

Logan Smith
Bread of Life Baptist Church
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Psalm 8

God's Glory, God's Image, and the God-Man

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to Hong Kong. One day, my friend and I went down to the harbor, and we were blown away by how beautiful the scene was. The large, downtown part of the city of Hong Kong is split by the bay, so that there are massive sprawling skylines on both sides - on the mainland side, where we were, and on Hong Kong Island. And on that island, Victoria Peak, a lush, green mountain, soars above the city skyline. My friend remarked, "It's amazing; the skyline, full of buildings that Mankind made, is impressive, but the most beautiful parts of this scene are still the natural parts of Creation that GOD made." The massive skyline was indeed impressive; it boasted many tall, elegantly designed skyscrapers, full of modern architecture and engineering genius; at night, the whole skyline lit up with dazzling colors. And yet, true enough, the skyline was *dwarfed* by the natural harbour in front of it, the looming mountain peak soaring above it. *The beauty of nature* is what framed and magnified the city skyline, making it so beautiful and unique.

Try as we might - whether ancient man or modern man - we cannot create anything more marvelous and glorious than God can. All of Creation displays GOD's glory! THE beauty of nature rightly captures our imaginations, inspires us, and takes our breath away. It compels us to worship - not Creation, but the God who created it.

Psalm 8 teaches us to do just that. THIS Psalm reflects on the glory of Creation, recognizing that it displays the very glory of God the Creator! But then the Psalm turns to reflect on a specific part of Creation - *us, humanity*. This Psalm recognizes that all of Creation was made by God and displays His glory; but it also recognizes that Creation includes *us*, and that we were made *in God's image*, as the crowning glory of Creation. But it seems odd to talk about the *glory of mankind*, doesn't it? After all, *mankind is fallen and sinful*. Our sin has even stained and cursed Creation itself. In fact, we could even say that one of the chief sins of humanity is that we think *far too much* of our own glory - thinking we are *far more glorious than we actually are!* But Psalm 8 invites us to step back and look at humanity from another angle - from the perspective of how God created us to be - how He created us *in His image*, "crowning" mankind "with glory and honor." Psalm 8 invites us to look back at the first man, the first Adam, in the Garden of

Eden, as GOD made us to be. But it also invites us to look ahead to the second Adam, the True and Better Adam, Jesus Christ, who fulfills God's glorious purpose for humanity!

But let's hold that thought; we'll come back to it. First, we need to look at...

I. God's Unrivaled Glory as Creator of All Things

This theme runs throughout this whole Psalm; in fact, it even *frames* it. THE first and last verses are the same, repeating: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (vv.1a, 9). These verses proclaim God's glorious majesty! They proclaim that our LORD is the one true God, worthy of all glory, honor, majesty and praise! Clearly, this is the language of hymns, songs of praise and worship!

Verse 1 continues, "You have set your glory above the heavens." Just a little later, in verse 3, he says, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place..."

YOU can just picture David walking outside on a dark, clear night, looking up at the beautiful night sky, full of stars, with a large, bright moon shining down! Have you ever experienced that? Ever gone stargazing, seen a supermoon or bloodmoon, or watched a meteor shower? The night sky can be absolutely *brehtaking*. THinking about "the heavens," full of stars, moons, planets, galaxies, and who knows what - it evokes wonder, majesty, and awe! It takes our breath away and stirs our imaginations to wonder.

All of the wonders of the sky and heavens above are "the work of [God's] fingers." He has "set in place" the moon and stars. The work of God's hands reveals GOD's glory and majesty, in all the earth! And this, of course, is true of *all Creation*, in the heavens, the earth, and the seas - in all the universe! All of creation is in mind here.

And so verses 1 and 3 takes us to the heights of space above, to the largest and grandest of God's creations, but then verse 2 plunges down to the smallest: to newborn babies, to children and infants: "Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger." In other words, David is saying that God's glory is revealed from the greatest, even down to the smallest. A newborn baby is not a picture of strength; a baby is weak, fragile, and helpless. And yet, God can use even what comes out of the mouths of the small and weak, out of babies and infants, to display His glorious power and

strength, to silence His enemies. All of Creation, all of God's works, from the least to the greatest, display God's glory and majesty!

