

Do We Matter?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2017

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] We've come to the fourth of this series on what does it mean to be human. We've already dipped into the beginning of the Bible, Genesis 1-3, and seen how human beings created in the image of God, created first of all to have relationships with Him, and then with each other.

We noticed last week how both these relationships went badly wrong. And we're going to, in a sense, we could go all over the Bible in this, because in many ways the big theme of the Bible is who God is and who humans are, and how they relate to each other.

But probably there's nowhere better to go than to the Psalms, and we're going to go today to Psalm 8, page 450. It's going to be our study today.

So let's read the Psalm. Psalm 8, page 450.

To the choir master, according to the Gittith, a psalm of David, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

[1 : 17] You have set your glory above the heavens, out of the mouth of babies and infants. You have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man?

You are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him. Yet you made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray.

[2 : 28] O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Father, you are great, and we are small. You are wise, and we are foolish.

You are holy, and we are sinful. You are eternal, and we are mortal. And yet, in amazing grace, and in wonderful love, you care for us, you call us, and you want us to be your people.

So help us in these moments, as we look at these words together. May we hear them as a word from you to us today, as something that will build us up, as something that will challenge us, and encourage us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So the obvious question is, do we matter? Does God still care for us?

And how can God still care for us? After all, we continue making a mess. We continue getting it wrong. These words we read are glorious, aren't they?

[3 : 38] These were words written by a man who was an adulterer and a murderer. Many of the most beautiful sounds in the Psalter we can see that about.

David sinned in technicolor, but he also repented in technicolor. Read Psalm 51, the heart of the heart, the outpouring of his grief after his tragic fall.

So you see, it's not a question of whether we are sinners or not. It's a question of whether we are forgiven sinners or stubborn sinners. We are still in the image of God.

We still are loved by God. We still are cared for by God. And the great apostle Paul, at the very end of his life, describes himself as the chief of sinners.

Now, Paul was not the kind of man who was going to say that just for the sake of saying it or just to show off. Paul said that because he was deeply, acutely aware of his fallen humanity.

[4 : 47] So that's the first thing we need to realize. We are fallen. We are sinful. We get it wrong. And we will continue to get it wrong. And yet, God still cares for us.

In the fallen world, we can never serve God perfectly. But we can serve him acceptably if we are repentant and come to him in faith and trust in his grace.

Now look at the structure of the psalm. The psalm begins and ends with the same words. The bookends of the psalm give us an indication how we are to read this.

Verses 1 and 2 and verse 9 are about God and his glory. And that's the context in which the rest of the psalm has to be seen. So 1 and 2 and 9, the glory of God.

And between that, the place of humans and the value of humans, you see, a true appreciation of God is what leads to a true appreciation of humanity.

[5 : 51] As I said, I think, the first time, I probably repeated it, that there are two extreme views of humanity. One is that humanity is a God and a kind of second God.

The other is that humanity is utterly, totally corrupt. Neither of you is true. The truth of the matter is we were created in the image of God.

We are still in the image of God, but we are fallen. So let's look then at these two things. First of all, the majesty of God. Verses 1 and 2 and 9.

How majestic is your name in all the earth. We begin and end with God. The Bible is God's story about God.

And we need to fit our stories into that. Too often we try to write or to control our own stories on our own terms. But we can't do that. If we, however, if our lives are built on God, then our lives will go somewhere.

[6 : 55] Our story, in spite of lots of complications, will have a happy ending. And that's the whole point of what the Bible is saying. So what kind of a God is he?

Well, first of all, he is the universal Lord. Greater than the creation he has made, you have set your glory above the heavens. Now David is to talk about the glory of the heavens, looking up at the night sky.

And remember, David as a shepherd boy would probably often, the Bethlehem hills, look up at the night sky as he guarded his sheep. Now, you know that in cities we never really see the night sky in all its glory.

But all of you, I'm sure, will have been in lonely, isolated places and looked up and seen the amazing splendor of the night sky, the starry heavens, the full moon.

But the psalmist is saying this is only a reflection of the majesty of God himself. We mustn't do what Paul says in Romans 1 and worship the creation rather than the creator.

[8 : 06] It's easy to see how the ancient world worshiped the creation, the sun and the moon and the stars, so magnificent, so untouchable, so beyond our understanding.

But God is greater and beyond that. He created the universe and it only partly reveals God.

