

What Is Man? • Psalm 8

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *What Is Man?*

1. What is man?
2. The answer to that question varies from person to person
3. It seems there are almost as many answers to that as there are to the question, "Who is God?"
4. Many are the theories about the nature of mankind
 - a. there's the evolutionary theory, which sees man as merely the result of so many chemical reactions
 - b. there's the Freudian view which sees men and women as a hopelessly complex tangle of competing values and choices
 - c. there's the view of Karl Marx, that man is a social creature whose supreme purpose is to struggle together with others to throw off the restraints that keep him from moving forward in his physical and social evolution
 - d. and then there's the Homer Simpson view, which sees man as a donut-eating, TV watching, mindless couch potato
5. What does the Bible say about this subject? What does the Bible say man is?

B. *An Important Question*

1. It was Socrates who said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."
2. He is also the author of the oft quoted line, "Man - Know Thyself!"
3. I think we would be well served to heed his words
4. You see, there is a raging debate today over the question: "Who Is Man?"
5. And while we Christians have spent a lot of time developing our theology and answers to questions about God, we've largely neglected developing a biblical view of man
6. In the 17th Century Francis Quarles wrote, "Know yourself, that you may know God; and know God, that you may love him and be like him. In knowing God you are initiated into wisdom; in loving God, you are perfected in it."

C. *Redefining*

1. It's important we discover what the Bible says about man because if we don't take our view of ourselves from there, then we will inevitably take it from some other source
 - a. whether it's the theories presented to us in our school science course
 - b. or PBS programs
 - c. or even the manner of our upbringing in our homes as children
2. By and large, we see ourselves in terms of all the nurture, or lack it, we received as we were growing up
3. Psalm 8 is David's meditation on Who is Man?

II. TEXT

A. The Psalm

{1} O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

{2} Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

{3} When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

{4} What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?

{5} For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

{6} You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,

{7} All sheep and oxen; Even the beasts of the field,

{8} The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas.

{9} O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!

1. You can almost see David singing this psalm to the Lord
2. It's not hard to picture him as a young boy, out in the field at night, tending his father's flock
 - a. at certain times of the year when the weather was warm, he would take his sheep farther afield to pastures distant from the fields around his home at Bethlehem
 - b. and on these nights, he would stay in a cave, or in the open field
 - c. after a light dinner cooked on a small fire, when the flames had died down to just red coals -
 - d. he would pull his shawl up over his head and shoulders against the chill
 - e. then he would lie on his back, pull his lyre to him, strum the strings and compose a song of praise to the Lord
3. And gazing up in to the night sky he would sing . . .

B. V. 1

{1} O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

1. "O Yahweh - our master, You excel in everything and everywhere"
2. "You're not just the God of Bethlehem or this field in which I am lying: You are the God and Master of all"
3. "And Your glory exceeds that vast expanse of heaven I am staring in to right now"
4. David does something here we need to note
 - a. when he sang his praise to God - he was specific
 - b. he didn't just sing, "I praise You Lord"
 - c. he actually PRAISED God
 - d. we so often sing praise songs and choruses the words of which aren't praise so much as they are *calls* or *invitations* to praise

- e. for example: If I want to praise my wife, I don't say "I praise you Lynn."
 - 1) I say something positive and exalting to her and about her
 - 2) "You are such a good cook. - You are such a great mother and wife. - You Look Mahvelous Darling!"
 - 3) that's praise
 - 4) if I say, "Honey, I praise you!" she's likely to say, "For what? How?"
- f. yet we typically sing to God words like, "We praise You - We lift our praise to You - Receive our praise."
- g. it's almost as if the emphasis is more on OUR praising, than on God
- h. and I wonder if He doesn't say, "Yes - for what are you praising Me?"
- i. and if we could hear Him asking us this - how would we respond?
- 5. God, you are such a good God. You are a great Father. You do everything You do, perfectly. You never fail. You are EXCELLENT - YOU EXCEL!
- 6. This is precisely what David does in this Psalm
- 7. Now, I hope no one gets too hung up on this the next time we sing a chorus.
 - a. God looks at our hearts and knows our desire to honor and exalt Him
 - b. but at the same time, I think it is an important point that we ask the authors of our worship music to give some substantial content to the words we sing as praise to God

C. V. 2

{2} Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

1. David's meditation on the excellence of God runs to something from his own experience:
2. That God often shows His greatness by a complete reversal from the expectations of man
3. A cynic once said, "God is on the side with the biggest army."
4. But that is not so
5. God is on His own side - and He often confounds the wisdom and power of this world by using the weak and dependent to show His victory
6. When God wanted to humble mighty Egypt, he sent a little Hebrew baby in a basket onto the waters of the Nile - His name was Moses
7. When God wanted to humble the proud people of Philistia and a giant scoffer named Goliath, he sent a lad named David
8. And about a 1000 years later, when God wanted to silence the proud deception of the devil, he sent another babe to a manger in Bethlehem
9. God doesn't need an army - just a baby!