And this is why nature has the power to move us, to affect our hearts. I absolutely love being in nature. There are few things that refresh and revive my soul so much as getting out and enjoying the beauty of God's Creation. I love going on a hike in the woods; I love walking by the lake or down trails at Point Au Roche with my family; I love to walk outside at night and gaze up at the stars. Back in October, when the Fall colors were at their peak, my family and I just took a drive up in the mountains, marveling at all the colors painted across the canvas of the mountainsides, the towering peaks, and the plunging ravines. When I think of a truly relaxing vacation, I automatically think of sitting on the beach, staring out into the vast ocean, watching the waves break on the shore. If I'm ever particularly stressed, mentally drained, or emotionally weary, my wife Ashley wisely suggests that I go out in nature, since she knows it can so quickly revive my soul.

The beauty of nature inspires and encourages me. It evokes *joy* within me. But most importantly, it evokes *worship* within my heart. Not worship of the Creation or nature itself! No, of course not! It leads me to worship the Creator - God Himself, who created all of the wonderful beauty of this world, and even the heavens above! In the words of the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."¹

So it is right for us to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of nature in such a way that we recognize *God's glory, beauty, and majesty*, which the works of His hands displays. So when your gazing at the stars above, taking a hike through the woods, watching the waves break on the shore, or even studying insects and plants in biology class, let the beauty and wonder of it capture your heart and imagination; and as it evokes joy in us, let that joy lead us to *worship the God who created this wonderful world and cosmos all around us!* Indeed, as we gather here on Sundays and sing songs of praise to God (especially songs like "How Great Thou Art," which we'll close with today), let us remember that we're singing to the God who created all things, whose glory is far above the heavens, far more glorious than all the universe!

And amazingly, this God *created and cares about us!* Which brings us to point number two...

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44395/gods-grandeur>.

II. Mankind's Derived Glory as Made in the Image of God

In the midst of reflecting on the grand scale of the cosmos, on the grandeur of the heavens above, and GOD's glory set even *above* the heavens - in the midst of his awe and reverie, he asks, "Why, then, would GOD care for us, for human beings, at all?" We see this in verses 3-4: "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?"

When you approach a mountain towering far over you, or stand on the sea shore and stare out at the never-ending horizon that just seems to go on forever, or you contemplate just how vast and deep the oceans are, or if you go out on a clear night and gae into the starry night sky, and think about the fact that there are millions and billions of stars out there, so many planets, moons, and even galaxies that we know practically nothing about, and think about just how *big* and *complex* and *wondrous* the universe is - well, it makes you feel very small, finite, and insignificant, doesn't it? It reminds us that we are just one very small person, cast within a vast universe. You can picture David experiencing that very feeling in these verses, can't you? He looks at the glory of the heavens above and asks, "What is man? What is mankind in comparison to all of *this*?" We're not as big, as bright, or as permanent and lasting as the moon and planets and stars and galaxies above, displaying GOD's majesty and glory in all the earth, in all of the Created universe - when we have that perspective, well, would God care for us at all?

And yet, the answer that David comes to, in verses 5-8, is actually pretty shocking. He answers his own question, saying, "Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings" (v.5). I know when we say that something is "lower" than something else, we're usually making the point that it is *less significant*. But actually the *opposite point* is being made here; David is showing that mankind actually has a *very high* place of honor in the created order - God has made us to be only a *little lower* than the heavenly beings, which is probably a reference to the angels who live in heaven. And this means, even though we feel so small and insignificant compared to the awesome moons, stars, and planets of the night sky, God actually made us to reflect *more* of His glory than even these! David makes this point even more explicit, saying God has, "*crowned him with glory and honor. YOU have given him dominion 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 along the paths of the sea.*" God

created human beings to be the *crown* of creation, having the highest place of honor among created things, revealing G^Od's glory the most!

Now, why would David say this? It's because he's looking back to the account of Creation itself, in Genesis 1, specifically verses 26-28. After creating the universe, the moons and stars, all the animals of the land, sky, and sea, he then creates mankind, saying, "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." That's what David is looking back to and reflecting on: God's created design for all things, to reflect His glory, including His design in creating humanity. God created mankind to have *dominion* over all the earth, putting "all things under his feet." He crowned humanity with glory and honor, making us the crown of creation, by creating us *in the image of God*, in His own likeness.

