



BUT WE SEE JESUS

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 Psalm 8
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Introduction

Psalm 8 is a beautiful hymn of praise which celebrates the character of God through meditation on the wonder and glory of the creation, and, especially, the role of mankind in that creation. But it is more than a hymn of praise. Jesus, in a dramatic moment of controversy with Jewish leaders in the temple in Jerusalem, applied Psalm 8 to himself. From that moment on, the church has found the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus, in every verse of this Psalm. Today, let us look at both aspects of this beautiful hymn: its Davidic context and its more complete fulfillment in the pages of the New Testament. Sensing how Psalm 8 took on such extensive “filling out” in the New Testament, John Calvin said about our reading of this psalm, “it is our duty to rise higher, and to contemplate the invaluable treasures of the kingdom of heaven which [David] has unfolded in Christ, and all the gifts which belong to the spiritual life, that by reflecting upon these our hearts may be inflamed with love to God.”¹

I agree with Calvin that a right reading of Psalm 8 will inflame our hearts with love to God. The reason for this, as we will see, is that in the hands of the inspired New Testament writers, Psalm 8 is all Jesus—his incarnation, life, suffering, death, glorification, and eventual lordship over all of creation. When we understand that this is God’s gift to each one of us, we can begin to feel the flame of love to which Calvin referred.

I want to study this psalm with you by first exploring it in its Davidic context. Here we will find much encouragement. Then we will turn to the New Testament use of Psalm 8 and see its glorious extension, fulfillment, and completion in the Son of Man, Jesus.

Psalm 8 – The Old Testament Context

Like so many of the psalms, the header, or introduction, to Psalm 8 does not reveal much about the psalm which follows:

**For the choir director; on the Gittith.
 A Psalm of David.**

We can safely conclude that Psalm 8 was written by David and was used by Israel with musical accompaniment. Beyond this, there is more room for speculation than for certainty.²

There is, however, a fairly simple structure to Psalm 8. The first verse—“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”—is repeated verbatim at the close of the psalm, forming an obvious literary unit. In between the repeated line, the hymn is composed of three parts:

- 8:1-3 – God’s enemies are silenced by the very order in creation
- 8:4-5 – God’s mindful care gives man a lofty position in creation
- 8:6-8 – Man’s place in God’s creation is most evident in his stewardship over it

A Name of Great Power Seen Everywhere (8:1)

The opening and concluding line of Psalm 8 is:

**O LORD, our Lord,
 How majestic is your name in all the earth!** (Ps 8:1, NASB)

David begins Psalm 8 with praise—the first psalm in the Psalter with this kind of beginning. Most of the first seven psalms be-

gin with a prayerful address to God seeking his involvement in some dire personal or national situation. Here, David begins with praise; that is, with the recognition of who God is. And, who is he?

Many English translations simply repeat the title “Lord,” in verse 1. In Hebrew, though, two very different words are used. The first, signified in most English translations by the use of all capital letters, is the personal name of God: *Yahweh*. This is the intimate and divine name for the God of Israel. It is the name by which he chose to reveal himself. It invokes the possibility of relationship as well as the overpowering presence of a divine, living essence. The second title is the Hebrew word *adonai*. Although most often applied to God in the Old Testament, it can also mean “master” or “lord” in an earthly, worldly, intensely practical sense.

Thus David begins his hymn of meditative praise with a contrasting recognition of God. Martin Luther believed that this contrast pointed to this psalm’s focus on Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God:

The name Lord [*Yahweh*] is ascribed to no creature on earth, not even to an angel in heaven, but only to God. Therefore it is a special and proper name of God and means “the right, true, and eternal God...” But the word [*adonai*], lord or ruler, is a common name, which Holy Scripture uses even for princes and heads of the household...Since, then, this King is called “Lord, our Ruler,” it follows that He must be true God and true man at the same time.³

Next, David exclaims that this heavenly and earthly king is “majestic,” and this vision of majesty is universal: it is “in all the earth.” Although I do not know Hebrew, after looking at all the Old Testament uses of the word, I think that “powerful” or “mighty” might be a better translation than “majestic.” *Addir* connotes “powerful,” because it is frequently connected with an ability to inflict death or to be victorious in war. Thus, in the Old Testament, the waves of the ocean are *addir*, not because of their stateliness or beauty, but because they can overwhelm in death those who would try to navigate them.⁴ Even something humble—like a drinking bowl—can be *addir*. The poem in Judges 5 calls a drinking bowl *addir*, because it was the means of a man’s death. It might have been nothing more than an animal-skin container! Thus, it is not just the outward appearance, but the inward power that matters when something is *addir*.

