

# What is man?

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Preacher: Dick Lucas

[ 0 : 00 ] Psalm number 8, as you have already, I think, understood. And our text is going to be verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 8.

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 that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

And my text tonight really is just three words and a question. It's that tremendous question in verse 4 at the beginning, what is man? Now I think I'd better make a confession right at the beginning of this evening and say that this psalm and this text is too big for me.

I hope very much that I will be clear tonight in what I think are the simple and straightforward things that we're taught here, but I certainly won't be complete. I may have, at a previous time, told you the story of a Baptist friend of mine in North London, a New Zealander, who alas has had to go back to New Zealand.

And I always enjoyed listening to him. He was a fine Bible teacher. And he had an elderly gentleman in his congregation who said to him on one occasion, I understand your sermon by Thursday morning.

[ 1 : 33 ] Now this elderly gentleman was a fine Christian man. He was long retired, of course. And he made it his business to take the minister's sermon and the truths that have come out of the Bible and try to earth them, to try to apply them to himself, the world in which he lived, to make sense of them.

Now I think that preacher, that pastor was a very lucky man. Most of his congregation probably forgot his sermon by Monday morning. But that elderly Christian worked it out.

And you know, that's right, because there ought to be a partnership between pulpit and pew. That is, I can't do all the work. In terms of application tonight, you've got to do some of the important work.

I won't have time to do it. And it's very personal, some of this application. I don't know your life. I don't know your circumstances. And so you will have to take these great truths away and say, how does that make any kind of sense to me, my family, my position, on Monday morning and so on. Okay? Now this morning we looked at human depravity. I hope you weren't, if you were here, depressed by that. It was epitomized by that stunning statement at the beginning of Psalm 14.

[ 2 : 48 ] The fool says there is no God. And we thought about many of the fools of today and prayed that God would give us wisdom. So we're going to leave those dark clouds behind and come out into the sunshine.

And I want to balance what was done this morning by talking not about human depravity, but about human dignity. And it's very important to see how those two relate.

Just a word on that. You remember the story of the prodigal son. Now if the prodigal son had always lived alongside the pigsty, if the pig's food had always been his natural food, then there would be nothing to be shocked about to find him there, would them?

We are shocked because he comes from the father's house. We are shocked because of the nature of the father and the home that he left. That a man from that height should come down to that depth.

That's what shocks us, isn't it? See, if man is just an animal, then his sin can't possibly shock us. You know, Boris, the cat next door to me, I hate Boris, he's always killing the birds in my garden.

[ 3 : 51 ] But it's Boris' nature, isn't it, to do that? I can't be cross with him. I am cross with him. But it's his nature. He's always going to do it. He's not going to listen to me. And if we're just animals, then we can't be cross with one another because animal nature means I will do that.

I'll be selfish. I'll be greedy. See, I'm an animal, but I'm not that. I come from the father's house. And therefore, to see a human being at the pigsty, and we see so many human beings at the pigsty today, ought to shock us.

Human depravity means that we've come from the father's house and fallen to a low level. Now, again, I may have said before, when I've been here, and it's always such a joy to come here, that I've been studying these psalms for some years now.

And it seems to me that there are two elements that we saw this morning, and two elements that we're going to see tonight, that make the psalms what they are, as marvelous hymns.

They are the hymn book of Israel, and they are actually the hymn book of the Christian church. So you might not think it from where I come from, where the psalms have virtually fallen out of ordinary worship in churches at home.

[ 4 : 58 ] That ought not to be so. Now, the two elements that make up a psalm are divine revelation and a pattern of human response. Divine revelation means that when I take up a psalm and read it or sing it, I'm actually learning something from God.

That is, that they tell me something, they reveal truth, just like the rest of Holy Scripture. So this morning, there was a diagnosis of atheism, which I think is uniquely valuable.

You won't get it anywhere else. And as you say or sing Psalm 14, you get this remarkable revelation of where atheism comes from. I'm not going to go into that now.

