

# What is Man That You Are Mindful of Him?

*Psalm 8*

November 11, 2018

## **Introduction:**

There is perhaps no more profound and important question than, “What is man?” It’s a question we’ve been asking ourselves throughout history and every generation in every culture has formulated an answer to it. Why am I here? What is mankind’s place in the universe? Does our existence have meaning and purpose? While there is widespread agreement that this is a question worth asking, there is widespread disagreement as to what exactly the answer is.

The most common answer to this question in secular Western societies is found in a broad philosophical position known as naturalism. Naturalism is the view that the natural world, the material universe of atoms and molecules, is all there is. Carl Sagan once summarized naturalism succinctly in his popular PBS show entitled *Cosmos* where he famously stated that, “The universe is all that is, or was, or ever will be.” It means everything exists as a result of physical properties of cause and effect and therefore there’s no supernatural beings or spiritual forces that play a role in the creation or operation of the universe. In naturalism, the laws of physics are sufficient to explain material origins and processes.

As a result, naturalism can only offer a rather bleak and unsettling answer to the question of, “What is man?” Since we’re only the result of blind chance, then there is no purpose behind our existence. The universe didn’t plan for us to be here, it doesn’t care that we’re here now, and it won’t cry any tears when we’re gone. It means we’re nothing more than cosmic accidents, intelligent animals lucky enough to evolve a sense a self-awareness, whose destiny is to eventually perish with the rest of life on earth once the sun burns itself out and the universe exhausts all its energy. If naturalism is true, then you have no purpose, no value, and no worth other than what you can deceive yourself into believing you possess while you live out your short, miserable years on this tiny speck of dirt spinning around the blackness of space until you return to nothingness after you die.

Needless to say, naturalists don’t often get employed to write Hallmark cards! In contrast to this bleak and hopeless perspective on mankind, Christianity paints a considerably more optimistic picture of why we’re here. The Bible tells us that far from being cosmic accidents in a cold, uncaring universe, we have a God who created us, loves us, and has bestowed upon mankind positions of great honor and responsibility. You and I have value and worth because our Creator has endowed us with a dignity that far exceeds the materialistic sum of our parts.

So let’s get into what Psalm 8 has to teach us about mankind by opening your Bibles to our passage this morning. You should be able to locate Psalm 8 on pg. 450 of the pew Bibles should you be utilizing one of those today. Last week we covered the first three verses of this psalm and today we’ll go over the second half of it, focusing specifically on v. 4-8. But nevertheless, let’s read the entire Psalm together and then get into the details once we’re done. So please follow along as I read Psalm 8 from the ESV.

**“O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
you have established strength because of your foes,  
to still the enemy and the avenger.**

**When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?**

**Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under his feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the heavens, 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!”**

Our main focus today will be answering the question David asked in v. 4. Reflecting on the moon and stars and the heavenly array, David wondered, **“What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”** In light of this amazing universe, who am I that God should bother with me? I’m but a tiny creature living on a speck of rock spinning around a medium-sized star in a universe of trillions of billions of stars spread across billions upon billions of galaxies. Why take any notice of me? Why bother to be concerned with mankind when God has an entire vast universe to run?

We’re given answers to those questions in v. 5-8 that I’d like us to explore together. So the first reason why mankind is important to God is that...

## **1. God has made us a little lower than the angels**

David says in the first half of v. 4, **“Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings...”** The heavenly beings David is referring to here are angels, such as appear throughout Scripture. They’re spiritual beings that serve in the presence of God and sometime interact with humans in accordance with God’s instruction. They are holy beings, free of sin, and so glorious in appearance that people who’ve seen them are either struck with terror when encountering one or are tempted to worship them, as was the case with the apostle John when he encountered an angel in the book of Revelation. So to say we’re **“a little lower”** than angels is a highly exalted statement to make about mankind.

So the thing we need to recognize here is that while we're similar to animals in some respect, our differences far outweigh our similarities. Let's talk about similarities with animals first. To begin with, we share with them a physical existence. We are embodied creatures: like the animals, we're flesh and blood and have the same needs they have: for food and drink, rest and shelter. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the organizational aspects of our bodies are very similar: we have skeletons and digestive systems and DNA, just to name a few. Like the animals, we are material creatures with bodies that depend on our environment to survive. On the basis of a purely physical level, our differences with other animals is only one of degree.

But yet we are vastly different than them and this is what I believe makes us far more similar to the angels. There are four aspects of humanity that I would point to that demonstrate our radical distinction from animals and our similarity to angels.

