

**Sermon preached by Pastor Bob Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, May 15, 2011**

SEARCHING FOR SIGNIFICANCE?

Psalm 8

Did you see the movie *Antz*, a cartoon feature about life as an insect? The movie came out a number of years ago, in 1998, and features voice-overs from the likes of Woody Allen, Gene Hackman, and Sylvester Stallone. In an early scene the camera pans down from a faraway view of the earth down to a room in an underground ant colony. The main character, an ant named Z, “played” by Woody Allen, lies on a leaf couch and tells his therapist:

All my life I've lived and worked in the big city.... I always tell myself there has got to be something better out there. I think everything must go back to the fact that I had a very anxious childhood. My mother never had time for me. When you're the middle child in a family of 5 million, you don't get any attention. I've always had these abandonment issues. My father was basically a drone, like I've said. The guy flew away when I was just a larva.

And, my job really annoys me. I was not cut out to be a worker. I feel physically inadequate – my whole life I've never been able to lift more than ten times my own bodyweight. And, when you get down to it, handling dirt is not my idea of a rewarding career.... I mean, am I supposed to do everything for the colony?

What about MY needs? What about ME? I mean I've got to believe there's some place out there that's better than this. Otherwise I'll just curl up into a larva position and weep. The whole system makes me feel ... INSIGNIFICANT.

The therapist responds: “Excellent! You've made a real breakthrough! You are insignificant!”

Do you ever feel like that? Insignificant? Well, most people – perhaps all of us – are in some sort of search for significance, for a sense of and meaning in life. We see evidence of that all around us – seminars, self-help books, makeovers to change whatever seems to rob us of our feelings of worth and significance. There is a deep desire in the human psyche for significance.

Even as Christians, we try a lot of ways to find it, don't we? So, how do you find a sense of purpose and significance in your life? Put another way, when you meet someone new, how do you describe who you are?

Do you define yourself by the work that you do? Perhaps you feel worthwhile because you have a respected position – a lawyer or doctor, an accomplished musician, someone who has done well in business, government service or the military. Our careers seem to give us great meaning

in life – we feel OK when we land the job of our dreams, but pretty rotten if our work is demanding, unfulfilling, or unpleasant.

Last week, Rob Mackey reminded us of the pain associated with unemployment . . . and the promise of God’s care through those difficult times. But if you and I find our purpose and worth in our work and careers, not having work to do will certainly overwhelm us.

Do you draw your identity from your family? You are a Mom or a Dad and rightly esteem and nourish your children, teaching them the grand stories of the Bible and how they may come to know Jesus as their Savior. You want them to embrace your values. But how do you feel when your kids do not live up to your expectations? As children, they act like children , disobedient, temper tantrums, behavior that may embarrass you in public. How do you react?

When we characterize our worth and significance solely by our family, especially our children, we get angry or despondent when our desires for our family – often good desires – are not realized. We are unable to cope with, or just barely get along, when family disaster hits – our children fail us, they precede us in death, or even we cannot have children at all.

Now, don’t get me wrong; your family is the most important set of relationships you’ll ever have. The family is ordained by God as a sacred institution. But when we anchor our identity in being a Mom or Dad, a husband or a wife, we tend to value that identity so much that we exclude almost everything else for the sake of family.

Here’s another. *Do you place great importance on what other people think about you?* Do you feel good about yourself when the folks around you say good things about you and bad when they don’t? Are you worried that other people don’t seem to notice your fine qualities or the great things you have accomplished, but always seem to pick up on your mistakes? Is there something you wish you could change about yourself just so other people will think better of you?

It is hard not to get wrapped up in these things, isn’t it? As Christians, we realize that our value and significance does not come from our families, our jobs or what other people think of us. Our culture and our own desires scream at us, telling us that our meaning in life must come from those created things rather than the Creator Himself..

If you are honest with yourself, you have to admit that you struggle with those things and feel the emotional temperature rise when you are denied those things about yourself that bring you esteem. How can you and I ward off these influences and gain a biblical understanding of our significance? Psalm 8 provides some answers.

THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF GOD

First, I’d like you to see that the secret for realizing our own self-worth lies in understanding the glory and majesty of God. Notice how Psalm 8 begins and ends – “O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth” (NIV). We will never understand life unless we see

ourselves as God's creatures and recognize that we have a special responsibility to Him as our Creator. This psalm talks about the honor and high calling of men and women because it is a song about the greatness of God.

God is majestic. His glory is above the heavens. *Majesty* is a term that carries the idea of being superior in power and position. We are familiar with the idea – throughout history, the people of countries ruled by kings and queens often use the term “Your Majesty” to show submission to the authority and acknowledge the right to govern by whoever is on the throne.

So, God shows His majesty because He created the heavens and the earth. He is on the throne. He made everything out of nothing – simply by His command the whole universe came into being. Because God is its maker, He stands outside and separate from His creation and is not controlled by it. He governs all He has made. It is His will that will prevail, not yours, not mine!

But, in another way God shows His majesty as He delivers men and women from their troubles. As king of the universe, He makes – and keeps – promises with His people; He actively calls them into a relationship with Himself. Look again at how Psalm 8 begins and ends with the words, “O LORD, our Lord.” Many of our modern English translations use the all-capitalized “LORD” for the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. This name God used when He first revealed Himself to Moses as the One who would rescue Israel from bondage in Egypt. It is the name that refers to the Lord in His relationship as redeemer of His covenant people.

The second use of “Lord” is the Hebrew word *Adonai*, the word for God that refers to His sovereign rule and government over His creation, including hurricanes like Katrina. By using *Yahweh Adonai* – Lord, Lord, the psalmist declares that the Sovereign Creator is his God, his Redeemer. The One who made all heaven and earth has redeemed him and called him into a personal and real relationship.