We looked at that this morning. But no one would guess it unless they were told by God. And of course, all fine hymns in history have this element, don't they, of proper teaching.

They're not just empty. They're not just froth. So while John Wesley was preaching his marvellous sermons, Charles, who also actually was a preacher, was writing his marvellous hymns.

[ 6 : 04 ] And one of the remarkable things about the hymns of the 18th century is how full of doctrine they are in Christian teaching. You see? It may be that more simple, uneducated people, learnt from Charles' hymns than they did from John's sermons.

I guess that was so. So don't let sing hymns that are empty. When we turn to the Psalms, they're full. But they're also full of a pattern of godly response.

We saw that this morning in verse 7. Again, I won't go into it now, but if you were here this morning, you remember at the end of this rather doleful story of atheism and man's depravity, that there was the response of the living church to long for God's restoration, which is the only answer to the secular world.

Now, this, of course, is a two-way traffic, and a two-way traffic which is at the essence of a proper relationship. A relationship means speaking to one another. And in the Psalms, as in the rest of the Bible, God speaks to us unquestionably.

But also, he gives us matter with which to pray and to praise. In other words, to speak to him. You know, sometimes come across in Christian history, especially amongst the mystics, the idea that I have no words that I can approach so great a God.

[ 7 : 19 ] I can understand that feeling. You know, sometimes when you're in a public prayer meeting, you wonder how few words people have to pray. Oh, bless Bill and bless Jane.

We seem to have very little vocabulary, do we, for prayer. And that's why the Psalms can be a great help to us. If you are dried up in your prayers in the morning or the evening, why not open the Psalms and pray a Psalm?

Because they're wholesome words, words that God has given us to speak to him. Sometimes, incidentally, they're very startling. When the Psalmist says, Wake up, Lord. Well, haven't you sometimes felt that?

Why isn't God doing something about this matter I prayed over? So these Psalms have these two sides. And I want to show you that tonight in Psalm 8 because it's a remarkable example of revelation.

God is going to teach us the answer to the question, what is man? And at the same time, it gives us a remarkable response which you can see at the beginning and the end and that your minister has referred to already.

[ 8 : 18 ] Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Right, let's then turn to Psalm 8. I hope you have it open in front of you. It'll help me if you do because it contains the answers.

I have no original answers to give you. I want to point you to the answer here. And the question that is facing us today is a question that many a university student has put before them, not necessarily in theology, but maybe in some other university discipline.

And that set before them is this tremendous question, what is man? Now, I think that this Psalm gives us a wonderfully satisfying and very stimulating answer.

And it's going to be going to discover, but for many of us, of course, to rediscover this evening. At the same time, I'm telling you that the answer to this, the question here is what is man?

So that man, humankind, is at the center of Psalm 8. That's what it's all about. The nature of humanity, man made in the image of God.

[ 9 : 29 ] At the same time, I ought to tell you that man is not the hero of Psalm 8. I mentioned just now the beginning and end, which is our proper response to the Psalm, but just look at the way in which the Psalm goes.

You see, although he's answering a question about us, the Psalm is really about God as well, and without that knowledge of God, we can have no knowledge of ourselves. How majestic is your name?

When you have set your glory, you have established strength. When I look at the heavens which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him, yet you have made him a little low, you have given him dominion, you have put, you see?

So, although I'm going to be concerned tonight in this hall with man, human beings, you, myself, and ask, what are we here for? What are we? What are we made to do? Yet, behind it all, we're going to find that God stands and without him there are no answers.

So, let's look at our question. I ought really to put in its context, isn't it? I can't just say, what is man? I've got to read verse 3 and 4, and you'll see that there, God is at the center.

[ 10 : 48 ] When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, when I do that, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

I think that's a wonderful context, isn't it? When I look at your world, your universe, who am I? What we're going to find now is an answer that science cannot give us.

I'm sure you've seen the same sort of thing, but I was watching television a few months ago, and there was an enthusiastic lady introducing us to her friends who were some chimpanzees.

