

Psalm 8 "The Superiority of God"*

Proposition: According to Psalm 8, when we affirm the superiority of God, we are asserting two things about God.

I. God has a superior reputation (1-2).

A. Here's what God is like (1).

1. He is personal.
2. He is unique.
3. He is transcendent.

B. Here's what God deserves (2).

II. God has a superior resume (3-8).

A. When we look at the heavens, we see God's majesty (3).

1. They show us how great God is.
2. They show us how small man is.

B. When we look at man, we see God's mercy (4-8).

1. He gave us an honored position.
2. He gave us an honored possession.
3. He gave us an honored privilege.

C. When we look at Christ, we see both.

Our Response (9): How should we respond to the superiority of God?

1. Praise Him for His majesty.
2. Appreciate Him for His mercy.
3. Thank Him for His Son.

A visitor came to our home a couple of weeks ago with a question. He was a pastor from another community, in fact, from a different denominational background. He requested permission to ask me a question. I said, "Sure, go ahead." He proceeded, "What do you believe about...[and then he mentioned a particular doctrine]?" I got out my Bible and proceeded to explain what I believed the Scriptures had to say about the theological issue he raised. He listened carefully.

Our further discussion prompted him to make a statement about the problem of denominations, as he perceived it. I felt compelled to address the issue and said something like, "I'm not convinced that denominations are all bad, at least historically. Denominations came about by individuals who held to held to the same basic truth of Christianity, but who differed in their convictions on more minor issues."

That statement prompted me to address the question, "What, then, are the fundamentals? What are the non-negotiables a person or a church must believe to be truly Christian?" I proceeded to list what historically have been the fundamentals of the faith.

The second fundamental I listed, which happened to be the inerrancy of the Scriptures, caught his eye, and

he stopped me and asked, "Are you saying a person who doesn't believe that can't be a Christian? That if a person believes there are some 'minor' discrepancies in the Bible, he's not a genuine Christian?"

How would you answer that? His assumption was that if a person believes in Jesus, that is enough. I answered his question with a question, "If the Bible is not without error, how do you know what Jesus to believe in?"

After he left, I finished my lunch, pondering our discussion. Since that day, I've been going over and over the question, "What are the fundamentals of the Christian faith?" Granted we live in a culture that has a high view of experience and a low view of truth. That's bad enough, but even in the church the confusion is great.

That's why I'm compelled to begin a new series this morning entitled, "What Makes Christianity Christian?" In this "Bible belt," there are dozens and dozens of churches filled with people who claim to be "Christians." But are they Christian in the historical, biblical sense of the term? What are the non-negotiables, the essentials which a person must affirm if he or she is to be a genuine, biblical Christian? What is so central, that if a church doesn't believe it, it's not a New Testament church?

Back at the turn of the century, in response to Liberalism, several orthodox leaders published a series of twelve volumes known as *The Fundamentals* to state what they considered to be the core issues of Christianity. I'll share more about that next time, but realize this. The fundamentals identified in the early 1900's grew out of a different context than the post-modern setting we find ourselves in today.

So what are the key essentials that are under attack today? In the weeks ahead, we're going to find out. We're going to see what makes Christianity *Christian* by looking at five fundamentals.

The first is the superiority of God. You might think, "Well, everybody believes that God is superior, don't they?" No, they don't. As never before, modern man is trying to smudge out the line between the Creator and the created.

New Age guru, Shirley MacLaine, makes statements like, "The New Age is man being divine, man can become God. Man does not need a savior, he can save himself through cyclic rebirth and reincarnation." Man can become God?! That's what the New Agers tells us.

You say, "Well, maybe the superiority of God is under attack *out there*, but certainly not in the Church, is it?" In *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck, a psychologist popular in both New Age and Christian circles, states: "God wants us to become Himself (or Herself or Itself). We are growing toward godhood. God is the goal of evolution."

In the modern Faith movement, such ideas are promoted by well-known teachers such as Kenneth Hagin, who asserts, "Man...was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority...God has made us as much like Himself as possible...He has made us in the same class of being that He is Himself."

Is that true? Are we in the same class with God? Historical, biblical Christianity says, "No! God is superior." That is a non-negotiable. But what does it mean? There are many places in the Bible we could turn to develop the doctrine of God (such as Genesis 1, Deuteronomy 6, and Isaiah 40), but I've chosen Psalm 8. According to Psalm 8, when we affirm the superiority of God, we are asserting two things about God.

I. God has a superior reputation (1-2).

According to its heading, Psalm 8 is a psalm of David. David was a man who was qualified to speak to us on the subject of God's superiority, for David knew God. He didn't just know about God, but He had a close relationship with God, so much so that He could pen elsewhere, "The Lord is my shepherd."

David begins (1), "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens."

Picture a night scene on a country hillside. You are lying on your back gazing at the stars above. There are no street lights to dim the brilliance of the spectacle you see. You are awestruck by the greatness of the starry heavens and your own frailty. And you whisper, "O Lord, You make all this!"

