

## Songs of the Spirit | Using the Psalms to Connect With God Creation

Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2.6-9  
4.22.18

*O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! <sup>2</sup> From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease. <sup>3</sup> When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; <sup>4</sup> What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? <sup>5</sup> Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! <sup>6</sup> You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, <sup>7</sup> All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, <sup>8</sup> The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas. <sup>9</sup> O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!*

Hebrews 2.6-9 *But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? <sup>7</sup> "YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; <sup>8</sup> YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. <sup>9</sup> But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*

Today begins the Season of the Spirit here at Park Road; it's our general plan for the church year and the sermons... We loosely observe a season of the Father and a season of the Son (i.e. Christmas – Easter) and now as we look toward the third great holiday of the Church Year (the Day of Pentecost – May 20, 2018) we sort of observe a Season of the Spirit... THUS the title of this new series: "Songs of the Spirit – Using the Psalms to Connect With God".

Today is also a holiday...a secular holiday... like Easter coincided with April Fool's Day and we capitalized on that (sermon: The Jester) so today is Earth Day... and I didn't plan this...but the first Song of the Spirit in Bonhoeffer's outline is Creation...so, on Earth Day a sacred and inspired song about Earth/Creation.

Well, what about Earth Day...what about Planet Earth...and what about creation? Tony Campolo wrote a book some years ago, How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature – and I think most people think that way... It probably strikes the right balance.

My focus today is a little bigger...maybe we could say, "How are we to think about the Physical Universe?" OR to put it another way: how can we situate ourselves in the world...how can we take our place on earth and IN this vast universe... how can a thoughtful approach to creation help us connect with God, understand ourselves and our purpose, our calling, our PLACE in the whole scheme of things?

Let's think of: 1) Nature as END 2) Nature as MEANS and 3) What the REAL END of Nature REALLY MEANS

Seeing "Nature as the END" CAN mean seeing the physical world as basically...all there IS. Some (a small minority of Modern Americans) believe in a philosophy called Naturalism or Materialism i.e. that the physical, observable world is IT.

And there are varieties of this outlook... Some people take a deliberate studied approach. For them there is NO UNSEEN WORLD... no spirits, no God or gods...just atoms/molecules. Love is a chemical response and purpose is something indefinable. (What we call purpose or meaning is just a survival instinct...)

And I'm not going to turn this into a class (we do offer some very excellent classes on these topics) but I will say, that those purists who hold this as a deliberate, considered life-philosophy...at some point they have to see that if MATTER is all there IS then NOTHING MATTERS.

So the very famous and VERY BLEAK words of the brilliant philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell are haunting: (QUOTE) "There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendour, no vastness anywhere, only triviality for a moment, and then nothing." (Autobiography [1967, p393])

Now...most people are NOT studied, philosophical materialists like Bertrand Russell but there are a lot who are either casual materialists (just because they haven't thought it through or for whatever reason) but they basically live as if what we see IS IT ... that there may be a God (or not?) but what's really important is work and family and you know, "takin' care of business." And that's a form of seeing the physical world as the end...that's what really matters – "there MAY be a God behind it all...and I guess I'll find out when it's all over...For NOW...its matter that matters."

YOU may believe that... but almost certainly you have friends and neighbors who do.

One last possible end/purpose of the physical world is that nature IS to be worshiped and again, we MAY know some classical pagans, some "Gaia" worshipers but most often we meet this in its

popular form: “I meet God BEST IN THE NATURAL WORLD...” It could be a golf-course or at the beach... but “I just feel closer to God when I’m surrounded by nature.”

And I know I’m moving now from END to MEANS (like this is simply using nature as a means to GET to God) ...but people like Emerson and Thoreau believed this and in the end, nature became an END...and they lost God altogether (Pantheism). Nature might awaken a person to God...but nature can’t sustain us. C.S. Lewis wrote, “Nature cannot satisfy the desires she arouses nor answer theological questions nor sanctify us. Our real journey to God involves constantly turning our backs on her; passing from the dawn-lit fields into some poky little church... (The Four Loves p. 33)

SO if Nature/Creation can’t be the END... how can it be the MEANS? What does God intend the natural world to do...and how can creation help us and be a means to our knowing God and finding our place in the world?

The truth this hymn, the Eighth Psalm, celebrates is that what we call NATURE really DOES have a use in God’s whole plan. Creation speaks: “The heavens declare Thy glory” (that song taken from the 19th Psalm) and here “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth.”

