

PSALM 8
THE MAJESTIC GOD!

A picture paints a thousand words, so the saying goes. Here's a picture of the magnificent world in which we live; and another example; and we could spend all day putting pictures on the screen that show something wonderful about the world! We can talk about the splendour of these things, but pictures are much more powerful and even when we talk about them, we're imagining them and painting pictures of them in our minds. There are all sorts of scale to this that I see even in my little world: my study window looks over the Pentlands and there are times when sun hits them, late in evening that the hills seem to be on fire with orange light; at my gate there is a cherry tree and at this time of year it is beautiful with pink blossom, and it brings the garden alive in spring; on a different scale, we have a bird table that is often covered with spiders' webs and when it has been raining, the droplets of water cover these webs and make them into works of art; the birds themselves that come to visit the bird table, and there are lots of them, have their intricate colours and even the predator that is the sparrow-hawk is something to see when it goes to work.

"What is this life if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare" – these are words that begin the poem called *Leisure* by WH Davies; he goes on to paint a picture of someone taking the time to look at world around him and marvel at the beauty of it; he concludes that life is poor if we have no time to stand and stare, to stop and ponder the beauty of the world. For the Christian, there is another step to this sense of the world and its wonder: to marvel at the God who made this. This is God's world and as we ponder the beauty of the world, there is a clue to the power and majesty of God. This is the world that God has made; we are the people that God has made – we marvel at the power and love of God. Find time to stop and ponder the beauty of the world this week and let it deepen our faith in the God who made the world and gave us life.

Psalm 8: "an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God... in a spirit of mingled joy and awe." (Derek Kidner) The Psalm is full of the glory of God and of praise for that glory and majesty; it gives us a unique insight into who we are and the love that God has for us; and it inspires us to praise and worship. It lifts our hearts so that we see the world more clearly and feel better about ourselves. The centre of the hymn is God Himself; this is a hymn in praise of God in all His glory and majesty and He is worthy of our praise. We stop and ponder so that we can praise: it is good for us to lift our hearts in worship and sing songs of praise to God; we were made for worship, to glorify God; worship lifts our eyes to see something of the glory of God and it does us good to express our worship.

"O Lord..." (*Psalm 8:1f*) We marvel at the splendour of the world; we see some amazing things in the world and they blow our mind. But as Christians these should also strengthen our faith in a great big God. There are people who will tell us that the universe is simply a random coming together of matter in a particular way and no more than that; Christians believe that God made the world. Psalm 8 takes us back to Genesis 1 and the picture painted there of God creating the world: once "*the earth was...*" (*Genesis 1:2*) and then God made the world. I don't believe that Genesis 1 is an attempt to describe the process by which God made the world and science has answered that question in some quite remarkable ways. Science tells us how, but I still want there to be room for me to say: "*by faith...*" (*Hebrews 11:3*) The world is God's world; He has made it; it reveals to us something of the glory of God, His power, His nature, and His majesty.

The world is a wonderful reflection of God's glory and we rejoice in what we see. "The one who made this wonderful world is someone that I can believe in."

There's another question in our man's mind as he looks at the world and the glory of the stars etc: "*When I...*" (*Psalm 8:3f*) "Where do I fit into this world? The world is a huge place, the universe seems endless and I am so small; where do I fit?" The question suggests such a small answer: "what are human beings that you care for them?" The question suggests that we are small and insignificant in the grand scale of things, that we are of no account, like ants scurrying across the face of the universe, unnoticed, unloved. Here's a question: on a scale of 1-10 where do we fit in? If the beasts and animals are 1 and God is 10, where do we fit in? The person who first posed that question suggests that the psalmist would put us at 8 or 9! We have this affinity with God and so we are people of dignity and respect; we are the prime display of God's glory in the world, the only part of creation described as being made in the image of God, the crown of all creation.

"*What is...*" (*Psalm 8:4*) 'mindful' suggests that God remembers us and loves us. Why should that be? Why should God do this for us? After all, people are capable of the most terrible things; we see these terrible things on the streets of London just this week; human nature scrapes the depths of evil and hurt; we know that the wages of sin is death and that these things come back to haunt the world at times; so we consider that God will hold us at arms' length; we are pushed aside and there is something of that suggested by this question. In fact, the answer is quite different: "*You made...*" (*Psalm 8:5*) We are 8 or 9 on the scale; we are next to God; our closest affinity is with God. People, by just being who we are, are full of dignity and are worthy of respect! This all-powerful, majestic God notices us, knows us by name and loves us and is mindful of us, remembers us and cares for us.

