

# Creation Psalms

Psalm 8

May 26, 2019

Today we're beginning a new sermon series called, "Summer Psalms." Let's begin with a brief introduction to the book of Psalms. Before jumping right into a study of a new book of the Bible, it's usually a good idea to do some background study of that particular book.<sup>1</sup> Exactly what is the book of Psalms?

- 1) The title "Psalms" or "Psalter" refers to **songs** sung with the accompaniment of stringed instruments such as the harp, lyre, or the lute. The traditional Hebrew title for the book of Psalms can be translated as simply "praises."
- 2) However, many of the Psalms are actually **prayers**. In fact, just last Sunday we prayed our closing prayer by singing the hymn, "The Solid Rock."
- 3) In addition to songs and prayers though, Psalms is also very much a book of **teachings**. Psalms is packed with historical accounts of God's activity among his people as well as theological teaching about who God is and what he is like.

If you were to look at one of our church's blue hymnals, called, "The Worshipping Church," you could see that Hymn #2 is the well-known song, "Holy, holy, holy!" while Hymn #528 is a beautiful prayer, "Give Us Steadfast Hearts." Hymn #14 is the classic teaching, "The Apostles' Creed." Therefore, very similar to our own hymnal, the book of Psalms is filled with songs, prayers, and teachings. In fact, one might say that the Old Testament book of Psalms was the hymnal that Jesus used. That's why it's no surprise how often Jesus referred to various psalms throughout his earthly ministry.<sup>2</sup>

The reason for such a broad diversity of content and topics, is that these 150 psalms, that make up the book of Psalms, were written over a period of some 900 years.<sup>3</sup> This writing was done by multiple authors, as many as 10 or more, all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the book of Psalms is a collection of collections. Beginning as early as the time of Moses, and spanning to the time of the Babylonian exile, these psalms were being written and put together in various collections. In fact, if you look in your Bible carefully, you'll find that Psalms is a collection of 5 different books (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150). But, even these 5 books are only loosely organized and each book contains a wide variety of topics and authorship. That's not to say that there is no design in how the book of Psalms is laid out, but rather that the design is not well-suited for those of us who are more analytical or Type A. But, for musicians? They love it!

Therefore, as we go through this series we're calling "Summer Psalms," we're going to wander around a bit. But, in the words of Tolkien, "not all who wander are lost."<sup>4</sup> So, in a more artsy and musical kind of way, we'll float around wherever the music carries us. Our plan is to follow certain key themes scattered throughout the Psalms: So, for example, today we'll look at some Creation Psalms. Next week, we'll dive into "Deliverance Psalms." And, the week after that, "Psalms of Confession." Every week will be a little different but every week will help us consider more carefully why God is so worthy of our worship.

We do need to keep in mind that, during this sermon series, the genre of Psalms is very much poetic. This means that the Psalms are loaded with metaphors, similes and vivid imagery. Imbedded in the original Hebrew text is all kinds of alliteration and wordplay. So I'll do my best to dig in and research this each week, so that as we study from the English text, we are still able to catch the

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<sup>1</sup> For this overview, I referred to both *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 841-856 as well as *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 968-976.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, even Satan quoted Psalm 91 when tempting Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4:6. Learn more at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-and-the-psalms/>

<sup>3</sup> See also Luke 24:44 where Jesus refers to the Psalms in a broader way, referring to a way of dividing the 3 main sections of the entire Old Testament. "Psalms was the most prominent book of the third section, called the Writings." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1755.

<sup>4</sup> Learn more at <https://www.quora.com/Where-is-not-all-who-wander-are-lost-from>

artistic intent behind the Hebrew structures and meanings. Be assured though, that much of the poetry, things like repetition and parallelism, are very clear even in our English translations.<sup>5</sup>

Before reading this transcript any further, please turn in your Bible and read Psalm 8 in its entirety.

As we might expect, Creation Psalms point us to one simple, but profound proposition: **Our Creator is worthy of our worship!** In Psalm 8, we'll see this demonstrated in 3 ways:

**1. Our Creator silences his enemies through the worship of his Name.** Psalm 8 begins and ends with identical words in verses 1 and 9, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" The name of the Lord is majestic because it is "the manifestation of his character;" in Hebrew thought, the Lord's name "is synonymous with the Lord himself."<sup>6</sup> In other words, the reason we worship God's name is that it represents him FULLY, in all of his goodness and in all of his greatness. Let's note here that when you see the NIV capitalize all four letters in "LORD," it signifies God's personal name, Yahweh. This emphasizes his role as our "Redeemer and covenant Lord."<sup>7</sup> This is the special name by which God told Moses to have the Israelites call him beginning in Exodus 3.<sup>8</sup> Psalm 8 reminds us that God's name, the LORD, is indeed majestic!

