

Parish of Central Saanich - St. Stephen's & St. Mary's  
LENT 2017 - BIBLE STUDY SERIES  
*"The Psalms: Tools for Being & Becoming"*

**Study #2: "God's View of Reality"- March 7/8, 2017**  
**Psalm 8**

**Opening Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, from the lips of children you have called forth praise; help us now, by your Holy Spirit, to glimpse your view of reality, that we may see our place in your creation, and so live to the praise of your name, through the One who suffered death for us and is now crowned with glory and honour, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**INTRODUCTION**

In my early ministry, I worked with high school students as a staff-member with Inter School Christian Fellowship. One of the things that sticks uppermost in my mind from that period was a comment from one of the young people who once told me that, before he came to know Jesus, when he wanted to be thankful about something, he didn't know who to thank – so he used to thank a chair. Perhaps one of the most frustrating things in life is being thankful and not knowing who to thank.

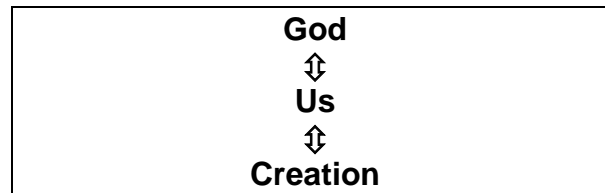
In this study on Psalm 8, I hope that we will come to see more clearly the One who deserves our thanks and praise. I also want to show you what to be thankful for by explaining where we fit in his scheme of things. This little gem is a psalm of praise and creation and reveals to us God's view of reality which, when we know it, totally reorients how we live our lives and set our priorities. Psalm 8 – God's view of reality.

**OUR VIEW OF REALITY**

However, before we look at God's view of reality, it may be helpful to compare it with our own, unaided, perspective of what life is all about. Right at the beginning, we decided to make what we thought would be a "slight" alteration in how God had ordered things. In Genesis chapter 3, we took matters into our own hands as to how to gain the knowledge of good and evil – with disastrous results.

• **God's original plan:**

God had set things up as follows: he was over all with us under him and responsible for creation under us.



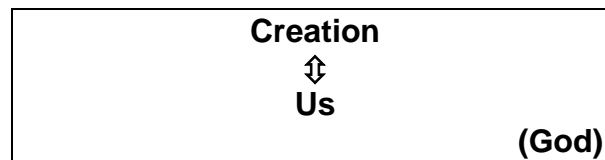
- **Our “little adjustment”:**

We thought we would make a “little adjustment” as follows: we humans in charge, with the creation under us and God available when necessary.



- **The real picture:**

Well, things didn’t work out quite as we planned. What happened was that, with God gone from his rightful place, all chaos broke loose and creation took charge of us with God out of the picture.



The Bible’s way of putting it is

***“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”***  
***(Genesis 3:17-19)***

- **Examples of the "curse":**

A concrete way of demonstrating this is to look at what happens when we invent things to control the chaos we created. We invented the internal combustion engine to take us places with ease and ended up polluting the planet with greenhouse gases and covering the earth with asphalt. We created the internet to give us easy access to information and communication and it has ended up as a vehicle for soul pollution through pornography. Our advances in medicine to bring healing and deliverance from pain are used to terminate prematurely the lives of those least able to protect themselves. Many of know how difficult it is to resist answering the phone or internet even though we are in the middle of a conversation with someone else or having dinner? Everything we do to control things around us seems to end up dominating and controlling us.

One of the greatest evils our “readjustment” of reality has created is a distorted view of how we see ourselves. Humans are either elevated as gods – emperors, movie stars, business tycoons, etc. or devalued as objects - peasants, prostitutes or slaves. Within our own hearts, we either rate

ourselves too highly – or look down upon ourselves with shame. What we need is a reassessment of reality – to see reality from God’s point of view. This is exactly what Psalm 8 does for us.

## GOD’S VIEW OF REALITY

God’s view of reality is expressed first of all through the very structure of the psalm. The first and last verses speak about God:

***“O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (verses 1, 9)***

The middle verse speaks about humanity:

***“You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honour” (verse 5)***

The commentator Walter Brueggemann observes about this psalm that:

“At its centre is an affirmation of human power and authority. At its boundaries are affirmations of praise to God...Human power is always bounded and surrounded by divine praise.”<sup>1</sup> Affirmation – this psalm is an affirmation of who God is and who man is. (I will sometimes use gender-specific terms in this study because I think it helps bring home the uniqueness of who each of us is more than generic terms such as “humanity” or “they” and also more clearly ties in with Jesus’ as Son of Man, or representative human, as we shall see later.) Having a right view of God will lead to a right view of humanity.

