question** (what is man that you are mindful of him?) and to offer an **answer** (you made him ruler over the works of your hands). And this brief sequence of *wonder*, *question* and *answer* are expressed from the psalmist’s vantage point of trusting praise.

Psalm 8 is the first hymn of **praise** in the Psalter. After the introductory psalms, 1 and 2, (torah attention and messiah adoration) and the first **lament**, Psalm 3, we have psalms 4, 5, 6 and 7 that cry out to God for **deliverance** or help of some kind. Then Psalm 8 articulates a song of praise—in fact it is the only psalm in the entire OT composed entirely as an address to God in words of praise and adoration.

It begins and concludes with an exclamation of adoration: “*Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.*” God who is sovereign over all the earth is seen to be majestic in His creation. The first use of LORD (note the capital letters) translates *Yahweh*, the divine name...

Example: Yahweh and the Burning Bush

The second Lord (our Lord) is *Elohim*, the Hebrew word for the concept of deity. *Elohim* also appears in verse 5 (a little lower than the *elohim*).

Does it mean in that context a little lower than God? Yes, I think so. But it could also be translated “a little lower than the heavenly beings” or “*angels*”. Translators have been influenced by the citation of Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2—there we have “lower than the *angels*” in a section of Hebrews where the author is describing Christ as superior to angels.

This psalm’s beginning is repeated as an ending (O LORD, our Lord...). It is like a prelude and postlude. Here is the declaration that God’s name is *majestic* or *excellent* or *magnificent*. His name is his character, his being. In between these affirmations the psalmist makes his observation about God’s grandeur and poses his question and answer about mankind’s role in God’s kingdom.

David’s answer might be described as a confession of faith; it is an articulation of God’s exaltation of humankind to a role of royal **stewardship**-- “*crowned him with glory and honor.*” The relative insignificance of human beings is matched by a dignity granted to humankind at creation and exercised in dominion over the rest of the created order.

God is Creator of all and Lord of the heavens; but He sets us on earth as His governors, as stewards of the animal kingdom and the whole earth. There are echoes of Genesis 1 and 2 here. Adam and Eve and their progeny are created in the image of God. They name the beasts and we rule over them as successors east of Eden.

Animals, of course, can do little to make or shape their environment. They simply adapt to it. Human beings, on the other hand, create habitats. We build cities and navigate the seas and even travel into space. Animals make noises and gestures but only men and women can speak and use that gift of language to glorify God. Even children and infants have the capacity to grow into praising people.

Scholars rightly have identified this psalm prayer as a nature or creation psalm alongside the big creation psalm—Psalm 104. And as we ponder this hymn we

rightly ask ourselves how well has the human race done as stewards of God's magnificent creation. Greed and other sins, of course, cling to our thoughts and spoil our actions. Dominion becomes domination and even destruction, rule often issues in ruin; subordination in the divine purpose has become subjection to human sinfulness. We confess that we participate in the disparity between God's vision for humanity and the reality of human culture.

But the psalm does not consider this question so we will leave it aside. The psalm speaks of the praise of God from the primeval perspective of God's original purpose. God is great, Man is not, but God elevates humankind to a royal purpose and vocation. And so we praise Him for who He is, O LORD, our Lord.

Example: C.S. Lewis on praising (praising vs. thanking)

The New Testament and the NT Church understood anthropology (humankind) from a Christ-centered point of view. So too our view is informed by the fact/story that Jesus Christ, the new Adam, who identified with our human race and represents it in his person, has risen from the dead to a place of glory and honor. So the writer to the Hebrews interpreted verses 5 and 6 in light of the Lord Jesus.

But what of the personal implications of this psalm for praying people like ourselves? When we praise God in these words that highlight our call to an exalted stewardship before the Lord, what responsibility do we have to live out our share of dominion in the earth?

1. claim your realm
2. consecrate your realm
3. commit yourself to excellence in your realm

CONCLUSION

We witnessed a service of Ordination and Installation today. And we participated in it! We set apart elders, nominated and elected by this congregation, for terms of service. They made promises to serve God and His people, guided by the Scriptures and informed by our confessions of faith. We made promises to follow them and to support them. Together we look to God to guide us in His ways and to use us as his serving disciples.

And today we are learning to pray and praise anew with the words of David fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. This psalm has been re-translated in various poems, hymns and spiritual songs... You may or may not know these

contemporary Christian songs based on Psalm 8--Such as Chris Tomlin's *Indescribable* or Israel Houghton's *Friend of God* or Lincoln Brewster's *Majestic* or Michael W. Smith's *O Lord, Our Lord How Majestic is Thy Name* or this gem of a poem from 1877 by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Here is the beginning of "*The Grandeur of God.*"

**The world is charged with the grandeur of God,
It will flame out like shining from shook foil.
It gathers to a greatness like the ooze of oil. Crushed.
Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
The generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil
Is bare now nor can foot feel, being shod.**

Psalm 8

A psalm of David.

- 1** O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
- 2** From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise
[b] because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.
- 3** When I consider 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, the son of man that
you care for him?
- 5** You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [c] and
crowned him with glory and honor.
- 6** You made him ruler over the works of your hands; □ you put
everything under his feet:
- 7** all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the
paths of the seas.
- 9** O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!