

Messianic Psalm Psalm 8

*[Please note: section in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Please can I welcome you to *Truth for Today*, where we are continuing our series of talks entitled Messianic Psalms? Last week my colleague, Paul Thomson, opened the series by discussing Psalm 2, whereas today I shall be taking us on a journey through Psalm 8. Before I do this, however, I wish to spend a minute or two thinking about the figure of the Messiah. It is well known that the word is only used twice in the Old Testament, both in the ninth chapter of Daniel.¹ Does that mean therefore, that “Messiah” is unimportant in biblical thought? The answer to that is a definite no. The figure of the Messiah gleams out from many Old Testament Scriptures. The meaning of the word “Messiah” is “anointed” and as there are many examples of anointing, in Scripture, we are on safe ground seeking to extract the promise and identity of the Messiah.

One of the best examples is David being anointed by Samuel, which we can read about in 1 Samuel 16:1 & 13:

“The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go, I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided myself a king from among his sons.” ...Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers.”

From that time onwards, David was the king-in-waiting, which Scripture teaches is an aspect of the true Messiah. It is important for us to acknowledge that from the day of Pentecost right up to the present day, Jesus has been preached by Christians as the Christ, which is another word for Messiah.

The figure of the Messiah is further revealed for us in the group of Psalms that are sometimes known as the Royal Psalms, as they are concerned with the Davidic dynasty. As F.F. Bruce has written²:

“There are certain psalms which centre round the king, and, limiting our inquiry to those psalms which are indisputably royal, they depict a very precise character and career. Summarising, this king meets world-opposition (ii, 1-3, cx. 1), but as a victor (xlv. 3-5, lxxxix. 22, 23), ...he establishes world-rule (ii.8-12, xviii. 43-45, xlv. 17, lxxii. 8-11, lxxxix. 25, cx. 5-6), based on Zion (ii. 6), and marked by a primary concern for morality (xlv. 4, 6, 7, lxxii. 2, 3, 7, ci. 1-8). His rule is everlasting (xxi. 4, xlv. 6, lxxii. 5); his kingdom is peaceful (lxii. 7), prosperous (lxxii. 6), and undeviating in reverence for Yahweh (lxx. 5).”

The Psalm we are studying today is one of the so-called Royal Psalms which, as we have already noted, is one of the Messianic Psalms.

The understanding that we have from Scripture is that the name or title of Messiah, or Christ, is indicative of the One who is King by Divine decree and authority, who God has anointed with the Holy Spirit. In other words, Christians believe the Lord Jesus is that long-promised Messiah. [When Cornelius became a Christian \(Acts chapter 10:34-48\), Peter baptised him in the name of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years later this is still the only Name that offers salvation. The Christian Gospel centres upon the Lord Jesus Christ, which means that we recognise Jesus is not only Lord \(Romans 10:9\), but also that He is the Christ of God, or the anointed Messiah. He is the One who rules in the lives of His people, but who awaits that universal kingdom](#) described by James Montgomery, a Moravian minister, in one of his hymns, 'Hail to the Lord's anointed'.³

That hymn rightly applies the truth of the Messiah completely to Jesus. We await His appearance with patience.

In the light of those remarks we now come to the place Psalm 8 has for the Christian. It is simply that in the New Testament the Holy Spirit applies thoughts from this Psalm to the Lord Jesus, though for the moment we will deal with the Psalm's general theme, which is the Creator and man's place in God's creation. It begins and ends with an inscription of praise to the God of creation:

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Since about 1850, most people in this country have lived in towns, or cities, which meant that most of their daily life was bounded by terraced streets and the walls of their workplace. The beauties of the natural world were far away. For many years I worked on a machine in a large workshop, which meant that for most of the week my eyes tended to be closed to the wonders of creation. Not so with the Psalmist, who was conscious of the power of the Creator whenever he looked around. Notice the features of the natural world that are cited by the Psalmist as evidence of God's power in creation: the heavens, moon, stars (verse 3); sheep, oxen, beasts of the field (verse 7); birds, fish, and sea (verse 8). Do we ever stop for a moment to consider the work of the Creator God? When the Psalmist did, he exclaimed in breathless wonder that God was majestic and glorious.