The opening and closing verses of Psalm 8 praise God for the fact that his powerful name is evident in all the earth:

**O LORD, our Lord,
 How majestic is your name in all the earth!**

The Humblest Aspects of Creation Sufficient to Silence God’s Enemies (8:1-3)

After declaring that God’s mighty name is majestic for all to see everywhere, David continues the use of contrasts to show that in the humblest parts of creation—in the very mouth of a nursing baby—there is sufficient evidence of God’s majesty to silence God’s enemies.

**Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!
 From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength**

**Because of Your adversaries,
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease. (Ps 8:1b-2)**

The most confusing idea in this section is in 8:2, when David writes that the mouth of infants or nursing babes is said to “establish” God’s “strength.” It is not so much that the words themselves are difficult or that the manuscripts vary significantly. The issues center more on syntax—i.e., on establishing and understanding the text’s meaning at the level of sentences.⁵ The Hebrew words imply that an important foundation is being laid upon which the power of God is built and displayed. What does this mean? David is very close to providing what today we call the “argument from design”—i.e. the proof that there is a creator because the order and intricacy of creation demands it. David’s insight comes, though, in his observation of the simple actions of young children. No one teaches a baby how to nurse, and yet the mouth instinctively knows what to do, and this display of the order and design in God’s creation is sufficient to silence God’s enemies, or make them “cease.”⁶

The first section of Psalm 8, then, is a series of subtle but important contrasts. First, God’s splendor “above the heavens” is compared to the activity of infants here on “earth below.” Next, God’s provision for the vulnerable life of infants is contrasted to the thrice-named powers of evil in the universe: adversaries, the enemy, the revengeful. Finally, as we have seen, the oral activity of infants is contrasted to the silence which comes when God’s enemies “cease.” So great is this silence that they cease to be significant. David doesn’t even bother mentioning them in the rest of the hymn, for the most evident majesty of God in all aspects of creation has made their malignity meaningless.

In Matthew 21, we will see that at a moment when creation was indeed “in order,” Jesus silenced the enemies of God with the “establishment of strength” offered in the praise of Israelite children.

The Lofty Position of Man in Creation Due to God’s Mindfulness and Care (8:3-5)

By mentioning infants and God’s enemies, David has begun his meditation on man and his place in God’s created order. In verses 3-5, he contemplates how even though man appears small when compared to the vastness of the heavens, God still cares for and acts on man’s behalf.

As a shepherd, David spent many nights awake under the heavens. The constellations of stars and the phases of the moon would have been second nature to him. Even after years of exposure, they still provoked wonder in his heart:

**When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty! (Ps 8:3-5)**

Have you ever seen the stars on a clear night, far away from the lights of the city? As a suburbanite, I recall vividly a few such occasions: once when camping near Lake Tahoe—a night on which the Milky Way looked like a blanket of soft cloud arching through the sky; once in Romania—a night of shooting stars and feelings of disorientation because the stars were so bright and numerous that the few constellations I usually recognize were lost in the heavenly blaze.⁷ With such a vast and beautiful array before one’s eyes, it is natural to feel small. But God does not let us make the mistake of equating size with significance. As a devotional book I have says, “Two men looked out into space. One said, ‘Astronomically speaking, man is insignificant.’ The other said, ‘Astronomically speaking, man is the astronomer.’”⁸

What David expresses is similar, but his focus is on God. The vignette about astronomy shows that man has great mental capacity and is endowed by God with reason. David agrees, but fo-

cuses instead on how God cares for man even though he is small and frail.

