

PSALM 8
A Majesty Sandwich

I find philosophic and theological principles in various places, such as Peanuts cartoons. Linus and Charlie Brown are standing on a knoll; the darkest of nights surrounds them. While gazing into the mysterious night sky, Charlie says to Linus, "Have you ever considered the enormity of the universe, Linus?" The question is definitely a new one for Linus, who clearly has not thought of it.

In the next scene, with his arms wide as if taking it all in, Charlie continues, "Nobody knows what lies out there beyond the stars."

This very observation suggests that we do wonder about what is "beyond the stars."

The third scene has no words. In awe, both Charlie and Linus continue to stand and stare at the dark night. Finally, Linus, obviously reflecting on the enormity question, says to Charlie, "I don't even know what's in the next block."

As we launch VBS tonight with a Space Probe theme, I thought it would be good to look at Psalm 8...so that we have a better understanding of what's around the next block and the next galaxy.

1 O YAHWEH, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth,
Who hast displayed Your splendor above the heavens!
2 From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength
Because of Your adversaries,
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.
3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
4 What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
7 All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.
9 O Lord, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

As a non-believing churched freshman in college, I remember sitting out one night on campus looking up at the stars and having a sense of being really small. I was having one of those, "What's it all about?" moments that we all must face at some point.

Though I'd grown up in the church, I was lost and confused. I did not grow up in a church that taught a clear biblical message about God, Christ, mankind, and the meaning of life. I had no spiritual NorthStar or center, so I was tossed to and fro by the spirit of the age.

I had a sense of simply being thrown into the universe with no direction, aim, or purpose. Fortunately, I had enough spiritual background to know that there was a man called Jesus who seemed to be a good person to follow so I began to read the bible for the first time.

I WAS experiencing a sense of '**Geworfenheit**' but I didn't know it at the time. We would translate it into English as "throwness".

The German word 'Geworfenheit', a word with the meaning and connotation of a kind of alienation that human beings struggle against what is.

This concept, theorized by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), purports that as human beings we are "thrown" at birth into a world (class, nationality, gender, etc.) that we have no control over and must learn to cope with. We have to learn to navigate the challenges that come with that world: frustrations, sufferings, demands, social conventions, and ties of kinship and duty. These challenges, and how we cope with them or rise above them, ultimately becomes our identity.

Before we dive in, let's state the obvious:

The design of this Psalm is to remind us of the Majesty of the name of Yahweh.

I say that it's obvious because the Psalm is sandwiched in between two proclamations of God's majesty – v1 and v. 9

David speaks directly to Yahweh about Yahweh – “how majestic is YOUR name in all the earth”.

David considers God and responds in praise. He is not a silent bystander because He is praising the God of creation. The sovereign creator of the universe is not a quiet bystander EITHER. He is not passive; He is not a religious accessory or mascot. HIS IS THE SOVEREIGN DESIGNER AND CONTROLLER OF THE UNIVERSE.

Francis Schaeffer – He is There, and He is not silent. – Ps 19 The heavens declare the glory of God
If we know Him, how can we remain silent?

God is majestic in His NAME – Yahweh.

That name conveys a unique power – I AM THAT I AM. God ALONE has within Himself the power of existence, the power of being.

“Sound of Music” – ‘Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could’.

Schaeffer Vol 1 book 3 p. 255 – the question of being or existence vs non being is the great question for man.

Jean Paul Sartre – (Schaeffer paraphrase) “the basic philosophic question is that something is there rather than nothing being there.”

Again, from Sartre – “No finite point has any meaning unless it has an infinite reference point.”

This may NOT be something you think about often, but you do, or you will in the most critical moments when you face life and death issues. Whether we live in Walker country, NYC, or D.C., if there is no infinite reference point to our lives, then our life isn't worthy diddly squat.

You may try to fill your life with all sorts of things, but without an infinite reference point, you are just playing games.

We want to know the answer to this question, “Is there a WHY?”

