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TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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HEBREWS 2:5-10

PSALM 8

“RULING FOR THE MAJESTY OF THE LORD”

*The main point of this sermon is that God has redeemed us in Christ to exercise dominion in the way of Christ—the way of the cross.*

Psalm 8 is a “Psalm of David.” Which means in one sense we need to read the psalm in light of David’s life. And if you go back and read about David in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, you’ll see that David spent a good portion of his days on the run. Long before becoming king, David was dodging Saul’s spears and eluding attacks from Saul’s army. And even after becoming king, things didn’t quiet down for David. There was steady turmoil in his family and kingdom. His son Absalom plotted his father’s overthrow and forced David out of his own city. David, as the Lord’s anointed king, was never spared adversaries, folks who desired his demise and undoing.

And all that—his adversaries, enemies, foes, the constant attacks—taught David to pray. Psalms 3-7 are also “Psalms of David,” and they are full of David’s pleas for God to rise up and deliver him from his detractors. Five times he alludes to his enemies. Four times to his foes. Two times to his pursuers and evildoers. The impression we get in these psalms is that David is anxiously looking for God to dramatically and decisively intervene on his behalf.

But look again at verse 1: “O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” You see, David’s attention shifts. His prayer focus moves from his enemies to praising God’s glory and majesty. What David discovers is that what he needs most of all, even when his foes are coming left-and-right, is to worship the Lord.

What I want us to see is that we are permitted and called, like David, to lay our cases before God in prayer, because enemies and foes do exist. They ignite worry and stress in us. But our hearts and minds will always remain anxious and fearful when our priority isn’t on praising God and resting in His transcendence and providence and sovereignty over all things.

That’s the relationship between verses 1 and 2. It is from a place of worship, meditating on God’s character that David grasps that the LORD’S foes (and also his) are silenced or put to flight, not by a large, powerful army, but from “the mouths of babes and infants.” And I think what verse 2 means is that babes and infants, totally helpless and needy creatures, show all of us that the transcendent, majestic, glorious LORD actively preserves and supports life. David’s meditation on the LORD’S greatness leads him to consider how faithful and committed to life the LORD is. Because when we look at how infants develop and the things they do instinctively, even before they can utter a word, even before they are born, what other conclusion can we draw but that God is at work and makes all these things possible? And so, David finds his peace amid all his adversaries knowing that the God whose glory is not contained by the heavens is involved and present and sustaining the most desperate and needy members of society.

This hits home for me, because the times I’m most overwhelmed, cynical, and downcast are the times when my heart isn’t treasuring and worshipping who God is. I’ve noticed that when my personal worship time is sporadic and infrequent, I’m more likely to doubt God’s ability and willingness to be at work in my life. It seems paradoxical, but the more I dwell upon God’s transcendence and holiness, God’s sheer otherness, the more I grow in trust that God is caring for my life, even when things don’t seem to be going according to plan.

But when I’m not dwelling and praying on these things, I begin to think of God in terms of myself—limited, burdened, confused, weak, needy. And then I start trying to depend on myself. I work out of a place that believes what I can do matters most. I start feeling as if everything hangs on my ability and competency. What happens is that I end up trying to be my own god. And that leads to incredible despair and idolatry. And the only way out is to shift my focus and look to the God who is infinite, perfectly wise, free, self-sufficient, and depends on nothing and no one.

And this is what David continues to do in verses 3-4. In verse 3, David looks in awe to the heavens, the moon, the starts, all that God has established and asks, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that your care for them.” What’s interesting here is the Hebrew word our Bible translates “human beings” and “mortals.” The Hebrew word is *ʾenôš*. It can be translated man or human being, but what’s most insightful is that *enôš* is derived from the word *ānaš*, which means weak or sick. So, the word used in verse 4 for human beings stresses our frailty and weakness in contrast to the splendor and magnificence of the moon and stars.

