

“Life Worth Living”

Psalm 8

Dr. Randy Working  
Christ Presbyterian Church  
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The summer Evelyne and I were married we spent ten days hiking the Wonderland Trail, which wraps 93 miles around Mount Rainier in Washington State. The mountain is 14,410 feet, and the trail has a cumulative 20,000 feet in elevation gain. The mountain is so big it creates its own weather system. Its beauty and immensity are amazing. When we left the mountain after ten days and drove back, a couple hours after leaving base camp we were on the freeway in Tacoma. It was completely jammed—you know, where you look and see the fumes rising in the heat? We came around a bend in the freeway, and all of a sudden you could see the mountain again, thirty miles away, covered in glaciers, with a rooster comb of snow silently blowing off the mountain. It amazed me to think of the contrast between the things God has made and the things we make.

I think that’s the contrast David is making in Psalm 8. He’s saying, look how amazing what God is doing, and in contrast we just seem so small. The psalm has a lot to tell us about God and about us.

The very first word of the psalm is *Yahweh*, and it appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Whenever you see the word LORD, spelled in all upper case letters, *Yahweh* is the Hebrew word behind it.

Where does that name come from? It comes from when God appeared to Moses in the form of a Burning Bush. Moses falls to his face in worship, and God tells him, “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). God tells Moses to return to Egypt and to tell the Pharaoh to release his people from slavery. Moses says, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? How can you expect me to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11). Then he asks God, “What is your name? Who should I tell them sent me?” And God responds that his name is *Yahweh*. It means “I am who I am,” or maybe “I will be who I will be.” That’s the name that opens the psalm.

I think the name indicates a couple of things.

First, the name *Yahweh* tells us that God is self-referential. He doesn’t depend on anything for his existence. He is immortal, invisible, unchanging, all-powerful. He’s all-knowing, everywhere, and the same “yesterday, today, and forever.” The name *Yahweh* says he is God, and there is no other. He alone is worthy of our praise.

Second, the name *Yahweh* tells us that God is for us. When Moses asked God’s name, he wasn’t asking for a philosophical treatise. He wasn’t saying, “Let’s examine the epistemological underpinnings of our ontology of the divine!” He was saying something like, “God, if I go back to Egypt and demand that the Pharaoh, the most powerful man on the earth, that he let your people go—if I do that, are you going to be there for me? Because I

feel pretty insignificant in face of that challenge. I need to know you're there for me." And *I am Who I Am* says, "You can depend on me. I will be there for you." And he was, and from that point on, Israel would always look back and say the God-who-is-there-for-us brought us out of Egypt with a mighty outstretched arm, and he will be there for us again.

Now, the second time we read *Lord* in the text, this time it's with a capital "L" and lower case "o-r-d." There's a different Hebrew name behind it—not *Yahweh* but *Adonai*, Master. David is saying, *Yahweh*, the LORD God, the One who appeared to Moses in the desert, this one and no other is *our* God. And then he affirms, "How majestic is your name in all the earth" (Psalm 8:1).

What does David say about this God who is our Lord? He says, "How majestic is your name in all the earth!" (verse 1) David is giving God the praise his name deserves. His glory shines in the heavens and on earth. You go out on a moonless night and contemplate the stars. You think about galaxies, and how the more we learn about the universe, the smaller we seem. How grand is God's design behind it all. The greatness of creation tells us about the Creator who is greater.

And David says, even this lower world shines with God's glory. How? How does this world bear witness to the reality and power of God? Verse two suggests it's by silencing his enemies, and he does that through the mouths of nursing infants, who give God praise.

Somehow, mysteriously, in the plan of God, it's not through the powerful and rich, but through weak things that God communicates himself to the world. It's why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians,

"My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).