David says that God’s relationship to man is one of remembering and advocacy. The NASB translates as “takes thought” the Hebrew word *zakar*, which means “remember,” a powerful Old Testament concept. But this is not the first time that something in the heavens has provoked God’s memory. God placed the rainbow in the heavens after the destruction of the earth by water in the days of Noah, as a covenant sign, so that he would remember⁹ (*zakar*) his covenant with man and with all living creatures. Later, with Abraham and Moses, the stars provoked memory of God’s covenant to make Abraham’s descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens.¹⁰ The kind of “remembering” here is not some vague “thinking about,” but is a mental signpost that ignites active response in the one who remembers.¹¹

Thus, God “remembers” man, and is moved by his love for him to act on his behalf. The action that he takes is expressed in the second phrase of Psalm 8:4, which the NASB translates as “care for.” This is the Hebrew word *paqad*, a word with which Old Testament translators have a difficult time.¹² *Paqad* has a wide variety of meanings: “number,” “ordain,” “visit,” and even “punish.” It implies action, even advocacy. When God engages in *paqad*, it means that he “comes to” or “visits.” But the visit isn’t usually one that includes casual conversation over a cup of coffee! When Joseph asks his brothers to bury his body in Canaan, he prophesies that God will “care for” (*paqad*) them sufficiently so that they will be able to leave Egypt and take his body to Canaan. Here, to “care for” means to bless and deliver from bondage.¹³ When Israel played the harlot in the wilderness, the Lord promises that when he does come to “care for” them, it will be to punish.¹⁴

When God thinks about man, he thinks about him in a way that excites his love and holiness. Man, according to Psalm 8, is not an accidental creature, crawling about the earth in slime-evolved meaninglessness. Rather, God remembers man and acts. God moves towards man in grace and holiness. He has given us a mission and he will not relent until that mission is fulfilled. Ultimately, as we will see when we look at the New Testament understanding of Psalm 8, this mission can only be fulfilled through the incarnation: unable to meet the demands of our covenant relationship with God, God remembers us and acts on our behalf. He sends his son as a man, indeed as the Son of Man, who feels the full weight of God’s *paqad* on the cross.

David goes on to say that man has a very lofty position in God’s majestic order of creation:

**Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty! (Ps 8:5)**

Some of you will have different translations of verse 5 than the New American Standard Bible, from which I am reading. Instead of saying that man was made a little lower than “God,” your version might say “angels” or “divine beings.” Let me explain the issue that translators face regarding this verse. There is a common Hebrew word for God, *elohim*, that is plural in form. Well over two thousand times in the Old Testament this plural word obviously refers to God. Sometimes, however, *elohim* refers quite clearly to various “gods” (Judges 2:3). So, from the Hebrew alone, the translator is faced with an interpretive decision in verse 5.

But the issue is more complicated still. Probably in the first century B.C., some Jewish scholars in Alexandria in Egypt created a translation of the Old Testament into Greek. This version, which is called the Septuagint, became the most common translation of the Old Testament among Greek-speaking Jews, and was the “Bible of the New Testament Writers.” By this I mean that most of the citations and allusions to the Old Testament in the New Testament are based on the Septuagint rather than on the Hebrew versions that existed at the same time. When the Septuagint translators came to Psalm 8:5, they translated *elohim* with the

Greek word *angelos*, a word which means angels or messengers, and was never used as a word for God. This is not some academic question with no “practical” implications. Thus we find that the choices made when translating the words of David in Psalm 8 can be influenced by historical and theological considerations that arose centuries after David’s death.

For the immediate context of David’s hymn, however, it may not matter which being or beings, man has been made “a little less than.” For if we consider God or the angels, it is amazing how elevated a position man holds in God’s majestic display of power in creation. If the comparison to the most exalted beings is not sufficient, then David caps it off by saying that God crowns man with glory and majesty. While I was studying these two words, a common picture kept coming up for me: Solomon. In I Kings 3:13, God promises “glory” to Solomon even though he did not ask for it when his reign over Israel began. The word in this verse for “majesty” is different from *addir*, the word used for God’s majesty with which Psalm 8 opens and closes. Here the word seems to refer more to the outward adornment or physical manifestations that signal to everyone that before us we have a person of immense importance.

So, this is how God made man. Rather than being an insignificant speck, something very small compared to the vast beauty and orderliness of the heavens, man is, from the very point of his origins, significant in every way. His position is lofty; his appearance compelling. God has high regard for him, remembers him, and constantly acts on his behalf.

What is interesting to me about this is how one-sided a picture this is. We know only too well how corrupt and abusive mankind is. When I ponder the role of man in the created order, I find a paradox. The meditation of David in Psalm 8 cries out for completion or fulfillment. What man is there who has been clothed with glory and majesty and yet has not been marred by the ugliness of sin and its consequences? Who can live up to this lofty ideal and feel comfortable being compared to the transcendent loftiness of God? We will see in Hebrews 2 that Jesus, *the Son of Man*, can be the only answer to these questions.

