

One of the most unique things I've ever done in ministry took place many years ago when I was serving at a church in North Carolina. Now, my dad's a minister and I grew up in the church, so when I say this was unique I'm drawing from a large body of work. I was leading a team of volunteers from my church on a trip to Puerto Rico, to a little town called Juana Diaz where we would be working with children- teaching them about the Bible, feeding them, etc. It was a mission trip. That's not very unique, but flying down there on a private jet sure is! I know you're probably wondering about the ethics of taking a volunteer team on a mission trip in a private jet, but it's not what you think. One of the high school girls who signed up to go happened to have a very successful businessman for a father and he volunteered to fly our team down in his personal plane. What was I supposed to say? "No, you can't save us the hundreds of dollars per person in airfare, not to mention the logistical hassle of booking those tickets, because it just doesn't quite feel right to me?" That's not what I said, obviously.

So the day of our trip comes and instead of driving to the departures gates at the airport, my team and I drove straight to the hanger of this guy's jet. Instead of walking through security, we walked straight from our cars into his plane. As someone who has lead multiple groups through the gauntlet of airport travel I can only describe this experience as pure bliss. Not only that, but instead of flying into San Juan, which is on the north side of Puerto Rico- about a two hour drive from Juana Diaz- we flew into a small airport located just 5 minutes away. When we landed we walked off the plane directly to the vans that would take us to our lodging. It was amazing! We did some really good work that week, I promise you. We were very productive. When the time came to leave, we drove the five minutes back to the plane, and after takeoff we actually flew two circles around the campground where we had been staying- you know, just to say goodbye.

Psalm 8

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument.

1 *O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!*

Your glory is higher than the heavens.

2 *You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.*

3 *When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you set in place—*

4 *what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?*

5 *Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.*

6 *You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—*

7 *the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals,*

8 *the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.*

9 *O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!*

This week we're in week 2 of our series "Summer In the Psalms." Today we look at Psalm 8. This is a beautiful poem written by David, and let's notice how he describes God as a Creator. Vs. 1 & 3 he writes, "When I look at the night sky and see the work of *Your* fingers – the moon and stars *You* set in place..." that's God creating. Then verse 1 says, "Your glory is higher than the heavens," which means, when David sees the stars and the moon and the sun he sees the glory of God. These things express the glory of God. But the first thing that David sees when he looks at the physical universe is the reality of God. The universe speaks to David and it is telling him of the God's existence. And by the way, it does. There's an old hymn that contains these words- speaking about the moon and the stars- it says, "In reason's ear they all rejoice and utter forth in glorious voice, forever singing as they shine: 'the hand that made us is divine.'"

Over the centuries many people have found that the glories of the heavens, the physical universe, have resounded in 'reason's ear,' and they've looked up and said, "This couldn't have caused itself. There must be a God." Now, plenty of people don't agree with that, but even the staunchest skeptics are faced with a formidable task in trying to disprove that the physical universe is evidence that there is a real God out there. That's a huge hurdle to clear.

But David doesn't just see the reality of God up there. More to the point he sees the magnitude and the magnificence and the majesty of God when he looks up at the heavens. Notice how he says it in verse 3, "When I look at the night sky and see the work of Your fingers..." The commentators all point out that it doesn't say the work of His arm. It doesn't even say the work of His hand. It says "the work of His fingers." That's how you make a model.

Now think about what we're describing. If our galaxy, the Milky Way galaxy, was the size of North America then our entire solar system would be the size of a coffee cup and the earth would be just barely visible as a speck in the cup. And we know that the Milky Way is one of at least a hundred billion galaxies that we can see- and the universe might be dramatically larger than what we can see. And if all that is tiny compared to God- God made all of that with His fingers- if that is tiny when compared to God, then what is God like? No wonder David starts and ends the Psalm with praise to His majesty. "Oh Lord, our Lord Your majestic name fills the earth!"

