

“Who Am I?”

Who Needs the Past, Pt. 7

Well, good morning everybody. We are spending the summer looking for ancient solutions to modern problems through the prayer book of God’s people, the Psalms. And there is nothing more characteristic of modern life than the search for identity and for self-esteem. You see it in the titles of all the books in the bookstores. You see it on the TV shows. You hear it when you have lunch with anybody that you’re working with. It’s a constant theme. “I have to find myself. I have to find out who I am. I have to learn to *like* myself.”

So I’ve titled today’s message “Who Am I?”, because that’s not just the question your grandpa kept asking once the dementia kicked in. And it’s not just a question every middle schooler asks internally every day of their existence. It’s a question we all wrestle with and our society has loads of contending answers to the question. But I want to argue that the Bible gives the best answer. Of course I do! Wouldn’t it be a surprise if one day I said, “I don’t know, I think secular culture trumps the Bible on this one”?

Anyway, let’s jump in and read – out loud, all together – our text for this morning, **Psalm 8**.
*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 honor.
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!*

Now, if upon the opening and closing verses of that psalm, you couldn’t help but sing in your mind some early 80’s Sandi Patti, then you and I are not only of a same generation, but probably a very similar – and fairly rare – cultural background! But all of us can identify with the central question, “what is man?” Or in the more gender sensitive translation, “what is a human being?” What is our purpose? What’s the point? Who am I?

Now, from a certain vantage point, you have to understand this is a tremendously modern problem. It's very new. Can you imagine 400 or 500 years ago what it would have been like if you had said to your friends, "I don't know who I am?" Imagine this is 1550 rural France; "I don't know who I am. I have to find myself." What would your friends say? They'd look at you, and they'd say, "You don't know who you are? Don't you have a name? Don't you have a family? Don't you have a vocation? Don't you have a country? Don't you have a religion?" That's what they would say, absolutely.

And do you know the reason why people didn't really ask that kind of question? I'll tell you why. It's not because the formation of a personal identity didn't happen. It has to happen. We *have* to know who we are and feel what we are is a valuable, worthwhile thing. But for many years up until modern times, the formation of identity actually took care of itself. It just *happened*...and it doesn't just happen anymore.

And do you know why? I blame jazz music. I'm kidding! But it's very vogue to blame societal malaise on whatever form of cultural entertainment you don't happen to enjoy. But here's why *really*. Because instead of a vocation, we just have a series of jobs. Instead of a lifelong neighborhood, we have "where do you want to base out of?" Instead of a family, we have a series of living arrangements.

Instead of religion, instead of a faith, do you know what you have? You have a series of meditation techniques, seminars on how to deal with stress, and scads of self-published articles on Google about how to win over guilt feelings. Instead of those things that were *constant*, now we have a series of *disposable* items and situations.

And as a result, the formation of identity doesn't just happen. In a sense, we have to be conscious, we have to find an approach, and we have to figure out who we are. So I'm not saying it's wrong. I'm saying it always happened, but in modern times we now are more in *charge* of that. We actually have to *do* it. So everybody in this room – everyone watching at home - is doing it. How are you doing it? I would like to submit there are several theories reigning in the modern world right now on how to go about building up an identity, building up your self-esteem. And when it comes to this, I'm afraid Americans are ultra-pragmatic, and our pragmatism gets to us.

I recorded a guest spot on a podcast this week about leading a church during a political season – it'll wind up being three episodes and it was a great conversation. But I kept talking about elements of historical political theology and one of the hosts would say, "Well I like to be *practical*, what do we *do*?" And I would reply, "Well, I like to be *wise*...how can we understand?" He didn't care for that.

One of the things I found when I was working on my dissertation in Scotland, which is different between theological training in Europe and in America, in other words, how ministers study to be ministers, is in Europe there is a lot of theology, lots of theory, and very little in the way of telling you how to balance a church budget, *how to* run a small group, and *how to* manage a church. Very little on the how-tos, very big on the theory and theology. Here in America, *lots* of how-tos and very sort of down on theory.

In law school in Europe, jurisprudence, the philosophy of law, is a *requirement* because they figure you certainly want to know *why* you're practicing law and *what* you're practicing before you learn *how* to. In American law schools' jurisprudence is very often an elective. The philosophy of law is an elective. All that matters is you learn how to put together a case; that you learn *how* to do it.

