

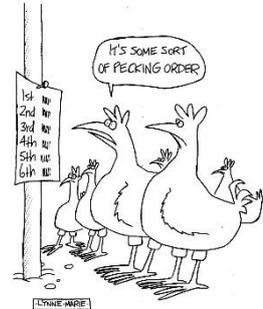
Sermon Series: Imago Dei

#2 Where do we fit in? Psalm 8

[A video clip from *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion*]

Intro

You know the classic **pecking order** in those school yard days as in 1997 film *Romy and Michele's high school reunion*? **Did you struggle** with where you fitted in to the order of things in your **school** years?



Do you sometimes wonder where **you** fit in to the order of things in the world **right now**?

I found a **photo** of my Year 10 school tour of the Northern Territory in the 1970's. I was **hiding** behind everyone else at the back, reminding me how badly the **pecking order** treated me during those **awkward** teenage years. Maybe for you, finding **where you fit in** is a lifetime challenge!

As someone sarcastically put it, "some days you're the **pigeon**, and other days you're the **statue!**" But, **does it have to be like that?**



The Order of Things

It may surprise you, but **Psalm 8 suggests that there is a right order to things.** Look with me at Psalm 8...

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens... 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 [the heavenly beings]¹, and crowned them with glory and honour. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet...

¹ Some translations have "God", the Hebrew *elohim* is a more general word for divine beings in the OT

Ancient philosophers sometimes pondered the **universe**, gazing at stars, recording their thoughts using the **physical framework** of what is **highest**, what is **below** and what is **lowest** to express their ideas.

The same physical framework is present in David's great hymn to God:

- David's God is "**above the heavens**". In contrast to the many gods of history, God is **beyond our sight** and **beyond our own mental engineering**. God exists outside of creation, and yet God's glory is seen in all things around us. God has pre-eminence **over** everything.
- Secondly, note that God has set **humanity "a little lower"** than the heavenly beings, inferring that we are "higher" than other created beings. David affirms, **without** any sense of selfish **pride** or reckless implication what we learned from Genesis 1 and 2 - that humans **distinctively bear the image** and likeness of God in all creation.²
- That **special place** of men and women is again linked to the Genesis creation narratives and views humans as those originally given charge "**over**" the rest of God's creation – the "**works of God's hands**".

A song of Good News

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon's suggested that this psalm can be called "The Song Of The Astronomer" as it seems to have been prompted while contemplating the night skies. The heading attributes this psalm to David, with instructions to the Chief Musician to be sung "according to The Gittith." This may mean "after the tune of the treaders of the winepress" (Leupold) and refer to the joyful nature in which the workers sung. The psalm is certainly a hymn of delight, as are others with this word in the heading (Ps 81, 84).

Unlike the terrible **pecking order** many of us suffer from in human systems, note that **the order of things** in Psalm 8 is **sweet comfort to David** – it **inspires** his hymn of **joyful** praise.¹ Here, we **find our fit!**

1. God is praiseworthy (vss. 1-2,9)

² Although the Bible isn't explicit about the nature of this *imago dei* in us, theologians often explain it from either a representative view, a relational view, or a functional view. The manner in which we bear God's image is also different to the unique way in which Jesus Christ is said to do so (Heb. 1:1-2)

Firstly, see in verses 1 and 9 (bookends, or a literary *inclusio*) that **God** is truly **worthy of the highest place, of praise, of trust and devotion** in life.

In David's time, the peoples of the nations and their many "gods" **sought to wipe out** "little" Israel. But those gods, and all other contenders do **not compare** with God's majesty and glory.³

ACTION

We should **not resile** from boldly acknowledging God as **above all**. We should indeed be **respectful** towards other cultures and other views about the universe, but we join the biblical witnesses in praising God as **worthy above all. This puts everything else in its right place.**

2. God cares for humankind (3-4)

Secondly, Psalm 8 notes **God's care for humanity**.

"Mindfulness" is a key idea in Psalms 3-7, but here it is said of God **towards us!** The gods of surrounding nations were often **capricious, disinterested** in humanity unless coerced or paid off. The gods used humans to serve *their* own desires. But by contrast, the God of the Bible **serves the needs** of those made in God's image.

ACTION

Don't be quick to join the chorus of those who criticize God for lack of care. David recognised that **without God's care** the world would be **overcome by evil** today. Instead, celebrate God as mindful of humanity, having plans for our **wholeness** and completeness.

