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# In All The Earth

## Psalm 8

### Introduction

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouth of babes and infants,  
you have established strength  
because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

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?

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and 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 seas.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

### Concerns

This season we celebrate a holiday we refer to as thanksgiving. It was established to remember our dependence upon God and the circumstances of the founding pioneers on this continent the Pilgrims. What images come to mind when you hear the word “thanksgiving?” Close your eyes and focus on the pictures and ideas that you imagine. Many of you are visualizing family gatherings – parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles -- and turkey. Others are recalling football games -- college rivalries and professional traditions -- and turkey. Many of you can see harvest decorations -- cornucopia and cornstalks -- and turkey. Perhaps some of your imaginations are so vivid that you can even smell the festivities – sage dressing, pumpkin pie, and cranberries -- and turkey. But some of you are

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recalling ideas of gratitude and praise because of what God continues to do in you and for you (and for turkey...it is my favorite meat...) The degree of our thankfulness flows from an awareness of the greatness of what we have received. Not that the primary motivator for our Christian living should be an attitude of attempting to repay what God has done for us in the past, faith should be that motivator. John Piper has this to say about gratitude (or thankfulness):

”There are ways that gratitude helps bring about obedience to Christ. One way is that the spirit of gratitude is simply incompatible with some sinful attitudes...Gratitude is a humble, happy response to the good will of someone who has done or tried to do you a favor. This humility and happiness cannot coexist in the heart with coarse, ugly, mean attitudes. Therefore the cultivation of a thankful heart leaves little room for such sins. There is a sense in which gratitude and faith are interwoven joys that strengthen each other. As gratitude joyfully revels in the benefits of past grace, so faith joyfully relies on the benefits of future grace. Therefore when gratitude for God’s past grace is strong, the message is sent that God is supremely trustworthy in the future because of what he has done in the past. In this way faith is strengthened by a lively gratitude of God’s past trustworthiness. On the other hand, when faith in God’s future grace is strong, the message is sent that this kind of God makes no mistakes, so that everything he has done in the past is part of a good plan and can be remembered with gratitude. In this way gratitude is strengthened by a lively faith in God’s future grace. Only if we trust God to turn past calamities into future comfort can we look back with gratitude for all things.”

This morning we are going to investigate a psalm that causes us to look back, and we hope will motivate us to walk forward with greater certainty and hope.

## Context

The Book of Psalms can be broken into five collections of poems and songs arranged by use, authorship and content. Book One extends from the first Psalm to the 41<sup>st</sup> Psalm. This section reportedly comes from David himself and we have no good reason to doubt this idea. It also appears to be musings from a time in David’s reign when things were not good. The psalms in this section are largely pleas for deliverance. Interspersed in this section are thanksgivings and praises for this God who can deliver. The eighth Psalm is one such praise psalm. But even in its praise character we should be looking to see if there are any clues as to why this praise song should be here as a praise in the midst of perplexity and the need for deliverance. The psalm begins with...

## A Glorious Assertion (vs. 1a)

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

This Psalm begins and ends with an exclamation of the glory of God. This construction referred to as an inclusion frames the psalm and focuses our attention on its point of emphasis. In this case the extent and wonder of the name of the Lord.

### His Name

We miss the emphasis on “the name” in most translations. “LORD” in all caps is the traditional way to identify the divine name in the original text. Because of ancient Israel’s concern not to use the name of the Lord in vain or to misuse it, it became traditional, even morally wrong to attempt to speak God’s name. The Greek translation of the Old Testament used the word for “lord,” hence the connection into English. (For interest, for a time the Hebrews would say the word “<sup>^</sup>adonay” [also translated into English as lord} when reading the scriptures or speaking to God in prayer. Evidently even today, Orthodox Jews replace even <sup>^</sup>adonay with a word that means “the name.” In the written text, as an aid the consonants for <sup>^</sup>adonay were written in the margin whenever God’s name was present so that one would remember to speak the correct word when reading aloud. It became a common misconception that God’s name be pronounced with those vowels and the term “Jehovah” was developed. More likely the vowels which compose God’s name would be pronounced as “Yahweh.”)