Americans tend to be pragmatic. And the same thing happens, but it trips us up in this area of self-esteem and identity. Read the books. Read the articles on self-esteem, and you'll see they're totally pragmatic. They don't like to think about the theory underlying. For example, next time your standing in line at the grocery store, pick up a magazine. They say, "If you lose weight, you'll find it helps your self-esteem. People who are making more money, it helps their self-esteem." There are all of these lists. So if you want self-esteem, lose weight, change your friends, switch your career, and so on, but nobody asks *why*.

Nobody asks for the underlying theory. Nobody says, "*Why* does losing weight in America make you feel better about yourself? Should it? Is that the way to find self-esteem? Is that important? *Why?*" Nobody asks that. All we know is, "Hey, statistics show if you'll lose weight, you'll..." In other words, we're so pragmatic; we only want to know what works. We say, "Have a makeover. It'll make you feel better about yourself. Change your friends. Lose weight," but nobody pops the hood and says, "But why? What is the underlying theory?"

I would like to suggest that it's very important for us today to understand there are certain theories of identity formation that are reigning. They're winning in the world today, and unless you know what those theories are, unless you recognize them and analyze them, you'll just pick them up like a virus. Most everybody I know to some degree or another is infected by one or more than one of them. A mask won't help you with this virus.

Unless you see them, unless you recognize them, you'll never be free of them. If you want to be free of them, you have to see what they are. So let's divide our teaching today into two parts. The first part is what the world says is the way to find out who you are and, secondly, what the Bible says is the way to find out who you are.

First, What the world says. I suggest there are probably three basic approaches to this issue of self-esteem and identity you're going to find. And I'm going to illustrate them using different parts of town in Austin. Because – while the search for identity is universal – we tend to identify with the different parts of town in which we live. Have you ever heard the phrase, “If you're going to live north of the river you might as well move to Dallas?” That is not without meaning!

So here are the three approaches. A. “I am what I acquire.” I call this the North Side approach to identity. This is the approach that says the *important* thing is to make yourself whatever you need *to get*. Now people want to get everything. There are a lot of different things. Some people want to get money. Some people really don't want money; they just want recognition and status. Some people don't want that; they want someone to love them, but it's all basically the same.

The desire to acquire. Last week Deanna and I ventured out to look for some furniture. We've not really gone out beyond the grocery store since the pandemic – well, for me the *bookstore*, but you know, the essentials! And so we went up to The Domain. And I guess, because I've been forced to live this simplistic, less materialistic life since March, the opulence of the place just overwhelmed me.

We went into one furniture store – we used to shop there in another location – but they've clearly changed their business model and now they occupy this giant 4-story, dark gloomy building behind literal walls that looks like nothing so much as the Haunted Mansion at Disney World. And when you walk in, there are a line of women dressed to the nines holding clipboards to walk you around. No “sale” or “clearance” signs, the whole store felt like something off the set of *The Great Gatsby*. The vibe of their business culture was clearly intimidation. We walked out without so much as a “thanks for coming” – visible disdain. It was clear we did not belong there.

Now what is their strategy? To be so exclusive that people want to belong there. People are *dying* to belong there. “My identity is to be the kind of person that buys a couch from...demonic furniture store at the Domain.” What's behind the desire to acquire? Adam Smith, the guy who invented capitalism, he understood it. He was a 18th century philosopher and in his book before *The Wealth of Nations*, he asked the question, why do people try so hard to better their condition? I mean, a sweater will protect you from the elements, why have ten? Or why have one from Nordstroms instead of Wal-Mart?

Listen to his answer, “To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of...are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from [wealth]. The rich man glories in his riches because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world. The poor man on the contrary is ashamed of his poverty. He feels it places him out of the sight of mankind. To feel that we are taken no notice of necessarily disappoints the most ardent desires of human nature.” (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759)

And the point is they feel like, “I am what I acquire. I am what I accomplish. Hard work! Get to the top so everyone will notice me!” Does this work? It doesn’t work. Oh, it will get you noticed. I never fail to notice a car wreck for what that’s worth. But it’s a hollow identity. Most people who lose themselves in their work find out they just lose themselves. And the reason it doesn’t work is if you decide the thing that will give you your identity is acquiring...success in a career, romantic love, or a certain amount of money and possessions, you will find you have no coherent self inside.

