

The Greater Greatness of God as seen in the Greatness of Mankind!

Psalm 8

8/23/92

Dr. Jerry Nelson

www.soundliving.org

(Humanity; Purpose in life; worship)

I love the exuberance of youth! I love the enthusiasm of children! One of the comments I often hear from newcomers to our church is how much the place seems alive. And almost in the same breath they will comment on all the students they see in this church. When you come into this building on a Wednesday night or a Sunday morning and many times in between you see students all over. They're loud, they're colorful, and they're great. They're optimistic, they're idealistic, and they're fantastic. We love their exuberance and their enthusiasm.

And as you think about it you wish there was a way for them to keep that outlook through life. Sometimes you'll meet a child or young person who doesn't have that attitude of optimism about life and you'll think "what's wrong". You ask yourself what happened at such a young age to take the "wonder" out of life.

Sometimes early in life but often by adulthood the bitter experiences of life bow and sadden our spirits. Oh, we maintain a facade of lightheartedness and enthusiasm but we grow increasingly skeptical and even cynical. Skepticism is habitual doubt. And while there is a reasonable skepticism that comes with experience it too often becomes cynicism - a contemptuous disbelief. The long hard struggles of life, the heartaches we experience, the seeming lack of change in us or others tempts us, even seduce us, to disbelief - a contemptuous disbelief. We no longer believe in a God who is there. At least we no longer believe He has anything to offer in this life. We no longer believe life can be positive and fulfilling and we become angry with those who say otherwise. We

end up just hanging on, waiting life out, or just managing to cope! We have a lifeless spirit - civil but cold.

The problem may even be compounded for Christians. We see ourselves in all of our weaknesses and failings. We see ourselves in all of our sinfulness before God. And we secretly despair of it ever changing.

Most people don't want to live that way. They want to change. They want to have an enthusiasm and optimism about life.

What is significant are the two fundamentally different ways people set out to recapture that zest for life. There are those on the one hand who try harder without God. An example are the many who just try to buck up and hit life harder. If they work more, get in better organizations, play harder, and maintain the facade, maybe they'll make it through or even find that elusive excitement for life. On the other hand we have those who do not struggle to become but praise their God for who they are by his grace. **Lasting enthusiasm for life, real excitement for living is not found by attaining but by accepting.** We don't do the right things to recapture a zest for life; we understand and believe the truth. It's not what you do it is who you are.

Why does youthful enthusiasm almost universally wane? Why does exuberance become skepticism and even cynicism? It does so because the enthusiasm and exuberance are misplaced. The young assume that by their efforts - their achievements, their successes, and their hard work they will find fulfillment. But most of their achievements and successes bring no more lasting enjoyment or fulfillment than last year's carnival prize. Lasting enjoyment and fulfillment are not found in attainment but in acceptance and praise; accepting who we are by God's grace and praising God

for it.

Please look with me at Psalm 8 and follow along as I give a slightly paraphrased version of the Song: "O Gracious Father, our Master/Lord, How majestic is your name in all the earth. You have demonstrated your glory and greatness in the starry heavens you have made. Yet from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what are we that you are mindful of us? What are we, the children of mere humans that you care for us? You have made us in your image and crowned us as kings with glory and honor. You made us rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under our feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O gracious Father, our Master/Lord How majestic is your name in all the earth."

When you look at the first two lines and the last two lines of this Psalm you see quickly the purpose the songwriter has in mind: It is to praise the uniqueness of God. How "majestic" is your name. You are superior to any other.

Why does the Songwriter praise God? He does so because God is worthy and also because he can't help it! His heart is so full it must come out. Let me ask you, "When someone is truly, not falsely, praising something are they enjoying the experience? Is it fulfilling?" Absolutely! In fact the very praise makes it sweeter and better yet. How many of you have relived the joy of some experience or some beautiful scene by describing it to someone else? How many of you have known the sweet labor of describing in detail to someone the beauty or character of your fiancé? Such praise

is not work it is almost an involuntary response. And the experience is sweeter still, more enjoyable, more fulfilling to you if you can get someone to join you in the praise. If they can see what you saw, hear what you heard, and feel what you felt - then the praise is the most satisfying.

