
The Pilgrim's Majestic Man

Psalm 8⁹

Russ Kennedy

¹ O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
⁹ O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

⁹ Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The thought structure of the Psalm looks like this.

Our Lord's Majestic Name (v. 1a)
God's Elevated Glory (v. 1b)
 Power over Enemies (v. 2)
 Work of God's fingers (v. 3a)
 Why Care about Mankind? (v. 4)
 Man's Crowning Honor (v. 5)
 Work of God's hands (v. 6)
 Rule over Creation (v. 7-8)
 Our Lord's Majestic Name (v. 9)

The literary structure is much simpler and will shape us as we study this Psalm.

Chorus : Our Lord's Majestic Name (v. 1a)
 God's Elevated Glory (v. 1b-2)
 Why Care about Mankind? (v. 3-4)
 Man's Crowning Honor (v. 5-8)
 Chorus : Our Lord's Majestic Name (v. 9)

How can the measureless glory of God and the honored place of mankind be the source of praise and worship? Let's see what the Spirit says to us through the Psalmist.

Chorus: Our Lord's Majestic Name (v. 1a)

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The Psalm opens and closes celebrating the royal grandeur of God's name everywhere.

PILGRIMS ADDRESS GOD AS THE TRUE GOD. Oh Yahweh, the transcendent, creator and covenant keeping God. The only true God. O God, the only God, the One and only God. The One who made us. The One who reveals Himself to us. The One who covenants with us. Yes, You. You are the One we speak to. This is the way the Psalmist opens.

People who think that the God of the Bible is one among many or who reveals Himself through many religions and paths are not thinking of nor speaking the One and only true God. They are speaking to a figment of their imagination.

PILGRIMS AFFIRM THAT GOD AS THEIR Lord. Oh Yahweh, our Sovereign Lord. We affirm that He is our King, our Sovereign. We bow to Him and surrender to Him. But more than that, there is a claim to ownership and relationship. We are His and He is ours. We are allowed to say, "Ours..." about God. He has stooped to say "Mine..." to us.

PILGRIMS ASCRIBE ROYAL GRANDEUR TO THEIR Lord. Breathless. Amazed. Stunned. Maybe even a bit shaken. This is the God of the Bible. He is majestic. He is excellent. He is (truly, truly) awesome. His royal grandeur is spreading throughout the earth. He is not just

some tribal god. He is the God of the universe. He does not become majestic wherever He is acknowledged. He *IS* majestic in all the earth. Now, may all the earth rise up and acknowledge it.

God's Elevated Glory

(v. 1b-2)

You have set your glory above the heavens.
² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
 you have established strength because of your foes,
 to still the enemy and the avenger.

PILGRIMS REJOICE IN GOD'S GREATER GLORY. This is an expression of faith, of belief. God has said in His Word that He has elevated His glory and His name above all things. HE has covered the heavens with His glory. The heavens are blanketed in glory like the dew blankets the morning grass. We believe that. So we confess that this is so. And it is not a grudging acknowledgment. Rather it is a glad affirmation. Regardless of your theological framework, this is simply Biblical. God exists to have His glory enjoyed. He made us to

PILGRIMS REALIZE GOD'S GREATER WAYS. This is meant to be surprising. God has decided and determined that He will have the victory over His enemies, His foes and the avenger. But the strength to achieve that comes not through the power of the strong but through the praise of the weak. So we do not pursue power, we prize weakness. For in our personal and physical weakness, the spiritual power of God is most clearly seen.

PILGRIMS RECOGNIZE GOD'S GREATER SON. A contrast is implied here. God establishes His heavenly glory and His earthly power. Jesus quotes this Psalm in a confrontation with the religious leaders of His day. Matthew records it in this way (Matthew 21:14-17).

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, " 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" ¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Look at how Jesus understands the text. He clearly indicates that this Psalm in some way is about Him. The children shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" are saying that Jesus is both the promised Messiah and the Divine King. The majestic name of the Lord is right among them. The children recognize it. The religious leaders do not. The Psalm says that God had "established strength... to still the enemy and the avenger." (v. 2). Jesus stills the Pharisees with the praises of children.

But more than that is here. Out of the smallest, weakest through their words God has instituted the power that brings victory over the enemy. Jesus in his incarnation has the power to defeat both physical and spiritual enemies. He healed the sick and lame. He stills the unbelieving tongues of scribes and Pharisees.

Why Care about Mankind?

(v. 3-4)

Knowing that God has set His own glory above the heavens in all its glory and beauty, there is a question.

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?

PILGRIMS CONSIDER HEAVEN'S IMMENSITY. This is their perspective. The universe is a vast place. God's great power, wisdom and skill are stamped all over it. The arc of the heavens lit with moon and stars in the evening invite humility, not pride. Today, we look up at the skies and often are not awestruck. Too few now would lie out in the night grass with all the lights off and fall into stars. When was last time you looked at the photos from Hubble Space Telescope and were just in awe of what God has made.

PILGRIM'S QUESTION HUMANITY'S INSIGNIFICANCE. This is their perplexity. With such massive and magnificent star structures scatter across the sea of light and dark, why does God give any thought at all to a living, breathing creature made from dust and returning to dust?