John Calvin, in his commentary on Psalm 8, says that God’s goodness is all the brighter and more evident, because God adorns human beings with the greatest glory and numberless blessing. We’ve all had that feeling when we’ve felt incredibly small. Maybe when flying or overlooking the ocean or Grand Canyon. That’s the feeling David is expressing. He knows he’s small compared to this creation. But that doesn’t bring David to despair. He’s all the more amazed at God’s goodness that gives us small creatures a special place in creation.

Notice that our place in God’s creation—*being made* a little lower than God and *crowned* with glory and honor—are given to us. What’s true of us is what God determines. This a very different notion than what our world stresses. Because the thought today is that if your identity isn’t of your own choosing or determination it isn’t authentic. So, the pressure now is to determine and achieve our identities. James Houston, the founder of Regents College in Vancouver, points out the difference we have as Christians. He says, “As Christians, we believe in a given identity, not an achieved one. The Christian is found in Christ.”

God never meant for us to find an identity apart from Him. But we still try, don’t we? We seek them in many places. But the self-achieved identity will always be fragile, because no humanly crafted identity will satisfy you. All those self-achieved identities you accumulate demand that you sustain them. Think about it: The person whose identity is built upon getting praise from others is always looking to others to establish their worth and is always one criticism away from falling into despair. The person who bases everything on their relationships ends up using people and being used and never finds real love. But it’s different with our identity in Christ. It is our identity in Christ, what he did for us in his life and on the cross, that sustains us, and answers are truest and deepest needs to be forgiven, known, valued, and loved. You see, Christ gave his life to give us an identity that will last for eternity. All those other identities will last for a moment and ask you to lose your real life for them.

But there’s something else about our God-given identity that we need to see. There’s a purpose in being made a little lower than God and being crowned with glory and honor. And the purpose is given to us in verse 6: “You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.” Recall back in verse 1, David praises God that God’s glory is above the heavens, and then everything that follows tells us that God’s glory and majesty and honor is shown to us through His benevolent, gracious, and tenderhearted care of fragile, weak, and needy human beings. God created us to tend to His creation as He does. God created us to be servant-kings who care for the least of these, who serve others before ourselves, and who sacrifice instead of exploit. And our sin is that we’ve rejected this way. We choose ourselves over God. We reject the servant’s role in ruling God’s creation. And so, instead of being viceregents, we become rebels to God’s kingdom.

And rebels never have any glory and honor. In rejecting God’s way, we squander our privilege of ruling alongside God. We deserve death instead of life. But David’s point throughout the psalm is that God’s glory is revealed through His incomprehensible concern for us frail creatures made from dust. And what we see in Jesus is the image of the glory of God giving up his glory and dying for those most in need to bring us to glory. The glory God originally designed for us.

Because Christ took upon himself our flesh and fulfilled all righteousness by obeying the law and took our place on the cross, suffering the penalty for our rebellion, our status changes. Grace is meant to restore us to a place of rule and dominion. And what we see in Jesus is how we live out that role. It is the way shaped by the cross and dependent upon the cross.

There are many ways open to us to exercise power in this world. There are many roads, and many take them. But Jesus calls us to follow the way that embraces a power made perfect in weakness. It is the way that calls us to deny ourselves and asks us to suffer in order to serve.

And I want us to know we are all imperfect in following the “pioneer of our salvation.” Even this week I have seen in fresh ways my own imperfections. But what we need for our imperfections and sin isn’t more strength and more ability, more self-help and more strategy. We need to learn a deeper dependence on God’s grace. We need to embrace Jesus more and abandon our ways. And the way we cultivate that is how David began this psalm—through an abiding worship and adoration of God. Worship sets our feet in the way of Jesus. Worship prepares our hearts to receive grace and shows us what is true. It is in worship we hear from the God who is mindful of us and cares for us. Our worship is where we remember and recite the good news that the transcendent, almighty God, the God who made the galaxies and stars, the sun and moon, stooped down to us in the form of a servant in order to crown us again with glory and honor.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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