

Psalm 8

Majesty! Worship his Majesty!

Open the service with Papa: Barbara Streisand: Papa, can you hear me? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwCPAo5e_F8 In the movie Y'ntl, Barbara Streisand plays a young woman who disguises herself as a man to be able to study the word of God in Hebrew school. **But what I want you to see in this clip, is the paradox. The main paradox of life: God is far, yet God is as near as your breath.**

Part 1: The Text (9 minutes)

A David Psalm to be played on a guitar like instrument. He is singing, praying, deep in thought. Perhaps he is outdoors. He looks up and what a sight and thought: God made this. He looks down and sees himself: God made me. God is far. Yet God is near. Who Am I? How can it be? It doesn't add up. I know him, yet I don't know the first thing about him! I know myself yet so very little. Those are deep philosophical questions. He is going to struggle with it. We get to see how his mind works. We get to learn how to do it also.

Verse 1: Yahweh... The name of God who creates all and reveals himself as loving, caring, ever present. Yet remains a mystery to us. No other category like him. The name God gave Israel to understand what he is. I am that I am.

Adoneinu, our Lord is what you would call a king you are subject to. It's a royal title for God as Supreme and Master of everything (See Psalm 135:5-12). When our ancestors in the faith wanted to speak of God's infinite power, wisdom, kingship and rule in our lives they used Adonai. Adoneinu is 1st person plural for Adonai. Our Lord.

God is unique. God is above creation. He is not part of it or identical with it. He exists of his own. Nothing adds to his existence and nothing takes away from it. He is existence itself. All existence comes from him. Nothing that exists is here that doesn't come from him. He is light. He is life. He is love.

You have set your glory above the heavens. We don't have words to tell what glory really is other than radiance, brilliance, weight. It's the kind of thing when you see it or perceive it with your mind's eye it makes you say "Wow". This is out of this world. Not like anything we see in our human experience. It's what Isaiah sees in his vision that the whole earth is full of his glory". His response: "Woe is me, I am undone (literally coming apart at the seams, a man of unclean lips"...

How majestic is your name! Oh what majesty? Wonder of wonders! Wonder and admiration and awe all wrapped up into one. What does he see? What overwhelms him? What is he thinking about? What makes him bow down in worship? What on earth causes us to say: Oh my God! His name is majestic! His name carries unimaginable power and dignity. His name represents him as your name tells about who you are. Your whole character, personality, reputation are all tied up in your name. In all the earth. There is nowhere in this universe where the signature of God is hidden. If you care to see it!

Verse 2: From the mouths of babes... God is able to handle his enemies by the simple speech of a baby. Yes God has enemies. They are many of many types. Other human beings. Other beings that are not humans. Nations that oppose his ways. The wicked. The fool who says no God. He opposes the proud, those who bring suffering to his people and to his world. Before ISIS and Hitler were enemies to anyone, they were the enemies of God!

Verse 3: When I look at your heavens... Here's the paradox, the tension in the heart of David. David comes to a point in his thinking where he realizes how awesome the world God created and how majestic God is and how he is connected to that and how at the same time he is so different and small he is in comparison. We human beings have a dual status. Created in the image of God and being so small when we take in all of what our creator made. We bring nothing into existence. He brings everything.

Verse 4: The way David asks the question is important: **What** not **Who** is the human race? What am I? Not permanent, fleeting nature. David wonders: Why does God want to bother with a bit of dust that returns to dust (Uses the word Adam to mean that)? Dust you

are and to dust you will return? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow (Psalm 144:3-4).

Notice that David can ask the question about his existence as a conversation partner with God. To him, God is not just a distant king, a deity above, unreachable. The song at the beginning: Papa, can you hear me... God is involved. He is majestic, but he is close. King Supreme! Loving Dad. God is mindful of us not just remembers us. He sets his mind on David. He pays attention, shows concern, does good and corrects whenever needed.

Verse 5: David talks to God directly: **You made me...** He knows that power comes from God alone. From him comes power in our world. Humanity is a little lower than Elohim, the most common biblical term for God. But here it's not used in this way. It's like saying "you, God, made me a little lower than God while speaking to God". If he wanted to say that he would have said "you God made me a little lower than you." In other words, Elohim is used to name other beings who are not God. It often refers to angels (context is everything) and supernatural beings. Elohim is a general word that can have that meaning.

How are we lower than the Elohim? In Genesis 3:5, and 22 the serpent entices Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He says to Eve: "Elohim, God, knows that as soon as you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad (Elohim in Hebrew)." They ate and became like the Elohim of God, knowing good and bad. We are like the angelic beings in this way. But unlike them in that we are subject to death.

Verse 6-10: Mortal yet gifted by God with grandeur and glory. God is majestic but is near. Man is mortal yet so close to God. People get their significance from the gift God gave to all humanity to be made in his image and likeness. No human is ever born or unborn that doesn't have that image stamped upon him. Glory is the language given to kings and to God. Here it is given to a lowly shepherd. God adorns all people with glory and grandeur. He decorates us with his beauty and dignity and infinite worth.