See the word “identity” comes from the Latin *indentitas* literally meaning “sameness”, to be the same. It means to be the same in every situation. How do you know who you are? After all, I’m different...If you heard me on the phone with my mother, it sure wouldn’t sound like the same person who gets up here with a microphone in front of you.

That’s because I’m *your* pastor and I’m *her* son. Those are two very different roles. You don’t talk in the same tone of voice.

There are so many different roles, but is there a core of sameness in your identity? Is there a set of commitments? Is there a core of values and goals at my heart that *never* changes regardless of whether I’m talking to you, whether I’m talking to her, no matter what? That’s identity! Identity is, “There’s something about me that’s *always* the same.” There’s a coherent core. Let me tell you something. If you make money or love or anything you have to acquire out there in the world your identity, you won’t *have* a coherent core. You will do whatever it takes to get it, which means there is no sameness. There’s no integrity. You sell your soul. You lose yourself.

And I’ll tell you what else. If you actually *fail* to get it – and many, many people are frustrated in their failed attempts to acquire - you will find out there is no you in there at all. There is nothing but a void. To build your life on anything but God turns you into something superficial, turns you into a façade, and - we talked about this several weeks ago with the wheat and the chaff - turns you into something hollow. It doesn’t work. So the first approach is “I am what I own. I am what I acquire. I am what I accomplish. I am my work.” It doesn’t work, because you’ll find all you do is lose yourself.

Get around those successful families. It's amazing when you get around so many successful people the brokenness there. Go into those successful families. You see the brokenness. You see the drug and alcohol abuse. You see the kids all have eating disorders. What's going on here? As the great German writer, Hermann Hesse, put it, upon winning the 1946 Nobel Prize for Literature, "I have become a writer, but I have not become a human being." What he means is "I did everything I possibly could to really become *great* at my job. I acquired, and it turned out I never really got myself a self." So the first way is too external; it's too artificial.

But then there's a second modern approach to identity – it's not "I am what I get" – but B. "I am what I feel." I call this the South Side approach. There's no Domain in South Austin. I'd never work. When you talk about "keep Austin weird" you're talking about the south side. "You don't have to put on airs, man, just do what feels right. You want to paint your house purple, man? It'd be cooler if you did." A lot of the artists live south.

I'll just put it this way. If the first answer was sort of an Industrial Revolution/Captains of Industry approach to identity, this is the Romanticist approach. If the first one was, you might say, the 80s and 90s approach, this is the 60s and 70s approach. "I am what I feel." You've heard this before, but let me put some flesh on it for a moment. This is the view that says, "The important thing is not hard work and accomplishment.

The important thing is to get in touch with your deepest feelings."

Lots of people go from one view to the other, by the way. Lots of people were into the second view in the 60s, and they got rid of it and got out into the first view for the 80s. And other people have been into the first view, and they finally decided, "This doesn't work. I've lost myself," and they jump into the second view, usually after they go into therapy.

The second view is what's important is you understand your deepest feelings. Now the language of this view is something like "I am *done* doing what everybody else wants me to do. I am *done* living up to everybody else's expectations. I've gotta be me. I have to find out who I am, what I most deeply want, and be true to that." So the goal is a complete integration of action and feeling.

There's a *real* problem with this view, though. The view *assumes* something very big for which there is no scientific evidence, and there's not even any common sense evidence for it. This assumes that underneath all of your conflicting feelings there is a bedrock of coherent desires - primary, steady, and constant. That underneath all of, you might say, the shifting and changing and contradictory feelings you have in your conscious level, down deep there is a whole set of *true* feelings, *true* desires, and if you could just find out what those are and become true to that, then you'll have an identity. Does that make sense?

Find your true self. But let me ask you a question. What evidence do you have that your feelings at the deepest level are any less contradictory than your feelings at the conscious level? What evidence do you have for the idea that down deep there is a *true* set of feelings that are unified and coherent?

Look at your feelings. “I want a career. I want a family. I want to eat ice cream. I want to fit into skinny jeans.” Those are all contradictory feelings. We want them. We love them. You say, “But down deep what I *really* want is...” What do you mean? For example, I talk to men, and I talk to women who say, “I really want a career, but I really want a family.” Okay, what’s your truest feeling? What’s your truest desire? I tell you, you want *both* of those things...you want them all the way to the bottom. Those things are in tension.