Secular materialistic scientist think they can tell us the how we came into being, but they have no answer for the ‘why?’. They don't even have a category for the ‘why?’.

A ‘how?’ without a ‘why?’ = ‘Geworfenheit’ – i.e. thrownness = uncertainty=chaos = no real meaning =despair IF WE LET IT SINK IN. The fact that we don't let it sink in, that we want some sense of meaning, tells us that we were made for more than a natural materialistic explanation of life.

ONLY YAHWEH is self-existent. All the rest of us are creatures who owe our being to Him. We can only truly understand ourselves in relation to Him and we truly flourish as we embrace the identity He gives us.

Our identity is that of humble worshippers. Psalm 8 should leave us in a state of wonderment at the greatness of God and our puny existence.

We should also be amazed that He is mindful of us and even more amazed that we are made in His image. Being amazed at the majesty of God is a missing ingredient in the lives of too many people in the church at large today. While a sense of the Majesty of God may be missing, quite often we are NOT AWARE of it.

PIPER: People are starving for the greatness of God. but most of them would not give this diagnosis of their troubled lives. The majesty of God is an unknown cure."

The Psalms are so helpful because they are filled with the cure that we don't even know we need – a deep awareness of the MAJESTY OF God.

Our word 'majesty' comes from the Latin root that means "greatness". The reference to majesty is to refer to God's greatness and to offer respect for all that He is.

The point of the Psalms is not just to give us information about how majestic God is. Rather the intent is that we bow down in worship, praise, and prayer.

David isn't acting like a Presbyterian because he wants us to get excited about the majesty of God. He does act like a good Presbyterian by going on to give a reasoned argument why we should be so enthralled with the majesty of Yahweh.

First we see ...

v.1-2 An UNEXPECTED STRENGTH – the mouths of infants and nursing babes

They are contrasted with the enemy, the adversaries, and the vengeful.

That which is small and seemingly insignificant overwhelms the seemingly powerful.

It's just like God to work like that.

What was their strength?

Matt 21:16 gives some insight. As Jesus is coming in Jerusalem after the triumphful entry, the crowds are crying out, even children. The chief priests and scribes heard this and became indignant.

"Do you hear what they are saying," they ask.

Jesus responds by quoting Ps 8:2

And Jesus *said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?"

It would seem that the strength of the children is their praise of Yahweh.

There is power in praise even when it comes from sources that may seem weak in the eyes of the world.

****One thing our adversaries can't dismiss is our praise to God even when the world would think it is crazy.**

EX: T.J. Jackson and his wife suffered the loss of a child at birth. Jackson and his wife were crushed. The next day he wrote to his sister and told her that he could submit to anything if God strengthened him for it. He was not trying to cover his sad despair but, in the letter, he said, "Oh, my sister would that you could have Him for your God!"

Though Jackson was weak at that time, he still proclaims that God is worth having.

The sophisticated jaded agnostic has no defense against the heartfelt praise of the humblest believer.

DAVID'S SECOND REASON is the mystery of God's care v. 3-4

David is not talking to an aloof impersonal being or force. He KNOWS God AS A PERSONAL BEING. David speaks of "your heavens", "the work of your fingers", "the moon and stars which you ordained."

David is not pondering the 'universal one' who dwells in all of us. He is not bowing before some vague pantheistic notion of being where all is God and God is all.

David recognizes the Creator – creature distinction and he is good with it. He embraces it as he embraces the role that God has given MAN – to rule over the works of God's hands v. 5-8. This goes back to the Creation narrative of Gen 1-2.

WHY DOES God CARE for mankind?

Because, though we are small in comparison to the heavens, we are His image-bearers.

He keeps us in mind always because we reflect Him.

You might say that this was a high stakes gamble on God's part.

EX: it's like having your child in some sort of competition and he or she is wearing a screen print jersey with your picture on the back.

God's creative work reaches its height with the creation of man and woman. He cares for us in the way that we care for something valuable that we create ourselves.

