

**Sermon preached at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia,  
by Dr. David Fischler, on Sunday, July 26, 2015**

## **LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS**

### **Psalm 8:1-9**

Before we proceed any further, I have to begin by asking the question: What time is it? That's not a rhetorical question. I really want to know. 11:07. Okay. Things have moved along a little quicker than normal. I wanted to make sure my watch was correct because I had a hard time believing it actually was that early. You all know what that means, don't you? Don't worry, you'll still get out in time for lunch.

Those of you who are fans of a particular British comedy troupe will recognize the phrase, "And now for something completely different." Those of you who don't recognize that, check out the works of Monty Python. Over the last four weeks that I've preached, we've been taking a look at 1 and 2 John and at Jude and the picture that we have seen, especially when we compare it to the world that we live in and the society that we live in, is pretty bleak. Anyone want to disagree that the last four messages that I've brought have been, shall we say not necessarily the most uplifting in the world? Necessary, perhaps, but not necessarily the most inspiring. I will be the first to admit that. Sometimes it is necessary to hear the Word and to look the world in the face and to hear some bad news and how we need to respond to it.

Having done that, I'd like to do something completely different now. I'd like to go back into the Old Testament and I'd like for us to hear a message that is at once inspiring and uplifting and a message that should give us hope, that even in the midst of a world where things don't look all that promising that nevertheless there is still more than enough reason for hope, more than enough reason to trust our God, more than enough reason to love Him. So if you'd turn to Psalm 8, I'd like for us to take a look at that. As we begin, the first part of it has to do with the glory of God. There's an inspiring subject: the glory of God. It is about One whom we serve who is no trivial deity, who is no figment of our imagination, but who is in fact over all things.

This Psalm begins with David, the writer, King David, addressing God personally. It may not sound that way exactly. He begins, "O LORD, our Lord." The term "LORD" that is translated that way in English in the New International Version is actually the name of God. This is one of those many places in the Old Testament where in English the word *Yahweh* has been rendered as *LORD*. So he begins with God's name. "O Yahweh." Can you all say that? *Yahweh*. You have to give yourself a sore throat to do that properly. You realize that, right? *Yahweh*. The name that God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai. A name variously understood to mean "I Am," "Who I Am I Am," "What I Am I Am," "What I will be." There are a lot of different ways to understand that. But the crucial thing about it is that it is personal. It's personal. It's God's name. We call things by a variety of terms and some of them are personal and some of them less so.

The person to whom I'm married I might call, "Woman," because that's what she is, right? I might get a little more personal and call her "Wife." Again, that's what she is. At that point I'm starting to denote the relationship that she and I have. But if I really want to be personal, if I really want to let you know who the woman is who is my wife, I will call her "Maryanne." That's who she is. The very first time I met her she introduced herself not by saying, "I'm the daughter of Roy Surrells. Glad to meet you." That means what to me? It wouldn't have meant anything to me. When she introduced herself she told me her name. And at that point, even though we had just met, didn't know each other very well, we'd come to know one another far better. At that point I already had a connection with her in the same way that I have a connection with all of you because I know your names. Just knowing a person's name makes a connection and that's what David does here at the beginning. He's not referring to God generically. He's referring to God personally because he knows God personally. And then, having said, "O LORD," he says, "our Lord." *Our* Yahweh. *Israel's* Yahweh. The Yahweh who is the God of the people of Israel, the people who are connected to Him personally. The people who are the people of His name. "Our Lord" makes it communal. It connects the people over whom David rules as an earthly king to the heavenly King who is their ultimate and true Ruler.

So "O LORD, Our Lord," already in the first words of this Psalm, we get something really important. We get the connection we have to God. And he then praises that name: "How majestic is Your name in all the earth." The root word that is used here translated "majestic" means broad or large or powerful. It's a word that makes quite clear we're not just talking about a local tribal deity here. That's what the people around Israel in those days worshipped. They either worshipped nature gods, which is to say a god who had to do with one portion of the created universe – a god of the sky, a god of the sea, a god of the land, a god of the trees – whatever it might be, but a god who had nothing to do with all that was but only with his little domain, his little fiefdom. This is no nature god and it's no local deity, either. This is not simply the God of Israel, though it is in fact the God of Israel, any more than He is the God of any of the other peoples of the world. We could call Him the God of the Egyptians, the God of the Babylonians, the God of the Americans. That would all be true, but, if at any point we did what the people of the ancient Middle East so often did and tried to claim that this God was theirs alone and had nothing to do with the rest of the world, we'd no longer be talking about Yahweh. The God of Israel who is, however, large enough to encompass all of humanity and all of creation. We're further told that He has set His glory above the heavens. So He's not simply "up there." And He's not simply "down here." His name is majestic in all the earth but it is not simply that God only inhabits our material universe nor is it the case that God has nothing to do with it. It is instead entirely separate from it. He's above the heavens. He exists in a way that we can't even conceive. He is that far above us. He is above even the heavens.