The question here is phrased in a Hebrew parallelism. At least in the mind of the human author it is. What is there about humanity that would attract God's attention? What is there about the son of man that would draw out God's care? Could it be that more is being implied in the second half of the question? Who is this son of man? Is this all sons of fallen Adam? Is our perplexity rooted in the our puzzlement over the fall and sin? In contrast to the delights of the universe, we have the depravity of humanity. This is a puzzle?

Many in the world think like this. In view of the immensity and intricacy of the universe, man is so insignificant. However, many in the world see the universe and magnify man's place in it. In their mind, since there is no god, or god is some part of the universe, then man's place in the universe

But strangely, Christian moderns would never ask this question. For most untaught Christians this sounds odd. Well of course God pays attention to us. After all, aren't we as humans of massive and great significance? I mean, some would go so far as to say, "How could God not take notice of and care for humanity, wonderful creatures that we are?"

As one writer noted, "[David] saw it as typical of the Lord's ways. Humankind, dwarfed by the immensity of the universe, is yet taken up by the Lord, given glory and made its master – a principle perfectly realized in the Lord Jesus Christ and yet still to be realized in redeemed humankind (Heb. 2:5-9)." (D. A. Carson, 1994)

The humbled Psalmist sings his wonder and his wondering. How could it be?

Man's Crowning Honor

(v. 5-8)

What makes the question even more stunning is the honored place God gives a man, this son of man.

- ⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

PILGRIMS UNDERSTAND HIS DESCENT. We know through Hebrews 2:6-8 that this text is talking ultimately about Jesus.

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, *“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?”* ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

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. ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was 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.

We do not yet see all creation returned to the original dominion as given to Adam. Humanity does not have dominion over the earth. Christians do. But not yet. The rule over the creation is now under one man, the Lord Jesus Christ. And one day, we will rule and reign with Him.

PILGRIMS CELEBRATE HIS ASCENT. Because Jesus has died, has been raised and is ascended into heaven, we celebrate Him. His resurrection and rule in heaven anticipates our own. We are not yet resurrected and not yet in the place of reigning.¹ But it will come one day when He comes and establishes His rule and reign in the new heavens and earth.

PILGRIMS SUBMIT TO HIS DOMINION. Since Jesus rules and reigns now, we submit to Him. We believe in Him and bow to Him. His reign has begun. He reigns over creation as it maker, its creator. He rules over humanity as the true sovereign, the true potentate. But He rules over His kingdom, His church through life not law. And those to whom He has raised from spiritual death through the new birth, to those who receive eternal life, they willingly bow their knees and acknowledge Him as their Lord and Savior.

Chorus : Our Lord's Majestic Name**(v. 9)**

This then brings us to the final chorus. Oh the words are the same; but swelling hearts now have Jesus centered reasons to shout these words:

⁹ O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

PILGRIMS BOW TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN RULE. We say and sing to the Lord that He is our Lord. We own Him because He owns us. We bow to Him because He has dominion over us. He is the sovereign; we are His sons and His servants. And that is good! Is this your own attitude? Do you rejoice to submit to God? Or...

PILGRIMS EXULT IN GOD'S ROYAL GRANDEUR. Majestic. Excellent. Great. Transcendent. Holy. Yes, God's true people revere God. We worship Him. We are glad that He is glorious and grand. Too many moderns are wholly enthralled with sandals, beard and dust of the peasant carpenter's lowly nearness. But that was a passing and momentary descent. He is still in a human body. But it is the body from heaven, perfect, glorified and what we will have one day. How magnificent is the royal grandeur of the Lord Jesus.

PILGRIMS SPREAD GOD'S EXCELLENT FAME. In all the earth. Everywhere. To and in every people group. Spoken and sung by every tongue. Gathering in from every tribe. And one day the creation itself will enjoy the newness, the resurrection, the regeneration that we will enjoy as well. Till then, may the fame of God be carried to all the neighborhoods and all the nations.

Reflect and Respond

Warren Wiersbe summarized the theme running through this great Psalm. He wrote, "... God the Father created us to be kings, but the disobedience of our first parents robbed us of our crowns. God the Son came to earth and redeemed us to be kings (Rev. 1:5-6), and today the Holy Spirit of God can empower us to "reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). When you crown Jesus Christ Lord of all, you are a sovereign and not a slave, a victor and not a victim. 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent in your name in all the earth!'" (Wiersbe, p. 43)

What does God's magnificent Man mean for us as pilgrims on the long and weary journey?

We address God as our Lord.

We affirm that God as our Lord.

We ascribe royal grandeur to our Lord.

We rejoice in God's greater glory.

We recognize God's greater son.

Why do we do these things?

God calls us.

God cares for us.

God crowns us.

Finally, this is one of those great, exhilarating already-not yet's. It is an eschatological truth. This magnificent man is the Lord Jesus Christ. His coming as a man, His death, resurrection and ascension to the throne is the forerunner, the template for our own resurrection and rule. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:9-28 with a quote from this Psalm, fuels our faith and confirms our hopes. Pilgrims will one day be what is envisioned here.

¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

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

Notes

- ⁱ Just as Charismatics tend to have an over realized eschatology as it relates to the human body and disease, Theonomists have an over realized eschatology as it relates to Christian's ruling the earth. This present world is not subject to our dominion. It is under the rule of Christ. But it is the new heavens and new earth in which we will rule. In that day, we will rule and reign with Him after the final resurrection.