Are you trying to tell me eventually if you push down, you’ll know, “I should just get rid of my family. I should just divorce, get rid of them, because what I really want, the *real* me, is to be a career person?” Or should you say, “The real thing is I just need to drop out. I just need to get a poor-paying job because what I really want is just to have a family?” Don’t you understand those things are in tension in your life because you want them both, and what’s wrong with that?

Down deep the Bible says you have both the flesh *and* the Spirit. Down deep your innermost feelings are just as much at war as they are up here on the surface. There is no coherent, single strain of desires that if you could just find them you’d be steady. A ship can’t anchor internally. By definition stability at sea requires anchoring to something solid – the sea floor or a dock.

You will *never* get a coherent view of the self by trying to anchor internally. You will *never* get a coherent idea of what the self is. To have an identity, to have a self, means to have a sameness. There’s something about me that’s always there. I’m *always* committed to it regardless of my changing feelings. Regardless of my changing roles, it’s *always* there. The anchor holds. Do you think you’re going to find that by following your feelings? That is silly. Feelings contradict. They come and go with the waves.

So the first view is too external. The second view is too internal. The first view leads to artificiality. The second view leads to superficiality. With the first view you lose yourself by trying to get something on the outside. With the second view you lose yourself by trying to find some coherent whole on the inside. Neither of them works.

But there's a third view which we need to at least mention before we talk about what Psalm 8 says is the biblical way to find an identity. It's a newer view, but on the other hand, it's the most consistent. As I said there was an North Side view that says, "I am what I have acquired." There's the South Side view that says, "I am what I feel." Then there's the Forty Acres view that says...C. "I am whatever I say I am."

Obviously Forty Acres refers to the University. And these are all, of course, symbolic representations. There are materialistic people in South Austin and hippies in North Austin. But I'm using the University to represent a view that is more and more widespread. This is the postmodern view. This is the deconstructionist view.

What is it deconstructing? The very nature of any consistent form of society. There are no rules, so it's silly to talk about a coherent self. It's silly to talk about a self you can discover. Oh no," says this view, "don't try to *discover* the self. Don't try to *find* yourself. You *create* yourself. Identity is never discovered. It's only constructed. You are whatever the heck you *say* you are." Now this came from Jean-Paul Sartre, but now it's picking up a lot of steam.

This is the root philosophy behind the gender identity movement. It's interesting to me that sex is always at the core of societal identity. I think it has to do with

how central a role sex is to proper theology. But in the feelings movement, it was all about "free love". In the acquirement movement it's about sex as commodity. The porn industry really became huge in the 80's. Every new technology always finds a sexual exploitation very quickly. And the same is true of post-modern deconstruction. Anything goes. No rules, but not even any definitions. Gender is something you create.

No listen, there's a balance here. Stereotypical modernistic views of gender roles *have* been very destructive to society. A Christian needs to champion that many views of modern family come more from Victorian Era Industrial Revolution than they do the Bible. And much of that is patriarchal and misogynistic and needs to be corrected.

And, let's be honest and compassionate about gender dysmorphia. We now know that gender is determined by three biological factors lining up like cherries on a slot machine. Three things you have no control over; your DNA, your brain chemistry and your physical plumbing all line up and...congratulations, you win the gender jackpot, you're a man or you're a woman! That's the nature side and there are plenty of factors on the nurture side as well. But according to studies from UCLA, about 0.6% of people identify as transgender. And they deserve a place to function in society without being abused and disrespected.

But... on the other hand. The abuses of the past don't always warrant the total displacement of definitions and categories. I say it all the time, it's Martin Luther's description of a drunk man trying to get on a horse – falls off on one side and then gets up and falls off the other side. It is not oppressive to have a definition of what constitutes gender without going to stereotypical, abusive role limitations. In other words, the old “men belong at work and women belong at home” is falling off on one side and “don't oppress your newborn baby by calling them a boy or a girl, they'll decide that for themselves.” Is falling off on the other side.

The logical conclusions of the “I am whatever I say I am” will tear society apart. It has too. You're already seeing it. Look, there's a lot of talk about how oppressive it is to identify as a heterosexual – cis normative male. But dig into the literature of the LGBTQ movement and you will find a big debate over the validity of *homosexual* identity. The original Gay liberation movement was based around “I've finally discovered who I was meant to be. This is who I am.” But now even that is under attack.