### 1. Right View of God:

What is the right view of God expressed in this psalm? As the structure shows, he is the beginning and the end. We do not start with human aspirations and yearnings to discover who God is – he is a given:

***“In the beginning, God...” (Genesis 1:1)***

is how the Bible opens. But who is this God which we assume? He is called, ***“O LORD, our Lord” (verse 1)***. Whenever the word “LORD” is in capitals, it signifies his special unique personal name, “Yahweh,” that God allowed his people to know. “Our Lord” uses the more generic term, “Adonai,” meaning governor or ruler - and here it is made clear that it is “in all the earth” and even beyond with “glory above the heavens” (verse 2). This sovereign God is truly “majestic” – great – and at the same time is “our” Lord - keeping it personal. The Old Testament is very cautious about speaking of God in intimate terms because of the aberrations of divine personhood in the surrounding pagan cults like Baal-worship. But here, we come as close as we can to Jesus’ prayer, “Our Father, who art in Heaven” – the God who is almighty yet personal.

But the power of this God whose “glory is above the heavens” – and we can think here of the heavenly host of angels praising him - is so great that he doesn’t need a mighty army; his praise or power (and either translation is valid here) is seen through the “lips of children and infants” (verse 2). God’s power against “the foe and the avenger” is shown through weakness – the most vulnerable. In fact, God delights in turning common conceptions about power and status upside down. As Jesus says,

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), pg. 37.

**Jesus:** *"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:25)*

Paul expands on this when he says,

**Paul:** *"The weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25)*

In hindsight, we could say "God's giving of himself up in weakness on the cross defeated the greatest enemies – sin and death." This is where reality begins – with an all-powerful God who is personal who reveals his power through weakness.

## 2. Right View of Ourselves:

Well, now we move to a right view of humanity. In the face of such greatness, the psalmist asks the logical question: ***"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (verse 4).*** The religions of the Ancient Near East would have come back with, "Absolutely nothing!" Humans in their world-view existed at the pleasure of the gods to do their bidding – pawns to be moved on a giant chessboard at the whims of fate. But, putting aside the gods of human creation, how can humanity stand in the face of the mighty God "the work of whose fingers" are the heavens and who has "set in place the moon and the stars" (verse 3)?

Surprisingly, to the question, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" the psalmist answers, ***"Absolutely everything!"*** We are "a little lower than the heavenly beings" but "crowned him with glory and honour" (verse 5). The term, "heavenly beings" here can be more accurately translated "God" – we are not divine ourselves (in spite of what some of might like to think!) – but we receive from him "glory and honour."

This is partnership language, implying dignity and worth. We are hearing echoes of Genesis 1 –

***"God created human beings in his image" (Genesis 1:27)***

– men and women bearing the stamp of God's likeness. This concept of the intrinsic value of each human being would have shocked the ancient world.

But there is more. We share responsibility with God for running the world. Then, as the psalmist continues,

***"You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas" (verses 6-8)***

"we can't help but compare with Genesis 1:28 where humans are given authority to ***"rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28).*** Not only are humans of intrinsic value, we share responsibility with God for running the world! This is the right view of ourselves that Psalm 8 reveals to us.

This picture of us has royal overtones and is taken up by C. S. Lewis in his *Chronicles of Narnia*.<sup>2</sup> The four children, two "sons of Adam" and two "daughters of Eve" (echoing the term "son of man" in this psalm) have overcome evil and are now ready to be crowned and take their rightful place as rulers of Narnia. After the coronation, Aslan, the Christ-figure, affirms who the children have become: **"Once a King and Queen of Narnia, always a King and Queen of**

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<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1965).

**Narnia”** Kings and queens - this, my friends, is the description of humanity in Psalm 8 and the destiny and reality to which you have been called.

### **THE ONE WHO BRINGS US INTO REALITY**

This is God’s view of reality – but is it our experience? To bring us into reality, we need to meet the One in whom this reality was completely embodied – Jesus. Hebrews 2 takes Psalm 8 and applies it first of all to him. The author first quotes the psalm,

***“You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour and put everything under his feet.”***

and then continues,

***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. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:7-9)***

In Jesus as Son of God, we see the mighty LORD who gave himself for us – who conquered the enemies of sin and death by giving up himself in weakness. In Jesus as Son of Man, we see the image of God in humanity perfectly restored; one who thus could stand in our place, pay the price of our rebellion, and win back for us the kingdom we have lost.

When we see and experience this Jesus, we can see and experience the reality of an almighty God who is also personal. We can see a God who is sovereign over heaven and earth and who can put right that which we have made wrong. We see a God who loves us so much that he would give his only Son for us.

When we see and experience this Jesus, we can see and experience the reality of ourselves – not as worthless bits of animal matter nor as small tin gods trying to establish our own independent kingdoms, but as kings and queens responsible and working with the Ruler of the Universe. Jesus brings into hearts the reality that each of us is of value and has dignity and self-worth. Jesus affirms for us our responsibility as stewards of God’s creation – servants, like him, who exercise our dominion through obedience. As his royal brothers and sisters, we too, empowered by the Holy Spirit, are called to “respect the dignity of every human being”<sup>3</sup> and to “till the earth and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15).

Psalm 8 calls to you to know and experience this reality. Receive it from God with thanksgiving and show that thankfulness by living it out.

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<sup>3</sup> Baptismal Service, *Book of Alternative Services*, (Toronto, ON: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), pg. 159.