Verse 1 also tells us that though the Creator God is involved with His creation, He is essentially not a part of it. You might ask what I mean when I say this. Well, there is a doctrine known as “Pantheism” that would teach that God and Nature are the same. Not for the writer of Psalm 8! They weren't! He reverently began and concluded his Psalm with an appreciation of how creation revealed the glory of God's Name. The majesty of this Name streams from His work in the universe. That word “majestic” also denotes royal power over His enemies, (Exodus 15:6-7), His law (Isaiah 42:21) and His authority over creation (Psalm 93:4).

Now back to our psalm where the second verse tempers the thought of God's glory and greatness by bringing to our notice the fact that God has enemies:

“Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.”

The war-cries of the enemies are as nothing when those ordained of God strike up a hymn of praise, even though they be the weakest in all the earth. I remember a preacher once challenging a congregation with the question, “When are we going to believe that?” I cannot recall the preacher's name, but the question raises a live issue. We listen to the streams of atheistic comments about the impossibility of a God who reveals Himself, or the snide judgment that we

Christians are naive and gullible. We are confident that faith is not an entrance into fairyland, but rather into a realm where we encounter the living God as revealed in Jesus. We ought to listen carefully to the Psalmist when he enunciates a principle that the Apostle Paul passed on to the Corinthians, namely that God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty (1 Corinthians 1: 27).

Verses 3, 4 and 5 of Psalm 8 declare:

“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? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.”

These verses counterbalance the thought that nature is a wonderful reflection of the glory of God with the fact of the supremacy of man in the universe of God. Verses 3 to 5 establish that man, frail and weak though he be, is at the centre of God’s purposes. A cursory reading makes it possible to consider man as a lesser being, which the writer forcefully expresses with the question, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” This is especially suggestive, for the word used for man in verse 4 is “enosh”, meaning frail. What a wonder of grace that this frail creature is the crown of creation. Some of the verbs in verse 4, such as “are mindful” and “care”, are indicative of God’s attitude towards man, for instead of executing judgment He manifests care and compassion instead. We must go back to Genesis to understand the place of man in the scheme of God’s creation. Chapter one of that book tells us that God created man in His own image. We now see the biblical superiority of man, which does not only apply to the time before sin marred the fair creation of God because man remains the crowned king of creation, superior to all other created beings.

I want to continue the thought generated by two words in verse 5 of our Psalm, namely “glory and honour”. Both of these words are indicative of God’s Kingship (see Psalm 29 verse 1 and Psalm 104 verse 1). With such words, the Holy Spirit is leading us to identify the Man, who is worthy to hold that unique place of being crowned with glory and honour. Verses 6, 7 and 8 gild the thought of the supremacy of that Man:

“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.”

With such sovereign power devolved upon man, it is easy to see how this Psalm became known as a Messianic Psalm. Before moving on to the New Testament’s identification of the Lord Jesus with this royal personage, can I make a point that you might think is irrelevant? It concerns the last line of the verses we have just quoted. Notice how David, the writer of the Psalm, describes the fish and other creatures with the words “passes along the paths of the seas.” He could have simply written “all the fish in the sea”, yet these poetic words embellish the imagination without affecting the Psalm’s status as the word of God. We see this many times in David’s writings.

If any who are listening doubt that this Psalm 8 has anything to do with Christianity, then we only have to trace references to the subject matter, within this Psalm, to the New Testament. Verses 4 to 6 of Psalm 8 are quoted by the writer of Hebrews, in chapter 2, where the Holy Spirit reveals the identity of the Man who is crowned with glory and honour. Owing to time pressures, I will resist quoting verses 6 to 8 of the second chapter of Hebrews in favour of verses 8 ‘b’ & 9, which are so great that I never cease to give thanks every time I read them:

"Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. 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 honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

Obviously, when David wrote Psalm 8, he had before him the words of the Creator God as recorded in Genesis 1: 26:

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.""

Now, in Hebrews 2 there is a different Man in view, a Man who has been into death, One whom the Apostle Paul calls the last Adam and the second Man (see 1 Corinthians 15: 45-49). Nor do I think that I am bending Scripture, if I equate the figure of the "son of man" (Psalm 8: 4) with the mysterious "son of man" in Daniel 7: 13. Certainly, the Lord Jesus referred to Himself by this title many times, though I do not wish to pursue this thought at this time, except to emphasise the supremacy of the Lord Jesus.

