Capitol Commission™

Crowned with Glory and Honor

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***Psalm 8.* What a humbling thought that the God who stretched out the universe notices something so small as us. More than this, He cares and has endowed us with a high purpose—to represent Him.**

L'état, c'est moi! "I am the State." So said Louis XIV (1638-1715), the longest reigning monarch in European history. He ruled France with absolute power for 72 years, able to change the laws, command opulent building projects, or even declare war as he pleased. No one contested the will of this king until he eventually abdicated his throne upon death.

All Europe knew the regality of France's court. Louis had spared no expense in life, and he wasn't about to change his ways in death. He was laid to rest in a solid gold coffin studded with jewels. No lighting, except for a solitary candle burning above his body. The funeral mood was meant to be solemn and the lone candle dramatized France's loss.

Bishop Massillon presided over the arrangements and ensured they were carried out as ordered. When it was time for him to speak, he arose, snuffed out the candle, and in the darkness declared, "Only God is Great."

> "A MAN WRAPPED UP IN HIMSELF MAKES A VERY SMALL BUNDLE"
>
> ~ BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

Massillon understood something of what we find in Psalm 8. It's easy for any of us to flatter ourselves and become drunk on our own greatness. The psalmist, however, was overwhelmed with the greatness of God. He was humbled that God would notice him, astonished that God had created him with purpose, and he was filled with worship.

ONLY GOD IS GREAT (PSALM 8:1-2)

At the dedication of Israel's first temple, Solomon said, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!" (cf. 1 Kings 8:27). The psalmist says that God's glory is "set above the heavens" (cf. Psalm 8:1), which is a way of saying it's supreme. Compared to the angels, His glory shines as the sun amid tiny candles.

What is glory or majesty? Glory tends to be anything good that overwhelms us. The word is often tied to God's might and power (cf. Ex 15:6; 1 Chr 28:11). When God moves to act, it is always good and sure to leave people astonished. In fact, anytime God displays Himself, whatever He does is glorious. It's good and overwhelming. Majesty connotes the same idea about God.

The psalmist says that the Lord's name is majestic in all the earth. His name symbolizes the totality of Him. God Himself is glorious throughout creation, from east to west throughout the earth. He created it, and it still bears the mark of its creator. John Calvin rightly referred to creation as a "dazzling theater." It ever displays the excellencies of its creator.

Creation declares the glory of God (cf. Psa 19:1). Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is so vast that earth sits 30,000 light-years from its center. Beyond it lies countless other galaxies, some many times larger than ours. The universe is incomprehensible, and yet, it's only the handiwork of God's fingers (cf. Psa 8:3). It is but the finer details of the Sculptor's masterpiece.

God's glory is supreme, His Name is majestic throughout the earth, and His power is unmatched. It's hard to comprehend God, isn't it? To speak of His power, the psalmist mentions the weakness of infants (cf. Psa 8:2). The point is that God uses what's relatively powerless to overthrow the most powerful among us. His strength is often displayed in the weakness of His servants; His wisdom in their foolishness (cf. 1 Cor 1:25-27).

WHAT IS MAN? (PSALM 8:3-4)

A God who is so great makes it hard to conclude that man is the measure of all things. The psalmist stands back awestruck and asks, "What is man?" Who is the greatest of us that the Almighty should care or even take any notice (cf. Psalm 8:4)? Yet, He does.

Man is insignificantly small, but he's significant to God. And why? Because God made man in His own image (cf. Gen 1:28). Man is the image of God. To look upon people is to get a glimpse of God. This is why the psalmist says man has been "crowned with glory and honor" (cf. Psa 8:5). Animals are not God's image, nor are angels. Man is God's image, a being distinct from all others, one bestowed with the highest dignity. The psalmist alludes back to Genesis in this and reminds us that man was created to rule as God's representative on earth (cf. Psa 8:6-8; Gen 1:27-28).

Bible Studies

Legislators: Thursdays at 7:30am, Governor's Office

Justices and Staff: Tuesdays at 7:30am, Supreme Court Building

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Before going any further, contrast this view of man with more contemporary ideas. The influential psychologist B.F.F Skinner argued that man is just a complex animal with no greater dignity than his dog. The prolific biologist Julian Huxley fully agreed, and so have many others since. These men were brilliant and reasonable, but they built their work upon a godless premise.

Set aside God and His thoughts on man, and it's hard to say your life has any higher meaning. It's whatever you make it, and in the words of Bertrand Russell, you and I are just, "a curious accident in a backwater." We live. We breathe. We die. No intrinsic purpose. No greater dignity. We just exist as a type of advanced animals.

> A RIGHT VIEW OF OURSELVES BEGINS WITH A RIGHT VIEW OF GOD.

The psalmist started with God and then spoke of man. Scripture teaches that man is fallen in sin, depraved, and filled with every evil desire (cf. Gen 6:5; Jer 17:9). Yet, it never teaches that man has no dignity, worth, or purpose. Because man is the image of God, man has an unsurpassed purpose. It is to bear God's image in all he does and bring God glory throughout the earth.

WHAT WAS MAN CREATED TO DO? (PSALM 8:6-8)

The first command ever given to man is found in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over [it]…" Prior to the fall, the earth naturally yielded itself. Thereafter, the Lord cursed it, and food didn't come quite so easily (cf. Gen 3:17-19).

It's difficult for us to understand this. We're accustomed to supermarkets and fast-food restaurants. Adam and Eve were not. Food seems abundant, readily available with a trip to the fridge. It's easy to forget the work that others expended to get it to us. For instance, someone had to subdue the animals we eat, and someone had to subdue thousands of acres of land for farming. Think of the lumber in our homes or the coal used to produce electricity—someone had to work the forests and depths of the earth that we could have these.

God instructed man to do this. He was created to rule over the earth… not as a tyrant, but as a God-like representative. Man was not placed here to destroy and plunder the earth, but to rule as a steward of all it contains. He is to reflect the character of God.

WHAT ABOUT NOW?

The psalmist looked at man's original creation, before the fall. What about today, after the fall? What is man? What is he to do now? It's all the same. Men and women are still the image of God, whether saved or unsaved, and humanity still has the same purpose. The problem now is that sin renders us utterly incapable of doing this. We can't rule as God-like representatives very well, and we hardly bring God glory on our own. Fallen, we need a great restoration… and that's exactly what we're given in Christ.

Man was created to rule, but it's mostly selfish today and bears little resemblance to the high purpose with which God originally intended. Did God scrap that plan? Not at all. For those in Christ, He is at work gradually conforming them back to His image (cf. Rom 8:29). One day that process will be completed when His people stand with Him in glory (cf. Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18).

Man has a glorious future, and it's all because of God. He who is so small sinned against His creator and threw it all away. Yet, rather than destroying him, God loved him, became him, died for him, and will redeem him. God's original purpose for man was high, and that purpose will one day come to fruition for all who know His Son.

The psalmist closes in the same way as he opened: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" He was humbled that God would notice him, astonished that God had created him with purpose, and he was filled with worship.