

Psalm 8

Big Babies

Introduction

Think of Psalm 8 as an envelope with a computer disc inside it. There is writing on both the front and back of this envelope describing its contents. The front of the envelope, verse 1, reads: "*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.*" The back of the envelope, verse 8, reads: "*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.*" We all understand the word "majestic". The British Queen is referred to as "Her Majesty". God's name is majestic. His name is the name of a great king. God's name is the revealed identity of God. God has revealed himself as the Great King all over the earth. Most people don't see this. But David can and so he praises God, saying, "*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.*" The computer disc inside the envelope, verses 1b-8, explain how God's kingship manifests itself all over the world.

Take the computer disc out of the envelope. Insert it in the floppy drive. It has two zip files on it. The first zip file is found in verse 1b. The title of this zip file is Heavenly Glory.zip. The NIV reads: "*You have set your glory above the heavens.*" A better translation is probably: "*I adore your glory on the heavens.*" To look at the heavens is to see the manifestation of God's glory as the Great King of the Universe. Verse 3 is the unzipped version of the file: "*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place.*"

Look at the other zip file on that computer disk. The compressed version is in verse 2: "*From the mouths of babies and breast-suckers you have established a fortress, because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.*" The title of this zip file is Baby Praise.zip. What does David mean by this? This file is exploded or expanded in verses 4-8: "*what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?* (etc.).

Heavenly Glory.Zip

Have you seen the movie *The Truman Show*? Truman is born into a gigantic TV studio and he does not know it. His birth and every part of his life since his birth is screened on live TV all over the world. Truman does not realise that when he looks at the sky he is looking at a painted dome. When he looks at the moon and stars he is looking at something which the Director of the Show has physically set into the dome. Ironically, ancients like David believed the world was covered by such a dome and that the moon and stars were set into them. So David describes the heavens as the work of God's fingers, something which God moulded into shape. That's why he says: "*the moon and the stars which you have set in place.*" Maybe David even thinks of God setting the moon and stars into the dome of the sky just like a jeweller sets jewels in a crown.

David's understanding of the size and extent of the universe was very limited. But he was still overwhelmed by its vastness in comparison to man. Light moves at a speed of 186,000 miles per second, that is, approximately six trillion miles in a year. So vast is the universe that some of the distant galaxies are believed to be not millions of miles, but millions of light-years away! Our sun is one of about 100 billion stars in our galaxy.

Our galaxy belongs to a small cluster of 19 galaxies which occupy a region over three million light-years in diameter. Over a billion galaxies can now be observed containing 10^{23} stars. If our sun and our entire galaxy is so infinitesimally small what does that make you and me. What possible significance can a puny human being have in such an unspeakably vast universe? The answer is revealed in the second zip file and its expansion. God, the Ruler of the Universe, has made human beings, for all their frailty and insignificance, to be the ones through whom he rules the entire created order.

Baby Praise.Zip

Small Soldiers

"From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." God uses the praise of little children to defeat his enemies. What does David mean? David was once a boy warrior who went into battle with the praises of God on his lips and who silenced for ever the defiant, blasphemous voice of the massive man mountain, Goliath, and who spearheaded the defeat of the Philistines.

America is effectively producing child terrorists from its own ranks. In Littleton, Colorado two teenagers killed massacred students in Columbine High School. In Texas five junior high school students, all aged 14, were charged with conspiring to kill students and teachers. A large majority of armed members of the Tamil Tiger guerrillas are children. As early as ten years old boys and girls are forced to join one of the deadliest guerrilla outfits in the world. Imagine your 10 year old son or daughter or grandchild armed with a sub-machine gun killing the enemies of your people.

"From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." In 1212 a French shepherd boy named Stephen claimed Jesus had appeared to him. He claimed that what the kings and knights of Christendom had failed to do children would accomplish with the Lord's help. He said that like the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea would divide before an army of children and they would march through it to Jerusalem. 30,000 children made their way to Marseilles. A 10-year old boy named Nicholas from Cologne led a second group of 20,000 children. A massive army of 50,000 children strode forth to defeat the enemies of God praising God as they sang:

"Fair are the meadows,
Fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the pleasant garb
of spring;
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is
purer,
He makes the grieving heart
to sing."

Many children died in the snow as they crossed the Alps. But many reached the sea. Stephen's army of 30,000 children reached Marseilles and Nicholas' army reached Genoa. Needless to say the sea did not divide before them and many sad children made their way home. But some 5000 children were taken on board seven merchant ships which promised to take them to Palestine. Two of these were smashed against rocks and all lives lost. The other five ships were slave dealers and all of those

children were sold as slaves to Muslims and were never seen again. God did not use these children and their praises to defeat the Muslims.

"From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise." In Matthew 21 Jesus applied these words to the little children who were praising him as the Son of David in the Temple. The Hebrew actually speaks of *"babies and sucklings"*, that is, of breast-sucking babies. David says that God uses breast-sucking babies to defeat his enemies.