D. Vs. 3-4

{3} When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

{4} What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?

1. If you've ever gotten away from the city out into the desert or the mountains and looked up into the sky at night, you can probably understand what David is

- saying here
2. There he was lying on his back, gazing up into that clear, black night sky
 - a. there were no street lamps, no neon signs, no headlights from a passing caravan
 - b. just the vast stretch of the summer sky, with it's thousands of little stars, twinkling down on him
 - c. off to one side was the moon, making it's slow path across the heaven
 - d. and suddenly, a shiver ran up his spine that was not due to the chill of the night air
 - e. it was a shiver sent by the realization that he was a tiny little speck in a vast universe
 - f. that God was so great and so exalted; so powerful and so incredibly wise, that the heavens were the work of His fingers -
 - g. like a man might stack up toothpicks - God's fingers had measured out and set the stars spinning in space {like flicking a coin with your fingers}
 3. What amazed David was that the same God who created such vastness would then bother with little, speckish man!
 4. Why? What for?
 5. Since the days of David, the universe has gotten bigger; not really, but in man's knowledge of it
 6. While David could see with his unaided sky between 4 & 5,000 stars, the telescope has permitted us to reach much farther into space
 - a. and now we know that we live in a galaxy that is made up of an estimated 100 billion stars
 - b. yet our galaxy is just one of hundreds of thousands of galaxies, each of which is comprised of its own billions and billions of stars
 - c. our sun, that mighty ball of fire that is the main energy source for our planet, puts out more energy in one second than man has used since the beginning of civilization
 - 1) the core temperature of the sun is estimated to be 16,000,000 degrees Celsius
 - 2) at the surface, it is only 5700 degrees
 - 3) but the solar atmosphere climbs again to several million degrees
 - 4) the sun is so large, you could pack over a million earths inside it
 - 5) the center of the sun, which is packed to incredible density is so hot and contains so much energy, that a pinhead of matter would instantly vaporize a human being 100 miles away!
 - d. yet the sun turns out to be only a mediocre star as far as stars go
 - e. it is a smaller star, and not really all that powerful as stars go
 - f. there are forces at work in the universe that simply cannot be grasped by most of us, and some that are still a mystery to the most learned astrophysicists
 7. Theodore Roosevelt and a close friend named William Beebe used to play a little game together.
 - a. being important men in the government and world, they realized the importance of keeping themselves in the proper perspective
 - b. after an evening of talk, they would go out on the lawn at Roosevelt's home

- and search the skies until they found a faint spot of light-mist beyond the lower left-hand corner of the Great Square of Pegasus.
- c. then one or the other of them would say: "That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one billion suns, each larger than our sun."
 - d. then Roosevelt would grin and say: "Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed."
8. This is precisely David's feeling as he looked into the night sky over Israel
 9. But because his mind was always stayed on God - he was driven to wonder why this lofty deity, with all His power and wisdom would erect such a vast stage, just to bring out the drama of humanity
 10. What is man - that God, who created and superintends the vastness of the universe, would concern himself with him
 11. Then David thinks about man himself and were he stands in the order of creation

E. Vs. 5-8

{5} For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

1. The word "angels" in verse 5 is really an unfortunate translation on the part of the King James translators.
 - a. the NIV translators were influenced by the KJV when they translated it as "heavenly beings"
 - b. the word in Hebrew is "Elohim" and is usually translated by the word "God"
 - c. it is the *plural* form of the word God and is literally "gods,"
 - d. but this was the common generic word for God in the OT and the reason why it is in the plural, according to the Jewish scholars, was to show the abundance of God's excellence, power, and majesty
 - e. really, it was a way to refer to God's magnificence!
2. And this is the way we should understand what David is saying here
3. You see, the word for *man* he uses in v. 4 is "*enosh*" and it speaks of mortal man, as a creature of weakness and frailty
4. But in verse 5, David says this mortal weakling has been made only a little lower than the majestic, powerful God
5. How? How is frail humanity elevated to such a place?
6. God has crowned him with glory and honor
 - a. of all the creatures God created, none were created in the image of God
 - b. none of them possess the moral or intellectual capacity man does
 - c. not one of them possesses the ability to enter in to covenant relationship with God
 - d. none of them are destined to rule and reign with God in eternity - none that is but man!
7. Certainly man begins his life in frailty and weakness
 - a. but then he grows and becomes strong
 - b. in fact, Hebrew has other words to describe the strong man

- 1) geber
- 2) and it is roughly equivalent to the word "macho"
- 3) the mighty men of valor we read about in the OT were the "gibbor"
- c. but after his years of strength, all too few it seems, he ages and once again becomes weak and frail
- d. he falls and breaks a hip, his back goes out, his lungs fail
- e. but the strongest man in his prime, compared to the awesome forces of nature, is but a weakling
- 8. Yet one day, God will change man's frailness into incredible glory
- 9. And He will honor man by granting him to sit with Him upon His throne
 - a. as it says in Rev. 3:21
 - b. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."
- 10. And in the meantime, while man waits for his exaltation to the Throne, he is put in a period of training, so that he might learn to reign with Christ
 - a. so David writes . . .