God gave us the power and the gift to care for his physical creation, his handiwork. It's like an artist who has produced a masterpiece. He gives it to the museum curator to preserve it, to show it, so everyone might appreciate its beauty. He doesn't give it to a greedy thief to sell it to the highest bidder.

He said to Adam and Eve, oversee my handiwork. Take care of it. Be responsible in your dealings with it. All that it contains from rocks and trees, whales and bees, all sing the music of the spheres. It is my masterpiece, my creation. Don't abuse it, look after it. He says in Genesis 1:28: "Fill the earth and master it... rule over all." This is power that is given by God not usurped by man. Man is made king of the jungle. He is responsible for it. "All the earth is mine; you are but strangers resident with me" (Moses speaking for God to the people in Leviticus 25:23). He owns it, we are tenants of it.

For David God is majestic yet near. Man is almost divine but is mortal. He loves what he has made and has entrusted his handiwork to us. He loves to be near us and showers blessings, protection and care on us his beloved.

Part 2: The Culture (9 Minutes)

Transition: How do we as Christians and citizens in our culture connect with the truths of this Psalm? God above and God near? Man just a little lower than angels?

What is God in America? What is man in America?

We are a nation under God so we say. We print In God We Trust on our money. We claim to be a God-believing nation. Other countries view us as a God-believing country. And so, we are! Surveys by the Pew Research and Foundation and the Gallup Poll people say we are a God believing nation overall. Nearly 9 of 10 of us are believers. Some are not sure what to believe. Less than 5% reject God outright, the other 5% are not sure about God. That

percentage is growing a little. But even atheists (Some say 25% or more) pray according to a BBC (British Broadcasting research study).

But is what David believing about God as creator of all and near at the same time, and about man being next to God, like God, yet mortal, what we believe in our culture? What do you think? I am not sure I can say. Who can? Michael Lipka says that counting atheists is complicated. Some atheists believe in God or a universal spirit. And some who count themselves as Protestant, or Catholic or Jewish say they don't believe in God. I can testify to that.

Atheists are mostly men, highly educated, and under 35. They want to talk about why they don't believe and they're looking for the meaning of life just like anybody else. 54% frequently feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe. In fact, **atheists are more likely than U.S. Christians to say they often feel a sense of wonder about the universe (54% vs. 45%)**. They hardly ever share their views while 26% of us who are religious people do, weekly. Where does the atheist go for answers to his questions? Science and common sense or practical experience. He is the captain of his ship, the master of his destiny.

In our culture, we like atheists just a little less than Muslims. Half of us would likely support an atheist candidate for president. That's gone up a fair bit from 10 years ago. But it's still an exception to find an atheist in Congress.

Half of us think we can live moral lives and have strong American values without God. Only 15% of the French believe we need God for good morals. But in many other parts of the world, nearly everyone says that a person must believe in God to be moral, including 99% in Indonesia and Ghana and 98% in Pakistan (all Muslim countries).

But what about us who say we believe? The God of Psalm 8 is Majesty and close by, with us and very mindful of us, involved on our daily affairs of home, work, country. Sociologist Christian Smith introduced me to a term recently that describes many Christians in North America: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism or MTD for short. He introduced his term in his 2005 book called: *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005). I claim it's not just the younger generation. He studied the lives of young people in our churches to see what they believed. Let's break down what the relationship to God for many of them feels like:

- Moralistic – God wants you to behave right (Don't smoke, don't chew and don't go with girls/boys that do).
- Therapeutic – God wants you to be happy and well-adjusted, kind and nice to other people.
- Deism – There is a God, but He made the world and then left it alone. God isn't personally involved in the everyday lives of people. When you are in a bad way call on him. The rest of the time, do your own thing, be nice.

How did we land in MTD? Who moved our cheese? Santa checks our morality: I've got a list, I'm checking twice. I know when you've been naughty or nice, I know when you've been good or bad. So be moral for goodness' sake. If you don't, you don't get shiny toys. So be good! Or the only thing you get is a lump of coal.

We scared kids by giving them a morality that doesn't work. If you don't believe and obey bad things will happen to you like what happened to Jonah. We've taught generations that trouble is for the unspiritual. Or when trouble comes nothing bad could happen to them. After all look at brave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. They believed and nothing bad happened to them. Didn't God protect them? In other words, suffering is bad for you. If you suffer it's your fault! You're not holy enough, you're not spiritual enough, you don't have enough faith. We made kids memorize the Ten Commandments and then told them to work hard to keep them.

You see our children need more than to know how to behave. They need a heart transplant. They need to learn to do life with God. They need training in godliness.

The pagans of David's time made the sun and the moon into gods. But the people of God knew better. Do you know that there isn't a word for nature in Biblical Hebrew, in the Old Testament? Today even Christians are confused about what to believe about God and man. The world says we are our own gods. Educate him and he will no longer need God. He is mortal, therefore live it up for tomorrow you die. Majesty? Creation has its own majesty. You can commune with nature and call it god if you want. God is a crutch. Church is for losers and the weak. I don't need to be in church to be spiritual and have a relationship with God. After all Oprah believes. Celebrities believe in believing. "Everything is possible if you just believe in yourself" or in belief itself. That's the Christmas Express, our culture's express. I am what I do, I am what I have, I am what others say I am. I'll build another barn for my new toys. This gadget. That'll do it.

