

The Head of Humanity -- Psalm 8

by A.B. Simpson

This sermon explores the glory and majesty of God, and the importance and honor bestowed upon humanity, with a focus on the hope of future glory and dominion through Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 8:3-5, John 1:14, Romans 8:17, Hebrews 2:6-10

Topics: "The Majesty of God", "Humanity's Dignity"

Description

A.B. Simpson reflects on Psalm 8, marveling at the majesty of the heavens and the insignificance of man in comparison to the vast universe. He emphasizes that despite our frailty and sinfulness, humanity holds a unique and intimate relationship with God, as we are made in His image and crowned with glory and honor. Simpson highlights that Jesus, as the Head of humanity, has already been crowned and serves as our hope and guarantee of future glory. He encourages believers to look to Jesus, who connects us to our divine destiny and empowers us to rise above our limitations. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a recognition of our worth in God's eyes and the glorious future that awaits us through Christ.

Transcript

What a wonderful page is the blue firmament of heaven! Always beautiful, it is most beautiful of all in the glorious East as David gazed upon it often on the plains of Bethlehem, and Persian sages studied it with eager search for truth and God. Oldest pages, grandest of records, graven with the finger of God, punctuated with burning stars of light! All else beneath those old skies has changed, but the skies are still the same. The same constellations are hanging in the blue vault which the Magi studied and which David wrote about in this beautiful Psalm.

But how the page has grown since David's day, in another sense, through the deeper insight which human science has given to the vision and the mind of man. Under the telescopic lens, how much more those skies reveal than David saw, and with what deeper meaning and profounder feeling the intelligent astronomer, or even the well-informed and developed student of natural science, can read these ancient words: "When I consider Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You are mindful of him? and the son of man, that You visit him?"

I. THE MAJESTY OF NATURE

We have here a view of the majesty of nature. Majestic and glorious as the heavens are to the natural eye, they are incomparably grander when seen with the eye of science and under the magnifying lenses of the

telescope of the astronomer. Man has been able in the progress of the human mind to weigh these mighty orbs, to span that vast immensity, to tell how far those worlds are hung from our little planet, and how long their light has been traveling across the mighty spaces of immensity.

The facts of astronomy are so stupendous that the mind reels under the weight, and the brain almost sinks in the effort to realize their magnitudes and distances. So we first think of their vastness.

We know something of the dimensions of our globe. It is a pretty large sphere, especially when we begin to travel across the continents. But our globe is but a pigmy among the planets of our system.

Yonder crystal star that shines in the evening -- our noble planet Jupiter -- is hundreds of times bigger than this globe; and yonder sun that whirls us around his center once a year is 350,000 times the size of the earth. It would take 350,000 earths to make one sun. But the sun is by no means the vastest of the worlds of space. While he is the king of light to the planets of our system, yet there are other suns in yonder firmament that look to us like little stars, far vaster than he.

Beautiful Sirius, the brightest of the fixed stars -- that shines like Venus all night long in our heavens -- is 63 times as big as the sun. Yonder Pole Star, that you have to search for in the heavens because of its comparative insignificance, is 86 times the size of the sun. Arcturus, of which Job sang so long ago, would make 500 of our suns; and Alcyone, which twinkles in the Pleiades -- the beautiful seven stars, so-called, which you can see any evening directly above your head -- could be divided into 12,000 pieces, and each piece would be as large as the sun.

The comet of 1680 covered a space four times the distance between us and the moon, and its tail was long enough to reach from here to the sun, and then nearly as far beyond, or about 130,000,000 miles.

Shall we look next at the distance of these vast orbs? Our nearest neighbor is yonder silvery moon that seems to us so much greater than the stars because so near. She is 240,000 miles away, or about thirty times the diameter of our globe. The sun is about 400 times farther distant than this, or 95,000,000 miles. This seems an enormous distance, and yet light which travels about 240,000 miles in a second, could reach us from the moon in a little more than a second. From the sun it takes about ten minutes for the light to come; that is to say, after the sun rises in the morning, it takes about ten minutes for its light to reach us, swiftly as it flies across the intervening spaces.

But yonder Pole Star is 3,000,000 times as far as the moon, and the light which takes only ten minutes to reach us from the sun would be sixty years in reaching us from Polaris. That is, if it had been destroyed sixty years ago, it would only now disappear from the sky. But what is that compared with distant Andromeda, one of the stars of yonder nebula, so far away that it would take 7,000,000 years for its light to reach our globe!

Look up some night in the southern heavens, and you will see a faint light upon the sky. When looked at with a powerful telescope, it is a great bank of suns, each standing out distinct. How wide, do you suppose, is that space of stars? How far from the one extremity to the other of that little circle of nebulous light? It would take a ray of light, traveling 200,000 miles a second, 30,000 years to sail across that little speck.

Do you begin to realize the immensity of the universe? In that one little cloud of light there are suns upon suns, systems upon systems, worlds upon worlds.

But, again, think of their numbers. We can count a few thousand stars upon the sky at night. How many do you suppose astronomers have found in our firmament? Eighteen million, and these are all suns, each of them with its train of worlds around it like ours.