The world speaks of the "sweet smell of success" or the "taste of victory" but those experiences are at best fleeting. It is praise of God that brings the deepest joy and the most lasting satisfaction. The deepest joy is an attitude of gratitude that overflows into worship of God. But what elicits such praise? What thought fills the Songwriter's heart so full that he can't help himself? What gives him such enthusiasm for life, such exuberance?

Surely you have looked closely at a diamond. When you did, you noticed the faces or facets of that diamond - the many flat surfaces at angles to each other. Your attention was grabbed and you were struck with the beauty of the diamond as light reflected from one of those facets. So in this short Psalm, the Songwriter shows us just one facet of the character of our God - a facet that grabs our attention, strikes us with the beauty of his grace, and elicits thoroughly enjoyable praise.

In the last half of verse one, combined with verse two, we get a preview of David's thoughts in this Psalm. I said "David" because the introduction to the Psalm says it is of David. Many of you are familiar with training manuals or articles in technical journals. You know that often the manual or article will have a brief paragraph at the very beginning that sets forth the basic idea of the chapter or the article. As I study this Psalm I get the sense that is what is happening here.

The Songwriter expresses amazement: His amazement is in the fact that the God who

set his glory forth in the heavens would ordain the praise of children and infants to be the means He uses to confound his enemies.

Do you remember from Matthew 21 when Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey and all the people praised him and honored him as a king? Just after that He went into the temple and the Bible tells us that children were shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David" or in other words, "Praise to the King". The priests and teachers of the law were angry at this but Jesus quoting Psalm 8 said, "From the lips of children and infants God has ordained praise". Those who were Christ's enemies were confused and frustrated by the praise of Jesus by children. The apostle Paul said to the Corinthians that God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and he chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God is pleased to honor himself before his enemies by the praises of little children.

In these first two verses the Psalmist is expressing amazement at a great contrast. God has created all the heavens - the galaxies that extend as far as the eye can see - these heavens that so ably display his glory and yet he chooses to use the weakest, the least likely, to bring himself greatest praise. It's that theme that the Songwriter now expands. When he starts verse 3 it is as if he thinks back to what he just wrote in the last part of verse one. There he spoke of the greatness of the heavens and now he picks up on that idea again. "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place." You can imagine the poet out on a mountain side late into the night, away from any city lanterns, seeing the stars and the moon set forth in all their beauty. Words can't fully describe what that is like. But you've been there haven't you? And when you stand all alone out there under

those stars don't David's next words fit perfectly: "What is man that you are mindful of him the son of man that you care for him? Oh, God, the vastness of it is too great to comprehend, and the insignificance I feel is almost overwhelming.

Hundreds of years ago, even before modern astronomy would make the statement even more compelling, a man wrote, "A survey of the solar system has a tendency to moderate the pride of mankind and to promote humility." He went on to write, "Perhaps there are no rational beings throughout the universe among whom pride would appear more (inappropriate) or incompatible than in (human beings)..." Dr. Chalmers said that to give ourselves some idea of our insignificance consider that if our whole globe were snuffed out the galaxy would suffer no more loss than if a single leaf fell in a million-acre forest. (from Spurgeon p 81-2)

I recently heard the illustration of a golf ball and a grain of sugar on a football field. Let the golf ball at one end of the field represent the sun and let the grain of sugar at the fifty yard line represent the earth. And then imagine 5 billion people reduced appropriately in size to fit on that grain of sugar. Such is our size in comparison with the sun. And then imagine that the sun is the closest of all the stars. In the vastness of such a universe what are we that God is mindful of us, what are mere human beings that God cares? Now if you think about it and let that emotion grip you, you will see that we are right where I began this sermon: In contrast to the enthusiasm of youth many people feel very insignificant. They'll just try to hang on. Life is too big and they are too small. Skepticism and even cynicism take over. If there is a God he clearly doesn't notice me. Such a view produces despair at worst and a "Life is short - Play hard" attitude at best.