David sees the glory and the magnitude; the majesty and the magnificence of God because He has created all things. That's all true, but we need to move from that point onto the primary rationale for David's poem. He is writing about how God made us, and what His relationship is toward us. So this is not Genesis 1 where the text is really about how God made all things- Psalm 8 is really about how God made us. But before moving on, let me remind you that there is no fact about God that has more implications and applications than He made all things. Let me just leave you with applications of this idea that God is the creator of all things. One is an insight on how we should think about God, and one is an encouragement on how we are to think about the world.

If God made everything with His fingers, how should we think about Him? Tim Keller describes something that he learned when he was a new follower of Christ. He was at a camp in Colorado listening to a woman teach and she said: if the distance between the earth and sun (93 million miles) was the thickness of a piece of paper, then the distance between the earth and just the nearest star would be a stack of paper 70 feet high. And the distance between the earth and just the end of our galaxy would be a stack of paper 310 miles high. And our galaxy is just a little speck of dust in the universe. And if God created all that with His fingers, and if He upholds it all with a word of His power, do you ask a God like that into your life to be your assistant? (Bumper sticker- God is my co-pilot) Do you connect with God in order to get Him to do what you need? Do you ask Him into your life to be your consultant?

No, if you come into contact with a God like that then you're His assistant- if that. He's got to be a King, not just something you bring up to add spice to your life, and certainly not something to whom you say, "when I need you I'll call you." No. If God is God then how do we regard Him? He's King. The Center of Life. Majesty.

On the other hand, if God really made all things for His own glory do you know what that means

for how we should regard the world? I don't think we've really thought this out. What does David mean when He says of God that He made all things with His fingers? It means He's an artist. Every other creation account that was written back before or around the time of the Scriptures always has the world being created out of a battle. There's always some kind of struggle or some kind of battle from which the world is created. Go take a look at them. All around the world every other account describes creation as the consequence of some type of violent forces coming at each other in combat. But that's not how the writers of Scripture describe it. Scripture says that our God is so all-powerful that He made the world as an artist would, with His fingers. He made it simply for the delight of doing it- for the love of doing it. What we know about great art? Great art always shows you the inner being of the artist. So, what does creation say? It describes the wisdom of God; the joy of God; the humor of God. To see the universe- to appreciate it as art- is to see the glory of the God who created it.

Then there's some tension in this Psalm. You go down from verse 3 to verse 4 and there's something that David felt that was frightening. Verse 4 asks the question, "*What are mere mortals that you should think about them; human beings that you should care for them?*"

What is David trying to get at here? It sounds like a philosophical question, doesn't it? "What are mere mortals..." But it's actually not a philosophical question. It's a rhetorical question and it's a cry from the heart. He's saying, 'when I look at all this; when I consider the vastness of it all, I wonder: what are we? We're nothing.' He was looking at glory and the glory made him feel by comparison, worthless. And David was looking at the vastness and the vastness by comparison made him feel insignificant.

Now you might understand how David felt that way. But I want you to see that the question he is raising is possibly more poignant for us today than it was for David's contemporaries and the people of ancient times. Very often when you're studying the Bible you have to understand the importance of the time period and the context into which the writers were speaking. Back then, this is the question they were asking and this is what it meant. Etc. This is a different kind of text.

This Psalm is more directly relevant to us than it was to the people who would have heard it in David's day. Why? If you believe in God, but you believe this great God who made the world with His fingers doesn't care about us, it makes you feel insignificant and worthless. David was saying, 'how do I know that the power behind the universe cares about me at all?' And of course you can believe in God and still wonder if this great God even cares. But what about today? When you have a culture that is essentially secular, and the people who write most of the books and who teach most of the courses all say, 'As far as we know we're here by accident. And everything that happens has a natural cause. There's no supernatural cause. There's no creator God.' If you feel insignificance and worthless because you're not sure whether the God behind the universe even cares about you, how much more reason do you have to feel insignificant and worthless when you know the universe doesn't care about you? When you absolutely know it?

If there is no God; no creator; this is not the work of His fingers; if there's no one out there who made it, then what are we? Of what significance are we? Do we matter? Does anything that we do matter? If there's not a God that created the world, that means everything you do now, no matter what it is, will make no difference in the end, because the universe is blind and impersonal and it doesn't care. You can live a nice clean life or you can be a serial killer but in the end it's not going to matter because when you die and when all civilization dies it will be as though it never happened, because the universe doesn't care. It's blind and impersonal.