Man’s Original Dominion Most Evident in His Rule over Creation (8:6-8)

David provides an answer to these unspoken questions in verses 6-8. He says that man is most noble, is most himself, is most true to his created nature when he acts with dominion, or as steward, over the creation that God subjects to him.

**You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas. (Ps 8:6-8)**

It doesn’t take much insight to notice here echoes from Genesis 1.¹⁵ In fact, almost all of the creation story, except for the creation of plant life, is meditated upon in Psalm 8. It is not too much to say that in this section, David reverts back to man’s original mission upon earth before the fall: man was created to be a gardener and governor.¹⁶ The picture of domesticated cattle contrasts with the wilder birds of heaven and the more alien fish of the sea. Finally, in the odd phrase, “whatever passes through the paths of the sea,” may be a reference to strange sea creatures and mythical monsters which lurk behind the creation account references scattered throughout the Old Testament.

I find it interesting how different people are attracted to different animals. My youngest daughter, Emily, loves everything about horses. It seems as though many, especially girls, share this enthusiasm. My delight is in birds. I love their cries and calls (except for those loud territorial cries of the mockingbird in the late spring and early summer that can wake me up from a dead sleep), their colors, and their delicate features. Some people have a passion for dogs. Whatever it may be, I think this is profoundly

instinctual in man. We were created by God to rule over earthly creatures. I think we would have had some fun and fantastic relations with the animals if it hadn’t been for the Fall, which destroyed the peaceful sovereignty of man in this area.

Thus, “peaceful coexistence” or “man as one among the animals” is not the right way to think about what the most glorious and fulfilling relationship is between man and the animal world. Rather, texts like Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 make it clear that when man exercises loving and creative stewardship over the animals, we see a dim reflection of a long-destroyed image from the pre-fall Garden of Eden. This is why the Old Testament uses the word picture of the friendship of animals (the lamb lying down with the lion, etc.) to show what things will be like under the rule of the Messiah. This is why the New Testament speaks of all creation “waiting eagerly”¹⁷ for mankind to return to its proper pre-Fall role in creation. This is why so many of the saints in the early and medieval church are portrayed as living in harmonious relationship with animals.¹⁸

It would be unwise for us to leave this section without noting that the primary emphasis in Psalm 8 is not on the glory of the role of man, but is on the fact that God, as Creator, has ordained the world to be as he has created it. Throughout Psalm 8, this truth is emphasized by the repetition of words like ordained, established, made to, etc. It is the creative action of God that puts the created order “under the feet” of man. But it is only when we turn to the New Testament, and especially 1 Corinthians 15 and Ephesians 1, that we see how the ultimate subjection of the creation can only be to Jesus, through whom and for whom all things were created.

From his contemplation of the created order, and how the loving care of God places man in such an important role in that order, David returns to his initial exclamation of praise:

**O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is your name in all the earth! (Ps 8:9)**

But We See Jesus—Psalm 8 in the New Testament

Psalm 8 is used (quoted¹⁹ or obviously referenced) at least four significant times in the New Testament. As mentioned earlier, Jesus uses Psalm 8:2 in a controversy with the chief priests and scribes, that Matthew records (21:16). Hebrews 2:5-10 contains not only a reference to Psalm 8:4-6 but a significant explanation of the psalm’s meaning. And, finally, Psalm 8:6 is quoted in both 1 Corinthians 15:27 and Ephesians 1:22 to the effect that all dominion and power, not just governorship over the animal world, is subjected to Jesus.

In each case, I believe that what we find is the meaning of Psalm 8 stretched out, filled up, or completed in an extreme sense. In its Davidic context, Psalm 8 gives us a meditation on mankind. In the New Testament, the focus both narrows and grows bigger. In the New Testament, we see Jesus, and through him to mankind restored to his original position and mission in the universe.

Or, more appropriately still, it’s like the incarnation. It is not just that Jesus was a good man: submissive to the will of God and obedient even unto death on the cross. Jesus is also more than man. He is the Son of Man, God Incarnate. So too, the meaning of Psalm 8 is not just stretched out, filled up, and made bigger in the New Testament. It becomes so big that it is transformed; it is completed in Christ.