In Psalm 19, David again says, the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky shows his handiwork. But that's only a partial revelation of God as we'll see in a moment.

The physical universe is a revelation of his glory, but it is not a God in itself. And without him, as Psalm 103 says, one day you will roll it up as if it were a garden that will be changed.

He is great. There is no other God. There is no other security. There is no other hope for us. This is the God of Genesis 1 who created the heavens and the earth.

[9 : 12] Days far, far greater than us. But secondly, he is the God who listens. Verse Psalm 2, out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger.

It is an astonishing verse. Do you see what the psalmist is saying? When small children sing the praises of God, that is a powerful and that is powerful and terrifying to the enemies and to the darkness.

When the children in Sunday school and in Christ sing, my God is a great big God, this is an, this is an illustration of this because the principalities and powers, Satan and his empire, tremble when they hear these truths because they know that it cannot prevail.

Even the weakest praise on earth doesn't even have to be mass voices and to be great crowds. It doesn't have to be musically perfect.

Even the weakest voices on earth praising God are stronger than the powers of darkness. And that seems to me what this verse is saying. You have established strength because of your foes.

[10 : 37] That's why it's so important to bring children up from the earliest days to praise the Lord, to sing to him, to learn of his greatness. And so the psalm begins and ends with that note, verse 9,

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

And that, of course, applies to the name of Jesus as Charles Wesley saying, Jesus, the name high over all in earth or air or sky, angels and men before it fall and devils fear and fly.

So a true appreciation of God, who he is, how great he is, is a true way to be human. It's when we start praising ourselves, when we start depending on ourselves, then we're headed for disaster.

That's why we must never depend on human beings, however distinguished. I'm not saying, of course, you distrust everybody and disbelieve everybody. All I'm saying is in the last resort, it's in God we trust, not in human beings, however distinguished, however prominent.

That's the first thing. And then, in between verses three to eight, there is the nature of humans. In our final study next week, we're going to go Hebrews 2, which picks up this psalm and shows that this is perfectly revealed in Christ.

[12:05] But even so, when you notice three things, there's the sense of worship when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

I say, I imagine David looking up on the Bethlehem hills and seeing and seeing the night sky. And when you look at the wonders of the created order, you see that if we don't have a true view of God, we're not going to have a true view of humanity either.

The real danger is the person who does not look up. I don't mean necessarily literally looking up, but the person who never looks up to anyone greater than themselves.

The person who, this leads to a shriveled view of humanity. And an awful lot of the thought of the last 150 years has been teaching this false gospel that the only reality is the physical world in which we live.

That there is nothing outside of it or beyond it. And the kind of thing that's taught nowadays by people like Richard Dawkins and has been at the 100 years ago people like Bertrand Russell and so on saying the only, there's nothing outside of us, there's nothing outside of the universe.

[13:33] Worship is taking us out of ourselves. When we worship, we are taking, turning attention away from ourselves to the Lord himself.

That's what worship is about. it's nothing to do with styles of worship, nothing to do with the kind of items of praise we choose.

We all have different ideas on this and different cultures and different places have different ideas. The really important thing is that we look up, we look outward, we look beyond ourselves.

That's why it's so important. When we want people to come to church, we don't point to ourselves, we point to Christ. John Wesley said, I offered Christ to them.

That's all we have to offer. You'd never guess that looking at our church websites, would you? We're all friendly and informal and welcoming and so on. Well, that's good.

[14:33] Of course that's good. We want to be. But, if that's all that it's about, then we're no different from any other group of people who invite people for coffee and so on.

All this matters, but it's not what it's about. What it's about is God, a sense of worship. And the second thing is the sense of our place in the universe.

Verse 4, what are humans? That you care for them, that you visit them. We're not God, nor are we animals.

We are a little lower than the heavenly beings, a little lower than the angels, but we are a unique creation. May remember back in Genesis 1, the word created used sparingly in the chapter is when humanity is created, repeated three times, created, created, created.

That's what we are. We are made, and we are made for a purpose. And that purpose is to, as the catechism says, to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

[15:47] And properly speaking, the glorifying and the enjoying belong together. Glorifying is not some solemn thing we do in church and enjoy something else. Glorifying and enjoying is luxuriating in his greatness and in his grace.

As we'll look at next week, particularly, this is spoiled. Naturally enough, we're proud. We're concerned with ourselves and with our, with our, you know, we're concerned with ourselves, with our own families and all the rest of it.

