

**“The Majesty of God”**  
**Psalm 8:1-9**  
**January 22, 2012**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

There are times when it's not so easy to discover the theme of a particular passage of Scripture, but that is not the case with Psalm 8. The psalmist makes his theme explicit through a literary device known as *inclusio*, in which a verse of the psalm brackets the entire thing by being repeated at the beginning and end of the psalm. So the theme is stated in verse 1 and 9 of the psalm. **“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”** This psalm is about the majesty of God.

What is meant by that word “majesty”? In English, it's a word that we reserve for things that are big, stately, powerful and impressive. Majestic things produce in the human heart a thrill of awe. When you see something majestic, your heart, if not your lips also, responds with a “Wow!” Words seem inadequate to express the feeling of majesty. I can remember an experience of majesty when I saw the Grand Canyon. When you stand on one rim at Grand Canyon Village and see the other rim ten miles away, and realize that the Colorado River is about a mile below you, it is majestic.

In Hebrew, the word means basically the same thing that it means in English. Psalm 76:4 says, “Glorious are you, more majestic than the mountains of prey.” Psalm 93:4 speaks of the majesty of the thundering waves of the sea and Ezekiel 17:23 of a cedar tree. It is possible for there also to be majesty with man-made things. Isaiah 33:21 speaks of the majesty of a ship. So the word is generally used of those things that are out-sized or powerful enough to cause us simply to step back and admire them. So when the psalmist remarks on the majesty of God's name, he means simply that God is great. His greatness is the kind that makes you stop and say, “I had no idea God was this big.”

One of the curious things about this psalm is that a psalm with a stated theme of God's greatness speaks more about man than about God. Early in the psalm, the author transitions from God to man, and then doesn't return to God until the last verse. Why is this? I think the reason is that there is a double connection between the majesty of God and seeing our place in the world. On the one hand, we will never come to see our rightful place in the world until we see the majesty of God. But on the other hand, we will not see the majesty of God until we find our proper place in the world. These two are inextricably bound together. So let's consider what the psalm says both about God's place in the world and man's place.

## I. God's Place in the World

The appropriate place for God in this world is to have his unsurpassed majesty recognized by all. His name is to be majestic in all the earth. There are many fascinating and majestic things in this world, but none is as fascinating and majestic as God the Creator. Ever since sin entered the world, there has been an attempt to reduce the majesty of God. In the days of the psalmist, that was done by the belief that the gods observed national or tribal boundaries. The belief was that there was a god for each nation, and the gods didn't venture outside these boundaries. The god of the Philistines was Dagon, that of the Canaanites was Baal and Israel's God was Jehovah. They each had limited jurisdiction over their own lands. The psalmist boldly claims that such a reductionism is completely false. Israel's God is to be held in the highest esteem not only in Israel, but throughout the entire earth.

Our modern culture is also guilty of this kind of reductionism of God's glory. The popular belief about God is largely utilitarian and consumer-oriented, that God exists simply to serve our needs. If we find one particular view of God more comforting than another, then we can simply change gods like a person who chooses to shop at Target instead of Walmart. There is no ultimate truth, but rather just ideas of God that a person can change according to his own needs, as one might change musical preferences. But what we can't do, according to this view, is criticize another for his choice. This psalm teaches, as reflected in the entire Bible, that there is one God. This one God is full of majesty, so that if we know him, our hearts thrill and we are full of awe. God's place is to sit alone as the one Being in the universe truly deserving of such a response.

The psalmist begins to unpack this idea of God's majesty by saying that he has set his glory above the heavens. What he means by this is that the heart of God's glory and majesty is beyond our reach. Whatever we see of his glory, we are not seeing the best part of it. He then proceeds to describe two aspects of his glory that we can see. The first is that God defends his honor among his opponents through the weakness of babies of infants. God is so secure in his honor that he commits his defense to those who are weak. Jesus quoted this verse when the scribes and chief priests heard children crying out in the temple about Jesus, **"hosanna to the Son of David!"** (Matt. 21:15). They were angry at Jesus for allowing this, but he was unapologetic in claiming this incident as a fulfillment of Psalm 8. He rebukes the powerful with the weakest. For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, the greatness of God is often revealed through the small and insignificant things. Part of seeing the majesty of God is to pay attention to little things: the wonder of a baby's tiny fingers, the delicacy and beauty of a small flower God has made that no one in the universe noticed until you took time to see it, and the ability of a dolphin to move through the water with such agility and speed.

The psalmist next encourages us to see the majesty of God not in the small things, but in the big things. He looks skyward at night and sees the moon and the stars and is reminded again of the greatness of the God who created these. If David the psalmist had reason to stand in awe of the majesty of the God making these things, we have even more reason. Thanks to the work of astronomers, we have knowledge of this universe that was unknown to David. We know, for example, that the earth is part of a solar system anchored by a star, the sun, that burns at a temperature of 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Though it is 93 million miles from the earth, this sun is so big and burns so hot that it can warm our faces even on a winter's day. We know that the sun is one of about 200 billion stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way, and that it is quite puny compared to some other stars in our galaxy. A few years ago, astronomers discovered a star near the center of our galaxy that is so big that if it were located at the position of our sun, its outer perimeter would be about where the earth is. It is ten million times as powerful as our sun. One report of the discovery of this star said, "Actually, a star so big and bright should be unimaginable, according to some theories of star formation." But here it is nonetheless, defying minds far better than my own. Even this massive star is only one of 200 billion stars in our galaxy. The bigness of this galaxy is hard to imagine. But there's more. Astronomers have discovered that ours is not the only galaxy in the universe. They estimate that there are about 125 billion galaxies in the universe. This is a big universe, which makes it even more remarkable that the psalmist reports it to be the work of God's fingers.