And she was getting very excited about them. Oh, she said, it's so wonderful, you know. There are only four less chromosomes than you and me. The implication is quite plain, you see, we're really very similar.

She obviously thought the world of them, obviously thought more of her chimps than she did of the viewers. Well, maybe, I don't know, I'm not a scientist, if there are any of you who know these things, please tell me, I don't even know what a chromosome is, but it may be that chimpanzees have only four less chromosomes than you do.

[ 12 : 05 ] Shall I tell you what the life of the chimpanzee is about? You can tell on the television as you watch the program, they did nothing but sit alongside one another scratching and taking out each other's fleas. That was their life work, other than jumping around in the trees.

Now, I don't know how much time you spend taking the fleas off your neighbor's back, but I doubt it very much. It may be that some of you mothers have to do it with your children's head after school, but, you know, what a stupid thing to say, wasn't it?

I mean, what a stupid thing to say. To suppose that there's any likeness between these delightful animals scratching each other's backs with delight and human beings with all the amazing knowledge and abilities that God has given them.

So let's leave that kind of stupidity behind. Now, to answer that question, the psalm looks in two directions. It looks to the past and it looks to the future.

I'm going to read this psalm as a Christian who believes in Scripture and believes in Jesus Christ. This psalm, first of all, looks back to the creation and then it looks forward to Jesus Christ.

[ 13 : 13 ] Of course, the author could hardly have known what we know about the Lord Jesus Christ, but we're reading it, as I say, as Christians who do. Now, just before we look at the creation and Christ and find our answer to the question, what is man there?

Look again at verse 3. One scholar has imagined, and I think it's rather a delightful imagination, that the young shepherd poet David is lying down at night after a hard day's work with the flock.

And he's looking up into the wonderfully clear sky that we so seldom see, those of us who live in cities. I was lucky enough to have a holiday in the southern tip of South Africa last year. And one night, I looked out of my bedroom window quite late, and I saw what I don't think I've ever seen before, the marvel of the night sky when you're not in a city. And when everything is absolutely clear above you.

And we can imagine David doing that. We can imagine David looking up at this immense canopy above him and saying, am I just an insignificant dot? Do I matter against this amazing universe? [14:24] Well, it could have been like that. But how much more today? Every year that goes by, we are told by the experts as the telescopes get bigger, that the universe is vaster than our forefathers ever imagined.

And so, just to bring you up to date, I looked at the scientific textbook this week. It's all completely new to me, and I guess that we never really catch up with it. For example, the galaxy in which we live, and therefore we look at from inside, not from outside, as other galaxies, the Milky Way galaxy has at least a hundred billion stars in it.

It is part of a cluster of galaxies, thirty other galaxies, all of which contain the same number of stars probably. Astronomers today, because of the Hubble telescope and other things like that, now estimate that there are fifty billion galaxies like that out there in the universe, each containing a billion stars.

The observable in the universe, now I'm only talking of course about 2007, by the 2008 we shall observe a bit more, is three hundred thousand times larger than our Milky Way.

In other words, these figures have become meaningless. They're beyond computation. So I always enjoy that lovely sort of off-the-cuff sentence in Genesis 1.

[15:51] It's so lacking, isn't it, in Ballyhoo when it just says he made the stars also. Isn't that a wonderful sentence? Well, back to business.

Let's go back to the creation. That means we're quoting from Genesis 1, 27, 28. So keeping a finger in Psalm 8, we'll turn back to Genesis 1. I'm not going to give you the page number. If you can't find Genesis 1, there is no hope for you.

Verse 21 of Genesis 1. Verse 27. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.

Notice that. I'm not being sexist in saying man in this sermon tonight because when God created man, he created the male and female.

Isn't that clear? And God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. And then this very, very important word, have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

[17:02] Now, come back to Psalm 8. Now that is the center of what the psalmist is saying here. What is man? Yet, verse 5, you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

Incidentally, you notice that your minister talked about our reigning in the world to come. Yes, that is wonderfully so. That will be beyond anything we can imagine here. But this psalm is saying that we begin to rule here and now.

