

Psalm 8 – God's glory shines through all creation

- ¹ LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
in the heavens.
- ² Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
- ⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honour.
- ⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
- ⁸ the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

About 5 years ago we went to visit friends of ours who live in Perth in Western Australia. While we were with them they took us on a road trip down to Albany in the South West tip of Australia. One evening we were travelling on a deserted road which was quite isolated, a long way from any town or house. Our friends stopped the car and got us to lie on our backs on the bonnet and just look up at the sky. In this remote spot and on a clear night, with no light pollution from human habitation, we had a wonderful view of the southern night sky with all its many stars and galaxies and the great sweep of the Milky Way. It was a breath-taking sight.

David the shepherd boy must have had similar experiences. He would have been watching over sheep by night in areas where there was no artificial light. He must have looked up to the sky above him and marvelled at the countless stars he could see and the beauty of the moon with its changing face. And as he looked at these things, he was not only filled with wonder at creation, he was filled with wonder and awe at the one who alone could have made all of this and whose power kept it daily in being. And he gasps, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

We now know so much more about the universe around us, so much more about the stars and about space. There are about 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe. There are about 100 billion stars in our galaxy – the Milky Way. Our sun is just one of those 100 billion stars. Our planet is just one of 8 planets going round our sun. In this last decade we have seen some extraordinary pictures of these planets taken by spacecraft sent across the vast reaches of space to photograph them. And as for the moon, why astronauts have even walked on its surface and brought back samples of its dust and rocks. Does our scientific knowledge of the universe lessen our wonder as we look into the night sky? Not at all. Nor does it reduce our awe concerning the one who created it all.

The more we discover about the universe, the more we are filled with wonder at the way it works.

But does the immensity of the universe make you feel small and insignificant by comparison? David asks, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"

We need to note carefully what David says. Although he is filled with wonder and worship as he looks at the starry heavens and wonders what can be said about himself in comparison, he quickly answers:

- ⁵ You have made them [human beings] a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honour.
⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
⁸ the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

We human beings, says David, have been "made a little lower than the angels", or perhaps, more accurately, "a little lower than God himself."

David is clearly echoing the opening chapters of Genesis where we read that human beings, male and female have been made in the image of God and have been put in charge, under God, of all that he has made. They have been "crowned with glory and honour."

There is something very special about human beings – about us. We are animals but more than mere animals. The human brain is considered to be the most complex object in the universe. It contains about 100 billion neurons, about the same number as there are stars in our galaxy or galaxies in the observable universe. And each neuron in the brain has about one thousand connections to other neurons meaning that there are about 100 trillion connections in the human brain. It's just mind boggling! We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

But there is more. If we switch our attention from the physical lump of mushy grey matter in our heads, with all its wonderful capabilities, to the human mind, we see more of the wonder of all that we are. We are self-conscious beings, aware of our own mental processes and capable not only of reacting to stimuli but of comprehension. We do not understand everything, far from it. Nevertheless we have plumbed many of the mysteries of the universe and begun to understand how it works – from black holes to the behaviour of the fundamental particles from which all things are made. We have begun to understand how a single fertilised cell divides and develops into all the differentiated cells that make up a human body resulting at last in the birth of a human child. In understanding these things, and so many other things about the world in which we live we are, in the words of Kepler, thinking God's thoughts after him.

We are made in the image of God and are made to appreciate the works of God. The Cavendish Laboratory, the home of the Department of Physics in Cambridge University, built in 1973, has an inscription over its main entrance which reads, "The works of the Lord are great; sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." In seeking to understand the workings of our world, we are thinking God's thoughts after him.

We were created to appreciate the wonder of the world that God has made, the intricacy, beauty and glory of creation. We have eyes to see the wonder of it even if we do not always look through the beauty of creation to the glory of its creator.

In his book *Notes from a Big Country*, Bill Bryson writes about Autumn in New England in the United States. He writes,

In autumn, as you will recall from your school biology lessons ... trees prepare for their long winter's slumber by ceasing to manufacture chlorophyll, the chemical that makes their leaves green. The absence of chlorophyll allows other pigments, called carotenoids, which have been present in the leaves all along, to show off a bit.

The carotenoids are what account for the yellow and gold of birches, hickories, beeches and some oaks, among others. Now here is where it gets interesting. To allow these golden colours to thrive, the trees must continue to feed the leaves, even though the leaves are not actually doing anything useful except hanging there looking pretty.

