

Praising God When Life Hurts

Psalm 8

Studies in the Psalms #8

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I FIND it interesting that as we read the book of Psalms, which means “praises,” it’s not until the eighth Psalm that we actually have a Psalm that is a praise in the sense of a prayer that praises God from beginning to end. As I said last Sunday, in Psalms 3–7 we experience the sufferings of the Christian life before we get a glimpse of glory in Psalm 8. As Paul said in Romans 8:17, “if [we are God’s] children, then [we are] heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*” Don’t ever forget that we suffer *with Jesus* and we will be glorified *with Jesus*. And as we seek to apply this Psalm to our lives we recognize that it first applies to Jesus, whom Paul said at his resurrection God **put all things under his feet** (v. 6; 1 Cor. 15:27), and whom the writer to the Hebrews said was **made...a little lower than the heavenly beings** for a time in his incarnation and suffering but is now **crowned...with glory and honor** (v. 5; Heb. 2:5–9). So we suffer now with Jesus in this life but have the promise of being glorified with him in the life to come.

And here in Psalms 1–8, it was Psalm 7:17 was the transition point from David’s suffering to praise when said, “I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.” Psalm 8 is David’s praise “to the name of the LORD.” And when we put Psalms 3–8 together we are taught about *praising God when life hurts*.

Awed by the Majesty of God (vv. 1–2, 9)

Life hurts because I am attacked by three enemies. I have the internal enemy of my sins. I have the spiritual enemy of the devil. And I have the temporal enemy of those who want to do me harm. And it’s when they hurt me that David says we are to step back and praise God. In what way? When I think of God I am *awed by the majesty of God* as the Psalm begins and ends, **O LORD, our Lord, how majestic**—how excellent, how beautiful (*‘addir*) **is your name in all the earth!** (vv. 1, 9) And then he gives examples of his majesty. First, **you have set your glory above the heavens** (v. 1). Have you ever seen the Hubble Deep Field image? It’s an image that would be the size of a tennis ball three hundred feet in front of you, or, 1/24-millioneth of the sky. And in it area three thousand galaxies—not stars—*galaxies*. Then there’s the Ultra Deep Field image, which has ten thousand galaxies! One person

said if our Milky Way galaxy were the size of North America, our solar system would be the size of a coffee cup! And it's one of one hundred billion galaxies in the known universe!¹

And above it all sits the Creator King! But then David goes somewhere totally unexpected. The second way he expresses the majesty of the Lord is by taking us from **above the heavens** to right below a mother's loving look: **Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger** (v. 2). Ha! All you temporal enemies (3:7; 6:7, 10; 7:4, 5, 6) who backbite, curse, mock, and slander me will be brought to nothing. And to show how impotent they really are David says little babies are stronger than they! According to the ancient Greek translation, which Jesus quotes in Matthew 21, the strength that outmuscles enemies is the praises of children. Children's faint praise drowns out the screams of God's enemies. Children, sing! Children, you have an important part to play in our worship. The devil hates it when God is praised. So sing LOUD!

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life*, 97.

Humbled by the Love of God (vv. 3-4)

And you'd think that thinking of the majesty of God when my enemies are so mean would be enough. Then David transitions in verses 3-4 by saying that when life hurts I am *humbled by the love of God*. And as he's looking up and contemplating the majesty of the Lord above the heavens he says, **When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?** (vv. 3-4)

It's not just that the Lord is a majestic Creator who sits above the creation, merely looking down upon it. No! The heavens he sits above are the heavens his own fingers made. That's close, intimate, and personal, isn't it? Don't we often feel like God is so far away? Don't we often think in terms of God as a cosmic watchmaker, who made the watch, who wound up the watch, but who then just left it to work on it's own without his care? When you feel that way think of this verse: **when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers** (v. 3). And if God cares about the creation, and I am a part of that creation, he must care for me! That's what we see in verse 4, which is the center of the Psalm: **what is man** (this is the generic Hebrew word for a human, *enosh*) **that you are mindful of him, and the son of**

man (this is a specific man, *ben-‘adam*, who in the Psalter is a royal person; 80:17; 146:3) **that you care for him** (v. 4).²

Now, I know that when we read that question, **what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him**, it is meant to be a humbling thought. And it can even lead us to the kind of thinking that some of us are prone to when we feel spiritually depressed. We sit around with our spiritual flower in hand and we pluck off the petals saying, “He loves me, he loves me not,” and every day we end in a different place. That’s not what the Psalm is meant for. Yes this is a humbling thought—humbling precisely because God loves me! Above and beyond the light years of the universe the Lord sits enthroned, but his eye is on me—*me* of all people! Jesus loves sinners, my brothers and sisters and friends. And the wonder of his love is not found in the worthiness of the objects he loves—us—but in the wideness of the heart that loves, which is his! Are you humbled today by his love of a sinner like you?

² He is the *‘ish* of Psalm 1 and the *melek* of Psalm 2. Futato, 53.

Privileged by the Purpose of God (vv. 5–8)

And it's because of his love that when life hurts I also praise him because I am *privileged by the purpose of God*. In verses 5–8 David reflects on the purpose the Creator made us to have in the beginning: **Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor** (v. 5). The word behind our translation of **heavenly beings** is the word *'elohim*, which sometimes is used of angels (Ps. 82), but David is referencing the creation story where God made man in his own image (Gen. 1:27). We were made a **little lower than God** as his image bearers. And as the pinnacle and privileged part of God's creation, David says, **You have given him dominion 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 along the paths of the seas** (vv. 6–8). This is what Adam was given; this is what we are supposed to be. But the world seems chaotic, doesn't it? Why is that? Adam sinned and brought disorder into the world. Now what? Let's turn to Hebrews 2, which is mentioned earlier. The context here is that Jesus is more glorious than even the angels God created, the angels whom the Jews honored as the mediators of the law at Mount Sinai. And in verse 5

we read, “For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking,” and then he quotes our Psalm at verses 4–6 (vv. 6–8). Then notice what he says: “Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control” (v. 8). That’s the creation purpose. But then he adds our experience: “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (vv. 8–9).

“Okay, great; so the Psalm is all about Jesus. I get that, but what am I supposed to do when life hurts?” Let me say contrary to so much of popular Christianity out there that Jesus is not like a prescription drug promising to make it all better in this life and if you would just believe in him you’d be alright. The practicality of what Hebrews 2 is saying about Psalm 8 is that life hurt for Jesus. He suffered not only under the temporal enemies around him and not only under the spiritual temptations of the devil, but when he tasted death he suffered the very wrath of God due to our internal enemy of sin (Heb. 2:9). He suffered everything you will ever suffer, but to an infinite degree. Life hurt for Jesus. But after he put the enemy of death under his feet

at the resurrection, he was crowned with glory and honor. And the benefit for me is that if I put my trust in Jesus and am united to him, everything he has now in heaven is already mine. He is the down payment of my glory and honor. He is the guarantee that I too will be crowned. And this God's ultimate purpose for me—glory! Now I can get up each day, knowing where I am ultimately going, knowing what I already have in Christ, and seek to live out of that purpose in this life.

So when you and I put our heads down at night after another day absorbing the blows of our enemies, reflect upon your God—who he is, what he has done, and what he calls you to be. Be awed by his majesty. Be humbled by his love. Be privileged by his purpose. Amen.