So God's majesty, which is to say His power, which is behind all three of the words used in verses 1 and 2, - majesty and glory and strength – all of this is witnessed to by all of His creation. In verse 2, He says, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise." From the lips of children and infants. Do we normally take instruction

from our children? For the most part we don't, right? We give them instruction. They've been given into our hands to see to it that they grow up and take the right path in life. So we give them instructions. We give them rules to live by. We give them directions. We will give them praise or punishment, depending on what they do, in order to try to channel their behavior. But here, David is saying we have something to learn from them. They speak God's praise. Even in newborns. Even in the cries of those just born. They give testimony to His power because they show Him as the giver of life. How many of you were present at your children's delivery? Did I say something funny? That completely got past me. Well, those of you whose children were not hatched in an incubator, mothers you obviously were all there, so men how many of you were there? Okay, quite a few. Mothers know this instinctively. Men, they have to maybe have it pounded into their heads. Like me, about the idea of where babies come from. The birth of a child shows forth the glory of God in a way that is absolutely unparalleled. Where there was no life before conception, now there is something completely new, completely different. Every child that has ever been conceived, while yes, it bears a portion of its mother's DNA and a portion of its father's DNA, it is recombined in a way that is completely unique. If you have one child, two children, three children, five children, you've got all of these unique individuals and every single one of them is a testimony to the extraordinary power of God bringing into being a life that had never existed before.

Even babes show forth the praise of God and in the process, he says in verse 3, "because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger." It's almost as though children are a witness to the reality of God, to the truth of God, to the power of God. When the atheist wants to say, "No, there is no God. We have come into being purely by chance," you want to ask if their mother or father thought that about them. That they came into being purely by chance. I guess it would depend on whether their mother or father liked them or not. This has an echo, you know, in the New Testament, in Paul's declaration that the cross is seen by Christ's enemies as foolishness. He writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Children are not the disposable creatures that our world seems so often to think that they are. They are testimonies to God's glory. If there's no other reason – and of course there are lots of others – to oppose abortion, it's to oppose the elimination of a creature who carries within himself or herself testimony to the glory of God. But the world so often thinks children are weak, they're trivial, they can't take care of themselves, they're disposable. But it's precisely because of that, it's precisely because the world views them that way that God has ordained them to show forth His praise.

Okay. So we have the glory of God and then we have the glory of humanity, which may sound like kind of an odd thing, but I don't know how else to put it. The glory of humanity is exalted here as well. David raises a marvelous question in the face of the universe. That question is, essentially: "Who are we?" He says in verses 3-4, "When I consider 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, son of man that you care for him?"

Look up. Look into the night sky and ask yourself: “How is it possible that God could care about us? Our universe is so enormous.” It’s positively inconceivable how large our universe is, how many different galaxies there are, much less the stars in the galaxies, the planets that are around the stars. When you consider that, what possible significance could I have? What could you have in the face of all that? And the truth is, this is one of the three most important bases for the modern rejection of God. The other two are the problem of evil, which has been the case since the beginning: “If God is real how can there be evil?” Obviously we won’t deal with that today. The other basis is evolution. “Well, for us to have gotten here, what we know about evolution, it must mean that there’s no God.” We’re not going to deal with that today, either. But the third basis for the modern rejection of God is that people have looked up into the sky and said, “We are so inconsequential.” Have you seen those short videos that people will put up on Facebook – they’re found elsewhere on the Internet as well – that do one of two things. Either they start from microscopic level and move outward one level at a time, from the subatomic particle to the atom to the molecule to more complicated chemical combinations to organisms to human beings to the earth to the solar system to the Milky Way to our galactic neighborhood to the universe as a whole. Or they go the other way around. Have you all seen them? They’re really impressive. And some people look at that and say, “Boy, we are really inconsequential. We are as nothing. We’re dust. We’re just floating fragments of matter, careening mindlessly through the universe.” And given that reality, given how inconsequential we seem to be, how could God possibly care about us? Certainly, how could He care enough to send His own Son to die for our sin. As far as it goes, our sin? Yes, it affects us but in relation to God who oversees an entire universe, why should He care whether I tell a lie? Why should He care whether I cheat on my wife? Why should He care whether I covet my neighbor’s donkey? Doesn’t that seem like a silly thing for the Ruler of the universe to care about, if indeed He’s real?

The wonderful thing, David says, is as ridiculous as that may sound, it is in fact the case. “You have made him,” he says in verse 4, “a little lower than the heavenly beings, a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.” And he doesn’t say in so many words why that is, but I think we all know why that is. Genesis tells us why. It is because we have been created in His image. We have been created in the image of God, and every single human being carries that image. Now, if you don’t mind my referring back for just a moment to what I have been preaching about, there’s a really important implication for that. Even as we seek to combat the falsehood that is so prominent in our world, even as we seek to combat the lies on which our society is increasingly built, even if we recognize the sin that is all around us and more and more embraced by the nation in which we live, even as we do that, and even as we reject that falsehood and even as we reject that sin, it is absolutely crucial to remember that those who advocate those positions and those who engage in that behavior are, just as we are, made in the image of God. And as such, people for whom our Lord may have come and suffered and died, and they may not know that now, but there’s nothing to say they won’t know that in the future. And so never, ever, ever may we usurp God’s place and condemn them as individuals, as people, because by the power of God, no human being, having been made in the image of God, is irredeemable. No human being is irredeemable.

