

# “The Wisdom of Worship”

Psalm 8

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Psalm 8

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

From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies,

to silence the foe and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, 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!

Please join with me in prayer. Lord God, we thank you that you are great. We thank you that you reach out to us with your great love. I pray in these moments that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts would be acceptable in your sight, Lord. Bless us with your presence in these moments, we pray in Christ's name, Amen.

We're continuing our series through the issue of wisdom this summer, and let me begin by asking a question. Why worship? Why are you here on Sunday morning? Why are we out in this wonderful world God has given us, giving thanks for God and worshipping God? One of the things that I think is true of us that I think we need to always remember is that we as Christians are heaven-bound. We are people who live our life on earth within the power of the Holy Spirit and the priorities of Jesus Christ, but this is not the end of things for us. Some people, of course, view that as an escape through life: “Since I'm heaven bound, I don't need to bother with anything in the world.” Some have used that as a source of fear and threat toward others. But I think, and this is best, that when we worship God in order to know the whole character of God, not only toward us, but toward other people, and use that as a motivation for both thanksgiving and service, that is indeed what is best.

The ministry of Jesus points to the book of Revelation and that wonderful symbolic language of what it will be like for us to live in heaven for eternity. I don't think we think of that enough. But God is moving us to a place where we will worship before the throne in eternity and so for now, we need to be

people who learn what it means to worship. I think it's a challenge because we're stuck in this world and we're working hard at being successful and accomplishing the things that we would like to do in life now. But that blinds us to the greater work of God, not only around us but as we move toward the heavenly place. One of my favorite series of books is C.S. Lewis's series of children's books, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I would commend those to you if you haven't yet read them to your children. If you don't have children at home, I would commend them to you as some great theology. You don't even have to tell anyone you're reading the children's books. They're just really great. In the last book, called *The Last Battle*, when Aslan the Lion who is the Christ figure, is wrapping all things up, there's an interesting scene when the dwarves are in a place and cannot see the glory around them. I want to read this to you and think about what it means for us to have God's glory in our faces and not seeing it and what it does to our lives.

*Aslan the Lion raised his head and shook his mane. Instantly a glorious feast appeared on the Dwarfs' knees: pies and tongues and pigeons and trifles and ices, and each Dwarf had a goblet of good wine in his right hand. But it wasn't much use. They began eating and drinking greedily enough, but it was clear that they couldn't taste it properly. They thought they were eating and drinking only the sort of-things you might find in a Stable. One said he was trying to eat hay and another said he had got a bit of an old turnip and a third said he'd found a raw cabbage leaf. And they raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said "Ugh! Fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey's been at! Never thought we'd come to this." But very soon every Dwarf began suspecting that every other Dwarf had found something nicer than he had, and they started grabbing and snatching, and went on to quarrelling, till in a few minutes there was a free fight and all the good food was smeared on their faces and clothes or trodden under foot. But when at last they sat down to nurse their black eyes and their bleeding noses, they all said: "Well, at any rate there's no Humbug here. We haven't let anyone take us in. The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs." "You see," said Asian. "They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out. But come, children. I have other work to do.*

I think that's an image of how life can be for us. We get stuck in fighting and grappling for things that are not worthy of what God has called us to, or so consume us that we fail to see beyond them to the life that God has called us to. Let's look at the wisdom in matching that with a sense of worship. The Psalm tells us that God's name is majestic and worthy of praise. Let's begin by remembering that God does not need our praise, that God will function just fine in the universe without our praise. God does not depend for God's self image on our praise. Psalm 113 says that God above is above the nations, and God will be praised whether or not the nations praise God. In Luke 19:40, Jesus says in the triumphal entry when he's being challenged by the Pharisees of all these people singing his praise, he says that even if the disciples are quieted, even the rocks will shout out in praise. God will be praised in creation and in the universe, whether or not we do. But we're called to praise because it is we who need to praise and to worship. God has sent his glory for all of us to see. It's there. We walk by it every day. We ignore it, we pass by it, we miss it because we have our heads down and we're moving through whatever to-do list we have at the moment. We can't fathom all of it, of course, but it's there enough for us to see and to worship.