The value of humanity is underscored by the fact that the eternal Son becomes one of us. He doesn't become a tree or a frog or a star or a zebra. He becomes fully human in all ways like us yet without sin.

It's a short step from Gen 1 to Gen 3 – from creation to rebellion. Those created in His image turned from worship and obedience to wanting to be like God and the consequences were disastrous for them and for their posterity. So, God sent His son to live the life we should have lived and to die the death we should have died.

Jesus, the visible image of the invisible God, took what we deserved so that we might have the assurance that God cares for us.

If you ever feel the angst of insignificance, remember that you are a divine image bearer, and the Creator of the universe is mindful of you.

David's final argument is based on THE Enormity OF THE UNIVERSE

Cosmic cliffs & a sea of stars. @NASAWebb

reveals baby stars in the Carina Nebula, where ultraviolet radiation and stellar winds shape colossal walls of dust and gas.

Given the size of the universe, v. 4 Asks the burning question of the ages: "What is Man?"

Ex: Walton's Homecoming – Mary Ellen tells a verse to a boy so he can receive a present:

"What is man that thou are mindful of Him"

Missionary woman: Does anyone know what that means?

"It means that He's so big and we're such puny little old things, why does He mess around with us?"

NAILED IT.

We should all live with the astonishment of the answer

All that we see with the naked eye or with the latest telescopes is the work of "his fingers". God is SO GREAT that the universe is like finger painting to Him.

Do you remember finger painting? I remember that from kindergarten or pre-K. It was fun and required no great skill. It was a way to occupy us during the day.

THAT'S WHAT THE UNIVERSE IS TO God.

It's not even His masterpiece. His greatest work is US, people made in His image.

David gives us this perspective to make us feel how small we are and then comes to the truth of how valued and significant we are.

The question, "What is man?" is one that we have taken as an existential mystery, but David is speaking it as a statement of amazement.

The biblical creation account gives an answer to the quandary – "What is man?"

Think through the days of creation and what do we encounter? After God bedazzles the heavens with stars and the earth with creative and colorful plants and animals, he says, "Let us make man in our image. ...So he

did so...God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

*** Side Road – those verses from Genesis have never been more relevant than they are today. The Creator/creature distinction and the Male/ Female distinction have been the foundations of human flourishing and continuity since the beginning of human society. They are under attack today. When those two distinctions are unclear, humanity suffers confusion, chaos, and decline. ***

TAKEAWAYS FOR US:

We do have an infinite reference point, so our lives do have meaning.

No matter how small, insignificant, or even hopeless you may feel at times, the God who spoke it all into being knows you and cares for you.

Francis Schaeffer saw this as being so important that it is the title of one of his books, NO LITTLE PEOPLE. In that book he also points out that there are No Little Places.

Whoever you are and wherever you are in this little corner of the universe, you have infinite worth.

A key aspect of this infinite worth is fleshed out by humble service to one another.

We are unique among creation – made in God’s image and given privileges and responsibilities.

*** this impacts how we should value life and treat others.

Our great savior, the eternal Son of the Eternal Creator of all became a servant of all. so that we might become the servants of those He places in our paths.

While viewing the heavens should humble us, seeing that the eternal son gave Himself for us should humble us even more. While the universe displays the majesty of God, Jesus is Majesty incarnate.

Majesty is not something we proclaim, it is someone we meet – the one who humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross is the Majestic One.

THE TABLE BEFORE US represents His death for us.

Our infinite reference point is not just an idea but a MAN – Jesus.

God didn’t give us an air-tight argument; he gave us an air-tight Savior.

Because of His perfect life and obedience, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the NAME which is above every name, so that at the NAME of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are 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. Phil 2:9-11

O YAHWEH, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth,

Prayer

Communion

http://ignatiusinsight.com/features2007/schall_theuniverse_dec07.asp

<https://that-which.com/what-does-heidegger-mean-by-daseins-thrownness/>

<https://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition.php?term=Thrownness>

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