Perhaps it was such an occasion in the shepherd David's life that the Spirit used to produce this inspired text. David is enthralled with God! He begins his poetry by reflecting on two aspects of God's superior reputation.

A. Here's what God is like (1). We learn three things about God in verse 1.

1. He is personal. "O LORD, our Lord." In His reputation, God is personal. David says He is *our* Lord. The pronoun is plural indicating David intended this psalm to be used in corporate worship in Israel.

The first "LORD" (all capitals) is the translation of the Hebrew name, *Yahveh*, which is God's covenant name. It's the name that reveals that the God of the universe is One Who enters into a special, family relationship with His chosen people.

The second "Lord" represents the Hebrew *Adonai*, which highlights God's sovereignty. It speaks of royalty. He is King. He is Ruler. He is *our* Ruler.

2. He is unique. "How majestic is your name in all the earth!" We often misuse the term "unique" by saying things like, "That's a unique dress." Or, "My, what a unique house." But unique means more than just different. Unique means *one of a kind*.

Do you realize that God is one of a kind? There is none like Him. He's in a class all by Himself. The biblical term is *holy*. To say that God is holy is to affirm His set-apartness. There is no legitimate rival to Him.

David says, "How majestic is your name in all the earth!" God has a one-of-a-kind reputation. He is excellent and majestic. He's above all and over all. I like how Psalm 2:4 describes God's reaction to the attempts of pagan rulers to ignore Him, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the LORD scoffs at them."

3. He is transcendent. "You have set your glory above the heavens." What is God's glory? It is the reflection of His Being. It is the expression of Who He is. We see His glory expressed in His creation (Rom. 1), reflected in His Word (Ps. 19), and fulfilled in His Son (Heb. 1). Here David says He sets His glory above the heavens.

The heavens represent the highest created element, "In the beginning God created the *heavens* and the earth (Gen. 1:1)." As David beheld the splendor of the heavens in the night sky, he was humbled. Yet he knew there was something greater--the glory of God.

God is transcendent. He is infinite, without beginning and ending. And He will not tolerate the cheapening of His glory (if you doubt that, check out Romans 1:23 which says He revealed His wrath against those who "exchanged His glory" for the corruptible).

So God has a superior reputation in the universe. He is personal, unique, and transcendent--that's what He's like, according to verse 1. In verse 2, we learn a second aspect of God's superior reputation.

B. Here's what God deserves (2). "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." Notice the contrast here. What's true of an infant child? He or she is vulnerable and weak. What's true of an avenger? He prides himself in his power

and ability to conquer. But David says the weakest babe has a strength more powerful than the most aggressive avenger when the name of God is on the lips of that child.

Answer this. What's the appropriate response to the Majestic God? It's praise. "You have ordained praise." Praise is what God desires and deserves. Yet not all praise Him.

What makes Christianity Christian? First and foremost, a true Christian is a person who has been gripped by the superiority of God. Is that true of you? Are you giving God what He deserves in your life? He is great! Is He great in your life?

What else does it mean to affirm the superiority of God? First, it means we recognize God has a superior reputation--there's none like Him. Second, it means...

II. God has a superior resume (3-8).

By that, we're talking about God's accomplishments. In next section of the Psalm, David reflects on the unparalleled things that God has done. God's works shout to us, "The Lord is superior!" If you really want to get a handle on what God is like, look at His creative acts. David mentions two in verses 3-8.

A. When we look at the heavens, we see God's majesty (3). "When I consider 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, the son of man that you care for him."

David said, "When I *consider*." The problem most of us have is we don't *consider*. We're too busy to reflect, to think, to meditate, to ponder the evidence that shouts to us, "God is superior!" It's not that we dislike God. It's that we ignore Him.

Will you stop and *consider* for a moment? Let's *consider* the heavens and see God's majesty. Donald DeYoung helps us in his book, *Astronomy and the Bible*. If the sun could be hollowed out like a giant pumpkin, a million planet earths could easily fit inside, like marbles. On a clear, moonless night about 3,000 stars are visible to the unaided eye. But that's just the beginning! The stars we can see are all in the corner of the Milky Way galaxy. The entire galaxy numbers 100 billion stars. And beyond our galaxy, are countless other galaxies--astronomers estimate that 100 billion such galaxies are known to exist. If we wrote out the number of stars in the universe, we would have a "1" followed by 22 zeroes!

How many is that? Suppose we took all five billion people on planet earth, and divided up the stars and gave each person an equal number. Each person would receive two trillion stars! Mind-boggling? We're not done yet! The Bible says God calls all the stars by name, and He keeps count of them (Ps. 147:4)!

It's staggering to contemplate the size of the universe. Just take the Milky Way, for instance (just one of at least 100 billion galaxies). If you could get in a spacecraft and fly across the Milky Way at the speed of light, the trip would take you 100,000 years, a distance of 600,000 trillion miles! And that's just one of 100 billion galaxies!

There are two unmistakable lessons we learn when we consider the heavens.

1. *They show us how great God is.* Isaiah 40:22 puts it this way. God "stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in."