Can you see what David is saying? The world looks to power, but God's ways are different. So, on Palm Sunday children say Hosanna, the chief priests and scribes were indignant. They asked Jesus, "Did you hear what they are saying?" And Jesus responds by quoting Psalm 8. He says he hears what they're saying. He says,

"Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babies and nursing infants you have perfected praise'?" (Matthew 21:16)

This is astonishing, because Psalm 8 is saying that God ordains praise for himself from the mouths of children. For Jesus to apply Psalm 8 to his entry into Jerusalem amounts to Jesus saying he's God. Who can fathom that? Because a lot of men have tried to make themselves gods, but only one God ever made himself man. Paul explains,

God's way seems foolish to the Jews because they want a sign from heaven to prove it is true. And it is foolish to the Greeks because they believe only what agrees with their own wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the

Jews and offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the mighty power of God and the wonderful wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18-19, 22-24)

That's how God silences his enemies. He conquers evil by absorbing it in himself. He defeats his enemies of death, sin, and the devil not with an overwhelming show of force, but by laying down his life. That means that in the birth, ministry, teaching, miracles, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, God's name is magnified in the world.

What I'm saying is this: according to the New Testament, Psalm 8 is about Jesus Christ. Paul says,

For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For the Scriptures say, "God has given him authority over all things"...Then, when he has conquered all things, the Son will present himself to God, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere." (1 Corinthians 15:25-27a, 28)

And the writer of Hebrews says,

What we do see is Jesus, who "for a little while was made lower than the angels" and now is "crowned with glory and honor" because he suffered death for us. (Hebrews 2:9)

God takes all the power and wisdom and glory of Yahweh, *I Am Who I Am*, the Ancient of Days, the one true living God—and he takes the form of a servant, and he lays down his life for us.

Let me make two observations for us that I think come out of the text.

First, remember your vulnerability.

When you see how big God is, it reminds you just how small you are. I think that's great for developing an appropriate sense of humility and perspective.

David writes, "What are mortals that you should think of us? Mere humans that you should care for us?" (Psalm 8:6)

No matter what we accomplish in our lives, it's only a gift, all by God's grace.

Not only that, not just that we're frail and weak, but we're in need of forgiveness. The Bible's clear that no matter how well we think we're doing, we're not doing so well compared with the majesty, glory, and holiness of God. Paul says,

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Romans 3:19-20)

You know, the world systems have a lot of ways of describing the human problem. But the Bible calls it sin—not simply missing the mark, not simply weakness, not just mortal limitations, but willful turning against God. But even our *good* intentions end up hurting, don't they? Like Paul wrote,

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do...O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:21, 24)

No wonder David writes, "What is man that you are mindful of him!"

Now, human weakness and sin aren't the last word on human beings, but they're the starting place. Strength and position aren't human rights that we assert against God. If we do, then we're his enemies. Instead, the power of the gospel, the power of Jesus' death and rising, comes in this frail, problematic package that is us. And Paul says,

But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held in perishable containers [or earthen vessels, or jars of clay], that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own. (1 Corinthians 4:7)

That's why we're:

- strong when we're weak,
- wise when we're foolish, and
- lifted up when we humble ourselves like children and come to him.

It's like when some of Jesus followers came to him and asked,

"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:1-6)

Remember your vulnerability. That leads to the next observation:

Second, remember your value.

The language used here is amazing. God is the one worthy of glory, but by extension, as a pure gift, that's exactly what he gives to us. Verse five says,

You crowned him with glory and honor. You put us in charge of everything you made, giving us authority over all things. (Psalm 8:6)

God doesn't stay at a distance, but he bends down to show the "work of his fingers." That's a way of saying "by his Holy Spirit." God's infinite majesty extends itself in infinite mercy toward undeserving us. He thinks of us. He remembers us in our struggles. He put us a little lower than himself, and he places us as his agents, his custodians, to care over what he has made. The psalm echoes the creation language of Genesis here:

So God created people in his own image, God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and told them, "Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be master over the fish and birds and all the animals." (Genesis 1:27-18)

God puts us in place to do his very work in the world. And one day, we'll reign with Christ in glory. What a glory that is! His image in us is effaced, but it's not erased. And he says we have infinite value and dignity. "Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." We have infinite value and dignity. That comes out in Psalm 139:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (Psalm 139:13-14, 16)

And God has given us a great purpose, predestined by God's plan that works everything out for his good purpose. He made us to glorify himself, and to enjoy him forever. We're not the product of blind chance, but of God's own design.

So let me sum up:

God has enemies. And he will silence them, defeat them, through weakness. And God has made us in his image, and he crowned us with glory and majesty.

This is what makes life worth living! Like the song goes,

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.  
Because He lives, all fear is gone.  
Because I know He holds the future  
And life is worth living just because He lives.