

Psalm 8

Majestic Name

Amington St Editha

Sunday 2 July 2017

The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life (8)

from Dale Ralph Davis' book

A scientist approaches God and says to Him: 'God, we don't need you anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life. We can now do what you did in the beginning!'

'Oh, is that so?' replies God. 'Yes,' says the scientist, 'We can take dirt and form it into the shape of a human, and breathe life into it, thus, create a human being.'

'Well, that's very interesting,' God said, 'Show me.' So the scientist reaches down, grabs a handful of dirt, and starts to mould the soil into the shape of a man.

'No, no,' interrupts God, 'Get your own dirt!'

Today's psalm is about praising God – for his majesty, his power in creation, his care for us, his people.

Praise (1-3)

For once, David isn't in trouble (well, actually we don't know that – but at least this time it doesn't *say* he's in trouble). Instead he is writing a song, most likely for use in temple worship. It's the sort of song we might begin a service with: the focus is on praising God.

David's praise focuses on the breadth, height and depth of God's power.

First, breadth: **how majestic is your name in all the earth** (1)! Some people are so famous their name is recognised around the world – usually footballers like Lionel Messi. John Lennon famously said the Beatles were 'more popular than Jesus'.

But *no-one* can achieve the sheer breath and majesty of God's name – because one day *every* knee will bow before him.

Second, height: **you have set your glory in the heavens** (1). When we look up at the night sky here in England, we can see at most a few dozen stars with the naked eye, due to the light pollution. When David looked up at **the heavens**, he could see **the moon** and several thousand **stars** (3). But that is only the tiniest fraction of the tiniest fraction of the whole universe, which is so vast the numbers don't even make sense any more.

We can't even see most of the universe – and yet the God who **set it all in place** (4) – is infinitely greater still: **you have set your glory in the heavens** (1).

Third, depth: **you have established a stronghold against your enemies** (2). What makes a building strong? Good, solid, deep foundations which support the weight of the whole building. God's **stronghold** is so strong, it doesn't simply *defeat* his **enemies**; they are **silent** before it (2).

God alone is worthy of praise. He is more mighty, more majestic, more glorious than we can ever imagine.

I'm sure you all know the one about a teacher who was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She walked around to look at the artwork. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, 'I'm drawing God.' The teacher paused and said, 'But no one knows what God looks like.'

Without looking up from her drawing the girl replied, 'They will in a minute.'

Care (4-8)

As David considers the incomprehensible majesty of God, his thoughts zoom right in to us, puny little humans at the centre of the vast cosmos: **what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them** (4)?

Well, it's a good question! What are *we*, that God would not only (v4) *think* about us, but *care* for us too?

Various philosophers down the ages have tried to define what the point of humanity is, what our purpose is.

Pagans suggest we are at the mercy of capricious gods, and the movements of the stars. They look for meaning in horoscopes, and worship the sun, the moon and the stars.

Atheists say that humanity has no higher purpose, that we are here by accident, a mere speck of dust in the history of the universe. Richard Dawkins says we are 'simply gene machines', the purpose of which is to pass on our traits to our children.

Humanists tell us to stop looking outside ourselves for answers, that humanity has everything it needs to thrive within us already. All we need, we already have.

The Bible gives us a different answer, one which David rehearses here in Psalm 8. Here some words from Genesis 1:

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

Genesis 1.27-28 (NIV)

In Psalm 8 David rehearses these words, not as the answer to a philosophical question, but as words of **breathless praise** (p98):

You made [human beings] rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

Psalms 8.6-8 (NIV)

It's important to note the way David speaks these words: he is talking to God, he is praising God (**you**). He isn't bigging up humanity (look how great we are), but gasping in wonder that God would give such a place in creation to *us* (**you made us rulers**). David **is not posing a mental teaser; he is engaging in breathless praise** (p98).

Jesus

You may have noticed that I read those verses (6-8) slightly differently to what is printed in the church Bibles. They read:

What is *man* that you are mindful of *him*,
the *son of man* that you care for *him*?

You made *him* ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under *his* feet...

Psalm 8.4 & 6 (NIV pre-2011)

There is a deliberate ambiguity here. Is the psalm talking about *everyone*, or *one specific person*? Well it isn't 'or' it's 'both'. As David echoes the promise of God to the whole human race in Genesis 1, so he also prophesies about the coming Messiah, who ultimately fulfils that promise – and that person is Jesus.

For, not only did God *think* about us; not only does God *care* about us; he also *became one of us*. God – the infinite, majestic, almighty and eternal God – stepped into our world as a man, in a specific time and place, to live with and as one of us.

How that happened, I can't explain, any more than David can explain *why* God would give us such a place of honour.

But, like David, I can testify to its truth. Unlike other philosophies which try to seek out an answer to life's biggest questions, the Bible tells us that *God comes to us*. We don't need to find *him* – because *he* has already found *us*.

This God of creation, whose glory is set in the heavens, is with us, is with *you*, here today. He promises he will never leave, that he will always be with us.

I wonder, will you turn to him today? Will you turn away from your old life, full of sin and pain, will you turn away from all that, and turn towards God?

We do that by saying sorry, thank you and please to God: sorry for all the things we've done that are wrong, thank you that he forgives us through Jesus, please fill us with the Holy Spirit, and set us free to live a life of praise and thanksgiving to God, like David did.