Nature and the created universe FILL IN our vocabulary ABOUT GOD...When we want to know BEAUTY we look at a sunset... When we want to know mystery we look at the ocean...When we want NOT just a definition but a visceral sense of LARGENESS, we turn to images from the Hubble Space Telescope and then when we say, “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth” – then we have some frame of reference for the word “majestic”. We’ve seen mountains and we have at least SOME idea what majesty and glory ARE.

In John Piper’s great book, *The Pleasures of God* he recalls a Harvard astronomer’s discovery in the late 1980’s. A Great Wall they called it – a cluster of galaxies some 500 million light years long, 200M light years high and 15M light years thick...

Then Piper reminds us that ONE LIGHT YEAR is six-trillion miles (that’s a 6 with 12 zeros behind it) – this cluster of galaxies is 500 MILLION light years long!

Then he adds that a few months later the same astronomers said this clump was only one of dozens more like it... and Piper concludes with these great words, “What IS this universe but the lavish demonstration of the incredible, incomparable, unimaginable exuberance and wisdom and power and greatness of God! What a God he must be!” (p.94)

The dimensions of His work (“work of His fingers” v.3); the dimensions and the diversity (the classifications of organisms: domain, kingdom, phylum, division, class, order, family, genus and species)... and the design of it all, the astounding beauty of even a tiny lady bug or the leaf-structure of a Live Oak Tree... astounding.

Nature...creation is so helpful to inform our vocabulary so we can even begin to fathom God. Isn't nature and creation a marvel?

And you may be thinking, "Man! I need to get out'a here...out of the city...into nature...away from people! People are ruining nature!"

No... people ARE nature... we are the pinnacle of the whole creation. Trees weren't made in God's image – YOU were! And only WE...the human race bear the image of God Himself!"

It's why David ponders, "What is MAN? Why are we human beings so special that we would be given these realms and resources? God has put it all at our disposal...what an incomparably great privilege!"

All of life is a gift...it's all grace! That God would make this playground...this infinitely fascinating earth situated in this vast universe and give US the keys...the dominion to manage HIS WORKS...Why us?"

We're like little gods...a little lower than God...agents.

But did David forget that we threw it all away? Did David forget the Fall of Man – our disobedience, our renunciation of our calling to BE the God's agents over this majestic, glorious, vast, diverse creation?

And did David not see: we've failed as stewards...and we are NOT in control... a tiny microorganism can take you OUT (a virus, a cancer cell) AND we can't even control OURSELVES... I mentioned it a few weeks ago, James CH 3: "For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue" (7-8).

But David...it seems...has his poetic eye...NOT on the First Adam...but on the Second Adam...and THAT'S how the New Testament interprets it.

Our destiny has been interrupted...but it has also been reclaimed by the Ideal Man – Jesus Christ IS Man...the archetype of a New Humanity has burst on the scene... God Himself has incarnated...entered His own creation to reclaim the world... He is fully US... totally human...and He will reign over nature, over Earth...even over ALL THE GALAXIES...

He has shown us that all microorganisms will be rendered benign and helpful and all the forces of nature (wind, waves, storms) will be subject to humanity...and even death cannot dominate this New Man... God became Man and humbled Himself, submitted to the Laws of Nature...the

Laws of God and even to death... in order to reclaim the place that God the Father has always destined for US.

For now...cancer...hurricanes...pollution of air, water and earth... we don't see dominion and we are not experiencing cosmic and natural harmony (shalom) but we do see Him... "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." (Heb 2.9)

The Lord of Creation was always meant to be a human being and now we know His name: "O LORD, our Lord, Jesus Christ, how majestic is Your name in all the earth." (It's the name above every name!)

We have seen a glimpse of the END for which all the universe was spoken into existence...the great GOAL and the meaning of everything is a Human Being on the throne of creation – that's the End, the GodMan with all creation submitting to His beautiful reign.

And when you see this, it becomes the MEANS for a relationship with God, purpose in your life/work and relationships and even a new way to think about the environment and the natural world.

Every molecule and atom is His – the Man...every ladybug and leaf is His and He will perfect it all and will step in to rule all realms with harmony... ONLY, don't miss the one little snag in this amazing poem.

Jesus actually quoted it on the Day of His Triumphal Entry (v. 2) From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength...

He defended the children singing to Him in the Temple. He quoted only the first part of the verse but the priests would have known immediately how it ended: "Because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease". (They were indicted!)

Point is: be like a child – run to the Lord of Creation and ask Him to usher you into His world with new eyes... find new wonder in people (even though God's image is marred in us...it's still there) and look at leaves and lizards and Live Oak Trees every day – not to worship them but to rejoice in the Lord of Creation.

Take your place under His rule...it'll change your work-life, your mundane tasks. You can see with the eyes of a child and even the universe, galaxies and goldfish will leave you marveling and crying out:

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!