

Praying With The Psalmists: A Study in the Psalms, Psalm 8, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on October 12th, 2008

“Doxology gives dominion its context and legitimacy. The two must be held together.”
Walter Brueggemann

Intro:

Last week we took a look at the parameters that God has given us to flourish (Prosper) in this life. Like a fish that flourishes in water, we (Humans) flourish in the center of God's command/will. *“Blessed is the man...whose delight is in the law of the Lord.”* God gave us His law to move us toward Him (**Galatians 3:24**), so that we would prosper in Christ (**John 10:10**). The prosperity gospel has it half right. We do prosper in Christ, but that prosperity is that deepening relationship with Him, not the stuff that we think He can get us. Both physically and spiritually, God has created an atmosphere for us to flourish in.

In God's creation story He declares that what He created was *“Good”* (**Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25**), and after He created humanity and sat back and looked at all He created He said it was *“Very Good”* (**Genesis 1:31**). Amazing, as it may seem, God has created man as His co-regent here on earth. Man is the only animal made in His image, and He clearly gave humanity rule over nature (**Genesis 1:26-27**). There is uniqueness that we humans share, and it is because of this *“Image”* that we should treat every human with dignity and respect (See **James 3:9-10**). The bible has the only solid reason for tolerance and love. In our passage today, we are going to take a look at the close relationship between praising God and dominion. How are we to rule well?

From the Head...

Genesis one gives humanity its *“Cultural Mandate”* to *“Be fruitful and multiply”* and *“Rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air...”* The key here is a *“Fruitful”* multiplication. Humanity was given the mandate to create culture, so that it would be a culture that would turn to its maker and praise Him (Which is why he/she was created, and what gives the greatest joy to humanity).

It has often been noted that humans are more *“Homo-Religioso”* (Religious Man), than we are *“Homo-Sapient”* (Wise Man). We do appear hopelessly religious creatures, in spite of many attempts to secularize us. Agnostic Emile Durkheim characterized religiosity as *“The consecration of the group and the core of society.”* Noted Agnostic social biologist Edward O. Wilson wrote, *“The predisposition to religious belief is the most complex and powerful force in the human mind and in all probability an ineradicable part of human nature...Skeptics continue to nourish the belief that science and learning will banish religion...so that organized religion must continue its retreat as darkness before enlightenments brightening dawn. But this conception of human nature...has never seemed so futile as today.”*¹ Man is born to worship!

The problem comes when we try to rule apart from worship. When we try to take control as the ruler and as the god, we end up creating things that end up destructive rather than constructive. We humans have been given co-regency in the creating/ruling department, but not the apotheosis department. We were never intended to accept the praise, but deflect the praise to a great God.

In Psalm eight we see our passage surrounded by this praise to God, *“Yahweh, oh Lord, how majestic is your name in the all the earth!”* I believe it is there to remind us that we are not God! We are *“Co-Regents”* with Him, but we are not God. Only He is majestic (Mighty) and sovereign in His creation. We are little kings, and little creators, but when we rule well, and we create well, we are acting as God on this earth.

It would appear to many skeptics that if man is God's crowning accomplishment, then He is an abject failure. That may be true, if man was God's crowning accomplishment, but he's not; God's glory is, and what we see here in this Psalm is God's route to His glory, and the ultimate co-regent, Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 2:6ff** shows us that even though man was *“Made a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory and honor,”* the ultimate man (Second Adam), Jesus, fulfilled this perfectly. The fact is man has either abdicated his role, or he has abused his role as co-regent; and as a result, this world is in the chaos it is in. As man futilely tries to do what is right in his own eyes, he creates more problems with his solutions. When man's heart turns away from worshipping God, he can only then turn to worshipping himself and his/her own accomplishments. Pragmatics, not values become the governing ethic for making decisions, leaving us in the wake of a self centered myopia, which continues to repeat failures of the past.

There are a few outstanding truths that stand out in this passage:

1. **God's creative plan anticipates oppression, and inherently has a mechanism to mitigate its damage.** The weird placement of verse two reminds us that it is *“Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and avenger.”* *“Babies and infants”* are most often used in

¹ Edward O. Wilson, On Human Nature, 169-170

scripture as symbols of oppression, war and death (**Deuteronomy 32:25; Psalm 137:9; Lamentations 1:5; 2:11, 19, 20; 4:4; Matthew 2:16-18**), and quite possibly a symbol of Israel itself (See **Psalm 137**). One commentator says that, *"The abusers of children are the powers that opposed Yahweh's creative purpose."* Abuse, oppression and war are a reality in a world that doesn't praise God.

- 2. David seems to have the same issues many contemporary skeptics have in relationship to the size of the universe and the significance of humanity.** Humanity is significant because God has given him significance. That's it; otherwise, we have no significance. In a world without God, there is no good reason why killing someone or loving them is significantly different from the other. A godless world is a purposeless world, and therefore a cruel world.
- 3. That although humanity is given the treasured task of co-regency, we are called to succeed in that by turning our praise on Him.** We are created by Him to praise Him. Our joy and significance and purpose come as a result of our relationship with him. The fact is (As Hebrews 2 reminds us), we are fallen creatures that have not ruled well. The fact is, no matter what we are called to "Rule" we have messed up.

It is because of this fact that we turn to the second "Adam," and a new humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, who also was also *"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."* Jesus became what God had intended all along for humanity. It is in His cross that ultimate justice is (And will be served), and humanity is rescued from the great oppression of his own folly and sin. Once we are turned to God in Christ, can we truly worship Him, and rule God's creation with the love and grace that Christ demonstrated on His cross.

...to the Heart

This Psalm brings us back to our purpose (Ruling), and our refuge (Praise to God). We aren't doing well unless we are doing this in balance. Most often, in our sin, we want to rule/control, but we aren't doing so with the balance of worship, which is what we are created for. Subsequently our lives are unbalanced. What is it that rules your heart? How are you ruling the things that God has given you to rule (Your family, people at work, students, etc.)? Is your heart turned toward God regularly, or are you ruling out of anger, conflict, pride, and the desire to be known?

Books for Further Study: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, Wisdom and Psalms, *Psalms Vol. 1-2, John Goldingay*; *Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer, Eugene Peterson*; *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary, Walter Brueggemann*, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible, Dietrich Bonhoeffer*; *Praying the Psalms, Thomas Merton*; *Bread in the Wilderness, Thomas Merton*

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