Psalm 8:2 and Matthew 21:15-17—When Creation Sang the Praises of the Son of Man

In Matthew 21, Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph. Matthew’s account is thick with Old Testament references as the true King returns to his City. Once inside the city gates, Jesus cleanses the temple of the money-changers and dove-sellers with the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah on his lips. In all the excitement, children were running around shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

The chief priests and scribes “became indignant” and confronted Jesus. Matthew records Jesus’ response as a Septuagint-based citation of Psalm 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?’” And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there. (Matt 21:16b-17)

When I first began to study Jesus’ use of Psalm 8 here with the chief priests and scribes, I was taken aback. What is the connection between the meaning of the psalm, as David wrote it, and Jesus’ authoritative use of it in controversy with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem? But the more I have pondered it, the more profoundly appropriate I find it. As I learned when I studied Psalm 2, the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, which we commemorate on Palm Sunday, is one of the few times in the pages of scripture when the Jews clearly “got it right”: they recognized the King approaching his own royal city, and celebrated this wonderful fact openly and enthusiastically. It is a supreme moment of recognition of Jesus’ royal majesty. So, when the praise goes up to heaven from the mouths of the young children in Jerusalem, God’s created order is, for the moment, acting in accordance with the deepest designs of God’s original plan for the universe: God’s majestic name is being praised, his splendor is being openly displayed and recognized.

When the chief priests and scribes question this, they insinuate rather than directly raise the issue that troubles them: Who are you, Jesus? We hear and see all around us Israelites accepting you only as they should the Messiah, the Chosen One of God, the Deliverer of Israel. Are you the Messiah? Instead, they complain about the behavior of the children²⁰: “Do you hear what these children are saying?” But Jesus responds creatively to the real question in their heart: “Absolutely, I hear them! Isn’t the sound beautiful and their praise wonderful? The universe resounds with it because they are welcoming the King not only to his royal city, but to the very seat of worship here in the temple. No behavior could ever be more appropriate because every aspect of it is right. It fits in completely with the ordained purposes of God. Every time God’s creation functions as it should, your reaction should be praise.”

Matthew doesn’t record that Jesus quoted any more of Psalm 8 on this occasion. But I would not be surprised if Matthew intends for us to understand by implication that Jesus was thinking about the next two lines of Psalm 8:

**Because of Your adversaries,
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease. (Ps 8:2b)**

For, the chief priests and scribes make no answer. Jesus simply leaves them. They are silent. Very elegantly, then, Matthew uses Psalm 8 to underline who truly recognizes God and his work in the gospel narrative, and who God’s enemies are, the ones who are not only blind, but also cannot speak against the bulwark of praise ordained by God through his creation.

Thus, for Jesus, Psalm 8 was most appropriately fulfilled when the children of Israel recognized him as King and Messiah. At that climactic moment, Psalm 8 was fulfilled in him, and he claimed it for himself. All was right with the universe in that moment, and the enemies of God ceased and were silent.

Psalm 8:4-6 and Hebrews 2:5-10—*The Ultimate Act of Remembering and Caring*

The most extensive New Testament use of Psalm 8 occurs in Hebrews 2:5-10. The argument in the first part of Hebrews is the superiority of Jesus’ ministry, as the Son of God, when compared to the angelic ministry which God has used at other times and other ways in history. Among the marks of the superiority of Jesus’ ministry is the fact that God never subjected “all things,” including the “world to come,” to angels, but only to his son, Jesus:

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified some-

where, saying,

**What is man, that you remember him?
Or the son of man, that you are concerned about him?
You have made him for a little while lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And have appointed him over the works of your hands;
You have put all things in subjection under his feet.**

For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. (Heb 2:5-10)

For the author of Hebrews, Psalm 8 is about Jesus. He says that Jesus became a “little lower than the angels” when he took on human flesh in the incarnation. The “crowning with glory and honor” of which the psalmist speaks is clearly seen in Jesus’ suffering and death. Psalm 8 is not merely about mankind, but about a man who most beautifully and powerfully became what all mankind was created, but utterly failed, to be. While David was filled with praise when he contemplated God’s faithful remembrance of mankind, we live on the other side of the most incredible act of remembrance that God has undertaken so far in history: the incarnation. For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son—by making him a little lower than the angels—so that he would suffer and die for us. But, the writer points out, Jesus’ suffering and dying was the opening of a door through which we can walk by faith, by believing that this Jesus is the one who came, who suffered, and who died in place of us on the cross. David was right to praise God for what he saw in the created order, and in mankind’s place in it. We are right to praise God more exceedingly still for the utter fulfillment of mankind’s position and mission in the created order, when we see Jesus.