*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* One’s name was often an extension of one’s self. It represented and stood for you in your absence and should carry some of your personal “power.” One often attempted to emulate the meaning of their given name or they were nicknamed in accordance with their personalities or character. Also, knowing one’s name also was an indication of a sense of relationship, you knew them beyond formalities and titles. One’s name also was tied to one’s reputation, what one knew about you...

### His Reputation

His name is associated with majesty. *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* His reputation carried with it a sense of the majestic. Majesty should bring to mind the idea of power. Gerald Wilson puts it this way: “the common thread seems to be one of impressive – almost intimidating – power. It is a power that is visible, on display for all to see... [it] describes God’s public side, God’s willingness to be seen – God on display, so to speak. That public presence is for the psalmist impressive, awe-inspiring, even intimidation, but not particularly threatening or destructive; the psalmist is instead inspired to rejoice.” When we know God by name, we have a relationship with the one whom should cause us to shudder and fear, yet trust and love for the relationship he established with us. A relationship that recognizes his dominion...

### His Dominion

His name permeates all the earth. *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* The public nature of the word “majesty” is why that word is used

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in this context, that the “majesty” of his name is found in all the earth. His authority and dominion are found wherever his name is found (remember the idea behind one’s “name”?). His rule and protection extends over the entire earth is implied in making a claim regarding one’s name. It is not just that everywhere people know *of* Him, it is that everywhere He is to be revered because of his power. This would be a comfort in a situation where things appear to be out of control, to be chaotic and haphazard. How often do we look around us and wonder what God is doing or maybe even under our breaths doubt that God is even near. Yet the psalmist confidently declares: *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

But then he leads us to...

### A Goading Question (vs. 1b-4)

Let’s set up the continuing presentation of the psalm by asking the question, “how is it that God’s name and its majesty found in all the earth?” What does this psalm say regarding this assertion? For example: Does the psalm describe the results of this presence, does it repeat this statement to give more poetic emphasis, and therefore be a praise song? Or, does the psalmist give us additional information to help us understand and apply the power of this great statement. Let’s go on and read some more.

This section finds its focus in verse 4, in a question. But the psalmist crafts his question in a style that flows from the assertion made in the beginning of the verse.

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouth of babes and infants,  
you have established strength  
because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

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?

### His Standard (vs. 1b)

In the style of Hebrew poetry, that of portraying lines in parallelisms. That is presenting a thought, often in visual, metaphorical language and then repeating the thought in the next stanza. Some times it is just a restatement. Other times it is the reverse thought. Often it is an elaboration or expansion on the previous assertion. That is what is happening here in verse 1. The psalmist expects for us to see the first half of verse one as bound stylistically to verse 9, but he enters the body of the psalm, not with a sharp break, but with a smooth parallel transition. *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory above the heavens.*

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We should see the parallels between the “majesty of your name” and “your glory.” The phrase “in all the earth” should be seen as being related to “above the heavens.” He is building and expanding upon his exclamation and actually begins to set words of action and intention into the mix. The second stanza has God in action. The “glory” that is parallel to the “majesty” of the first phrase is now “set” by God. Whereas “majesty” is often understood to be the public display of one’s greatness and position, glory more often is used to describe one’s character. It refers to know Him in a more direct way. It is a more ominous term with respect to God because it his glory that when seen is expected to cause one’s immediate demise. But the psalmist tells us the God himself is at work in this activity. He becomes active in the display and proclamation of the glory and majesty. He is busy in the work of making himself known and exercising the dominion that accompanies this “knowledge.” He sets the standard by which we are to know him and follow him. *You have set your glory above the heavens!*

### His Ways (vs. 2)

But that is not all that we see displayed, not just the fact that God does set his glory before us (and by implication spread his majesty in all the earth), we are given a glimpse of how this work is accomplished. For those who do such things, evidently this section of verses 1 and 2 are difficult to translate. The words have built-in ambiguity and the grammar is confusing. The ESV puts it this way:

Out of the mouth of babes and infants,  
you have established strength  
because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

But others wrestle with the text and render it somewhat differently:

NIV:

From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger.

NLT:

You have taught children and nursing infants to give you praise, they silence your enemies who were seeking revenge.