Because the bi-queer movement questions the whole *idea* that you have to submit to a certain kind of self and sexuality. This group says, “It's *oppressive* to say I have to be something. It's oppressive to say I have to discover any particular self. *All* self is constructed.

All self is chosen. I am whoever I say I am.” You watch. All the TV shows for a decade have had gay characters on them; have you noticed now they all have bisexual characters. If you say, “I'm not into having sex with that gender” -whatever it is, you're going to be labeled as sexist. It's already happening in the college literature. And that's going to put heterosexuals *and* homosexuals in the same boat as oppressors. Strange bedfellows indeed.

To define is oppressive. You see it in the fascinating conflict going on between the feminist and transgender movements. CNN had a headline recently that said something like “new medical treatment for persons who menstruate.” And the feminists got up in arms about, “Um, I think those are called ‘women’” Oh no, you can't be for women's rights. That's too exclusive and oppressive. After all, who's to say who is a “woman”? The new culture war is not going to just be between conservative and liberal – but between order and chaos.

There is an assault on any identity categories at all that refuse to say, “You can be, and you must be, whatever you choose to be. The important thing is not hard work, and the important thing is not finding your true feelings. The important thing is *freedom*. The authentic person is someone who chooses to be, and you are what you are simply because you say you are.”

There's a major problem with this. It's perfectly consistent, and it will decimate the other two views. And the other two views are intellectually defenseless against it, because if there is no God, if there is no eternal world, if there is no essence that was put into you, if there's no natural law we have to submit to, then everything is random, and we can do whatever we want. The only problem with it is you can't live this way at all. It's impossible to live in a way that isn't *immediately* contradictory.

Because why can't I just be racist then and oppress people that I find beneath me? I mean, that's who I identify as. I like to oppress people. I like to *step* on people. I like to make people feel small. And on the basis of their own view, they have no right to say what you're doing is wrong. That would be to say there's some kind of essence. There's some kind of truth we have to bow to, but the whole idea behind this view is there *is* no such thing. And therefore, as soon as you start to say, "It's oppressive to make people into a certain way," you've already blown your cover. You can't even live consistently with your own approach.

I don't have time to get into it, but you read about Michel Foucault. He's now dead, but he was one of the French deconstructionists who pioneered this view. A darling of the academy. But study his life – it's ethically challenging – he took pleasure in cruelty.

The natural consequences of this philosophy leads to *being* cruel. There's no morality. There are no boundaries. There's nothing we have to be true to. We can do anything we want. You'd expect it to lead to cruelty, and it does.

It's impossible. So the first view is too external. The second view is too internal. The third view is plain impossible and yet if there is no God, it's the only view we really have. What do we have instead here in the Bible? Don't you see the reason I'm asking you to look at the theories instead of just reading the articles? When somebody says, "Ah, when you lose weight, you look better, and you look more like the toothpaste ads, you have higher self-esteem." Okay, why? You're operating on a theory.

"My identity is wrapped up in my physical attractiveness." Is that a good idea? Isn't that a dead end in the way we've been talking about? Let's look at the theories, and the theories underneath all of the how-tos of self-esteem are woefully inadequate. **So let's look secondly at What the Bible says.** The Bible gives us a completely different alternative. The Bible says self-esteem is not a psychological issue. Primarily, it's a theological issue. It's not a matter of psychological theories. It's a matter of what you worship and what you serve.

And the basic truth of Psalm 8 as we've read it is the more you see and realize the glory and majesty of God, the more you will see and realize the glory and honor of your own individual self. The glory of God and the honor and glory of the human individual are *bound* up together. They are *wrapped* up together.

The more you see the *greatness* of God, the more you'll see the *greatness* of the human individual. On the other hand, the less you see the glory and majesty of God, or if you don't believe it's there, then you have *no* basis for the glory and honor of the individual. "*O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!... 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 heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.*"

Let me show you how these things are bound together. Let's ask this question. Let's go to theory. Was the universe created by a great majestic Creator, as Psalm 8 is saying, or is the universe an accident? Now if the universe was created by a great Creator, then everything in it, including you and me, is a work of art. If it *was* created by a Creator, then we can't live as we wish, can we? We can't live as we wish because we would have to honor this great Creator who created us. And therefore, He *owns* us, and, therefore, we have to listen to His will.