And what is it in Jesus that we see? The writer to Hebrews is brutally honest here. We don’t see everything happy, the universe tied up with a neat little bow. No, we see suffering. For it was appropriate, says the writer, for God, “for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.”

In order to complete his purposes in creation, God has redeemed man through suffering—first, the suffering of Jesus, and next, through our own suffering as we take up the cross and follow him.

I don’t know about you, but texts like this make me come to a complete stop in the deep places of my understanding and feelings. I have to forego all other distractions for my mind to begin to grapple with what it means for God to love me this much, that he would let his son suffer so much – for me. And as my mind grapples, my heart begins to burst with gratitude and love. What kind of response can I make to this loving God, who has spared no price to bring me to glory, a thing that I walk away from, in filthy defiance, time after time? Yet he keeps pursuing his mission in me, and he will not fail.

Psalm 8:6 and 1 Corinthians 15:27—*The Full Glory of Creation*

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is arguing about the resurrection being essential to Christianity: “and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain” (15:14). And again, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” (15:17). Moving from this crucial point to describe the order of the final things, Paul uses Psalm 8:6 to show that, eventually, all things, even death, will be subjected to Jesus

the Son, who in turn will be subjected to the Father, "so that God may be all in all" (15:28).

Once again, the attribution of meaning in Psalm 8 to Jesus is absolute. Where we might have been tempted to see in the words of David a hymn of praise for God as shown through man's stewardship over the created order, we are forced by Paul to see the ultimate sense or application of this idea in Jesus. The ultimate steward over the creation, appropriately, is the one through whom and by whom all things were created. Coming in the flesh to save us, Jesus suffered and died on our behalf. Then, at the moment of his resurrection, all history begins to work backwards towards its glorious beginning before the fall. Hear Paul's words:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For "he has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:20-28)

To show the ultimate example of rule in all of history, Paul, guided by the general principle of man's ruling over the creation as expressed in praise in Psalm 8, sees Jesus who "must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet."²¹

Conclusion

So what are we to make of Psalm 8? How can we apply it to our lives? In one sense, there is only one application: Praise! As a hymn of praise, this text does not offer us a five-step program for how we should love our neighbors, or provide details on what we need to do to right the world's social injustices. But if we remember what, how, and why Psalm 8 praises God, I think we will find at least three things our hearts and minds desperately need:

First, it is good and right to see the hand of God in the created world and praise him for it. What a wonderful discipline it would be to have every manifestation of nature, every cloud, blade of grass, singing bird, or breath of wind recall to our conscious thinking the sovereign majesty of God. As we have seen, Psalm 8 takes us beyond this. The design and order in creation point us inevitably back to the creator. When we declare this openly, with the innocence and power of the children who recognized Jesus as the Messiah, we become building blocks in the foundation of strength that displays the majesty of God in all the earth.

Second, when we contemplate the Scriptures, we should be constantly finding our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a tremendous and life-long challenge when faced with intellectual and spiritual integrity. But, as Psalm 8 indicates, God remembers man, and visits him. This active love of God directed toward man is fulfilled exhaustively in Christ. The Scriptures are the written record of this active love, and if I fail to find Christ in them, then I am blind and deaf indeed.

Finally, Psalm 8 asks us to join an on-going story. When Jesus fulfilled his redemptive task on the cross and left that empty tomb, he opened the way for us to join him in restoring ourselves to our original role in creation. We join him by faith; we work and suffer with him in love; and, that we will be redeemed with him, is our glorious and most sure hope. On a daily basis, this restoration of our humanity consists primarily in suffering, as he

day-by-day molds us into the "little lower than God" beings we were created to be. Someday, all things will be subjected to him. In that day, we will not see with the eyes of faith. We will not praise with a mortal mouth. But with all hopes fulfilled and with new and glorified bodies we will declare:

O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is your name in all the earth!

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1. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 1 (repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 108.

2. One speculation that I find very appropriate and attractive (though not conclusive) is that the Hebrew word *gittith* refers to wine presses. Did the Israelites sing Psalm 8 as they trod on the grapes that would yield an abundant supply of wine? If so, the earthy, natural wonder and gratitude for God's gifts to man in nature found a marvelous fulfillment!

3. *Luther's Works, Vol. 12, Selected Psalms I* (St Louis: Concordia, 1955), 99.