3. Humanity has a special place (5-8)

Thirdly, **men and women** have an important place in God's plans.⁴

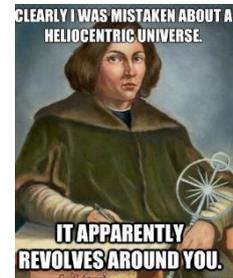
Our friends might think it **ludicrous** today to suggest that (if there is a God) **humans**, so seemingly insignificant in a vast universe, **are of great**

³ God even defeats the enemy and avenger with "little" ones, babes and infants (vs. 2)

⁴ Verses 1-5 link to the first half of the creation narrative in Genesis chapter 1, verses 6-9, to the second half of Genesis chapter 1 and dominion, stewardship God placed "under the feet" of humanity

importance in the Bible’s “eye”. They may think us deluded to say we are bearers of God’s image and were given charge as **stewards of God’s real estate and assets**.

The parents of Copernicus (allegedly) said to him at age twelve: "**Copernicus**, young man, when are you going to come to terms with the fact that the world **does not revolve** around you." 😊



ACTION

We should join David in his **humility** and **wonder** at the **elevated status** of humanity. And we must **reject the notion** that the Bible justifies or encourages **reckless exploitation** or **subjugation of** nature for progress and gain for the few over the many.

NASA satellite images highlighted continuing wilful recklessness towards the planet this week, revealing **rivers of the Amazon devastated** by a **proliferation of illegal gold mining** (including the use of mercury).



The continued illegal **dismantling of democracy** in Myanmar this week by the military reminds us corruptible power still ravages our world.



ACTION

Because Christians have been **perpetrators** of similar crimes down the centuries, we are tempted into **theological cancel culture**. Instead, **let’s re-affirm the bible’s view**:

- i. We should **re-affirm our special place** in God’s plans and purposes [e.g. “dominion” (Genesis 1:26-27, Ps. 8:6-8)] as **stewards** of and **carers** of creation, and as **bearers** of God’s **Good News** to the world. **We should** live in the **likeness of God’s care** for us, and with great praise to God.
- ii. We should turn our attention **to the wonder** of all God’s creation. Nowhere does the Bible say the rest of creation is **devoid of God’s image!** Instead, some 20th Century theologians [e.g. Langdon

Gilkey (1919–) and Gregory Peterson (1966–)] argued that **all of God’s creation** is in some sense **image-bearing** and worthy of sacred recognition (something Western Evangelicals have often denied to our detriment).

- iii. Finally, we **should learn** from our **first nations Christians** about theology from the ground, the sea, and the sky, and the Bible.
 - a. For example, this painting by **Saffina**, hanging in our small hall, commends the **connectedness** in the Bible’s creation story to us.
 - b. Aboriginal Christian **Neville Naden** says, “Land for the majority of my people is everything about them, and they are everything about land...”⁵
 - c. And, as **Garry Worete Deverell** says, “...country is **more than just a dwelling-place** for human beings... the land is... something of a sacred text for [indigenous people].”⁶

We Christians need to do a bit **more star-gazing with David** and with **others**.

Psalm 8 leads us to:

- 1) **praise God** above all else,
- 2) **celebrate** and imitate God’s care with dignity for **all** human beings, &
- 3) **own** our special status as a stewards of, and carers of God’s creation (even if our role is somewhat hindered or distorted due to sin).

What is humankind? Old Testament scholar **Derek Kidner** makes the point...

“Only human beings are able even to ask the question (of Psalm 8, verse 4)... and only one who is **also redeemed** by God can grasp the answer to it.”

Conclusion

How interesting that **Psalm 8 is quoted** in the New Testament Letters to the **Hebrews**, to the **Ephesians**, and to the **Corinthians** in relation to Jesus Christ

⁵ *Grounded in the Body, in Time and Place in Scripture*. Ed. Denise Cooper-Clarke & Jill Firth 2021 p.35

⁶ *Gondwana Theology*. P.11

and his death and resurrection.⁷ The Bible declares Christ to be the **perfect** bearer of God's likeness.⁸

Through Jesus' death for sin, and by faith, we are **being made** more and more into **His own image** through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Where do you and I fit in? The Gospel of Jesus tells us **where we fit in** today –

- in the scheme of God's plans and purposes,
- among God's people,
- and in connection with all of creation.

Steve Webster St Michaels North Carlton 2021

⁷ The authority (Heb. *Masal*) given to humanity at the outset (Gen. 1:26, 28), then again after the flood (Gen. 9:2) and then embodied imperfectly in the kingship of David and his successors is fulfilled in Christ, to be fully revealed when everything is "subject to him" (Heb. 2:5-9). The glory is with Christ now (Eph. 1:19-22), but will be revealed to all when every enemy, including death, is "under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:24-27).

⁸ In a unique manner compared to that which 'adam was given in Genesis 1 (see Hebrews 1:1-2, 2:5-9)