It is not only the night sky that reveals such amazing things, but the day sky does as well. Consider, for example, the miracle of rain. In a meditation on a passage from Job 5, John Piper talks about the wonder of rain. Imagine that you're a farmer in Kansas, and you need your crops to be watered if they are to grow and produce a harvest. The water they need comes from the ocean, but it is over a thousand miles away. God manages to carry water that far in order to bring rain in Kansas. That's especially significant when you consider how heavy water is. If one inch of rain falls on one square mile of farmland, that would be almost 28 million cubic feet of water, which is 206 million gallons. That much water weighs 1.6 billion pounds. Yet God sends many inches of rain over many thousands of square miles. Through a process of evaporation, he gets the water up into the sky, and through condensation he gets it down to the ground again, and removes all of its salt in the process.

## **II. Man's Place in the World**

As the psalmist considers the majesty of God, he can't help but think of his own insignificance. God is so big, and man seems so little and inconsequential in comparison. In light of the greatness of the universe, it is tempting to think that my life is little and without meaning. But the psalmist doesn't go there. He asks the question that would be on anyone's mind upon the serious

contemplation of this big world we live in. **“What is man that you are mindful of him?”** But then he remembers Genesis 1 and arrives at an answer that serves to increase God’s majesty.

Genesis 1 teaches that man is made in the image of God. The language of Psalm 8 expresses it a little differently. **“Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor”** (v. 5). The big question in this verse is that of the correct translation of the word translated in our versions as “heavenly beings.” In Hebrew it is the simple word “Elohim”, which is almost always translated as God, and most commentators agree that would have been the better translation here. The NASV does in fact translate it this way. It’s not talking about man being created a little lower than the angels, but a little lower than God. This majestic God who created the wonders we observe all around has decided to confer on human beings an exalted status.

Not only does humanity have an exalted status, but also an exalted calling. **“You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet”** (v. 6). Man and woman, in the original creation, are given authority over all of God’s creation. The term often used for this is that of vice-regent, which means an assistant king. We have been given dominion over God’s creation here on the earth. Let’s consider three important applications of this truth.

The first application is to exercise the rule God has granted over creation rather than being ruled by it. One of the results of sin is the reversal of the created order, so that instead of ruling over the earth we become slaves of various parts of it. We don’t have to look far to find people who are slaves to drugs and alcohol, to food, and to their sexual appetites. Some are slaves to food by eating too much and others by eating too little. It is a violation of the nature of the created order for us to be ruled in this way. The path back, ironically, is not to assert our freedom from the reign of these things, but to allow ourselves to be ruled by the one Being who is supposed to rule over us. We’re going to consider in just a minute how we do that.

A second application is to be God’s faithful stewards over the creation. This truth becomes the foundation for a proper Christian environmentalism. Much of today’s environmentalism is not anchored in this theological foundation and has become the worship of the creation. Creation is not divine, but it does belong to the one who is. We are to exercise our dominion over the world not as if it belongs to us, but remembering that it belongs to God.

I want to spend a little more time on this third application. As Christians, we are to affirm original glory as well as original sin. The truth about humanity is not just that we are sinners at heart, but also that we were created with an original glory that David speaks of here. We really can’t understand our sin

unless we put it into the context of our original glory as image-bearers of God. The tragedy of sin is that it has corrupted the glory God created. I believe this means that we must approach people in the same order the Bible uses to describe our situation, glory first and then ruin. The application is that we must approach people with what is right about them rather than what is wrong with them. We must find the reflection of God's image in them, and then speak of sin as the thing that is spoiling that image.

Let me give an illustration to help us understand this connection between glory and ruin. I like to ride bicycles, and one of my favorite rides here in town has about a two mile climb up to a beautiful mountain top vista. When I get to the top, I like to stop and take in the view for a while. But many others before me have noticed what a beautiful spot it is and they too have stopped. Not all of them have been respectful of the beauty of the place, and it is scarred by things such as some people using it as a trash dump, and others as a place to write inappropriate words on the big rocks there. The tragedy of this is heightened by the place. The same trash dumped at the landfill would not be offensive. So it is with humanity. The ruin of sin is heightened by the fact that we were designed for the glory of bearing God's image. We are to be serious about sin because of the glory of our original design.

Let me be a little more specific about this application. I believe the way the Bible instructs us to approach people is glory first and then ruin. That is, we ask God to give us a clearer picture of his design for a particular person. We are all unique, and we need to ask ourselves what this person with his or her unique gifts would look like with the restored image of God. This is very important for the parenting role. Your children are sinners, but the context for addressing their sin comes as you see them as image bearers of God. So start with what is right and good, and then move to the sin that prevents the full development of that which is right and good about them. We are to do the same with those who are not yet believers in Christ.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Hebrews 2 quotes this passage and applies it to Jesus. What that means is that Jesus is the one who leads us back to this glory. The first Adam sinned and led the entire human race into ruin. The last Adam, Jesus, obeyed fully and becomes the one to restore original glory. All who follow him and trust him find healing for the ruin of sin. We find our dominion restored fully and even increased. Jesus is the Ruler of the entire universe, heaven and earth, and his followers are given the privilege of ruling with him. Do you remember that time when Jesus rode an unbroken colt into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? The colt submitted to Jesus as the one with authority to rule. In him, our glory too is restored. And that prompts us to say all over again, as the psalmist concluded, **"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"**