One place where Psalm 8 is quoted is in Matthew 21:16. After his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus is in the temple healing the blind and the lame and people shout Hosanna to the Son of David. The chief priests and scribes were angry with Him, so Jesus quotes from this psalm: “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (NIV). By doing this, he was making the claim to be *Yahweh Adonai*, the Creator Redeemer to whom all praise is due.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE MAJESTY OF GOD

Second, in order to realize where our significance comes from, we must understand our relationship as human beings to the great majesty of God. Verses 3 and 4 are the heart of the psalm. “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” These words ask, “Why would a majestic all-powerful Creator pay attention to us?”

Imagine the writer of this psalm (probably David as a shepherd) lying in the fields staring at the stars. This must have been an emotional experience, as he contemplated the vastness of the universe. And he knew less about the universe than we.

We know that the earth, as big as it is, is a small planet in a relatively small solar system toward the outer edge of one of the billions of galaxies in the universe. How small we are in relation to this vast cosmic setting! How astonishing that the God of this universe would take notice of us! We truly are insignificant in comparison to God!

It is said that when President Teddy Roosevelt entertained diplomatic guests at the White House he was fond of taking them out to the back lawn at the end of the day. As the president stood gazing at the night sky, all eyes would eventually be cast heavenward. The magnificent display of God's brilliant creation would overcome the party. After a long moment, Mr. Roosevelt would say, "Gentlemen, I believe we are small enough now. Let's go to bed."

Yet, the Creator of the universe decided to crown humanity with excellence. We have a royal dignity. He has crowned us with glory and honor and made us ruler over the works of his hands. The rest of Psalm 8 speaks of the privilege and responsibility we have as God's stewards on earth, created in His image as His co-regents over Creation. The psalm is repetition of the mandate in Genesis 1:26 when after creating everything else, God said, "Let us make humans in our image and let them rule over all the earth."

Created in God's image! Rulers over God's world. Endowed in such a way that we are crowned with royal majesty. As God's-image-bearers, serving Him, doing His will to use creation for His glory, to shape and mold culture so that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. That is real significance.

So, what happened? It sure doesn't seem that we are ruling over the earth, does it? This Psalm 8 job description sounds pretty good, but it certainly is not the reality of life today!

Adam and Eve should have fulfilled Psalm 8 by assuming the position God made them. But they did not! They disobeyed God and through Adam, each of us has inherited the problem of sin. When Adam fell, we were divested of the glory in which we were created.

Because of sin, we have lost something. We now disregard our rightful place in the universe. We think of ourselves merely as creatures among the other creatures. As Romans 1:25 says: We "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (NIV).

So, we end up seeking our sense of purpose and meaning in life from our relationship to created things – our jobs, our wealth and position, how others think of us, instead of seeking significance in our relationship to the Creator Himself.

It is a messy picture! Because as humans we traded worship of the Creator to finding our worth in the things He has made for us. Because of sin, the world is falling apart – a world where we

do not rule, one full of evil and chaos, with tornados and over-flowing rivers, with terrorism, crime, murders and wars, with death and destruction. A broken, messed up world that seems to be without hope!

HOW CHRIST RESTORED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE MAJESTY OF GOD

But I trust that you know that the Lord has done something about this! He sent His own Son to save us from our sorry predicament. So, in order to realize our own self-worth, we must understand how Christ has restored us in our relationship to the majesty of God. Listen as I read from Hebrews 2:5-9.

⁵ It is not to angels that He has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁷ You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor ⁸ and put everything under his feet.” In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. ⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In this passage, we see Psalm 8 directly applied to Christ. He fulfills Psalm 8 on our behalf. What the psalmist says about the glory that we human beings were meant to have is summed up in the person and life of Jesus Christ. The futility and misery and insignificance in life that as sinners we deserve, Jesus endured so that we would not have to. He tasted death for us.

Through the Cross, Jesus has redeemed us from the spiritual death and destruction that our misplaced allegiance has brought us. By dying for us on the Cross, Jesus declared us valuable and has made us significant.

And through His resurrection, He has made His purposeful and obedient life possible for us. We were meant to draw our significance in a worshipping, obedient relationship to our Creator, looking after the world He has made. When we are united with Christ through faith in His death and resurrection, that relationship is restored.

We are empowered by His life to live out our lives as He has planned. Not that we will go through life without trouble, but we can live with understanding, meaning, and purpose.

CONCLUSION

We do not find our self-esteem through our jobs, the good thoughts of other people, or even the joy and warmth of family. All of these, as good as they may be, are never perfect, never completely the way we want. We live in a broken fallen world, where created things always fall short.

Career, reputation, and family are gifts from God, and are not meant to undergird our sense of value in this world. Bowing down to created things rather than worshipping the Creator is missing what Jesus has done for you.

When you feel insignificant in God's big world, when personal struggles overwhelm you, train yourself to consider your redemption in Jesus Christ.

You and I are significant only because we have been restored by the death and resurrection of Christ. We have been redeemed to our position as men and women created in God's image to serve Him in His creation. We no longer have to seek significance in lesser things, but in the absolute majesty and glory of God in Christ Jesus.

We find real significance, when we can say Yahweh Adonai, Sovereign Redeemer, you are our God and the majesty of your name fills the earth!

We can see ourselves as truly valuable and worthwhile only when we see the majestic God Jesus Christ as our Redeemer.

PSALM 8

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ² From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. ³ When I consider 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, the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: ⁷ all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. ⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!