First, we are *relational* in that we can have a relationship with God. Obviously, we recognize that animals are also relational: primates clearly have social hierarchies, mates, and social interaction, but they do not engage in any kind of worship or recognition of God. Only humans relate to God through religion: there is no such thing as a dolphin temple or religious ceremonies performed by chimpanzees. Only humans engage in a relationship with God through religious beliefs and practices. So like the angels, we are in relationship with God.

Second, our *intellectual* abilities place us close to angels than to animals. Again, while animals have varying forms of intellect and the ability to communicate, they're nowhere close to what we can do. Like angels, we're able to use reason, to speak using words, to grasp abstract thought, and reflect upon ourselves in relation to the past, present, and future. These are not things any other animal can do. There are no universities created by elephants or math textbooks written by owls. Our intellect far surpasses that of even the highest animal and thus we are more like the angels than like any other creature here on earth.

Third, our *cultural* development testifies to our uniqueness. We create works of art: painting and sculptures and grand cathedrals of great beauty and splendor. We write literature and pen poems and compose music. We're able to take the material of earth and fashion from them things as simple as bricks and as complex as computers and space shuttles. No other creature on earth develops cultural artifacts. No matter how many monkeys you sit in front of a typewriter or a piano, they'll never come remotely close to creating a sonnet like Shakespeare or a symphony like Mozart.

Finally, we're more like the angels because we are *spiritual*. We've been given a soul that will continue on after death. We are both body and spirit, created in God's image to reflect him in our lives. Angels have no physical bodies, but have spirits. Animals have bodies but no spirit, no soul. We have both a body and a spirit and so we fall between animals and angels. So we're like the angels in that both we and they are spiritual creatures.

So given who we are relationally, intellectually, culturally, and spiritual, we're far closer to angel than animals on the hierarchy of creating things. We may be "**a little lower**" than angels, but we're vastly higher than the animals, even though we share many physical characteristics with them.

This teaching is important for us today because there are groups that attempt to make moral equivalencies between us and animals. They insist human beings are equal to animals and therefore if we have rights, so must animals. As a result, you have groups like PETA - People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals - demanding equal rights for animals. They'll insist we not kill animals for food or use them for fur or test medicine on them because to them there's no distinction to be made between a mouse and a man. But they err because they do not recognize what Scripture teaches about who we are as human beings: we're similar to animals, but we are far greater than them because we've been created in God's image and are in fact only slightly lower than angelic beings. Instead of moral equivalency with the animals, God's given us dominion over them, a point to which we'll get to soon.

So the first answer of who we are as human being is to place us on the continuum of life just under the angels. We are not cosmic accidents or slightly advanced animals: we're creatures made in the image of God who are made a little lower than glorious angelic beings. But moving on now, there's more that David has to say about God's view of humanity in the second half of v. 5. So our next point is that...

## 2. **God has crowned us with glory and honor**

Besides being made "**a little lower**" than the angels, David goes on to say in v. 5 that God has "**...crowned [man] with glory and honor.**" The first thing I would call your attention to is the word "**crowned.**" That's a royal word. Kings wear crowns. This means we are royalty, not of course on the basis of our own merits but because we are his children, his creation. Prince Harry and Prince William are royalty not because of any merits of their own: it was because Prince Charles and Princess Diana were their parents. Their royalty was bestowed upon them by virtue of who their parents were. So also for us, we have a royal dignity to us as human beings because we're created by the King of the Universe. As those created in God's image, we're to reflect him in how we carry ourselves and relate to this creation. God has crowned us with glory and honor by making us royal image-bearers of the King of Kings.

But there's more to the "**glory and honor**" God has bestowed upon us than simply crowning us as image-bearers. I think ultimately the glory and honor we possess comes as a result of God caring for us. Look back at v. 4 for a moment. David asks, "**What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?**" Don't miss out on what's being said here. David is asking what is man in light of a couple of truths about him. What are those truths? That God is mindful of us and that he cares for us. God is interested in us. He's concerned about our lives. He's not indifferent toward us. He loves mankind. He lavishes upon us his care and attention even though we are but lowly creatures.

You see, we don't possess any worth intrinsically. It has been said that our bodies are worth less than \$10 in raw materials: bone, skins, blood, etc. But we become valuable because God cares for us. It's his loving attention that makes our lives ones of glory and honor. It's similar to what takes place on eBay, in terms of how the value of any item is determined. Let me use sports cards as an example.