Now, that's not wrong. After all, if we're not concerned, then, then there's something wrong. But, ultimately, because we are fallen, we tend to be proud.

We tend to be conceited. You will be like God, said Satan. And, when that happens, when we try to be like God, we don't become like God.

We degenerate to a lower level. Think of the people in history who have tried to be like God. Think of the Hitlers and the Stalins and the various dictators who have behaved, who have trodden the human stage as if they were accountable to nobody and nothing.

[17:03] That's what happens when someone tries to be like God. You see, human beings have, human beings have dignity crowned with glory and honor. That's another way of saying we are in the image of God.

And then, in Genesis, in verses 6 to 18, 8, Genesis 1, God said to Adam, have dominion over the creatures of the earth.

And that's repeated to Noah after the flood, which means that even in the fallen world this is to happen. And, of course, it looks back to Eden and also forward to the new creation.

There's a little verse in Mark chapter 1 about the story of the temptation of Jesus, which is told very briefly in Mark. There's a significant little phrase. It says that he was with the wild beasts in the desert.

Now, I think some commentators go on the wrong track when they say that was an additional hardship. He was with the wild beasts and they were dangerous. I don't think that's what Mark means at all. I think what Mark means is that because the perfect man, the man who was God, was there in the desert with the beasts, they were no threat to him.

[18:19] They behaved in the way they will behave in the new creation. He had come to establish the new creation. And this is an anticipation of it.

He was with the wild beasts in the desert. So there's this sense of responsibility. It means caring stewardship. And it means, I mean, after all, this is not the gospel, but it's a consequence of the gospel, if we truly believe in the gospel, if we truly believe in God the creator and the value of what he has created, then we will not exploit the non-human creation.

We will not behave in ways that destroy the environment. Now, sometimes this might be very simple, straightforward things. It might be as simple as recycling and not dropping litter and so on. That's how practical the gospel is, actually. I mean, these things, the environment matters. And it matters because God one day is going to renew it. So, to be truly human, says David, is not, is to relate to God.

It's also to relate to each other, but it's also to relate to creation. Creation, which one day is going to be renewed. And, verse 6, again, you have given him dominion over the works of your hands.

[19:47] You have put all things under his feet. Notice, you have given him dominion, not, not he has taken dominion. That's a very, very different thing.

And, of course, just as in human history, our relationships, male and female, and other relationships often go bad. So, this relationship has gone bad often.

As I say, the exploitation of creation, the wasting of creation resources, and all the rest of it, because we are still in a fallen world. But one day, the children of God will rule over the new creation.

Adam, or Adam and Eve, were created to be God's stewards on earth. It's God's will that humanity are still his stewards on earth, and one day it will be fully revealed.

So, to be truly human is to relate to the creation around us, as well as to relate to God and to each other. And to be truly human is to recognize our dependence on God.

[20:54] Once again, this phrase, you have given, you have put all things under his feet. That phrase, you have put all things under his feet, Paul is going to use in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

And you see, all the way through the Old Testament, it's not just, we're not just being told that humanity is fallen, humanity has got it wrong, we're being told there's a destiny for humanity, and that destiny is in the last Adam, whom we talked about last week.

The one who came and lived as a man fallen, as a perfect man in this fallen world, the only person who ever did it. And by dying and rising again, he's going to make it possible for all his brothers and sisters to live in the new creation as God intended.

And that's the, I think, that seems to me the final meaning of this psalm. If we read this psalm, and think, and look out at the world, and look into our hearts, we realize this is not yet true.

As I say, remember who wrote this then. And remember the sinfulness and fallenness of our own hearts. As we look at the world, as we look at the terrible suffering of the world, as we look at the wars, as we look at the destruction of the environment and all these things, we realize that the story

cannot end here.

[22 : 33] Because if the story ends here, it's a failure. And when God begins something, he completes it. Paul says, he who has begun a good work will continue and complete it in the day of Jesus Christ.

That is true about redeemed men and women. But it's also true about the whole creation. And that's why David says, O Lord, O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Let's pray. Lord God, we praise you for this great story of your love. The story that began long before you created heaven and earth.

And the story that will continue into the new creation with all its wonder, with all its greatness, and with its endless sound revelations of your love.

Help us, day by day, to live in such a way that we become more like what we will be when Jesus comes. And we ask that in his name.

[23 : 41] Amen.