You know what a baby is. An alimentary canal with a loud voice at one end and no responsibility at the other. Little Susan was gazing at her one-day old baby brother, Matthew, who lay crying and wailing in his hospital crib. As she listened to all this noise, Susan asked her Mum, "Did he come from Heaven?" "Yes, dear," replied her Mother. Susan said, "No wonder they put him out!"

In verse 2 David is contrasting what comes *"out of the mouths of babies and breast-suckers"* with the defiant and blasphemous words of *"the foe and the avenger"* - enemies who must be silenced. In the Balkans Serbs have been smashing the heads of Albanian babies against rocks. In war it is especially babies whom people try to protect. In a war who are those most incapable of doing anything to fight against the enemies? Babies. Who does God use to defeat his enemies? God uses the most useless persons to effect the defeat of his enemies.

Big Babies

Verses 4-8 represent the unzipped, exploded, expanded version of the second zip file of verse 2 - Baby praise.zip. Overwhelmed by the greatness of God in such an immense universe David realises how insignificant people really are. So he asks, *"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"* In Psalm 8 in 9 short verses we have a summary of God's plan of salvation. *God is the unspeakably glorious king who has chosen to use a feeble, insignificant creature, man, to defeat his enemies and establish control over the entire created order.* Hebrews 2 quotes Psalm 8 and teaches how Jesus becomes the perfect Man through whom God achieves these purposes and how he tastes death for us, on the cross, so that we might also become sons of glory who rule over everything as he does. But human beings as such are as useless for God's purpose as babies and God is so immensely great that when we try to praise him our words are but the incomprehensible gurglings of babies. We have absolutely nothing to offer God. The wonder is that he does care for us and he does use us.

Verse 2 tells us God uses babies to defeat his enemies. In verse 6 we find the parallel thought: *"you put everything under his feet"*. This is a common image of conquest in the ancient world. When the Sumerian king, Utu-khegal, defeated King Tirigan it is stated in an inscription that he *"set his foot upon his neck, and restored the kingdom of Sumer unto his own hand."* In Joshua 10 when the coalition of 5 kings was defeated by Joshua and his forces and the defeated kings were brought to Joshua he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him and said, *"Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings."*

Psalm 8 is an extended meditation on Genesis 1. When David says, *"You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour"* he is thinking of what it means in Genesis 1 when it says God created man in his image and

likeness . When he says , “ *You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the sea*” he is clearly repeating the description of man’s rule in Genesis 1 . In Genesis 1 God commands the man and the woman, “ *Fill the earth and subdue it*”, that is “conquer it” (v28). God himself conquered the forces of chaos as represented by darkness and the turbulent sea (Gen 1:2). God created us in his image, to rule like him, to be conquerors like him, and therefore, as David says in verse 6, “ *You put everything under his feet*” .

Who am I? I did not have a manly physique and all my life suffered with ill health. I failed to complete my studies and never distinguished myself as a student. I was not a charismatic, popular person. No, I was a shy and withdrawn man. I travelled to a certain country at the age of 21. I had no human resources.

“On Sunday, June 25th, 1865, unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security, while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, in great spiritual agony; and there the Lord conquered my unbelief, and I surrendered myself to God [to establish a new missionary organisation]. I told Him that all the responsibility as to issues and consequences must rest with Him; that as His servant, it was mine to obey and follow Him - His, to direct, to care for, and to guide me and those who might labour with me. Need I say that peace at once flowed into my burdened heart? There and then I asked Him for twenty-four fellow-workers, two for each of eleven inland provinces which were without a missionary, and two for Mongolia; and writing the petition on the margin of the Bible I had with me, I returned home with a heart enjoying rest such as it had been a stranger to for months, and with an assurance that the Lord would bless His own work and that I should share in the blessing.”

Who am I? By 1895, eight years before my death, this mission organisation I founded had 641 missionaries, 462 Chinese helpers, and 260 stations and out-stations. The mission organisation I founded was called the China Inland Mission which later became known as Overseas Missionary Fellowship. My name is James Hudson Taylor.

Take a leaf out of Hudson Taylor’s book. God uses weak, insignificant people like Hudson Taylor, not the strong and the mighty, but people who are overwhelmed by the greatness of God and who surrender themselves to be his instruments and his channels of blessing. If this church is to be a spiritually powerful instrument in the hands of God, if this church is to be a spiritually powerful channel through which the blessings of salvation come to thousands and perhaps millions of people, then we must be first and foremost a people of praise. When we truly praise God we recognise his immensity and how insignificant we are. God is so great that we cannot begin to express in words how great he is. The best we can do sounds like the babblings of babies. But it is precisely such a weak and insignificant people God uses to effect his kingly purposes in the world. It is through a helpless people who are full of his praises that God overcomes those who would thwart his purposes. One reason that this is so is because right at the centre of God’s purposes is in fact the creation of a people who do praise him.

The praise of which David speaks is not a case of moving away from old hymns and using modern choruses, and moving away from traditional musical instruments like organs and using more contemporary instruments, good as these initiative may well be. As this psalm makes clear praise involves a profound consideration of God's glory which leaves us utterly overwhelmed, recognising that any power we have to influence and move the hearts of people is God's power working through as mere channels.

What will you do, what will we do to become a people of praise, a people of power?