Growing up in Milwaukee, I was a big fan of the Milwaukee Brewers, especially during the 1980s. One of the stars of the team was an outfielder named Gorman Thomas. He was the Brewers power hitter, the guy who led the team in home runs every year. I looked up his rookie card on eBay and do you know how much it goes for? About \$2 at most, if it even sells at all. Why is it so cheap? Because no one wants it. No one is interested in Gorman Thomas anymore. He's quit playing baseball a few decades ago and so he's not on anyone's radar any longer. No one cares about him other than a few diehard Brewer fans that might be interested enough to buy his baseball card.

But then I looked up the price for a Michael Jordan rookie card, produced by Fleer in 1987. You might have heard of him – basketball star of the Chicago Bulls, considered by many to be the greatest basketball player ever. His rookie card, depending on its condition, can sell for anywhere from \$25,000 to \$100,000. Pretty amazing, right? So why is one worth so much more than the other? Materially, they're exactly the same: just a photo of an athlete printed on a thin piece of cardboard. Here's why: the value is based on how much someone wants it. The card is only as valuable as the price someone is willing to pay for it. If no one cares, the card will sell for a couple of bucks at most. But if it's highly sought after, it can be worth thousands of dollars.

So let me ask you, what's your price tag? How much did God pay for you? Your price tag was the cross and God paid with the precious blood of his Son to make you his own. God cared for you so much he was willing to pay the highest price imaginable to bring you into your heavenly home. You're valuable because God wants you. All the Michael Jordan rookie cards in the world don't hold a candle to what God paid for you. So then that's where mankind's glory and honor comes from: not because of anything in us but because God cares for us. We're of infinite value because God was willing to pay an infinite price to redeem us from his wrath. God did not pay that price for chickens or cows or camels: we've been given glory and honor because of all God's creatures, it is to mankind alone that God came as Savior and Redeemer, paying to redeem us by the blood of Christ.

So then, as human beings we're far greater than anything in all creation because God uniquely has loved us and has given us honor and glory by sending his Son to become one of us in order to redeem us. But now we need to circle back on the question of our relationship to the rest of creation. Since we've been given glory and honor by God due to our price tag of the cross and our exalted position as being made a little lower than the angels, what exactly is our role and responsibility to the rest of creation? Is God indifferent to how we relate to the material world he has made? So moving on now to our third and final point, the last reason given in this psalm to why mankind is of great value and worth is because...

### 3. God has given us dominion over creation

Please look back in your Bibles once again at v. 6-8. **“You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.”**

Although God is the absolute sovereign ruler of the earth, he’s given us the privilege to have dominion over it. So what does this mean, that God has given us **“dominion”** over all creation? I think we need to consider this responsibly from both a positive role of what we’re to do as well as on the negative side what we need to avoid. So let’s consider the positive role that’s been given to us which is best expressed as the role of being a steward. A steward is someone who looks after or manages someone else’s property. For example, those of you familiar with *The Lord of the Rings* might remember the character of Denethor, the father of Boromir, who served as the Steward of Gondor. While the true king was absent, it was Denethor’s responsibility to oversee the realm. Denethor served in the stead of the king, managing Gondor and its fortified capital city, Minas Tirith.

We are stewards of the earth. We’re not the true king – God is. This is his creation. Everything belongs to him. But God has delegated to mankind the responsibility to have dominion over it as stewards who rule on his behalf. We’re to take it and use it to further his goals and to bring him glory. So how do we do that? Well, consider what it says in Genesis 1:28 where God said to the man and woman, *“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* We’re to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. The earth isn’t meant to remain undeveloped and wild. We’re to exercise our dominion by subduing the earth, by taking the resources of the earth – its land, its animals, its plants, its minerals – and using them to improve the world, to make it better.

What this means is that culture-building such as business, science, technology, the arts, is exactly what we should do as stewards of creation. That is how we accomplish our God-assigned role of having dominion over the earth by subduing it. It means it is proper for us to use the earth’s resources to develop culture. Animals are meant to be domesticated so they can provide for us food and materials like wool or leather. Plants are entrusted to us to grow food to eat and materials to use for building, such as wood. God has seeded the earth with minerals such as clay to make bricks or iron to develop airplanes. Fossil fuels exist so that we can unlock the potential of coal and gas and oil to be used for our benefit.

So when we use wood and bricks to build houses, when we melt down metal to make automobiles, when we create highways and light bulbs and bicycles and trash cans and blankets and iPhones and a million other things that are part of human civilization, those are good things. The neighborhood I live in, with all its roads and houses and sewers and landscaping is what subduing the earth and ruling over it should look like. Cities with all their complex services and transportation networks and power grids are

human beings having dominion over the earth. Those aren't bad things. God doesn't expect us to live in caves and barely survive at a sustenance level as hunter/gatherers. The development of human civilizations and the use of natural resources to create technology that makes life easier for us is exactly what God has called us to do as stewards who've been given dominion over his creation.