Now, where does that bring us? David is bringing up a feeling that he has, even with belief in God. You see, even with belief in God it's possible to believe that the power behind the universe does not care, but what if you believe that you live in a universe that is absolutely blind and impersonal and it's ultimately going to devour you? You see the secular understanding of the universe is a view from which nothing counts and nothing makes any difference.

Do you have the intellectual integrity to admit this is true? You need evidence that there's a God to bring any significance to the lives of human beings. And even if you believe there's a God, you need evidence that He cares and that He's mindful of you. 'Well,' you say, 'that's kind of looking at things negatively.' But here's what I want you to consider.

Recently there was a book, and it was reviewed in the New York Times book review, called *All Things Shining*. A Harvard professor and a Yale professor and a Berkley professor attempt to answer the question, now that you know there's no God how do you find any meaning in life? They were concerned, because the number of people who don't believe in God is growing rapidly even though it's still not a majority. The number of people who are really secular are still not the majority, but it's working its way there. They said a nihilism is working its way through our culture, and it is. There's a cynicism, a deep cynicism, preventing us from taking anything serious. We make fun of everything. We can't lift anything up. We can't keep a straight face. There's a sense of meaninglessness that's working its way through the culture, and you know what these professors suggest? They suggest that we go back to the classics. We should go back to classic literature to find meaning. But the reviewer says, 'yeah, but the classics all believe something different than we believe about the world. Of course the writers of classic works believed in nobility and right and wrong and heroism, and all that stuff. Of course they consequently felt that life was filled with meaning, but we can think that way anymore.' What are we going to do?

Here's what we can do. We can see what David learned. What had David learned? David here is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we believe. So he's not just writing as an ancient writer, he's also writing as a person who was having things revealed to him, not fully but partly. And I'd like you to see a couple of interesting things that show him that God does care, and which will show us that the creator of the universe is mindful of us. When we've grasped this, it can shoot our lives through with meaning- instead of what the secular culture that we live in is going to be pressing on us. If you don't have what David has, I'm afraid culture is going to suck the meaning and the joy out of your life- maybe slowly, rather subconsciously, but secular culture will suck the meaning and the joy out of your life.

Now here's what David learned. First he learned that God cared because of creation. He writes, "**4** *what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?* **5** *Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.* **6** *You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—*"

These are amazing terms. "Glory." "Honor." "Authority." These are only attributes that the writers of Scripture would use to describe God, and yet here they are ascribed to us. And this is David recalling what the writer of Genesis said, that when God made us He put His image upon us. He made us rational. He made us moral. He made us self-conscious.

He gave us a soul and many other things. And therefore every human is infinitely precious. God cares about them and cares how they are treated. This doctrine of creation in the image of God is very important.

Let's consider a couple reasons why. Some years ago there was a medical resident who was a follower of Christ and he was with some other residents while they were doing their psychiatric rounds. And at one point they looked at a particular patient, and this patient was very depressed and he hated himself, he didn't like himself at all and he was suicidal. So the doctor who was sitting there with all the residents was working on the case and at one point one of the female residents said, 'Well, what we have to do is show him that he is a valuable person. He's not trash. He's really important and valuable. Every human being is valuable.' And do you know what the doctor who was leading the residents said? He asked, 'How do you know that? We're scientists. What scientific basis is there for saying that?' Now I imagine that's the Socratic method, but he was pushing them, and all the residents disliked it. They were very uncomfortable with what he was doing. He was trying to say, 'Yeah you have all these wonderful feelings that everyone is valuable, but what scientific evidence do you have that human beings are worthwhile?' And he was pushing them and they were all pretty upset except the Christian resident who said, "But I know he's made in the image of God, and therefore I know he's not junk. Nobody is."

Whether you're mentally handicapped or brilliant you're made in the image of God. Whether you're black or white or Latino or Asian, it doesn't matter what your race is, it doesn't matter what your class is, you're not junk and you need to be treated with dignity. It's an enormous recourse for not only psychological self worth, but also social justice. And it also means that every person you ever meet, no matter who they are, must never be treated with disdain. The idea that we've been made in the image of God has enormous implications for us psychologically, socially, & relationally. Do you believe this? That this is how God made every human being?