There's an intriguing mix of characters introduced in Psalm 8:2, "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." Why would the psalmist put children and infants in the same sentence as God's enemies, as his vengeful foes?<sup>9</sup> One idea is that this highlights for us, that even the weakest and most fragile among God's creation, can praise God in heaven and find him to be a stronghold. One commentator says it this way, "...they have strength greater than that of God's enemies when they take the name of God on their lips..."<sup>10</sup> And perhaps this is the point, we don't have to be someone great or mighty in order to worship our majestic God.<sup>11</sup> In fact, all of us have access to God and can praise and honor his great Name. So, not only is our Creator worthy of our worship but God also exercises great power through worship.<sup>12</sup> Psalm 8 invites each of us to silence God's enemies by praising the majestic Name of the Great "I am," of our LORD, Yahweh.

We are given a specific example of just how majestic God is in Psalm 8:3 which says, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers...." Take a look at your own fingers. Imagine them sculpting a piece of clay or playdoh. Can you picture that? Now, picture this: God's hands are so big and so powerful that he used his fingertips to shape the very heavens.<sup>13</sup> One commentator says it this way: "In contrast to God, the heavens are tiny, pushed and prodded into shape by the divine digits; but in contrast to the heavens, which seem so vast in human perception, it is mankind that is tiny."<sup>14</sup>

This leads us right into Psalm 8:4, "what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"<sup>15</sup> The Creator's interest in mankind is surprising. The writer of Psalm 8 expresses incredulity that God would be mindful of puny humans. And yet...

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<sup>5</sup> By the way, this is where a good study Bible and a good scholarly commentary really come in handy. So, if you're interested in digging in a little deeper this summer, come and talk with one of us pastors and we'd be glad to recommend a few good resources.

<sup>6</sup> Consider Ex. 20:7. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 862 footnote on Psalm 5:11.

<sup>7</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> See Genesis 2:4; Exodus 3:14-15, 6:6; and Deuteronomy 28:58.

<sup>9</sup> One possible explanation for this is that this combo makes more sense in light of the preceding psalms 3-7 which are calls for deliverance from foes. We'll probably talk about this in next week's sermon.

<sup>10</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1983, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Consider 1 Timothy 4:12. Also see Matthew 21:16 where Jesus alludes to Psalm 8:2.

<sup>12</sup> In 2 Chronicles 20, there is an inspiring story of a time when King Jehoshaphat "appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: 'Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.'" (verse 21) Spoiler alert: God's people win a resounding victory!

<sup>13</sup> As kids we sang, "My God is so big! So strong and so mighty; there's nothing my God cannot do!" Partway through the ever-worsening plagues that God sent on Egypt, Exodus 8:19 tells us that, "the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.'" But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said." I was thinking about showing a video of one of the recent meteor sightings around the world. But, as I previewed the videos, I realized that the video just doesn't capture the power and wonder of being there in person, of standing under the dark night sky in almost total blackness with only the stars showing. Sadly, sometimes we're like Pharaoh though. Even if we see the very finger of God working powerfully in front of our own eyes, we can fail to be struck with proper awe. We need to be careful not to miss the greatness of our Creator. See also Exodus 31:18 and Luke 11:20.

<sup>14</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1983, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> This central idea of Psalm 8 "...has no tinge of pessimism; only astonishment that thou art mindful and thou dost care." Note how this same idea from Psalm 8:4 is framed in different contexts in Psalm 144:3, Job 7:17 and 25:6. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 84.

**2. Our Creator pays special attention to mankind.** There's some poetic structure that we should notice of here in verse 4: "A particularly interesting [poetic] device is to place a key thematic line at the very center, sometimes constructing the whole or part of the poem around that center."<sup>16</sup> This is what we find in Psalm 8:4. In fact, the writer of Psalm 8 uses the same Hebrew interrogative in verses 1, 4, and 9.<sup>17</sup> The *NIV* translates this Hebrew word "how" in verses 1 and 9, and "what" in verse 4. But, in the Hebrew, it is the exact same word, which helps the reader recognize that there is an intentional grammatical structure to Psalm 8. The writer is trying to help us focus on something of central importance here. "While the [beginning and the end] of the psalm focus on God, the structural center of the psalm focuses directly on humanity."<sup>18</sup> While we should be careful here not to embrace an unhealthy narcissism, theologically we need to understand that as human beings, we "do have a central role in the created order."<sup>19</sup> You see, even as Psalm 8 calls us to worship the majesty of the name of our LORD.<sup>20</sup> Even as it points out that Yahweh is the majestic Creator of all things who sets his glory in the heavens. In addition to this, there is an interesting focus on mankind in middle of this psalm.

So even though we are earthlings, the God of HEAVEN stoops down to pay attention to us.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the word "mindful" in verse 4 literally means "remember." In other words, who are we that God would remember us? But not just remember in terms of data recall. "To 'remember' in the Bible is often... to express concern for them, to act with loving care for them."<sup>22</sup> This is reinforced by the echoing question at the end of verse 4, who are "human beings that YOU care for THEM?"