Instead, I want to return to the words of Hebrews, Hebrews 2 verses 8 and 9 that we might appreciate more the excellent greatness of Jesus the Son of God. Those verses tell us that He is "crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death." What a tale of love these words embrace. The path to the throne for the Lord was not strewn with lilies and scented roses or the cries of an adoring crowd. Rather was it lonely with intense agony. The crowd's response was hostility and mockery, while most of His friends fled, or worst still, betrayed Him. None of the sufferings that preceded the Cross paid the penalty for the sins of mankind. As Adolph Saphir wrote in his commentary on Hebrews⁴:

"What was it that He tasted in death? Death is the curse which sin brings, the penalty of the broken law, the manifestation of the power of the devil, the expression of the wrath of God; and in all these aspects the Lord Jesus came into contact with death, and tasted it to the very last."

It was at Calvary that the Lord Jesus tasted death, not only in the sense that all die, but rather in a unique sense. He endured, or tasted, the humiliation and bitterness of death. This is where sin was laid upon Him, the sinless, suffering Man of sorrows. None of us could ever make atonement for our sins. Only the Lord could give His life as a ransom for many. Can you recall a time when you first realised that and thanked Him with many thanks?

As we approach the end of our time together today, I want to return to the supremacy of man as pictured in Psalm 8. It has already been suggested that David, the author of the Psalm, is filled with wonder at the place of man as the crown of God's creation. In this sovereignty he is supreme as having dominion over the rest of creation. We have noticed how the author of the Letter to the Hebrews has, by the Spirit of God, applied the words of David to Jesus. He now adds one more facet of the work of the Lord to the status of man. From Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 10 we learn just what that was:

"For it was fitting, that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."

Adam's fallen race can now share in the fruits of the great victory of the One who died at Calvary. This so much greater than the authority handed to Noah when he came out from the ark and God delivered every living thing into his hands. Not only has the Lord, as the second Man and the last Adam, tasted death for man, He has also secured salvation that promises a place in glory, where He is. This is more than either Adam or Noah could ever accomplish. The important question that arises out of this is: Are you among that company which He is taking to glory?

Our final thought concerning the victorious Man, crowned with glory and honour, is found in Hebrews 2 and verses 14 and 15:

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

This is another statement where I have to ask myself whether or not I believe it. If I don't, what am I doing speaking to you this day? The resurrection of Christ is at the centre of the Christian Gospel. The fact that Jesus was raised from among the dead after being crucified is exactly what the apostles preached. In the death and resurrection of the Lord, the power of the evil one has been destroyed for ever. Obviously, people still die, yet Christians live and die in the faith of Christ. Some people are apt to say that modern man cannot be expected to believe that Jesus came back from the dead, which is to say that people over the last two millennia ago were hoodwinked when such a message was preached. Speaking for myself, and all of the *Truth for Today* team, we believe with all our hearts the New Testament message that Jesus is alive. In addition we believe that He shares the fruits of His victory with His children. When we attend the funeral of a Christian, we grieve at the loss of a loved one, yet our grief is tinged by the massive victory of the Lord by which He has secured for us eternal life. No wonder the Psalmist could speak of Him being crowned with glory and honour. Perhaps I have wandered away somewhat from Psalm 8 but on reflection I do not think so. The Psalm spoke of the dominion of man. Along with the writer of Hebrews we have identified that Man as Jesus of Nazareth, crowned with glory and honour.

Let us finish with the last verse of Psalm 8:

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Can I thank you all for listening to this talk from *Truth for Today*, number T1227, entitled Psalm 8 in the series Messianic Psalms?

Footnotes

1. Daniel 9:25 & 26 (KJV/NKJV). See Messiah. I. In the Old Testament, F.F. Bruce, page 811, The New Bible Dictionary, IVP, 1962.
2. See Messiah. I. In the Old Testament, F.F. Bruce, page 814, The New Bible Dictionary, IVP, 1962.
3. Mission Praise No. 204.
4. Expository Lectures...Hebrews (1874) p.130.

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