There are about 300 worlds in the solar systems. Suppose there should be as many in each of these 18,000,000 systems, how many worlds, do you suppose, belong to even our firmament? The mind is lost in trying to count. But they say there are millions of other firmaments besides ours, and each has its new stars which we have never seen. No wonder that we labor in vain to grasp the realization, and cry, "Lord what is man?"

Shall we think of their movements and velocities, the satellites revolving around their planets, the planets around their suns, and each sun with its planet revolving around some great center, and each of the suns revolving around some still greater? And so on, wheel beyond wheel, until we reach the satellite systems, the solar systems, the cluster systems, and the great universe systems, where all the stars of yonder heaven seem whirling around mighty Alcyone in the distant Pleiades, beyond which there may be still vaster wheels circling away through the realms of immensity.

This earth itself is spinning around yonder sun at the rate of 70,000 miles an hour, or twenty miles a second, and yet there is not even the vibration of the mighty express train as it sweeps through space. But the mighty comet of 1680 flew around the sun at the rate of 200 miles a second; and yet with this immense velocity, so vast was its orbit that it would take thirty centuries to complete its year. Surely, this is too high for us to comprehend, too vast for us to measure, and yet we can realize it sufficiently to sink into our littleness and to rise from our nothingness into the conception of our Father's majesty and unsearchable glory.

But not only are these heavenly bodies vast and majestic, but they are beautiful beyond expression. Looked at through our modern instruments, some of yonder suns are brilliant green; some, like the Pole Star, a gorgeous yellow; some, a heavenly blue; some, like the Southern Cross, the color of drops of blood, while other stars are variegated, combining all the colors of the rainbow and looking like great bouquets of light in the heavens. Oh, what will they seem when we shall be endued in the new creation with all the physical powers which science is now anticipating, and faith is foretasting, and we shall know as we are known!

Such are some of the facts of this material universe. Surely "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

II. THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF MAN

"What is man, that You are mindful of him? and the son of man, that You visit him?" Surely at first sight man seems to be a strange contradiction as heir of all this mighty universe. His body, how weak and frail, the prey of disease, the victim of even the animal creation, and at last the food of corruption and the worm; his mind so weak and enfeebled even to understand this mighty world ; his spirit so oppressed by sin and sorrow, and led captive by evil influences and unhallowed beings! How touching Job's description of the littleness of man who dwells in a house of clay, whose habitation is in the dust, who is crushed before the moth, whose days are as a handbreadth, and his life like the withering grass of the field!

And yet in the great purpose of God man has an importance that we can scarcely comprehend. Sometimes a very insignificant being has a singular value. Sometimes a little child is worth more than a whole kingdom. Sometimes it is the question of relationship. If that child is the child of a king, an empire's destiny is wrapped up in his life. Little Moses in the Nile was more important than the pyramids of Egypt. Humble David in his sheepfold was more important than all the sons of Saul. So man, little as he may be, sustains a relation to the Creator of this universe which is unspeakably intimate and glorious. Into our nature has come the very Son of God Himself. The eternal Creator has called Himself our brother. Our human form is worn by Him who sits upon the throne. Our strange race, fallen though it is, has been chosen as the one eternal link between the Creator and the creation; and to latest ages, as angel after angel shall come, and inhabitant after inhabitant shall find his way to the great metropolis of the universe, he shall still find seated upon the throne, supreme above all those glorious worlds that we have just been viewing, a Man.

This it is that makes our race so important, that it is related to God Himself, and has been chosen to be the eternal embodiment of the Deity. This is the mystery of godliness: "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, . . . received up into glory."

But, again importance is sometimes determined by a question of principle. A single human life has become important because it decided a principle. Six or seven Englishmen imprisoned in Abyssinia were important enough to bring on a war between Great Britain and that land. Nay, a single American subject, unjustly treated by a foreign nation, would involve this whole nation in war, if necessary, for his vindication. The little field of Waterloo was of no importance until a certain day when it became the scene where the destinies of Europe were to be decided and the greatest despot of the nineteenth century was to be broken forever.

And so man is linked with the greatest principle in the universe, the achievement of redemption, the settlement of the question of sin without inflicting punishment, the salvation of a lost race in harmony with the justice of God.

The question of sin, so far as justice was concerned, had been settled before when Satan and his legions had been hurled from heaven because of their disobedience and rebellion.

But now another question has come up. How can sin be met in any other way -- not by judgment, but by mercy -- and yet the holiness and justice of God be vindicated? Nothing less than the infinite wisdom and love of God met the issue. His own Son undertook the amazing mission, and, clothed in human form, bore the penalty of a guilty race, and now is working out for them the wondrous transformation by which the effects of that atonement become applied, and they are brought back not only from all the effects of sin, but to a place infinitely higher than the race ever could have enjoyed before; to be the sons of God, the partakers of the divine nature, the heirs of all the glory of which we have just now been speaking.