The word in the Hebrew, “established strength” vs. “ordained praise,” according to those who know, is a word that usually refers to strength. But many translators don’t like the ideas of “giving strength” to God, it seems inappropriate. So they render the idea as praise, tying it to what might come out of a mouth. But others see the mouth of a baby as also indicative of the weakness of a baby. It is utterly dependent on others for its food and nourishment and dependent on others since it cannot express the full content of its desires. The play on words as indicated in the translators of the ESV is that the enemy is confounded in the strength (or weakness) of mere babies (this not foreign to the ideas expressed in the other translations...). The point we are to see is that God “stills” or silences the enemy in the works of *weakness*. So whether it is out of the babble of infants that God’s praise can still be heard or in the dependency of a child that God reveals his

greatness, we should make the connection, yes, *God is displaying his glory still* but now the psalmist has us moving to understand the *how* this works. Just exactly what are God's ways of accomplishing his deeds? It is not necessarily in overwhelming circumstances of awesome magnitude, but most often in weakness. *You have set your glory above the heavens!*

### His Wonder (vs. 3,4)

This now brings us to the hinge of the psalm, the rhetorical center where the problem becomes clear and the resolution begins. In this psalm, our author does so with a question.

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 we are aware that it is God how is at work in the manifestation of his glory and the declaration of his dominion, we are forced to pause and reflect on exactly what it is that God is doing and how is he accomplishing this event. Verse 3 speaks of the clear evidence of his majesty that is reiterated as having been set in place, and then verse 4 expresses the wonder over who we are. Perhaps the psalmist recalled the myriads of stars that were visible on the hillsides as he tended his father's flocks. Perhaps he had witnessed meteor showers and lunar eclipses that have recently taken place in our own night sky. On a clear night, it is especially noticeable in the country away from the excess glow of city lights; the depth of the starry host is particularly evident. The night sky is not just a flat, black sheet with the twinkling of small lights in a one-dimensional array. There is depth and arrangement and movement and power and glory! Glory for those who have eyes to see...

So God is busy making his glory and majesty known, but what is man...that you even pay him any mind? Or in the context of the displaying of the glory and majesty, what is man that you would include him in this grand demonstration of your person and being? We should be brought to a halt here in our reading. We should feel very small, infinitesimally insignificant, and utterly worthless...

But the question is followed with a response...

## A Gripping Answer (vs. 5-8)

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and 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 seas.

## Our Honor (vs. 5)

In verse five the psalmist expects us to begin to answer this question he has posed with a reflection upon the creation account. He doesn't leave us in despair, he wants us to get up and go! So he takes us back to the beginning, back to the very beginning, where those stars were first formed and the organization of this grand endeavor seemed to begin -- to Genesis chapter 1. This set of stanzas should clearly recall the description of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. Let us quickly turn there and read this section in Gen. 1: 24-31:

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "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." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The psalmist expects us to make the connection between Genesis and his song. There is an implied purpose in the creation. Mankind was given a task and purpose. From our psalm in verse 5 we see mankind was given honor. We were established in a position to be able to accomplish a purpose. It is in mankind that God is working to accomplish his purpose. God displays the majesty of his name in the testimony of his people.

You all know that in order to get anything done you have to have the rights and responsibilities to accomplish them. How many times have you found yourselves dealing with a company over a problem, and you are obviously talking to someone who is a go-between. You are engaged in conversation with someone who is designated to screen and defer if at all possible. Eventually you get frustrated and say, "I want to speak to your supervisor!" You want to deal with some one who can get the job done. That is the position we have been given! It is not just that God made us pretty or unique or just "cool." He made us in this way for a specific purpose. The idea of the divine image has more to do with our function than it does with our innate faculties. We were crowned with honor to have it said that: *You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;*

### **Our Responsibility (vs. 6-8)**

But our assertion is that verse 9 is what is governing our reading of the psalm. The psalmist wants to make a point of God's majesty being in all the earth. Especially in the midst of the lament psalms all around this 8<sup>th</sup> psalm, he points out a purpose in all this uncertainty. Why it is that we are faced with such trouble and trials, such problems and positions. It is because God is making his majesty known throughout the earth. This has been his agenda from the very beginning. The reference back to the Genesis ideas are not coincidental, this is how God works. We are given here in this psalm, in a real sense, a *divine commentary* on what was been said in Genesis. Moses, in the Pentateuch, wasn't just giving the people an interesting historical account; he was giving them their marching orders to enter the promised land now they had left the bondage of Egypt. They were to go forward to what God had promised them, a renewed Eden. There were to continue in the New land to accomplish what God had intended for his people (his image) all along.

