

“THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING HUMAN” Psalm 8

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Human beings are the most privileged creatures in the universe. People are of matchless worth. But because there are so many of us it's easy to view people as cheap and to attach greater worth to things. A deplorable feature of our materialistic culture is the ease with which we love things and use people rather than love people and use things.

This attitude is not a recent development.

About 100 years ago Sir Walter Raleigh wrote:

*I wish I loved the human race
I wish I loved its silly face
I wish I liked the way it walks
I wish I liked the way it talks
And when I'm introduced to one,
I wish I thought, "What jolly fun!"*

Archie Bunker of TV's *All In the Family* fame, said, 'I got nothin' against mankind. It's people I can't stand.' Sigmund Freud said, 'I have found little that is good about human beings. In my experience most of them are trash.'

Depreciating human life has a long and inglorious history.

- This weekend is the official recognition of the Sanctity of Human Life.

President Ronald Reagan designated January 22, 1984 as the first National Sanctity of Human Life Day.

The date was chosen to coincide with the anniversary of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortions in the United States.

President George Bush said, National Sanctity of Human Life Day serves as a reminder that we must value human life in all forms, not just those considered healthy, wanted, or convenient.

- People are God's highest creation. God made the world and everything in it ideally suited for mankind. Earth is located just the right distance from the right size star (our sun), rotating at just the right rate, with a moon of just the right size and distance, orbiting earth at just the right rate—all to support life on planet earth. Those are just a few of the simple facts that demonstrate the uniqueness of our planet as a place for human life to thrive.

The evidence is all around us that human life is incalculably precious. It must never be cheapened or squandered.

- This is how King David praised God for the dignity of human life: *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made* (Psalm 139:13, 14).

Today we'll study another Psalm David wrote about the sacredness of human life. It's Psalm 8.

¹ *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.*

² *Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.*

³ *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,*

⁴ *what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*

⁵ *Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.*

⁶ *You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet:*

⁷ *all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,*

⁸ *the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

⁹ *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

David wrote this poem as a song to be sung to a tune the people knew.

The superscript of the Psalm reads, '*To the choirmaster. According to the gittith. A psalm of David.*'

'*al gittith*' is a Hebrew term that in this context is translated, "After the tune of the treaders of the winepress."

Apparently there was a song people liked to sing while stomping out the grapes to make wine. David wrote these words for that tune.

Psalm 8 shows us some distinctive human ways to celebrate the worth of people as God's highest creation.

I. WORSHIP GOD'S MAJESTY (8:1-2, 9)

Only human beings can worship God intelligently and deliberately.

¹ *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.*

⁹ *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

The earth and the heavens and all of creation are displays of God's glory.

But all the animals whose lives are regulated by the seasons and by light and darkness don't marvel at the majesty of God.

In this world only human beings can appreciate God's majesty.

The biblical creation narrative reports that, *God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* (Genesis 1:25-27)

Only mankind has the necessary perspective on God and his world to be able to watch over God's creation.

- So David wrote this Psalm to express his delight in the wonders of God's handiwork.

There's a grand old hymn that expresses worship to God as our response to what he has done. It's "How Great Thou Art." Originally written as a Swedish poem by Pastor Carl Boberg in 1886, the English translation was made a favorite by George Beverly Shea: *'O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds/works thy hands have made; I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder; Thy power throughout the universe displayed. Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee, how great Thou art . . .'*

- But there are powerful evil forces that don't recognize God's majesty, and refuse to honor him.

² *Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.*

Who are these foes of God? I think they include those who are determined to keep God out of the equation. They have decided that it all came about by chance without any intentional and intelligent designer behind it.

It's actually quite convenient to deny the existence of a Creator, because if there is no supreme Creator then they don't have to give account for the way they live.

- But according to David, people who exclude God, are confounded by a crying baby. The NIV reads, *From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.*

It's true that the sound a crying baby can be annoying at 2 o'clock in the morning. You probably don't say, *Just listen to the little bambino praising God.* But in a hospital delivery room, there's no sweeter sound on earth than what comes from the lips of an infant.

I'll never forget the emotional high Liz and I felt two years ago when we first heard our newborn twin grandchildren cry.

That's when a crying infant becomes a worship director! David said so.

That is a little human being in God's image!

- The first question in the Westminster Larger Catechism is "What is the chief and highest end of man?" The answer is, "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever." (Westminster Larger Catechism)

Our highest occupation as people is to reflect upon God's glorious nature disclosed in his Word and displayed in his world by all he has done, and to worship him with great joy.

II. PONDER HUMAN DIGNITY (8:3-5)

The ability to engage in reflective thinking is part of the essence of being human. Other earthly creatures don't have this capacity. They always work, always forage, always hunt. They rest only "between hunts." Instinct controls them. But God created people with the ability to ponder. All other creatures use their capacities and abilities to an optimum degree. Why do we humans fall so far short?

It's our responsibility to ponder what it means to be human—to grasp the dignity and nobility placed in us by our Creator.

History reeks with the carnage of human lives wantonly slaughtered by genocidal despots who thought nothing of eliminating millions of people in massive ethnic purges. Even today suicide bombers are willing snuff out their own lives to destroy as many other lives as possible.

- I've never been able to understand why human life is so cheap to so many. How can they scorn the truth that being human gives every person infinite worth?

Czech leader Vaclav Havel wrote: *'The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it bothers him less and less.'*

Few people pause to ponder the uniqueness of human nature.

Augustine wrote: *'Men go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering.'*

- God invested the human race with dignity, or nobility.

Humans have a place above everything else in Creation.

