

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Dr. Gordon Hughes

Comments from Book 1 of the Psalms: Psalm 8

Many of you will remember as children gazing up into the starry sky and reciting the nursery rhyme,

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are,
Up above the sky so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.*

Perhaps, like me, you gazed up wonderingly at the moon and wondered about that 'man in the moon'. But then, on 21 July 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon. Many of us watched that dramatic event on television. We remember the astronaut's classic utterance then: "one small step for man; one giant step for mankind".

It all now seems so matter of fact that, to some extent, that sense of wonder has disappeared. Instead of the nursery rhyme, we can say,

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
Now we all know what you are,
Hunk of sodium, lump of tin,
Sulphuretted hydrogen.*

It is absolutely vital that, as Christians, we hang on to that sense of wonder as we survey the creation of God, whether in all its vastness in outer space, or in its intricate detail in the unfolding of a flower. David, the shepherd boy in the Old Testament who rose to become one of the greatest kings of Israel, certainly had that sense of wonder, as Psalm 8 clearly shows. The ascription to the Psalm tells us that David is its author although, unlike some of the Psalms, it tells us nothing about when it was written. It's tempting to think of him, as a shepherd boy, keeping watch over his sheep by night under the starry sky by Bethlehem. The Psalm is only short. We'll read it together now and see how he felt.

O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, You who set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honour. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen even the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!

David certainly felt his own smallness in the presence of his Creator and was filled with wonder that this great God could have anything to do with insignificant David! It is interesting that David's son, Solomon, also had this same sense of wonder before God. Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8. There is time this morning to quote only a small part of it: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth?"

Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" As we look through Psalm 8 together this morning, may we all have a renewed sense of the wonder of the great God with whom we all have to do. But this Psalm does not only set out David's innermost feelings. Like the other Psalms which we are considering in this series, it also looks on to the coming of the Lord Jesus. We call these special Psalms the "Messianic Psalms".

Some might feel that we are, perhaps, reading too much into the Psalms in reading them in this way. We should remember that the Lord Jesus, as He appeared in resurrection to His disciples, gave us authority to look at the Psalms in just this kind of way. I quote from Luke 24:44 "Then [Jesus] said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me".

David begins, in verse 1, with a sense of the majesty of God: "How excellent (or 'majestic') is Your name in all the earth." Note that David first addresses God as Jehovah (His covenant name with Israel), then as Sovereign Lord. But the majesty of God is not limited to Israel; it is to be appreciated by all the peoples of the earth. So David would write in Psalm 19:1-4: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

Paul, similarly, would write as to the message of creation to all mankind: "For since the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:2).

Unlike the majesty of earthly monarchs, which is limited to earth only, David would say to God, "You...set Your glory above the heavens". What a great God He is! It is tempting to see in verse 2 David's recollection of the way in which God had been able to use him, an inexperienced youth, to defeat the giant, Goliath. Certainly, the historical record in 1 Samuel 17 emphasises David's youth and inexperience. "David was the youngest" (verse 14). "Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth'" (verse 33). But in the power which comes from God alone, young David had been able to silence for ever the voice of the Philistine who had defied the armies of the living God. Thus David writes, "Out of the mouths of babes and infants You have ordained strength (or, established praise), Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger."

So Paul would later write to the Corinthians: "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27). Let us, by all means, have a sense of our smallness but, at the same time, let us keep a sense of the greatness of our God!

It is noteworthy that the Lord Jesus uses this verse 2 to justify the praises of the children of Jerusalem as they cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David". The Jewish leaders would have silenced them but Jesus gladly, and rightly, accepted the children's praise (Matthew 21:15-16).

In verse 3, David writes of the vastness of the heavens as being the work of God's fingers. When I want to pick up a needle, I use my fingers. That's a relatively simple task - even though, at times, I seem to be all thumbs! When I need to pick up a sack of potatoes, that's a hard job - a job that requires both my hands! David looks upon the heavens, sun, moon, and the myriads of the stars, as just a small task for God. Have you noticed that in the account of creation in Genesis 1, after the creation of the sun and the moon, we read of God, "He made the stars also" (verse 16) - as though the stars, in the billions we now know them to be, were almost an afterthought in the ways of God!