{6} You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,

{7} All sheep and oxen; Even the beasts of the field,

{8} The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas.

- b. you and I, weak, frail, humble creatures that we are, are in training
- c. God has given us dominion over nature so that we might learn how to rule wisely
- d. that's what stewardship is all about
- 11. It's unfortunate that conservation and respect for the environment has been taken out of the hands of believers and invested in environmentalism
 - a. you see, environmentalism is like any other -ism =
 - b. it makes a god out of a thing
 - c. stewardship of the earth was originally part of man's creation mandate
 - d. God told man to fill the earth and subdue it
 - e. that word *subdue* connotes to many the idea of the rape and pillage of the world's resources
 - f. but nothing could be further from the truth
 - 1) the word means to exercise diligent care for
 - 2) it speaks of careful study and understanding
 - g. man's original calling was to exercise dominion as a caretaker
 - h. in fact, that's what we read Adam and Eve were doing before the Fall; they were tending and keeping the garden
 - i. it is sin; it is avarice and greed that have led to the harm of nature
 - j. the environmental movement will ultimately prove harmful to nature because one can never understand nature without first knowing nature's God
- 12. God placed man on earth as his school to learn how to rightly exercise the abilities and powers he was given as being created in God's image
- 13. Don't think that real life is to be found while you live your few days here on

- earth, and then you die and go to heaven where for eternity you are going to fly around on a cloud, strumming a harp and singing the Hallelujah Chorus
14. No - this is school, and then we graduate and go to work
 15. Eternity is going to be hugely fun and productive

F. What Is Man?

1. So, what is man?
2. He is just a little lower than God
3. But then he has to be doesn't he? Because there can only be one God!
4. But God has created man to be as close to God as he can be without being God
5. And God has created this entire universe as the stage upon which we live so that we might learn to rule and reign with Him in eternity
6. What and how that all works - we don't know -
 - a. that's the sequel
 - b. and God is keeping it tighter than George Lucas is the next Star Wars series

G. V. 9

{9} O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!

1. Once again, David is overwhelmed by God's awesomeness!
2. And so are we

III. CONCLUSION

A. You Are Not A Germ

1. Listen, contrary to evolution - you are not merely a grown up germ!
2. Nor are you Marx's social soldier
3. You aren't Freud's sick patient nor Skinner's blank slate which is the sum total of all your past experiences
4. You are a person created in the image of God, equipped with unique abilities to enter in to a meaningful relationship with Him
5. That relationship is one that is eternally rewarding and significant
6. And even now, God wants to begin that relationship with you

B. To Both

1. So let me end with a brief word to the two groups of people here today; the Christians, and those who aren't
2. Christian - remember who you are!
 - a. and never forget your destiny
 - b. called has called you into being for a very special purpose and He wants you to begin to understand and live that purpose right now - today
 - c. there's an interesting story about the life of the great Polish composer Paderewski
 - 1) a mother, wishing to encourage her young son's progress at the piano, bought tickets for a Paderewski concert.
 - 2) when the night arrived, they found their seats near the front of the concert hall and eyed the majestic Steinway piano waiting on stage.

- 3) soon the mother found a friend to talk to, and the boy slipped away unseen.
 - 4) when eight o'clock arrived, the spotlights came on, the audience quieted, and only then did they notice the boy up on the bench, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."
 - 5) his mother gasped, but before she could retrieve her son, the master appeared on the stage and quickly moved to the keyboard.
 - 6) he whispered in the boy's ear "Don't quit--keep playing,"
 - 7) then leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part.
 - 8) soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obbligato.
 - 9) together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized.
- d. in our lives, unpolished though we may be, it is the Master who surrounds us and whispers in our ear, time and again, "Don't quit--keep playing."
 - e. and as we do, He augments and supplements until a work of amazing beauty is created.
3. To those who are not Christians - God has created you too, and He loves you and has a great plan and purpose for your life
 - a. but the greatest gift God gave man - in fact the one that really separates us from the rest of nature, is the power to chose
 - b. and the thing about choice that makes it such a powerful thing is that God honors your choice
 - c. God will not make you believe in Him - He will not force you to accept Him
 - d. but He will attempt to woo you - to win you - He will court you and show you the evidences of His superior love and life
 - e. in fact, that's what Jesus is all about
 - 1) Jesus is God's love letter written large
 - 2) he is the supreme evidence of just how much God loves you
 - 3) that he would go to the cross to die for all those sinful and evil choices you have made
 - f. but - now that God has given the evidence and made known to you the offer of His love and forgiveness - it's up to you, it's your choice
 - g. so, what will it be?