So point of application: if your job is contributing to the well-being of people, either by the use of natural resources or by developing services and systems that benefit others, then you are fulfilling your God-given role of having dominion over the earth. So if you are a farmer, you're subduing the earth by providing food for thousands. If you work for John Deere, you are contributing to human flourishing by taking metal and creating machines that better help mankind subdue the earth. If you're teaching or cutting hair or maintaining equipment or sweeping floors at an elementary school or serving food at Chick-Fil-a, you're involved in subduing the earth and having dominion over it and that is a good thing. Your job has great value and worth because through it you are playing a part in doing what God has called mankind to do as stewards of creation. Do not look down on your work as unimportant or inconsequential: you're contributing to what we've been appointed to do as those called to have dominion over the earth.

But there's a flip side to this, because as stewards we run the danger of abusing our position. Going back to *The Lord of the Rings* for a moment, Denethor was not a good steward. He deceived himself into thinking that he was the rightful king of Gondor and as a result acted as if the realm was his to be used selfishly and carelessly. Instead of wisely ruling, he allowed the city of Minas Tirith to fall into decay and disrepair. We run the same danger in our stewardship of creation. We can abuse and misuse creation through greed and neglect.

Sadly, our technological development has not always been coupled with responsible stewardship. For example, as early settlers made their way across the West, they nearly drove the buffalo to extinction in their greed for wealth. Uncontrolled strip mining across the West led to serious erosion and flooding. And of course, we still face significant dangers from pollution and greenhouse gas emissions today. While we have become more aware of the effects we have on the environment, that hasn't always translated into making the necessary changes to correct the issue.

The problem of course is our sinfulness, where we take our role of having dominion over the earth as a blank check for us to do whatever we want. We are poor stewards of the earth when we carelessly pollute it and greedily exploit it without any care for the environment. When we drive animals to extinction by ruthlessly hunting them or thoughtlessly destroying their habitats, we're not acting as wise stewards of the creation God has entrusted to us. When we're indifferent to concerns about polluting our environment or how greenhouse gases might affect the generations after us by causing global warming, then our dominion over creation is being abused.

It makes me extremely sad when Christians don't seem to care about the environment or glibly dismiss warnings about the dangers of deforestation or endangered species or greenhouse gases. We ought to care about what kind of stewards of the earth we are

because we of all people recognize that this planet is God's, not ours, and we will answer to him for how we treat it. This isn't a liberal or conservative thing – being good stewards of the earth is a Christian thing because we know from God's Word that this is something we've been entrusted by God to do. We have politicized creation care and as a result I think those of us on the conservative side of the fence have been too quick to throw the baby out with the bathwater. If you are truly conservative, then shouldn't conserving what has been entrusted to us in terms of our environment be a something that matters to you? And when you couple political conservatism with the Christian doctrine of stewardship of creation then conservative Christians of all people should be on the forefront supporting wise creation care.

Now I don't mean tree-hugging or worshipping the earth or any such pagan nonsense. I mean we as Christians, who recognize our responsibility as stewards of a creation that has been entrusted to us by the true King of the earth, should be concerned about such things. To not care, to blissfully ignore the threats of global warming and pollution and the wanton destruction of animal habitats is poor stewardship. It doesn't mean we will all agree on what the best solution is, but we dare not be dismissive of the problem if it has been made evident to us. Creation care is part of what it means for God to call us to have a wise and God-reflecting dominion over his earth.

## **Conclusion**

So as I wrap this up, I would have each of you rejoice in the exalted role we've been given by God as human beings. God has made us a little lower than the angels, but also much higher than the animals, and so we need not believe the lie that would relegate us to be nothing more than advanced animals. Rather than being equals with the animals, we've been uniquely created in God's image and crowned with a glorious responsibility to have dominion over the animals and the rest of creation. That means our labors and the cultural creations we make – from paintings to patios to pillows – are bringing God glory because we are subduing the earth through them. But what makes us most valuable, what is the ultimate honor and glory that has been bestowed upon us, is that our God cares for us, so much that he sent his Son to save us. We are of immeasurable worth because of God has created us, cares for us, crowned us with the glorious responsibility to care for his creation, and gave Christ, his Son, to redeem us.

Let's go to him now in thankfulness. Please bow your heads with me as I close in prayer.

**This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2018.**