That having been said, we are told in verse 5 that we've been made a little lower than the heavenly beings. The word that's used there is the word *Elohim*, which again turns up in Genesis. *Elohim* is used in Genesis 1 when the text says, "Then God (*Elohim*) said, 'Let us make man in our image.'" And the usual way that that is thought to refer to is God is addressing the other heavenly beings, the angels whom He has created and who are His servants and who He uses even in the process of creation. We've been made but little lower even than them. That is a high place, an exalted position. And as a sign of that exalted position and role, we have been given dominion over the earth. Verse 5 says, "And we have been crowned with glory and honor," and verse 6 says, "as You have made him ruler over the works of Your hands. You put everything under his feet." Glory and honor are ours. Not because we're intrinsically wonderful or because we've done something to earn that glory and honor, but because God has bestowed it upon us simply by virtue of having made us in His image. And in the content of that glory and honor and the dominion that we've been given, we've been given a sovereignty over all that's in our world. And it's a sovereignty that derives from God. An analogy would be that of a governor under a king. A governor has a certain amount of freedom of action, but within the bounds that the king has clearly delineated.

For us, that sovereignty, according to verses 7-8, is over all that's on earth. That doesn't mean that we can wantonly do anything that we want to with it. I remember an editorial cartoon – this was from all the way back in 1981 – some of you may remember Ronald Reagan appointing James Watt to be the Secretary of the Interior. Watt was a member of the Assemblies of God. There were some people in the national media who thought this was terribly amusing because as we all know, members of the Assemblies of God are fundamentalist yahoos who should be no closer to the levers of power than turning on the light switch in their own home. That was the attitude that many had. And so they took views that Watt had expressed. For instance, he had perfectly orthodox perspectives on both the dominion that human beings have been given over the world that is talked about here and talked about in Genesis 1 as well as the return of Christ. And so this editorial cartoon depicted Watt carrying a sign that said, "Jesus is coming. Cut down the trees." It wasn't funny then, either. Because what they were doing was they were taking two orthodox Christian beliefs and they were making them sound silly. No one would suggest – the guy who was going to be Secretary of the Interior least of all – that the fact that we have been given dominion over the world means we can use it in absolutely any way we want. And that means if we want to turn the oceans into our garbage dumps, it's our world. We can do what we want, right? If it means that we want to destroy the entirety of Yellowstone National Park and pave it all over, we can do that. Absolutely. It belongs to us. No, that's not what this means. The sovereignty that has been given us is over everything in the world but it's a sovereignty that is within an order of creation that is overseen by God and which has certain rules attached to it. Use what is in the world that you need. Yes. Wanton destruction? No. That's a sign of a person who wants to be God rather than serve under Him.

Sad to say, the order that David is speaking of here, that dominion has been disrupted by sin. And that order is going to one day be redeemed itself. Paul put it this way in

Romans 8: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subject to futility.” Not just us. All of creation was subject to futility. “Not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage of corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” We live in a fallen world. We are not just a fallen race. We live in a fallen world. But that entire world will be redeemed in the end because of what Christ has done. “All flocks and herds and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,” all will be brought into a new creation.

Well, the writer ends with repetition, and he does so deliberately. He’s talked about the glory of God in verses 1-2 and in verses 3-8 he talks about the glory of humanity having been made a little lower than the angels. But here in verse 9 he comes back to his original theme. After declaring the glory of humanity, he ends properly with the glory of God: “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.” And he doesn’t just repeat that because one day he knows it’s going to be made into a really good praise song. He doesn’t repeat that because he thinks that from the beginning of the psalm to the end they’ve forgotten it. He repeats it because he’s giving us a message, and that message is simply this: In considering ourselves, in considering the state of the world, in considering our status as God’s people, as God’s witnesses, in considering the fallenness of ourselves and the world in which we live, we must always start and end with Him. Everything that we are and all the mess that we’ve made of the world, all of it has its origin in Him. The mess doesn’t, but what we’ve done and the stuff that we’ve done it with, that has its origin in Him and its final state is in Him as well. It’s not up to us to save the world. It’s not up to us to save creation. It’s not up to us to save the planet. It’s not even up to us to save ourselves.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is *Your* name in all the earth. Given how small, how inconsequential we are, the idea that the God of the universe considers us important enough to send His Son into the world to suffer death on our behalf. I don’t know about you, but that’s pretty inspiring.