But that begs the question: what exactly does it mean to be created in God's image? After all, Genesis 1 mentions this, but never defines it. But I think the reason why Moses didn't have to define what he meant by being made in the "image of God" is because such a phrase and concept would have been very familiar and obvious to his original audience. It's like if your boss said, "We'll take a day off for Christmas," he wouldn't then have to define what he meant by Christmas - he would just automatically assume that you knew what he was talking about. So it would have been with the phrase "the image of G^Od," or being made in his "image" or "likeness." But we don't live in the same culture and time period as M^Oses's original audience; so what, then, does it mean exactly?

Well, this language of a god having an image-bearer was language used in the Ancient Near East to refer to *something* or *someone* representing that god. For example, the people might build a large statue that represented the god (an idol of a false, pagan god). That statue was supposed to reflect, resemble, and represent the god, imaging the god who reigned over this territory (or so they would claim).

Similarly, the king himself of many of these ancient, pagan kingdoms was seen as a living image of a god - a living representative of that god. The idea was that the king was seen as representing a particular god and exercising that god's power and rule over a particular people and territory. Because of this, some kings in the ancient Near East were called "sons" of god. That is, there was a relationship between the king and the god. The king was called the god's

“son” because he was in the likeness of his god, reflected the god’s behavior, and represented the god’s rule. So, for example, think of ancient Egypt: the king of Egypt was called the son of the god of Egypt and was the living image of the god of Egypt. And, as the god’s son, he was to bear the god’s image as he resembled, reflected, and represented the god in his rule over the land of Egypt.

As a good summary, Peter Gentry writes, “In the ancient Near East, since the king is the living statue of the god, he represents the god on earth. He makes the power of the god a present reality. To sum up, the term “image of god” in the culture and language of the ancient Near East in the fifteenth century B.C. would have communicated two main ideas: (1) rulership and (2) sonship. The king is the image of god because he has a relationship to the deity as the son of god and a relationship to the world as ruler for the god.”²

In other words, as Genesis reveals, and what Psalm 8 is drawing our attention to, is the fact that God created all of us - humanity - to be His *image-bearers*. We were created to *reflect* and *represent* God as His appointed *rulers* over all Creation. Adam and Eve were created to be a little king and little queen representing and reflecting GOD’s reign and rule over all the earth; that’s why God gave mankind *dominion* over the earth. Therefore, as God’s image-bearers, his representatives, mankind was created to specially *reflect* God’s glory, as the climactic act of Creation; as David puts it, God made humanity in His image and likeness, and thus “crowned him with glory and honor.”

Every single one of us was made in God’s image and like; every one of us was created to have a relationship with God as His image-bearers, His representatives, as a son of God. Every single one of us was created to *display and reflect GOD’s honor and glory* with all of our lives, in all that we do!

This is why *every single human life has meaning, value, and dignity!* This is why the human life - *every human life* - is to be honored and cherished; it is precious, even sacred! It is absolutely right for us, as Christians, of all people, to cherish and uphold the *sanctity* of human life - every life! This is why its right and godly for us to oppose and work against evil acts, such as abuse, racism, murder, abortion, and euthenasia, or anything that *dehumanizes and devalues* any human life; because we know that God created *every human being* in His image, and this

² Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 192.

means *every human life*, from any background or ethnicity, male or female, from conception and the womb all the way through gray hairs and old age, has inherit dignity, worth, value, and meaning!

And this is why the point of our lives is to glorify God! This is what we're made for; all of creation is made to glorify God and display His majesty - and that includes us, humanity, first and foremost, those whom have been "crowned with glory and honor" by being made in GOD's image, to represent, reflect, and glorify Him!

But humanity doesn't seem to be living up to this task, does it? So how can this still be true, this side of the fall, as all of humanity and creation are broken and stained by sin? THIS brings us to our third and final point...

III. Christ's Glory as the True and Better Man

When we read a text like this, and then look back up at the world of humanity all around us - well, it's pretty clear that mankind isn't exactly living up to this picture, is it? We have filled this earth with people, and yet every single human being *sins against God*. We don't represent GOD or glorify Him as we're supposed to; we *rebel* against Him. And it doesn't quite look like GOD has placed everything under our feet, does it? Instead of mankind's dominion over the animals and creation, we live in incredible tension with nature; there are many dangerous animals and insects; we have to labor to grow food, and even find famines and droughts; the grass pokes through our concrete and asphalt; not to mention snowstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, and wild fires. And all of this is because Creation itself has been cursed, broken and stained as a result of mankind's sinfulness. Mankind has been exiled from the Garden of Eden, our sin has marred our status as image-bearers, and creation itself has been cursed. Paradise has been lost

And yet, this Psalm isn't a lament Psalm; David doesn't just point back to the Garden and talk about how wonderful it was before the Fall. No, he speaks of this as a *present reality*. Why can David speak this way, despite the Fallen state of mankind and creation?