I want to raise your understanding of what you are. I want to broaden your shoulders so that you can take a responsibility for it. because it is quite an alarming responsibility. God has made man, crowned him to be a king.

Notice that in the context of verse 1 where the Lord is himself the king and sovereign. In the context of the Lord's sovereignty, he has made us a little lower than the heavenly beings and given us sovereignty.

Got it? You've given him dominion and you put all things under his feet. everything under his feet.

[18:10] Here then is an amazing responsibility that God has delegated to his creatures, that is his human creatures, man made in the image of God.

He's placed on our shoulders the responsibility for looking after his world. Now there's an obvious reference here to our physical environment.

I'm not going to stop on that but it's such an obvious reference and application that I couldn't of course leave it out. For God has put the whole natural world under our care.

And it's only in the last twenty years or so that we've woken up to this tremendous responsibility and this great stewardship and realized that in the past exploitation has led us to a situation which is

damaging for the future.

Have we not? Furthermore, maybe a comparatively small thing compared to things like global warming we're seeing many of the wild beasts of the field disappear, many of the species of birds disappear and so on.

[19:15] So quite clearly this has to do with the environment and means that we Christian people ought to be aware of the fact that that's our responsibility to rule it and not exploit it. but I think it's more important because our time is limited to go on from there to say that not only do we have to govern the natural world and the animals and the birds and all the rest of it we have to govern ourselves and that's why you have Paul in Romans 13 saying that God has ordained the government and the government even though the government may be a non-Christian one it is their job to govern their fellow men because God has given us powers to rule each other to rule the countries the nations the people that must be more important mustn't it than anything else so the powers that be that is human beings and frail human beings are that and we know that don't we from our leaders the powers that be are ordained by God they don't know it you do know it to rule over us and I suppose the question comes to us can we trust men to rule over their own kind and I'm afraid outside the sovereignty and knowledge of God we can't just take one ridiculously small illustration what about the new president of Venezuela because he's been in the news this week he seems to be a pretty unpleasant bloke doesn't he he's just about to change the constitution of Venezuela so that he doesn't have to retire as president and he can remain as president for the rest of his life does that make you feel rather sorry for the people of Venezuela does me what does it mean when a man takes power over his country so that no one can get rid of him it's not good news all history shows it's not good news so what's the answer then because when we give power to man and man has fallen almost always that power corrupts the ruler what a sad thing that is that we can't take power ourselves without getting spoilt and the answer of this psalm is that if the ruler is not ruled listen to that if the governor is himself ungoverned by God then we're overtying the people and we get that in of course verses 2 in verse 2 now you must remember that we're reading poetry

God uses all kinds of literature doesn't he to teach us we're not reading Paul at his most magisterial in the epistle to the Romans we're not reading a theological lecture we're reading a poet we're reading a hymn and therefore the truth is given to us in poetic ways and I think that verse 1 and 2a is quite lovely don't you you have set your glory above the heavens and out of the vows of human beings at the youngest and weakest right from the beginning of their lives you have established strength they know how to praise you that is their work from the beginning of course wonderfully fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem you remember and the establishment said don't pay any attention silence and all the children burst out praising him well I think it's lovely don't you with children to see that however young they are indeed right from the beginning from infancy they acknowledge the divine sovereignty is not difficult for them because that's what we were created for now we won't go into some of the problems of verse 2 how this in fact stills the enemy and the avenger

I think all that is saying is that God establishes his power through human beings and these human beings are those who acknowledge his rule over them from the very beginning of their lives well our 20th century and there are many of you sitting in this hall tonight who lived a good deal of your lives through the 20th century have given us a terrible warning of what it means to have countries governed by godless dictators the result is too horrifying to mention isn't it it's almost right to call it a hell on earth see what we've got at the balance here we have man as a ruler of everything under his feet in verse 5 and 6 so on and yet at the same time we have man in his weakness in verse 2 governed ruled by god whom he praises and worships that's the pattern