Just at a time when a tree ought to be storing up all its energy for use the following spring, instead it is expending a great deal of effort feeding a pigment that brings joy to the hearts of simple folk like me but doesn't do anything for the tree.

What is even more mysterious is that some species of trees go a step further and, at considerable cost to themselves, manufacture another type of chemical called anthocyanins, which result in the spectacular oranges and scarlets that are so characteristic of New England. It isn't that the trees of New England manufacture more of these anthocyanins, but rather that the New England climate and soil provide exactly the right conditions for these colours to bloom in style.

... No one knows why the trees make this immense effort when they get nothing evident in return.

Why is there such beauty in nature – sometimes apparently extravagant and otherwise pointless beauty? Why do we have faculties not only to recognise the various species of tree but to recognise and appreciate beauty? What is the purpose of wonder? As the beauty of a piece of art feeds our appreciation of the artist, so the beauty of creation should promote an appreciation its Creator and even prompt worship – to declare, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" We were made not simply to rule over God's world under him but also to recognise the one who has created these things and whose they are. We were created to glorify God and enjoy him for ever – to live in conscious communion with God and to delight in him.

And, as those created in the image of God, we too have the ability to create things of beauty in art and in architecture and to appreciate the beauty of human achievement.

But the tragedy of it all is that, despite all of knowledge and capabilities, we have made a mess of God's world. We have not cared for it as God intended but have exploited the world for our own ends. We have not lived well with each other but have exploited one another and oppressed one another. Instead of reflecting the glorious character of God we have been intent upon becoming gods for ourselves. The image of God in us has been twisted and marred.

That is why the author of the letter to the Hebrews applies Psalm 8 to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 2:5-9 he writes:

⁵It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking.

⁶But there is a place where someone has testified:

‘What is man that you are mindful of him,
a son of man that you care for him?’

⁷You made him a little lower than the angels;
you crowned him with glory and honour

⁸ and put everything under his feet.’

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. ⁹But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Jesus is the one in whom God's glory is most clearly revealed – he is the radiance of God's glory. Though he was, and is, the living God through whom all things were created, yet he was made for a little while lower than the angels – he took upon himself human flesh. And he did so that we might see clearly all that we were meant to be as human beings made in the image of God, created to reflect his glory.

But he came also to redeem us. He came to take upon himself the consequences of our failure and rebellion and to die the death that we deserved. But he also rose triumphant over sin and death; he rose, crowned with glory and honour. He is the beginning of a new humanity and of a new creation. Everything has been made subject to him – he is Lord over all creation. At present we do not see everything subject to him – we still see a world still scarred by human sin and rebellion. But we know that the day is coming when Jesus shall return and make all things new. The world to come will be under his perfect and gracious

rule and will radiate the glory of God in every part; there will be new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

This is our longing and our hope for the world. The glory of God we see shining through creation now will be utterly eclipsed by the glory of God filling all creation in that last day. The glory that belongs to us as those made in the image of God will be fully realised when we are raised up to be like our glorious Saviour. The worship we now offer to God our creator is but a foretaste of the worship that we will offer then when we are restored in his image, when we see God face-to-face and when we know even as we are fully known.

God calls us now to have eyes to see his glory: to see his glory in creation and in ourselves as those made in his image; to see his glory especially in the Lord Jesus and in his death and resurrection; to long for that day when his glory will be fully revealed and when everything is made new.

I see your face in every sunrise
The colours of the morning are inside your eyes
The world awakens in the light of the day
I look up to the sky and say
You're beautiful

I see your power in the moonlit night
Where planets are in motion and galaxies are bright
We are amazed in the light of the stars
It's all proclaiming who you are
You're beautiful

I see you there hanging on a tree
You bled and then you died and then you rose again for me
Now you are sitting on your heavenly throne
Soon we will be coming home
You're beautiful

When we arrive at eternity's shore
Where death is just a memory and tears are no more
We'll enter in as the wedding bells ring
Your bride will come together and we'll sing
You're beautiful

[Phil Wickham]

We are called now to live in submission to our beautiful Saviour and to live towards the day of his coming. May his beauty, his glory, be seen in us.

Peter Misselbrook

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