I think because David knew that the story didn't end in Genesis 3. After mankind fell and all creation was cursed, God also promised that a new man, an "offspring" of Adam and Eve, would come and reverse the curse, by crushing the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). In other words, God promised a future redemption, with a new and better Adam, who would not fall into sin, but would fulfill all that God created humanity and this world to be! I think *that is exactly*

what David is looking back on and looking forward to here! And sure enough, that second Adam has come: Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, the true image of God, who is God who took on flesh. As Col. 1:15 says, Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” He assumed a real, true humanity, being fully human. And yet, he did not sin; He lived a perfectly human, yet perfectly sinless life. He withstood the temptations of the Serpent, Satan. He perfectly obeyed, represented, and reflected GOD. Jesus became the *true and better Man*, to fulfill God’s purpose for humanity! He even reversed the curse of humanity, and even all of Creation, by dying on the cross for our sins and being raised on the third day! The first Man fell, and ever since then, creation has been broken, the image of GOD in humanity marred, and all of us have been born with a twisted, sinful human nature. But Jesus came as a new and better Adam, who didn’t fall, and he came to restore creation and restore humanity, bringing about a New Creation - a new *people*, conformed to the image of God *in Christ*, through faith in Him! To be a Christian is to be born again of the spirit, into a new heart, as a new creation - a new humanity, rooted not in the first Adam, but the second and better Adam, Christ Jesus!

And this is why so many New Testament passages quote this Psalm and show us that its pointing to Jesus. **Heb. 2:5-9** says,

“For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that your care for him? You made him a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.’ Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside of his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 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.”

Paul speaks of this as well, when he quotes Psalm 8 in **1 Cor. 15:25-27**, saying, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under is feet.’” Being raised as King over all, Jesus inherits the whole earth, so that all things, in all creation, are being “subjected to Him,” “putting everything in subjection under His feet.”

As the second Adam, the true and better Man, Jesus fulfilled God’s design for humanity: He is the truest picture of the image of GOD in humanity, as the God-Man! He humbled himself, even to the point of death on the cross, so that in being raised, He reversed the curse of sin! And he came to save His people, bringing about a *new humanity*, reversing *our* curse of sin, to make

all things right! Jesus reversed the curse of creation, reversed the curse of our own sin, overthrowing even death itself! You see, Christ has already become the New Man, and he's already begun remaking humanity - so that when we believe in Christ, we're filled with His Spirit and become New Creations. But it doesn't end there - these are just the first fruits. A day is coming when we will be raised up into new, glorified bodies, to truly inhabit the New humanity that Christ has restored for us! We will return to God's design for humanity in the paradise of the Garden of Eden! And that's why the story finally ends, at the very end of the Bible, with the return of Christ, and the coming of a New Creation - the New Heavens, and the New Earth! In the last two chapters of the Bible, Rev. 20 and 21, all creation is restored and made new; and a city, the New Jerusalem, comes down - the dwelling place of God's people with GOD, in a new, restored, forever! And at the heart of this city is a new garden of Eden, with a river of life, and the tree of life on either side, and a Man sitting once more on the throne - the God-Man, Jesus Christ, reigning forever! And we, as GOD's people, be raised up to live with him there forever, even reigning with Him over the new world, having our dominion restored in Christ, our humanity restored, so that we will truly reflect and represent and glorify as His image bearers! We will be free from sin and all of its painful consequences! We will dwell in paradise forever in Christ! This is the glorious future hope we can look forward to as God's people, those who trust in Jesus Christ!

And if you're not a believer this morning, this glorious future can be yours, too! Simply believe that Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised in your place, bearing GOD's wrath against your sin, doing everything necessary to reverse the effects of sin and raise you to eternal life in paradise forever! Then, make your faith public by being baptized and begin your new life in Christ by following Him as a member of a gospel preaching church. If you have any questions about this gospel and salvation, or about baptism or church membership, I would love to speak with you. Let us pray.