⁵ *Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.*

Mankind was created, literally, “a little lower than God.”

When we say that, it seems to border on blasphemy.

Some Bible versions, like the NIV have made it more palatable: *a little lower than the heavenly beings.'*

That is a possible translation of the Hebrew text of verse 5, but in the Old Testament the word, *Elohim*, is used, with few exceptions, of God alone.

This is the same word as in Genesis 1:27, where we read that God (*Elohim*) created the man.

Mankind was placed so high on the scale of created things that we are said to be “a little lower than *Elohim*.”

That's what God intended when He said, *'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . .'* (Genesis 1:26)

On the scale of nobility and majesty, there is nothing positioned between human beings and Almighty God.

Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner argued that if the image of God faded completely from our minds, we would slowly cease to be human. This means we would retain our intellectual capacity, our ability to make ever-more-complex machines. But by cutting the umbilical cord with God, our source of ethical vitality would be gone.

Morally, we would become nothing better than a species of fantastically clever monkeys. Our ultimate fate would be too horrible to contemplate.

- As Biblical Christians we reject the claim of evolutionists that human beings evolved from lower life forms.

What about the fact that mammals also have vertebrae, hearts and lungs, and so forth? Doesn't that suggest we have similarly evolved?

A more intelligent explanation is that we the same Designer-Creator.

But humans alone were invested with the nobility of the divine image.

That's the amazing and sobering truth of human worth.

- But a terrible thing happened in the human race.

The first humans disobeyed God. Their sin separated them from God who is perfect.

None of God's other earthly creatures sinned and fell. They didn't have the freedom to choose to obey or to disobey.

The sin of the first humans corrupted the whole earthly creation—all nature.

- But sin did not make people non-human.

Sin caused the image of God to be corrupted and polluted in every one of us, but that divine image has not been obliterated. It is still there!

Every human life is sacred, even though it has been ravaged by sin.

That's why God sent his Son to save us—to become one of us, but without our sin. And he paid the penalty for our sins by his death on the cross, so that God's precious creation could be reconciled to God.

The Apostle Paul explained, *'And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,'* (Colossians 1:21-22)

- David was astonished that God who made the vast heaven and the earth should pay any attention to a fallen, puny being called “man.”

³ *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,*

⁴ *what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*

The word for man here is *anosh*, and a cognate of this word means “to be weak.” David is amazed that God would care for puny, fallen mankind.

- I suppose that at some time most of you have thought God doesn't care about you.

Haven't you felt like complaining, *'God, why don't you pay attention to what I'm going through? Don't you care?'*

David, on the other hand, was so convinced that God does care about sinful, unworthy people, that he exclaimed,

'Lord God, why do you pay attention? Why do you care? We don't deserve your kindness.'

The answer, of course, takes us back to verse 5: God created mankind for a relationship with himself.

Our worth is bound up in the truth that God is devoted to us.

Listen to these lines from a 17th century poem by Thomas Washbourne:

*Worse than a beast in man,
Who after thine own image made at first
Became the devil's son by sin. And can
a thing be more accursed?
Yet thou thy greatest mercy hast
On this accursed creature cast.*

The curse that came with sin blurred the divine image in mankind, but God cast his greatest mercy on us in Christ Jesus our Savior.

- God cares for human beings more than we can comprehend.

He provided salvation for us when we sinned and were separated from him.

- God has a vested interest in the human race. No human being is disposable trash.

People who cheapen human life violate what God has established as more precious than everything else in creation.

III. ACCEPT MANKIND'S RESPONSIBILITY (8:6-8)

Human beings did not forfeit their God-given dominion over his earthly creation when they sinned. God did not say to the first couple, "You're fired. You've lost the job I gave you."

In the covenant God made with Noah after the flood he once again affirmed mankind's responsibility to rule over every living creature (Genesis 9:2, cf. 1:28)

- David was fully aware of this heavy responsibility.

⁶ *You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet:*

⁷ *all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,*

⁸ *the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

God gave us the responsibility and the authority to manage his creation.

And mankind has a shameful record of abuse of this authority.

By our selfish appetites we have polluted and destroyed some of the wonders of God's creation.

- But nothing comes near the abuse of God's authority in the cheapening and trashing of human life by abortions of convenience.

It's astounding to me that people can be fiercely passionate about global warming or protecting endangered species, but their actions show that they have a cheap view of human life in the womb.

- Every human being has been created with the purpose of being with God for eternity—whether they are yet unborn, or old and frail, or hampered by some mental or physical deficiency, or twisted by the effects of sin. C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are no ordinary people . . . It is immortals who we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit; immortal horrors or everlasting splendors." (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)

God has not left us to decide what our responsibilities are as his highest creation.

He has given us guidelines in our intellect, in our consciences, and in the clarity of his word revealed in the inspired Bible.

- In some way we are all guilty of neglecting our responsibility and of abusing our authority before God. And we all have suffered for it.

If you could kick the person responsible for most of your troubles, you wouldn't be able to sit down for a week.

- God is not to blame for any of the problems in his creation. Instead God acted out of love for mankind to rescue us from the horrible consequences of sin.

There may be some in this room who are struggling under a burden of guilt over a life decision made days or weeks or months or years ago.

David was amazed that God would care for weak and sinful human beings—even those who have made a crucial wrong choice reflecting a lower view of human life.

But that is the amazing grace of God. He cares for us when we're suffering the consequences of our own wrong doing.

There is no sin too great for God to forgive, if we'll just be honest with him and sincerely confess our failure and repent of our sin.

That's what the Christian faith is all about. The apostle Paul expressed it so powerfully, '*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*' (Romans 5:8)