Did you realize that as impressive as the heavens are to us, their formation was like child's play to God? David calls the heavens "the work of your fingers (4)." To create the universe was no more difficult for God than a child making shapes out of play dough. The heavens show us how great God is!

2. *They show us how small man is.* David looked at the stars, and then looked at himself, and a question burst forth, "What is man that You are mindful of him?"

Stop there. We face the problem of cheap grace these days. May I suggest a reason we don't appreciate God's grace is because we have an inflated view of ourselves. We start with the assumption that we are basically good, that we have infinite worth, that we are a good catch for God. We think, "Why wouldn't God send His Son for us. Look what He got out of it!" That's not the biblical perspective at all.

David understood this. "O God, what is man that you are mindful of him?" The truth is, God is in a league all by Himself! We are not worthy of His care, yet in spite of that, He cares! Years ago, Stuart Hine captured this truth when he wrote, "And when I think that God, His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in; That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin. Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee; How great Thou art! How great Thou art!"

The heavens remind us that God is majestic! But His majesty is but one aspect of His Being. When we look at another of God's creative acts, we learn something else about our superior God.

B. When we look at man, we see God's mercy (4-8). In spite of our smallness, in spite of how undeserving we are, here's what God did for mankind. Three things...

1. *He gave us an honored position.* Verse 5 begins, "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings." The term "heavenly beings" is the Hebrew *Elohim*. It may refer to angels (as in the Schofield Bible), or even God Himself. However we translate the word, it speaks of our honored, God-given position.

That truth flies in the face of evolution. We're told that man is the product of time and chance, the highest form of animal on the evolutionary chain.

Sir Fredrick Hoyle once said, "Let's be honest. The probability of life arising by chance is the same as throwing a six on a dice five billion times in a row...It's the same as a tornado going through a junkyard and forming a Boeing 747."

Is the universe a product of chance? Impossible! When we consider the heavens, when we look at man, we see a Designer. The evidence shouts to us that there is a Creator.

2. *He gave us an honored possession.* Notice the second clause in verse 5, "And crowned him with glory and honor." Man's dignity is a gift of God. God created us in His very image (Gen. 1:27). He gave us an honored possession--His glory and honor.

3. *He gave us an honored privilege.* Verses 6-8, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas."

When God created Adam, He made him his vice-regent. He gave him dominion over all the creatures on earth. He made man His representative, and put everything "under his feet." What an honor!

But here's our problem. We tend to focus on our honored position, possession, and privileges, and forget the One Who gave them to us! We get impressed with ourselves. Our heads swell when we look at what we've done in our dominion. We've made Hubble telescopes and tiny computer chips, we've developed cures for diseases and ways to increase crop productivity. And we start believing our own press releases.

We forget that we are still but creatures. There is but One Who is truly superior!

Listen carefully. The evolutionists are not the only ones attacking the superiority of God. Tragically, it's

happening right in the Church.

A well-known teacher in the Faith movement, Kenneth Copeland, said this, "God's reason for creating Adam was His desire to reproduce Himself...He [Adam] was not a little like God. He was not almost like God. He was not subordinate to God even."

Another televangelist claims that the Spirit of God "declared in the earth today what the eternal purpose of God has been through the ages...that He is duplicating Himself in the earth." Is that what God's Word teaches, that man can become God?

Certainly not. In fact, that's Satan's oldest ploy. Remember his scheme with Eve (Gen. 3:4-5), "You will not surely die...For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will *be like God*, knowing good and evil."

You see, when we look at the heavens, we see God's majesty. And when we look at man, we see God's mercy. But that's not all.

C. When we look at Christ, we see both. You say, "I don't see that in Psalm 8." The New Testament writers did. According to the New Testament, ultimately, Psalm 8 points to Christ. How? Christ, the last Adam, fulfilled what the first Adam forfeited.

Hebrews 2:5-9 makes that clear, "It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come...[and then the writer quotes Ps. 8]: 'What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels...and put everything under his feet.' In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus..."

In 1 Corinthians 15:26-27, when speaking of Christ, Paul quotes Psalm 8:6, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet.'" In truth, in Christ we see both the majesty and mercy of God! Now a question...

Our Response (9): How should we respond to the superiority of God?

Verse 9, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" You'll notice that Psalm 8 ends as it began, with the same exclamation. Verses 1 & 9 are like two guardrails that hold together the theme of God's superiority. There's nothing outside of God, no surprises, no chance events, no rivals. He is superior in His reputation and resume. As a fundamental church, we are committed to that fundamental--the superiority of God. But how should we respond to it? Let me suggest three appropriate responses.

1. *Praise Him for His majesty.* Praise Him in song. Praise Him with your life. Be impressed with God, not with men. Choose today to live for His glory.
2. *Appreciate Him for His mercy.* Are you grateful that God hasn't dealt with you as you deserve? Tell Him so.
3. *Thank Him for His Son.* He's the fulfillment of Psalm 8. When Jesus Christ hung on the cross, He reconciled finite sinners like us with our Infinite Creator. There's only one way for you to be right with the God Who is superior. It's through Jesus.