

Prayers

To God

Praise God for His mercy towards you in every part of your life. Give Him your attention throughout your day and revel in His love.

For myself

Give the Lord your thanks and praise for sleep and for rest. Remember that the Lord God gave His people the 'Sabbath' as a day of rest and do your best to honour Him through resting, one day in seven, as He has commanded.

For others

Weekly theme: the United Nations

We thank You, Lord God, that there is an organisation responsible for bringing together the nations of the world. It has always been Your vision to draw people together in love and compassion, and we so rarely manage to give Your vision any reality. The United Nations is indeed a faulty and inadequate instrument, but we ask You to use it for the good of all people. Break through the divisions between nations so that all might agree, for the moral good of all people. **AMEN**

Meditation

When I feel like letting go, Lord Jesus, hold me close;
and when I want to run away, then stay with me, dear Lord.

When I know that I am lost, Lord Jesus, rescue me;
and when I lose direction, then be my compass, dear Lord.

When I see there's trouble ahead, Lord Jesus, clear my mind;
and when I feel the threat of fear, then soothe my soul, dear Lord.

When I hear the call to action, Lord Jesus, make me ready;
and when I stumble on the way, then lift my spirit, dear Lord.

When I sense the time is right, Lord Jesus, lead me onwards;
and when I open my lips to speak, then fill my mouth dear Lord.

When I'm sure I'm on the right track, Lord Jesus, keep me whole;
and when I grasp the call of God, then fill my life, dear Lord.

Bible Passage

For a couple of days we will study some psalms. This will give me time to get home after my holiday and start writing again. In a few days we will re-commence our studies in Luke's Gospel.

Psalm 8

For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.

- 1 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 honour.
- 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

Review

Praise is surely the foremost characteristic of God's people. In the Old Testament, praise is the mark of the righteous; God's chosen people who recognise Him as their Creator and Lord (see 33:1 and 119:7). Praise is to the Old Testament what Faith is to the New, and we can learn from our forebears in faith about the importance of praise, because praise reflects our most basic response to God. No wonder the whole book of Psalms is called 'Praises' ('Tehillim' in Hebrew), even though most of the psalms express forms of human trouble and distress. Those who praise the Lord with psalms find in Him the answers to their problems because He both Creator and Lord of all, and of all the psalms, Psalm 8 expresses this praise.

In Psalm 8 God is worshipped for His glory in creation, and whilst much of it reminds us of other scriptures about creation (Genesis 1-3) or praise (psalm 111 and others), it says one unique thing about praise. This is found in verse 2, where the Lord keeps his enemies at bay

through the praises of little children! At first sight, this comment is unparalleled in the Old Testament, but remember that when God needed to do a new work amongst His people, he often started with children, such as Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, and of course, Jesus (as prophesied by Isaiah - 7:14)! In the New Testament, Jesus himself speaks highly of little children, and declares that the secrets of His work have been revealed to them (Matt 11:25, Matt 18:3). He asks everyone to become like 'little children' so they may enter the Kingdom of God, and He rebukes those who prevent children from coming to Him (Matt 19:13), and when Jesus came into Jerusalem, the children called out 'Hosanna to the Son of David'!

A close look at verses 1 and 2 in different Bible translations shows that the text is difficult to translate, and scholars have agonised over them. The word translated 'praise' in verse 2 above may also mean 'strength'; the Hebrew is uncertain. Also, it is not clear how the end of verse 1 connects with the beginning of verse 2; but these confusing details do not stop the forceful point that children have an important role in praising the Lord and also in silencing 'the foe and the avenger' (8:2). But who are the foe and the avenger? They might be people or spiritual forces, but they must be kept at bay because they are in opposition to God and His Creation. Generally, they represent turning the world back to the primeval chaos from which it was created (Genesis 1:2). In psalm 8 no more is said of 'foes', they have been silenced by the praises of little children! We should perhaps give greater value to the praises of children in the life of our churches today. Some dislike 'all-age-worship', for example, because they find it trivial. It is certainly not trivial if the worship of children is one of God's chief ways of silencing Satan!

Psalm 8 has one other astonishing claim. This comes in verse 5, where people are described as being made 'just lower than heavenly beings'. When we read this, we immediately think the heavenly beings must be angels, but the word here in Hebrew is 'elohim', which, in this context, is a general name for 'gods' with a small 'g'. Being made a 'little lower' than gods means that we are made by Him and like Him, indeed, as Genesis says, we are made in His 'likeness' (1:27), and moreover, He give us His Spirit (Gen 2:7). Nevertheless, Psalm 8 reminds us that we are not gods ourselves, however highly we think of ourselves. We are less than Him, and we do not possess His divinity or immortality. Putting together these passages and others about Creation and the nature of humanity from the Old testament (e.g. Ecclesiastes 2:1f., Psalm 139) is a fascinating exercise, and aids our reflection on 'who we are'. We have a very close connection with God, even though he is clearly so much more than us, vast, majestic, knowing, saving, and glorious!

Finally, the psalm echoes Genesis again by affirming that we have an authority granted to us by God over all His created order (Gen 1:28, 2:15ff). Our stewardship of the whole earth is best seen in the light of the praise of the one who made it all. Clearly, today, most of those whose actions determine the future of the human race and our planet would not have much truck with praising God, and if they did, then they would need selective vision. An enormous amount of damage is being done to our planet by the actions of individuals and large corporations. Some of them flatly deny the plain evidence that what they do to the planet compromises its future (I leave you to consider who these may be); whatever the Lord chooses to do to deal with us and the future of our world. What can we do? We can continue to praise the Lord our God, who is our duty and delight; and we can do everything in our power to practice and advocate the proper stewardship of the world and its resources. Godly action is the sure evidence of the praises of God!

Discipleship

Application

The value of praise

Praise is liberating, and I have found that expressing my feelings to the Lord on a regular basis throughout the day has helped change many things for the better in my life. Praise is also something that it is easy to avoid and can slip away from you in life almost without thinking. If you do not do it, then nothing 'happens'. What I have discovered is that some people find praise easier if they read out loud a psalm such as Psalm 8 (and there are many others that can be used). This enable a person to begin the process of leaping out in faith, and once begun, praise then becomes easier to 'do'.

Ideas for what to do

- How can you develop praise as a natural part of your life? As 'praising God' means addressing God with all our hopes, desires and feelings, seek to find new ways of including Him in everything that happens, through a brief prayer, for example, talking to Him as someone present with us.
- Pray for the life of your church and the praise of God that it offers. Pray that God will enable all His people to praise Him through what is done.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. The word 'glory' is used twice in this psalm. What does it mean in each place?
2. When you look at the heavens, the moon and the stars, do you think of God? What do you think of, and why?
3. How do you express the authority God has given you over animals, birds and fish? Do you care, and ought you to care?

Final Prayer

Help us, Lord Jesus, to look back and be happy that we have learned from the past, look forward and anticipate the future you have in store for us with joy, and be content that we do indeed reflect the Faith that has been handed down to us. Bring us to that place of peace, Lord Jesus; AMEN