I can be trusted to rule other people only in as far as I walk humbly with my god once I no longer have that responsibility to a power greater than myself I shall certainly misuse the power that I have now I want you to be like that man who worked out what the sermon was about by Thursday morning I'll give you four days to work it out alright you've got to do the application because god has written into the world that he's made rule authority and hierarchy at every single level and I want you to ask yourself what authority and rule god has given to you in particular you may be a parent you may be teacher with authority over children daily you may be an employer a manager a magistrate a doctor in the smallest and the biggest areas of life most of us at some time are given authority and I can't think that out for you you've got to think it out for yourself what is the position of authority and dominion that god has placed upon my shoulders for which

I will have to answer you see it's a big responsibility we're not to duck out of this we're not to suppose that our lives are of very little importance because certainly god has given or will give to some of you young people positions of remarkable authority he's delegated it to you under his ultimate authority so let's leave that first answer the first answer is this is how god has created us i just want you to look at that again and see how the answer to this is sandwiched between verse one and nine and that when i see the privilege of being a human being whether a man or a woman when i see the awesome responsibility that god has given me when i see that i matter then i'm bound to say oh lord how majestic is your name in all the earth this is what you have done i would not dream of doing it you've done it and you put that responsibility on my shoulders can you bear it your shoulders broad enough so first we must read this psalm in the light of the past but secondly we've got to read it in the light of the future and this of course the psalmist probably did not fully understand and for that i have one more cross reference and you can probably guess what it is that actually this psalm eight is quoted several times in the new testament one corinthians ephesians but i'm going to look at hebrews chapter two and i will give you the page number of this because hebrews may be comparatively new to some of the young people here maybe you know better than i do and you'll find it on page 1002 no you won't 1001 but unfortunately it doesn't tell you that all right i love this passage that begins in chapter two verse five this is psalm eight understood by the new testament writers and if the new testament writers were here standing on the platform and they listened to this sermon of mine until now they said you are leaving out the most important thing and incidentally did you notice that that beautiful hymn we sung on psalm it leaves out the most important thing so if there are any good hymn writers here just add on a verse will you because it ought to go on to say something about

[ 27 : 55 ] Jesus well you could look for yourself let me read chapter two verse five now it was not to angels that god subjected the world to come of which we are speaking it has been testified somewhere it looks as though our author has forgotten exactly a word doesn't it it has been testified somewhere and then he quotes from psalm eight what is man that you are mindful of him now verse eight b in putting everything in subjection to him that is of course to Jesus he left nothing outside his control at present we do not yet see everything in subjection to him 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 I ought to read more but there isn't time you can read it for yourself it is in Jesus and in the incarnation God becoming man that we understand finally the astonishing dignity that we have that we are not animals but we are men and women made in the image of God you know I lose my patience when I'm talking to people who believe in incarnation and want to wake up as a beetle in the next life extraordinary how people talk such nonsense isn't it apart from the fact that it's an insult to

God because he's made us at the highest realm of his creation and that fact is shown by the incarnation because God chose to become man God was in Jesus the man and where we have failed to rule the world Jesus was sent to recapture it and to build a new world until every nation shall bow before him and you'll find all that in 1 Corinthians 15 when at the end the son himself will be subjected to the father having yielded up his completed work and as one version puts it God will be everything to everyone well let's come down to earth tomorrow is Monday morning let's get into our minds and hearts before we leave this evening the pattern of perfect humanity that Jesus has left us we look to the past and see we're made in the image of God God has given a responsibility which we have really failed to live up to and now he has sent

Jesus as the perfect man to do what we could not do and redeem the world I'm not against picture books for children which portray Jesus I'm not against those pictures in the nursery though I'm not really very fond of them they're usually of a rather strange figure in a dressing gown with a lamb in his arms and long hair and so on and I don't personally think that I don't think they do any harm to small children but I don't think they tell us very much because God has in his wisdom decided to portray his son the man Jesus not with an artist but through words through the gospels and that's what I want to do in this last two or three minutes tonight let me begin a portrait I'm not going to finish it I'm just going to begin to paint a portrait which is painted in the gospels and what it means to be a real man so let's put all preconceived ideas of what it means to be a real man a real person a real human being a man or a woman because in