But there was one task for which God needed His hands. When Jesus came into our world, He came, of course, with hands, and arms, and feet, and legs, just as you and I have. What a vital part of His ministry those hands were! When the mothers of Salem brought their children to Jesus, the disciples would have turned those children away. But Mark tells us, "And [Jesus] took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them" (10:16). The Lord Jesus needed His hands to hug those children and to love them! A leper, an outcast from society, was another who felt the touch of those loving hands. Again Mark tells us, "And Jesus, moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed'" (1:41). It is interesting that Mark uses the strongest form of the Greek word for 'touch', implying 'to hold on' or 'to embrace'. Could ever two such dissimilar beings be found in such close contact with each other? Those hands of Jesus were needed for healing. But above all, they were nail-pierced hands which Jesus, after His resurrection, showed to Thomas when He invited him, "Look at My hands" (John 20:27). So that our sins might be forgiven, those hands of Jesus had to be nailed to Calvary's cross. That was an infinitely greater work than the work of creation! Finally, we should notice that when the Lord Jesus went back to heaven, Luke tells us, "And [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them" (24:50). Those hands are still uplifted in blessing on His people today!

We started our talk this morning by emphasising the sense of wonder which every Christian needs to maintain. There are two places where we will be impressed with this sense of wonder. One is creation; the other is Calvary. In our thinking, and in our living, let us always keep the cross of Calvary before us!

Faced with the immensity of creation, and aware of his own smallness, David has to exclaim, "What is man that You are mindful of Him, and the son of man that You visit him (or 'care for him')". In this verse, we should notice that the David first uses the Hebrew word '*enosh*' for 'man', that is, feeble man in all his frailty. The second time, the word is 'Adam' man made in the image of God. The wonder of the recurring message of the Bible is that God cares for man, for you and me, in all our weakness and insignificance, and despite the fact that we have largely lost that image. Faced with Calvary, with its message of God's unceasing love, the Christian has no grounds whatever for crying, as Martha did in her busyness, "Lord, do You not care?" (Luke 10:40), or as the disciples did on that storm tossed lake,

when it looked as though they were going to drown, "Teacher, do You not care?" (Mark 4:38). None of us, whoever we are and wherever we are, are outside that love and care of God. So Peter writes, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for You" (1 Peter 5:7). In the beginning, man was made a little lower than the angels and given a place of glory and honour. So David continues, "You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands, You have put all things under his feet".

We can see something of that dominion in the Genesis record. There we read: "Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name" (2:19).

But the Genesis record goes on to record, sadly, how sin came in and spoiled the perfection of God's creation. To some extent, man's dominion over creation has been lost, though not entirely. Part of the punishment for the disobedience of Adam and Eve was that, as God pronounced, there would be "enmity between you - the serpent - and the woman". Little wonder that snakes induce a sense of fear in most of us! That dominion has also been lost in other ways. When faced with a roaring lion in the wild, most of us would run away as fast as we could! There would be little sense of dominion! We have said that that dominion has not been entirely lost as man's place in the animal kingdom testifies. Down through the ages, man has sought to establish his dominion over the animals sometimes by control, and sometimes by killing. The fact that we can today speak of 'endangered species' nevertheless testifies to how corrupted that dominion has become. What a mess man has made of his dominion!

Against such a background of failure on man's part, it is lovely to see that the writer to the Hebrews can take up verses 4-6 of our Psalm and apply them to the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 2:6-8). Where there has been total failure on the part of man, there has been no failure, nor will there ever be, on the part of the Lord Jesus! But Hebrews 2:8 goes on to add, "But now we do not yet see all things put under Him".

In manhood, the Lord Jesus, too, was "made a little lower than the angels". But the down-stooping of His incarnation is only part of the story. "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross". There is a glorious answer to that down stooping! "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-10).

Though "not yet", the day is not far off, we believe, when the Lord Jesus will be seen to fill this place of universal dominion. He will fill it when He reigns as King during the millennium, that 1,000 years reign which comes after He has taken the Church to heaven. Then He will be Head of a creation at peace, as Isaiah foretells: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:6-9).

In the eternal state, which follows the millennium, the supremacy of the Lord Jesus will also be seen. Paul quotes verse 6 of our Psalm as he looks on to that time: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:24-27).

David closes his Psalm on the same note of adoration on which he began: "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth". As we think of the greatness of God's handiwork, in creation as in redemption, may we, too, be filled with a sense of wonder at all His purposes of love and grace toward us.

We close with the words of Psalm 115:1: "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, and because of Your truth". Amen.

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