And so what David is saying is the way we were created- in the image of God- is one of the major evidences that God does care. As great as God is, and He's so big that He made all of this with His fingers, He still cares for you because He put His image on you and because of that every person is of infinite value and worth. Every human.

But that's not all that David learned. If you look carefully in the Psalm, David drops hints, not only of God's creation but also of God's redemption, and that also proves He cares.

First of all in verse 4, if you have a King James version of the Bible, it says, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Because the Hebrew word that's translated "care" in more modern translations is a word that actually means, "go out and find." To "visit" someone means that you care enough to go out and find them- to *move*.

What is David thinking? He's asking, "What are we, God, that we fill Your mind and that You visit us?" You're so great; so big that all this vastness is small to you, and yet we fill your mind and You visits us. How does David know that? My guess is that he doesn't fully know the implications of what he was writing. He was inspired and he probably didn't fully understand. And you say, 'Well maybe he's using the word "visit" figuratively?' No. The writers of the New Testament tell us that God did visit us and He came down. And there we begin to see the ultimate proof that the creator of the universe cares. Because when Zachariah, in Luke's account of Jesus' life, was told by an angel that not only would he have a son, but that his son would be a forerunner of the messiah. You remember what Zachariah said? It's in Luke 1

where he responds, "Blessed be the name of the Lord for He has visited and redeemed His people." When he heard that the messiah was coming Zachariah said, "you have visited your people."

And David has a hint that that is happening, but he goes beyond that. Look in verse 2. Probably when you read Psalm 8 you look past verse 2. Do you do that like I do? When I'm reading the Bible and I get to a crazy verse- just a crazy verse- you go: "What?" -and then you move to verse 3 and it makes sense and on you go. Verse 2 is actually extremely important. Do you know why? Because it's the only verse from the Psalm that Jesus himself ever quoted. It says, **2** *You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.*

Verse 2 says that this world is filled with evil. Opposition- you see. Hateful people. What is God going to do about the evil? Then very mysteriously, almost crazily, after verses 1 & 3 have described this glorious God, in verse 2 David writes that the way this enormously vast God is going to deal with the evil in the universe is out of the mouths of babies and infants. What?

In Matthew 21, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The Israelites expected the Messiah. They hoped for the Messiah, but they assumed that when the Messiah showed up he would ride in on a warhorse as a general followed by all his soldiers and they would take over. Instead, on Palm Sunday, Jesus rode in on a little donkey and the people who shouted "Hosanna" we're told, were the poor and the blind and the lame. The respectable people, the Pharisees and religious leaders came to Jesus and said, "Listen to that rabble proclaiming you! Tell them to be quiet. These people shouldn't even be here. Why do you even associate with such people?" And Jesus says, *"Haven't you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, 'You have taught children and infants to give you praise.'"*

Don't you know that this is how God deals with evil in the world? As great a God as He is, He deals with it through weakness. He deals with it through suffering. He deals with it in a way so much different than we can conceive. Look back through the Bible and see who God chooses to work with. He chooses the unwanted; the outcasts; the rejects. Over and over again He does this. Why? It's His way of pointing to the future. In the ultimate example of verse 2- the ultimate example of how God's glory and power manifests itself against the evil of this world- God became a baby. God became an infant. He was born, not in a palace, but a hay trough. He grew up, not a son of privilege, but a carpenter's son. And when he became an adult, instead of taking power, he lost power. At the end of his life he went to the cross. Why did he go to the cross? To die for our sins. Why did he die for our sins? Because he was mindful of us. When he went to the cross we filled his mind.

There's the ultimate proof that the creator of the universe cares- you fill His mind. So much that He was willing to become weak and die for you. When we understand this gospel; this good news, it can change us so much. Now we know we're not junk. Now we know nobody else is. We can live a life of meaning. We can live a life of hope. Creation sings to us about the glory of God and He is mindful of us. Oh Lord, our Lord, Your majestic name fills the earth!