

Psalm 8

How Majestic Is Your Name

(t/h - m: 21 Jan 18)

Have you ever had an experience when you are totally caught up in praising God? Have you ever experienced that sense that God is just so magnificent that you need to express your worship of Him? And this doesn't just mean that you sing songs of praise loudly or jump up and down in ecstasy. There are times when I have found myself catching a glimpse of God and His creation that words have been unable to express my sincere and utter worship of Him. For me, these times have been when I have watched a magnificent sunset, or when I've suddenly seen people transformed by God's amazing grace. But mostly I experience that need to praise God when I am on my own during my morning devotions, when God's presence just seems so real.

I found this quotation from a lecture by James T. Cleland, a theology professor at Duke University in the late 40s. *There are times and locations when a religious person has to shout hallelujah, or stand the risk of an inner explosion.* Cleland goes on to remind us that the birth narratives of Jesus are filled with the songs of angels and shepherds, Mary and Elizabeth, Zachariah and Simeon. There are passages in our Bible that read like a Rogers and Hammerstein musical, when people just seem to burst into song at any given moment. The Last Supper ends with a hymn, and the book of Revelation us is one great festival of praise and adoration. Cleland ends by giving a warning: *Beware of a religion that does not sing. Steer clear of a congregation that does not sing.*

There's no question about it; the religion of the psalmist is a religion that sings: We credit most of the psalms to King David, but they represent a wide range of authors, reflecting the worship of the community as well as the individual. The psalms reflect the Israelites highs and lows, their successes and sorrows, their doubts and disillusionments. The Israelites high moments of boundless praise as well as their deep moments of anguish and grief. It's all here in the Psalms; all of life captured in songs of a faith that sings.

Psalm eight, is one of the most eloquent in the collection: *LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

What wonderful words! In fact, these words are so wonderful that we just to sing them, so let's stand and sing **MP507 – O Lord Our God (We Will Magnify)**.

The words of Psalm 8 are words of faith. They are not scientific and they would not find favour with the people like Richard Dawkins who argue for scientific evolution, and deny the being of God. In our world today, we have post modernists telling us that *modernity-life* based solely on science, rationality and reason has failed us. Even the physicists and researchers are creating space for wonder, imagination, spirit, soul, mystery and majesty. Science itself is discovering that *just the facts* are not enough. Perhaps the reason that Dawkins has been making more noise than usual recently is because he has based his reputation on a theory that is deeply flawed, and that all truth is ultimately God's truth, and all the facts are God's facts.

Our world today has to make room for a song of mystery and wonder at the majesty of God's creation. *LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them?*

The greatest mystery is that God knows you and I intimately! God knows us better than anyone, more intimately than our closest friends or our dearest lover. God knows our location quicker than my wife or our cell phones. God knows us better than we know ourselves, and this God is mindful of us. The theologian James Crenshaw calls this psalm the most intriguing psalm of all. He says: *Psalm 8 manages to hold together an exalted view of God's majesty, and his value of human beings. It neither distracts from the other, although the psalmist appears surprised that God's awesome splendour does not erase His interest in people on earth.*

The notion of God being mindful of us appears to confuse the writer of this psalm. The writer seems to be asking; God, why are you mindful of us? How can it be that a God of such majesty, the God who filled the heavens with moons and stars, the God who formed the earth in the palm of His hand, cares about the lives of His tiny creatures? How could this great God give a second thought about me? And yet God, you've made us only one step lower than the angels. You've crowned our heads with glory and entrusted us with the care of all your creation. What's more, this God knows me personally! Isn't that an amazing truth! ***This almighty God knows us intimately and He cares for us! Even when we forget who we are and deny our identity as God's children, even when we get lost and wander away from our memory of our true selves, God remembers us and knows us. This is incredible!***

The writer G.K. Chesterton once said that the problem for modern people is not that we have lost our way, because people have always lost their way. The problem for us is that we have lost our address, and we don't even know where home is. But God remembers us, He knows each one of us and that is a comforting thought. To know that God has me in His mind, and He promises that even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for God will be with me, and His rod and staff will comfort me. (we're getting ahead of ourselves here, this is psalm 23!).

It's a great comfort to know that no matter where we go, God goes with us. God goes with us and He knows us intimately, and He sees into our deepest thoughts and emotions. While it can be a great comfort to have God with us and in us, it can also be troubling to realise that God knows us so well. It's troubling for me to know that my thoughts and deepest and strongest desires are known by God. It's worrying to know that my motives and hidden ambitions, my selfish pride and hurt feelings are all open and known by God. We all try to portray the person we want people to see on the outside, but we can't hide who we really are with God. He knows that I can be a bundle of anxieties and selfish ambitions. We have parts of ourselves that no one sees but God.

And here's another amazing truth: The Psalmist promises that although God knows us intimately, including the parts no one else sees, the psalmist acknowledges that God has made us: *A little lower than the angels and He has crowned us with glory and honour. God has made us rulers over the works of His hands ;and He has put everything under our fee!* What an amazing God and it's little wonder that we want to sing praises to His name.

And if all of this makes us feel unworthy, then the Psalmist acknowledges that this is an appropriate response. After all, *What is man that thou art mindful of him?* When we approach God with true humility and when we're really honest with God who knows us so well, surely we will find ourselves caught up in wonder, love and praise. And then our only appropriate response is humble confession, honest repentance from a contrite heart. *O Lord my God, how majestic is your name in all the earth! What is man that thou art mindful of him? Amen.*

Let's praise God: **MP 199 – Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.**

(1504 words)