Jesus we see perfection as I read the gospels I see that Jesus was a man's man men loved him obeyed him followed him but I also see it he's holy at home amongst women who were largely the people who supported him in his physical life and were the only people with him at the end he seems to have been a perfectly balanced person at home with men at home with women and with little children he was himself so learned that at the age of 12 he is asking and answering questions of the theologians and yet when he speaks the greatest truths about God it is said in such simple language that even the child really can grasp what he's saying a sower and a seed a farmer a merchant you know these stories

I remember coming away from Wickley College Toronto having been given a book by the principal on theology it was by a German theologian and German theologians when they write theology it's like walking in gumboots through treacle so I said to the stewardess after trying to understand a page of it I beckoned a stewardess and I said if anybody is finding it difficult to sleep I've got just the book for them you know they train these BA stewardesses wonderfully don't you she looked at me as a rather naughty boy and just passed on without saying anything so all I could do was to dump the book in the trash can and I got to Heathrow because Jesus didn't talk like that did he he was holy at home amongst the elderly and also amongst the young he frequently spoke to the crowds but that wasn't the only thing he could do he spends time for a whole day with an individual like a [ 33 : 33 ] Nicodemus or that poor Samaritan woman incidentally isn't that a remarkable balance he's at home with that great theologian he's at home with this woman who had many husbands and equally valuable in his sight he dines with rich people you might think that would spoil him not a bit he spends just as much time with the poor he is at home with disreputable people like prostitutes tax collectors and yet he is often in conversation with the religious elite he deals with both perfectly there is no imbalance in his words and deeds his words are unique his deeds are unique he doesn't do more than he says or say more than he does they are both perfect he's a man of prayer who goes away into the solitary place to pray and yet he's a man of action that isn't afraid to be in the fray he's all powerful to rule men and could do really entirely what he liked and yet always comes to serve men which we find very difficult he is a man of joy who looks up to heaven and says

I thank you father of heaven and earth that you have chosen these people and so on and yet a man of sorrows do you not find those balances extraordinary why not work on that yourself try and make the picture complete this week those are ten of my suggestions as I try to paint that portrait that I see in the gospels which is not a portrait in ink and paint but a portrait in words what I see there is a perfectly balanced normal heavenly human being heaven and earth come together in him without any exaggeration of either well I've only put my toe in the water I hope you can do better as someone has written the answer to what is man carries implications that only the incarnation the death the resurrection and the reign of Christ are big enough to satisfy right quick final words and I'll get down from my perch number one do you pray for your rulers well of course you do because it's part of our duty in the church to do that but you know I go to many churches now nearly always the prayer for the rulers is that they may have wisdom

I want my rulers to become worshippers they'll never get wisdom until they do it's no good being the son of the man so you've got to be actually a worshipper yourself do you have responsibility to rule in your daily life well work work out where it is and walk humbly with your lord and master as you rule over others remember what Paul said to the masters and employers do you marvel at what God's servants men and women have done to give us our great Christian heritage do you marvel at some of the great Christian leaders the great Christian missionaries the people you've known who've shown Christ in their lives do you marvel at that well if you do you won't praise them but you'll do what Psalm 8 tells you to do you'll say oh lord our lord how majestic is your name in all the earth well let's pray what is man heavenly father we thank you that as we look back to creation and then look to your new creation we get these wonderful clues in answer to that question and we ask that you'll give us grace and wisdom humility to accept on our shoulders in the coming week responsibility for others and as we have authority over them whether young or old may we do it as those who are governed all the day long by you yourself so we thank you for the privilege of being made in the image of

God male and female he made them and we ask that by your mercy we might conceivably live up to that privilege and we ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen best peace in todas do you são women eller