I remember many years ago I was up in northern Idaho with one of my college friends, it was a long time ago, we were still in college in those days. We went north from Sand Point, Idaho, to camp. We were on Lake Pend Orielle, which is a lovely lake up there. Dave and I went out to the dock at night and just laid down and looked up. I don't think I've ever in one evening seen as many shooting stars or stars period as I did that night. You could see the shimmer of the lake out before us. You could see the trees on the edges of the lake, and there was this great fireworks show going on in the heavens. God's doing that all the time and we miss it because we're pushing ourselves through. In another of C.S. Lewis's books, this is C.S. Lewis morning for us today, a series of essays called *The Weight of Glory*, not a children's book but a very serious exposition on what glory means. Lewis says this:

*It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go*

*on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*

I find that really challenging because when we seek out, when I seek out, a vision of God's glory in my life, it lifts me above just long enough to have a perspective on my life. It empowers me to know that God is leading me toward something greater than the challenges and the discouragements and the pain of the moment. That God is moving us toward a great and glorious end, and in our lives today when we catch a glimpse of that, we're changed. Our expectations are raised. We are pleased to be part of and to join in the work of Christ in this. In one of the most amazing phrases in this Psalm, it tells us that God has ordained praise. God has intended that you and I be people who worship because we are made for worship, because we are made for heaven and heaven is a place of eternal praise. Our praise opens our eyes to God but it also opens our eyes to the priorities of God today. Jesus moved people toward a vision of God, and yet who do we know in history, who reached out more to help the lowly and the dispossessed and those who were in pain and those who were in sickness, more than Jesus. His heavenly vision affected his earthly life.

We've all heard the quote: "To be heavenly minded is to be no earthly good." I think that's a lie. I think it can be misused. I think we can become so heavenly minded that we don't become the earthly good that God has intended for us. When we worship God in God's majesty, and God opens our eyes to all of creation, then we reach out in love. Properly heavenly-mindedness propels us into God's world as ambassadors of Christ. Friends, God's name is to be praised, and we're called to be those who praise. We are wise to worship. It corrects our perspective on the world. It creates an antidote for our worst fears, it reminds us that God has ordained praise to lift us up and to encourage us in our lives. When the Psalmist says that praising God silences our foes, I believe that what that means is that it protects us from the hostile noise of the world. The perspective of the world dominates our lives so much. It shapes us in so many worldly ways. We are barraged moment by moment by moment with information and opinion and priorities and values which may or may not be things that we believe in. It's discouraging to be in this tug of war all the time. So God lifts us in worship, not to disconnect from that, but to see beyond that,

beyond our hopes and fears, beyond every political, economic, and legal matter to know that even now the presence of Christ is with us. Our inner fears are overcome by praise. Praising God gives us a perspective. It gives us a perspective first on God. I think this about worship. If I don't pause and worship, how do I ever know that God loves me? How do I ever reflect on God's priorities if I just shoot through the world doing the things that are demanded of me? How do I ever let God address my hopes and my fears? I need to pause and not just to be quiet, but to worship the majesty of God's name. We are heaven bound. This is what we're made for: to know God. It gives us a perspective on the world as well, that valuing it too highly leads us to despair, and it reminds us also that we're called to be faithful stewards of God's creation. It is not only on the world, but it is for the world as God shoots us out of this place into service in the world around us.

Praising God is a gift. It's a transformative power in our lives that lifts us to an eternal perspective as it strengthens us for the challenge of our lives. It sends us, literally, into the world. Why is this important for us? Ben Patterson has said: "If you want to know what it means to be a human being, you must not look to human beings, but at Jesus Christ." We affirm that Jesus was fully God, but we affirm that Jesus was fully human, and so we embrace the divinity of Christ in raising us from our sin and forgiving us. We embrace the humanity of Christ as a model for what it means to live in our lives. Jesus went off by himself to pray. He went into the temple to praise, and in between those times he was fully invested in the world, reaching out to help other people.