Now let's go to Gen. 1:28 and 2:15 and see what this dominion entailed.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:28)

Adam and Eve were given the responsibility to fill the earth. Don't forget their principle function...that of bearing the image of God. Their function was to fill the earth with the image, dare I say the majesty and glory of God. When we see Genesis 2 we find this statement...

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Gen 2:15)

The ideas behind work and keep when used together in other places in the Old testament are words of priestly service involving the temple. “Keep” in particular carries with it ideas of protection. But did we maintain this project of dominion? No! We, in Adam, abdicated our position. Adam in essence saw his dominion sacrificed. He did not “keep” the garden. He did not protect the garden (and therefore the earth) from the evil. And what was occurring was a failure to “fill the earth,” to convey his name throughout the earth. We no longer could effectively multiply the image and testimony of God and his majesty any more.

But we are not left with the failure. God is still working to set his glory above the heavens. The New Testament has much to say on how this is still in operation. First of all we should have heard a clear reference to Heb 2:5-10.

Now 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 you care for him? You made him for 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 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.

The author of Hebrews knew the implications of this passage and the predicament it proposed. In Pastor Russ’s sermon on this passage in Hebrews he made these remarks:

“But look at the wording carefully. Now He is crowned with glory and honor *because* of the suffering of death. The emphasis of the writer is on what was suffered. And because of what was suffered, we now can see Him crowned as a victor. He has received the victor’s wreath having overcome death by virtue of His resurrection. So Jesus has gone through the suffering that sin and death brings and has already received the glory and honor as the victorious conqueror. Now He has everything put under His feet, though we do not see it yet in its fullness. But, O, the day is coming. And when that glorious day comes, we will rule and reign with Him. And now we can understand why it is that Psalm 8 begins and ends with these familiar words, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name

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in all the earth.” Not just because of the magnificent destiny and majestic dominion promised to the saints, but also because, when it seems hopeless because we are so helpless, we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth.”

Jesus is God’s way to magnify his name...made to be the man of which Psalm 8 speaks. Paul also speaks of this goal of God in Philippians 2: 9-11.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Can you now here echoes of filling the earth with his image and hearing his name majestically proclaimed in its dominion and strength?

So where do we fit in? Since Jesus is the complete fulfillment of what Adam was to be in the garden, of what the psalmist pondered in his wonder of God’s glory, what are we doing here?

Very briefly lets just look at Ephesians 2:10.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

For Paul, nearly everything hinges on our being “in Christ.” We were created “in Christ” for good works. Can you hear Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 in those words? In fact Jesus explicitly gave us the same type of command that is connected to Genesis and the Psalm. Read in Acts 1:7,8 where Jesus says:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

What do you think we are witnesses of and for? We are to give testimony to the wonder and the majesty and the glory of God.

Which brings us to the end for this morning...

## Conclusion

Are you a witness of his majesty? First off, are you aware of his majesty? Has the gospel gripped your heart and flooded it with the light of his glory? Notice I did not ask if you have made some contract with God for good behavior, “Lord I will live for your if...” that is not the gospel. The gospel is the promise of God that he will declare his majesty in you very own soul. He will make you his image. He will place you in Christ to declare the works of his hand. Have you trusted him today for that wonder? Have bowed your knee to yield to his will and stop trying to earn his favor or the favor of those around you?

And then are you a witness of his majesty, are you actively engaged in the cause of declaring his glory in all the earth? Or are you simply looking to survive and limp your way into heaven. If you think your only goals in life or to avoid embarrassing moments or to simplify your life from the pains and entanglements that many find themselves in, “If I am a Christian I wouldn’t have to deal with...” maybe our first point is not real for you. God takes the trials and turns them into ways to explode his greatness and glory through them. But only when we recognize our purpose and God’s plan do we, again in John Piper’s words, “...trust God to turn past calamities into future comfort can we look back with gratitude for all things” and then we will see his name majestic in all the earth!

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