We are given a job to do: "*You made him...*" (*Psalm 8:5*) This insignificant tiny speck that scurries across the universe – and there are 6 billion of us on planet – we are somehow in control of the world that God made. He has given us the world: we are given this spectacular place in which to live, to enjoy this wonderful world, to stop and ponder its beauty and the glory of God who made it, but we are also to look after the world on God's behalf. We are stewards of creation, of the world, to use its resources for our benefit, but not to abuse them; to use them for good of everyone, but not to pollute the planet or make this place an object of greed! Everything is put under our feet; we represent God in the world; this awesome responsibility given to us.

There are three issues that Psalm 8 raises:

1. our identity – I remember a conversation I had once with the daughter of someone I knew in Thurso. I had written about the question of our identity in a Church newsletter and her mother was retiring after lots of years hard work as an architect. That was how she defined herself: "I am an architect!" so how would she define herself when she stopped working, when she stopped being an architect? She depended on her work for her sense of worth, value, self-esteem, and identity. You may have heard lately of a *Girlguiding* project and petition to campaign for glamour magazines that teenage girls read to stop using photos that have been touched up; the images of models should show real people rather than people who have been perfected in a photo studio; showing perfect models makes teenage girls unhappy with their own image and they want to be perfect! Our identity as people, our value does not depend on our work, our achievements, or our good looks; our worth and value is something intrinsic, we already

have it because God has made us and cares for us. It doesn't matter what we do, or that we do nothing; it doesn't matter how we look; it doesn't matter that we're not same as everybody else; we are all equally created bearing the image of God, loved, noticed, and remembered; this is who we are.

2. A fair and just world – Sierra Leone is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. There are all kinds of natural resources there and they are so valuable and yet the people of Sierra Leone are amongst the poorest in Africa; some \$148 billion is taken out of Africa every year in corrupt payments to governments and corporations, enough money to provide clean water and sanitation for everyone in Sierra Leone at least. Yet, the resources of the world are abused by the greed of a few and many suffer because of that greed. How do we look after the world that God has made and how do we do it fair and just way? That is simply one example of lots that could be repeated. There are people who are abused; children, women are trafficked illegally across borders for money and this is not just an issue for the other side of the world; it is a real concern for Glasgow in the time of the Commonwealth Games. There are other ways in which the world and its people are treated unjustly. The world is God's; every human being is made in the image of God and is worthy of dignity and respect. How can we create a fair and just world?

3. We are loved by God – Can we believe that? We see ourselves and sometimes we really doubt that; we see our faults and failings and have such a low opinion of ourselves that we scarcely believe that God could ever love us; far from being 8 or 9 on the scale, we hardly rate 1 or 2! Yet, we are greatly loved. *“God demonstrates...” (Romans 5:8)* God notices us, He remembers us, He loves us and Jesus has died for us. This is how much we are loved. The times when we suffer and when life is hard are the times above all when we wonder and doubt, yet the cross is the most profound description of God coming into our world to suffer alongside us and for God to show us, in that kind of graphic way, just how much He cares, is amazing. We don't always see this; we're more often told that we're not good enough, or are reminded of our failures and that shapes our idea of ourselves. Here's another angle – God loves us, He notices us, He remembers us, He is mindful of us and Jesus died for us; let's see ourselves as Jesus sees us and rejoice in the love and grace of God.

I love Psalm 8; it is the ideal hymn, but I've not yet found a good version of it to sing! It is full of the glory and majesty of God and how big God is, being reflected by the glory and the beauty of the world in which we live. Even more – we are people full of dignity and are worthy of respect simply because we are made bearing the image of God; this is who we are, thank God! We are people greatly loved. This is a Psalm that inspires us to worship God, to celebrate His majesty; that inspires us to see ourselves in the way Jesus sees us; that inspires us to treat one another well - because we are all equal and all are worthy of value in God's eyes, then we should be worthy of value in each other's eyes too; that inspires us to look after and care for the world that God has made. *“O Lord,...” (Psalm 8:9)*