So let me share five things that our worship is, ideally. These are idealities for us to move toward in our worship, and we won't hit every one of them completely right, but as we move toward them, we will be blessed.

The first is that our worship is heartfelt. Jesus invites us to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. In the very sincerity of who we are, the very core of our being, we come to God in worship. We don't hold back. It's one of the reasons we not only praise, but we also confess. We lodge every experience of our lives in the presence of God because God loves us and welcomes us, frees us in praise, frees us in confession, frees us in learning, our worship is heartfelt. We don't come here in order to just check something off on our to-

do list. We don't come here because of an obligation. We come here to bring our hearts to God.

Secondly, our worship is fearless. I don't mean this in terms of our own bravery, but that we come to God freely, despite our flaws and our actions, we don't need to fear coming to God with who we are. Jesus has reached out to us in the midst of our failings, in the midst of our imperfections, in the midst of all that we don't do or don't do well, and said "Come to me, all you who labor and who are overburdened, and I will give you rest." We come with our very selves because God welcomes us, even in our imperfections. One of the great texts in scripture is Isaiah 6, in which Isaiah goes into the temple and has a vision of a holy God there, and he falls down on the ground there and says: "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell with the people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the Lord." He fully expects to die. And God reaches out and forgives him and calls him to live with God and that begins this prophetic ministry. Friends, whatever in our selves we're not proud of, we can bring that to God. Whatever we feel is weak or failing or out of balance, we can bring that to God. We don't need to fear. God opens his arms and accepts us. But our worship is also fearless because despite all of what's going on in the world, God is going to be in control. Psalm 46 says: "God is our help, an ever present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way," and there's this great imagery of a world falling apart. But Jesus reminds us that at the end of all things, God will prevail on his throne, and so we don't need to fear coming to God in worship.

Our worship, thirdly, is also what I would call unsophisticated, which means that we don't come to God because we have theological knowledge and we've put everything together, and we've dressed a certain way. Jesus says: "Unless you become like a child, you won't enter the kingdom of God." So we're invited to push away all of those things we feel we need to do to in order to come to God and to come in childlike praise. The Psalm emphasizes that: "Out of the mouths of children and infants comes praise to silence God's foes." We don't need to feel like we have to learn a certain amount in order to come to worship. We are wise to come to worship and let God reach around us in that.

Fourthly, our worship is expectant. A sense that God is going to meet us and to receive our worship and that God will lead us in these moments to something greater, something transformative, something wonderful in our lives.

Finally, to go back to the very beginning of the Psalm, our worship is name-focused: “How majestic is your name in all the earth.” The Jewish believers would have seen this as God revealing himself as Yahweh, before Moses at the burning bush, and we know that the name is the name of Jesus. Paul wrote in Philippians 2: “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” So, as I began this sermon, we don’t worship a nameless being. We worship the Lord, Jesus Christ, who has come for us, and who has come to welcome us home. At the very, very end of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, at the very end of the chapter of the book that I quoted from, there is a vision of heaven, and I would like to close by sharing this with you, because as we move in worship, we move toward heaven and we move in the promise that God will make all things new. *As Aslan spoke, he no longer looked to them like a lion, but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us, this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they lived happy ever after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world, all their adventures in Narnia, had been only the cover and the title page. Now, at last, they were beginning Chapter 1 of the great story which no one on earth has ever read, which goes on forever and ever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.* That is the wisdom of worship: Moving us toward this vision of God’s victory and peace.

Please pray with me. Lord God, we are so grateful for your love for us. In these moments encourage us, especially those who are discouraged today, with the vision of your peace and your glory and your majesty. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.