At this point in the Psalm, David has given us only half of the equation. Do you remember the contrast that was set up at the end of verse one and verse two? There David said that in spite of the vastness of the universe God took the weakest, the least likely and honored them to produce the praise that would confound God's enemies. So now in verses 5-8, David says, in spite of the insignificance of people in comparison to the rest of the universe, God has chosen to take us, human beings, and make us in his image and then set us as kings over all the rest of creation. Remember the 5 billion little specks on that grain of sugar on the football field? In each of us, unique among all creation, God's image is created and reflected. Look at verse 5, "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings". The NASB is more accurate, "you made him a little lower than God." The idea here is not how low mankind is but how high. God has chosen us to bear his image. Do not misunderstand, we are not God, as some would claim and we are not even gods as other false religions would claim but we have been elevated by God above the rest of creation to bear his image. The Bible uses that phrase several times and you've heard it many times but what does it mean to be created in the image of God? Briefly it means that we have some characteristics like God that animals, plants and inanimate objects don't have.

One of those is personality. Women and men have knowledge, feelings and a will in ways that God does and animals do not. It also means that we have morality. Animals don't possess freedom with responsibility as we do. And thirdly, we possess a spirituality - an ability to fellowship with God. God has given us a capacity to relate to Him that is unique among all created things.

But David says that is not all. In verse 6 he writes, God has "crowned us with

glory and honor." That is language describing a king and in verses 6-8 David describes the kingdom as all creation.

Of what part of the Bible do these verses remind you? Yes, Genesis 1:26. After God had finished creating everything else he said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground." When you read Genesis one and two you get a picture of men and women in their relationship to each other, and to the environment, and to God that is very different from what we experience today. Men and women were to love each other not abuse each other. As vice-regents on earth, men and women were to care for the environment and the creatures, to oversee them to accomplish God's purposes rather than destroy his purposes. And in their relationship to God, they were to enjoy him by serving him and his purposes rather than rebelling. Now when I go to the New Testament and read of God's plans for human beings on the new earth created after the coming again of Jesus I see the same responsible and loving relationships. But most of you know that between creation and consummation, because of the rebellion against God's authority of Adam and Eve and everyone since, all of those relationships out of kilter. And the results have been tragic conflicts with each other, a disregard of God and an abuse of the rest of creation. But with the coming to earth of Jesus, God's Son, nearly 2000 years ago, God continued His plan to recreate in us His image - that image that had been so terribly disfigured by our rebellion. And when we ask for God's forgiveness made possible through Christ's death on the cross, and we receive Jesus as the Saving Lord of our lives, God gives us new lives - his life. And He begins the lifelong process of

transforming us into his image and restoring us to the relationships he created us to enjoy with Him, with each other and with the rest of creation.

In the Psalm, David doesn't deal with the in between (the rebellion and subsequent forgiveness and restoration). Instead David's intent is to show the fundamental fact: God has created us to bear his incomparable image and to reign in responsibility and enjoyment over all creation. We may still be in process in that transformation of our lives but if we are trusting Christ our destiny is certain. In a sense the Songwriter says, "Can you imagine? In the midst of all he has created that is so awesome, so large, so mighty, God has chosen us to bear his image and to rule over everything else!"

Skepticism and cynicism be gone. Just hanging on or barely coping are wholly insufficient. To us has been given life and status and significance based not on what we've done but based solely on God's grace. We don't find enthusiasm and exuberance for life in the shallow, fleeting highs of temporary successes or the emotional rushes of new experiences. Instead we find it in God's acceptance of us and His appointment of us to reign. You may not feel much like a king right now but God says that if you are trusting in his Son, that is exactly what you are - a king bearing his image, crowned with glory and honor. David says when you consider all that there is only one response: O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is your name in all the earth.

There is no action I am asking you to take this morning. I only ask that you consider if what I've said is what God's word says. If it is then meditate on that truth. Begin to bask in its reality. Let it fill your heart and mind. All that you may know the joy of enthusiastic praise!