4. Perhaps the best translation for *addir* is "awful," but this word has shifted in meaning in modern English and no longer connotes its basic meaning of "full of awe." On the other hand, "awful" does not, even in its older sense, convey the notion of nobility, which is associated with *addir*. See especially the uses of *addir* in Jeremiah 14:3 and 25:34-36. Nahum 2:5 and 3:18 use *addir* in a similar way.

5. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 66-67, as usual, has even-handed and insightful comments.

6. The NIV and NRSV both use "silence." The Hebrew word, *shabat*, is the familiar word which gives us "Sabbath" and means, fundamentally, cease, desist, or rest.

7. If you want to think about the moon, stars and planets in a new way, read C. S. Lewis' space trilogy, but especially the first book *Out of the Silent Planet*. Lewis' blending of medieval cosmology with "modern" ideas has been inspirational for me. During the trip to Romania mentioned here, I wrote a poem, inspired by what I've learned from Lewis, about the moon. Whenever I see a full moon today, I recall that full moon which rose about ten o'clock each night in Romania and dimmed the lights of all the stars around it.

A Greeting For The Moon When She Rises

We salute you, Silver Sister,
Great but lesser light who rules the night
Scarred face, patient gaze
Military outpost of the Ancient of Days

We greet you, Silver Sister,
Reflecting brightness not your own
Deadly bright, bright in death
Crystal wind of frozen breath.

We recognize you, Silver Sister,
Battleground of demons grim
Our souls, your face
Tombs seeking God's embrace.

8. *The One Year Book of Psalms*. Devotionals written by William J. Petersen and Randy Petersen (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1999). The quotation above is for the second entry on Psalm 8, the reading for January 13.

"It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember [zakar] My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember [zakar] the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

10. In the account of the Golden Calf, Moses pleaded with God not to blot out Israel for her flagrant idolatry. He prayed,

"Remember [zakar] Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people (Exodus 32:13-14).

11. Recently my family visited Washington D. C., and had the opportunity of visiting the Holocaust memorial there. At the very end of the tour is a place for quiet contemplation, a place to absorb and process the horrors, outrages, deprivations, as well as the acts of humanity and courage that came out of that dark hour in World War II. Appropriately, the quiet place at the end of the tour is called the Hall of Memory.

12. Victor P. Hamilton, "paqad," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 731.

13. The usages of *paqad* in Genesis 50:24-25 are as follows:

And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care [*paqad*] of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care [*paqad*] of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

14. In Exodus 32:34, God promises that when he next comes to call, it will be with serious consequences:

"But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish

[*paqad*], I will punish [*paqad*] them for their sin."

15. Although very obvious in 8:6-8, there have already been echoes of Genesis in Psalm 8:3 (cf. Gen 1:16).

16. Since Psalm 8 focuses on man's role as governor, only the animal creation is mentioned in verses 6-8.

17. See Romans 8:18-22.

18. Examples are numerous. Recently I have been reading about some of the Northumbrian saints in the so-called Dark Ages, and there are endless examples of spiritual maturity of the saints pictured by miraculous interactions with the animal world. The story of St. Cuthbert, after a night of prayer in the ocean, being warmed and dried by two otters is one of my favorites. See Bede's account in his *Life of St. Cuthbert*, ch. 10. St. Francis is so often presented in "personal relationship" with the animals that a book-length study of him as a "nature mystic" has been written.

19. I use the term "quoted" here loosely. I do not believe that New Testament (or other ancient) writers very often quoted writings and sayings the way we do today. There was a much greater and freer emphasis on meaning and intention in ancient use of sources which we feel uncomfortable with. Our age expects exact reduplication between quotation marks. In the ancient world, sources are often quoted from memory, and exact reduplication is clearly considered less important than appropriateness or intention of meaning.

20. Interestingly, in the Greek, the chief priests and scribes do not actually reference the children as such. Using a demonstrative pronoun, they ask Jesus, "Do you not hear what *these* are saying?" When Jesus responds, he gives the children a "name" and thereby gives them great dignity—as much dignity as they are given in Psalm 8!

21. Paul's use of Psalm 8:6 in Ephesians 1:22 is similar to that in 1 Corinthians 15. In Ephesians, though, the emphasis is on Jesus as the head of the church, and how in this capacity all things are subjected to him. As members of the body of Christ, then, Paul invites us into the sweep of history in which our participation in the life of Christ contributes to the restoration of all things as subjected to Christ.