The end of Psalm 8:5 declares that human beings are crowned with glory and honor. And, although it is certainly a consequent glory that depends on God's greater glory, it is glory nonetheless. "God has crowned mankind as the capstone of his creation."<sup>23</sup> This glory and honor was bestowed on the human race when we were first created, created uniquely from all of God's other creations. Even though we are earthly, and it that sense lower than the heavenly angels, we were the ones who were crowned as God's special creation, because we alone were created in God's image.

Our central role in God's creative order shows up in Psalm 8:6, "You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet."

**3. Our Creator made us rulers over his creation** Much like the glory and honor that God crowns us with, is a consequent glory, so also our rule over God's creation is a consequent rule. What this means is that any ruling that we do, should be subject to God's rule over us. One commentator notes, "this power and vocation to rule is not absolute or independent. It is participation [in God's rule], but not as an equal...."<sup>24</sup>

Verses 6-8 point us back to the very beginning of the human species. In Gen. 1:26-28 God says, "... 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."<sup>25</sup>

The way in which we practice our rule over creation, will determine whether or not God receives the resultant glory. In other words, taking care of creation, taking care of this earth, taking care of domestic and wild animals, taking care of the birds and the fish and so on, is one way that we can worship our Creator. God is worthy of our worship and, as his image-bearers in this world, we need to

<sup>16</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 847.

<sup>17</sup> הַאֲנִי = "pronoun interrogative and indefinite what? how? aught" Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 552). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>18</sup> J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, Abingdon, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, Abingdon, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> Consider the implications of Jesus making himself nothing and taking on flesh as you read Isaiah 53:2b and Philippians 2:5-7.

<sup>21</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed., #5: Psalms*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008, p. 140.

<sup>22</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 21, footnote on Genesis 8:1 regarding Noah, etc.

<sup>23</sup> *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 986.

<sup>24</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 865 footnote on Psalm 8:6-8.

<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 1:22 says, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church." Jesus should be our example of how one "rules over" that which is put "under our feet," i.e. with loving strength.

take our responsibility as rulers seriously. Therefore, caring for God's creation, can be an act of praise, as we show reverence for that which our Creator has created. In fact, I would argue that part of the reason some of us find such joy in gardening and lawn care and in taking care of animals, is that it can be an act of worship. This changes our whole perspective on mowing the lawn! Now, I don't mean worshipping the garden or the lawn or the animals, but I do mean worshipping God, by stewarding well that with which He has entrusted us.<sup>26</sup>

Mankind was given this commission to rule, before our fall into sin. Sin now greatly complicates our ability to succeed in this mandate. For one, because creation is now subject to decay.<sup>27</sup> In fact, part of Adam's punishment in Gen. 3 was that the ground would be cursed and would produce thorns and thistles. The second reason that caring for God's creation is difficult, is that our sin nature makes us prone to greed, wastefulness, and the ruination of our world, rather than its care. Having dominion over the earth and using that dominion to destroy God's creation, seems at a minimum, out of line with one of our roles on this planet. In other words, completely ignoring any and all concerns about things like the pollution of our air, water, and soil is NOT ok. From the beginning of mankind's creation, we were commissioned as God's caretakers in this world. As we worship our Creator, we should keep this in careful perspective. There is a balance, of course, somewhere between the extreme on the one hand, of decimating the planet for just any kind of financial gain and job development, and on the other hand, tree hugging and worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

Verses 7-8 specifically focus on our rule over the animals in this world. There are two noteworthy ends to this spectrum. On one end of the spectrum, Genesis 9:3 says that animals are food for humans to eat, "Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." On the other end of the spectrum, Pr. 12:10 says that, "The righteous care for the needs of their animals..."<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, as Psalm 8:6 reminds us of our rule over God's creation and that God has put everything under our feet, we should not think of it as a license to abuse the things of this world or to treat them harshly. Rather, we should care for God's creation by caring for this world, including his creatures great and small.

Well, this bring us to the end of Psalm 8. V. 9 proclaims once AGAIN, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" If this Creation Psalm has impacted you today, why not read a few others this week? Try Psalm 19, 33, 100, and 104.

**Our Creator is worthy of our worship!** So let's remember to silence God's enemies, by worshipping the majesty of his Name. Let's give thanks that God has paid such special attention to us as humans. And, let's rule over His creation in a way that displays his glory!

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<sup>26</sup> Just a quick note here: we must also be careful not to make the mistake of worshipping the creation itself. We see how terribly this unfolds in Romans 1:25, "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen."

<sup>27</sup> See Romans 8:20-21.

<sup>28</sup> In Exodus 23:12, even a person's ox and donkey were included in the weekly sabbath rest from their work. Psalm 36:6 says this about God, "Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, LORD, preserve both people **and animals.**" I've always been intrigued by how the OT book of Jonah ends. Do you know what the last 4 words are? After God shows incredible mercy on the entire city of Nineveh, here is how the book of Jonah ends in Jonah 4:11, "And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—**and also many animals?**"