This gives to man an importance of which he in himself is altogether unworthy. This little planet has been chosen as the theater for working out the greatest problem of the ages, and it is yet to become the scene of the triumphant march of the King of kings and the Conqueror of Satan, over which all the stars shall wave their torches, and all the spheres shall sing in concert with cherubim and seraphim: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

III. THE HONOR BESTOWED UPON MAN

"You are mindful of him . . . You visit him. For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor. You made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet."

This is high honor. God is mindful of man notwithstanding his insignificance. God has devoted His highest, wisest thoughts to the welfare of man. We are the supreme objects of the attention of Jehovah. How precious are His thoughts! This glorious Bible is the record of some of them, but they are more than can be numbered, and the ages to come shall "show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

But further and higher; He has not only been mindful of us, He has visited us. He has made this world His residence. He has tabernacled among us, and He is coming back again to dwell upon it through the coming age, and for a thousand years this little planet will be the center of the universe and the metropolis of all other worlds. Not distant Alcyone, but little Earth, will be the proud and happy capital of the realms of air, and wondering angels shall hover round it, and often say, perhaps, as they come from yonder blazing worlds, "What is man, that You visit him?"

Not only so, "You crown him with glory and honor." Made a little lower than the angels, he is raised above them, for it is clearly taught here that he is to receive the supreme place in creation; for even this Psalm declares that this is to be taken rigidly and literally, and that "in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him" (see Heb. 2: 8). He is yet to rise to the supremacy of the universe, higher than those 18,000,000 suns, more glorious than all the satellites and stars, more mighty than all the forces of nature, and more honored than the highest archangel that bends before the throne.

IV. MAN'S FAILURE TO REALIZE THIS

This does not come out of the Psalm, but it does in the New Testament commentary of it. Speaking of it in the second chapter of Hebrews, the inspired writer says: "What is man, that You are mindful of him? or the son of man, that You visit him? . . . You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him." Oh, how true this is! We do not see this proud empire of man. We see human conquerors trying to gain this crown of universal dominion, but becoming themselves the slaves of sin and passion, enslaving others under them, and sinking at last beneath the dominion of the grave, while their empires fade away like the snowdrifts or the autumn leaves.

Man's place, as a fact, is still that of a poor, sinning, sinking, sorrowing creature. With every pulse beat, another and another is passing to the grave, and up to heaven evermore is rising from this sad world one ceaseless groan of agony amid the spheres of space in a little black cloud of unbroken gloom. Even we who have begun to receive our kingdom are yet struggling with forces that oft seem too strong for us. Sin, Satan, sorrow, and sickness press us, and all things are not yet put under our feet. A few have sprung into victory, but it is only moral and spiritual. Material things still hold us down, and we are shut in from our great inheritance by the limitations of mortality, and can only claim our crown in foretaste, in hope and aspiration. But, thanks be to God, the problem is solved, the paradox is explained. "We see not yet all things put under him, but we see Jesus."

V. THE HEAD OF HUMANITY CROWNED

We see Jesus, the Head of humanity, crowned already as the pledge that we shall share His crown and inherit all His glory. The race is not yet victorious, but the Head of the race is; and where He is, we shall be; as He is, so shall we be like Him! Glorious hope! We have not the victory yet in all its fullness, but we have the Victor, and "he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one."

He is not there for Himself, but for us, "Head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all." Glorious vision! Glorious forerunner! Glorious guarantee! It is enough! Man is crowned! Man is crowned in the Son of man, and all His spiritual seed are following hard after Him, and soon shall be by His side. Oh, as we see our failings and shortcomings, our limitations and disappointments, let us look up! One has reached yonder heights, and we are following Him. Invisible cords bind us to His heart. We can never be separated from Him. Not as a solitary and selfish Conqueror does He sit yonder, but as our Brother and Helper, and from His heart there come to our hearts the cords of love and power that are drawing us to Him to share His dominion and to partake of His glory.

This was the meaning of the cherubim that God placed at the gate of Eden in the hour of man's shameful fall. The faces of the lion, the ox, the eagle, and the man were typical of the glory of the Son of man, to which we, His redeemed posterity, are yet to rise. When the picture of man's primeval innocence had been blighted and broken, God hung up the picture of man's redeemed and far surpassing glory, that man might see from the beginning his future destiny, and that it might lift him to high and glorious hopes.

Not the cherubim now at the gates of Eden, but the loving Christ at the gospel gates, standing before us as the Pattern of our perfect humanity, the Inspiration of our hopes, and the glorious Head of our redeemed race. Let us claim the realization for ourselves. Let us see Jesus. Let us take Jesus. Let us rest short of nothing that He has given us in Himself, and amid all the discouragements, depressions, and defeats of life, let us look up, let us press on, let us sing:

"High is the rank we now possess,

But higher we shall rise;

Though what we shall hereafter be

Is hid from mortal eyes.

"Our souls, we know, when He appears

Shall bear His image bright;

For all His glory full disclosed

Shall open to our sight.

"A hope so great and so divine

May trials well endure,

And purge the soul from sense and sin

As Christ Himself is pure."

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