Part 3: The Solution (9 Minutes)

How do we get back to a Psalm 8 understanding of God and Man? How do we get beyond MTD? Our man-made god and our man-made man and our man-made feel good religion are not cutting it. The solution is to come to love God's majesty and nearness. To appreciate Man's glory and mortality.

On the surface, MTD doesn't sound all that bad, right? Producing happy moral people sounds like a worthy goal. But is this the kind of God David is describing? Does it sound like this MTD man is just less than the Elohim? Is that all Jesus wants? Did he hang on a shameful cross so we could be nice and well-adjusted people? What do you think? **We can regain a Psalm 8 existence and more in Christ.**

*****The Nearness of God in Christ.** John puts Psalm 8 philosophy on steroids. In the beginning was the Word... John 1:1-3, 14... In Christ, the Majestic God of David came near, So near that he became one of us. We saw God, we beheld him. We touched him. We learned him so we could become like him. Hebrews 1:1-4. Psalm 8 was just the introduction. Jesus is the fulfilment. God is Christ-like and in him there is no Un-Christlikeness at all.

It wasn't enough for God to care and protect, be involved and concerned and mindful of us. In the fullness of time, He became flesh and blood. He lived our lives so we can learn to live as he did. He invites us to step into his life, to become mature as he is and reach the stature he reached in life: Loving to all and to the utmost.

*****The Dignity of becoming like God**

Psalm 8 asks: What is man? The Bible answers from the beginning of time to the end of times there has been one design for man. That we should become sons and daughters of God. In fact, you cannot read a page of Scripture that doesn't scream at you: You were made to be like God. In Christ alone, today, that vision is restored and made available to all.

Paul saw it that way. And John saw it that way.

Paul teaches us in Romans 8:28-29 that from eternity past God meant for us to be conformed to his image, to be like him.

Paul also teaches us in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that we are now being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

John teaches us in 1 John 3:2 that one day when Christ returns, he will make us like him.

*****The absolute need for self-knowledge**

Many writers of the past have told us that knowing ourselves is a must. Augustine said: "Know yourself that you may know God. Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God, said Calvin, the reformer. David asks what is man? Who am I? Tell me

God. You are loved, you are the beloved. **We were created to be like him, he is making us now like him, and in the end, we will be like him when we see him face to face.**

Part 4: The Hortatoty (9 Minutes)

How do we then cultivate this life with God? How do we appreciate his majesty and his nearness? How do we deal with our mortality and our becoming like Christ? How do we live beyond an MTD life? How do we become philosophers of life?

Bottom line: Learn Jesus... The safe, full-proof way to deepen your understanding of God, yourself, and your trust in him. Behold the glory of God. Behold the glory of the cross. Follow him. Deny yourself. Carry your cross. Make it your life's most ambitious goal: To know yourself and to know God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn2n3wdAQi4> Aslan... Not safe but good.

I know of no better way to do that than to encounter Jesus in the Gospels. We must learn Jesus. It's our only hope for knowing God and ourselves. It was like that for Paul. And the early Christians, like the famous Augustine. Augustine lived a wild life as a young man. But he also was searching for answers to life's basic questions. He was settling into an MTD life. He studied philosophy but had no satisfying answers. He was a teacher of rhetoric, the art of public speaking, in Milan, Italy. He went to hear the preaching of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. Ambrose's eloquent style of speaking attracted him. Ambrose helped him to understand the Bible and grow in his Christian faith.

In 386 AD, Augustine and a friend were spending time in Milan. While outdoors, Augustine heard the voice of a child singing a song, with these words: "Pick it up and read it. Pick it up and read it." At first he thought it was a children's song he never heard. But the Spirit of God was at work in his life and he came to see the words of the song as an invitation from God to open and read the Scriptures. He located a Bible, picked it up, opened it and read the first passage he saw. It was from the Letter of Paul to the Romans. **Augustine read: *Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.* --Romans 13: 13-14.** His heart was flooded with light. He turned totally from his life of sin. He was Baptized by Ambrose during Easter on April 24, 387. His friend Alypius and his son Adeodatus were Baptized at the same time. Later, reflecting on this experience, Augustine wrote his famous prayer: ***You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*** He went on to become a powerful influence on the spirituality and theology of the Christian Church. Much of church's theology comes from him.

Here's your challenge this week: Find an hour and a half of free time. A drop of rain a day does is not like taking a shower. Pick up your Bible and find a private place in your house or in the public library. Read through the Book of Mark or one of the other gospels. Or a few psalms, including Psalm 8. Simply read and listen. Read, listen, pray, rest. Repeat! When God prompts, write down what you hear. When God prompts, share with someone what you learned. When God prompts, confess your sins, ask for forgiveness. When prompted say thank you. Learn the nearness of God in Christ.

Don't forget the book of nature too...