But on the other hand, we would *know* that we're valuable. We would *know* that we are crowned with glory and honor. We would *know* that we are precious works of art.

But either the world was created by God, or else it wasn't. If it wasn't created by God, let's just say we look at the vastness of the heavens, and unlike the psalmist we *don't* see God has created anything, that there isn't any Creator. Let's say it's an accident. In that case, you and I are a piece of junk. There's no purpose for us. We are absolute accidents. We're just a collocation of molecules that happened to come together in a certain way. There's no purpose for us, and there's no value to us. A piece of junk has no value. Something only has value if it can be used, if it has a design, and if it fulfills a purpose. "Well, there's no such thing as purpose."

In other words, if you look at the heavens, as it says in verse 3, and you say, "It's all an accident," in that case, you can live as you want. The postmodernists are right. There is no coherent self. There's no essence. There's no purpose. Might as well be cruel, because the universe is meaningless and cruel. So you're free to live as you like, *but* you are a piece of junk. There's no basis for saying there's a self, you're valuable, or you're worthwhile. You can't have it both ways.

Take the homeless person panhandling at the intersection. Does their life matter? I'd hope you say "yes", but why? By the way, there are plenty of pragmatists who don't think they do matter. But you're better than that. But what's your basis? Imagine you actually stop and talk to that person and they say, "I'm a worthless piece of junk," and you say, "No, you're wrong." You impose a value on them. You say, "Your belief is wrong. You are precious. You are beautiful. You are lovable. You are worthwhile."

Well where do you get it? If you get rid of the idea that there's a real God whom we have to believe in, you take away the basis for saying such a thing. Certainly you take away the basis for going after a person and actually telling them they're wrong. If we can think of God any way we want, then we can think of human beings any way we want. If you can live any way you want, then you have no basis for saying, "I can't feel like trash," or treat other people like trash. There's no basis for appeal.

If God is glorious and majestic and if He made the heavens, then I am a work of art crowned with glory and honor. It means I know I'm valuable, but I can't live any old way I want. *Or*, if God did not make the heavens and everything is an accident, then I can live any way I want. I can choose my own identity. I can be whatever I want.

I can construct whatever I want, but I have no basis for saying I or anybody else is valuable and precious. And yet we can't live without it. Oh we desperately need to believe that we're all special just the way we are. We *desperately* want to believe it. That's what's driving our quest for identity and purpose.

But see, here's what so interesting. People who deny the idea of the God of the Bible, people who say they can live any old way they want, still have to smuggle into their own lives truths and confidences that are *only* available to people who believe what Psalm 8 says about God. They have to, in a sense, steal crumbs out of the Christian cupboard. They can't live on the basis of their own views. They simply cannot.

Christianity gives you a whole different base. It doesn't build a castle in the air. Christianity doesn't say, "You're valuable and precious simply because you're valuable and precious." Oh my gosh, no. It gives us a position. Look at **v.5**, "*You made him a little lower than the **heavenly beings**...*" Now, that translation is problematic because what the Hebrew literally says is *elohim*. It's a word we looked at last week that is elsewhere translated as "god". So it's cryptic but it literally says, "You have made humanity a little lower than the gods."

Now, of course, the Bible doesn't believe there's more than one God. It's probably talking about the angels, but it's using the word "divinities" here as a way of saying God made human beings so high and noble we are just short of divinity. Then verse 6 and following says, "You put him over the animals – birds of the air, beasts of the field, fish of the sea." So in the creation order we are neither angels nor animals. We're actually something *better* than both.

In Genesis, it's called "the image of God." We are created in the image of God. What does that mean? See angels – "heavenly beings" - are pure spirit creatures. They are in the realm of the eternal. Animals – "brute beasts"- are pure physical beings. They belong to the realm of the temporal. Circle of life; eating the plants today, fertilizing the plants tomorrow. But God is the God of all that is, seen and unseen. That's why God is Trinity, you can't speak of God without referencing the physicality of Jesus or the spirituality of...well, the Holy Spirit. God is the all in all.

And God has created us to be more like Him than we are like either angels or animals. It's the created order. We're just short of divinity. We're below the divinity but above all the rest of the created order. In other words, God has made us crowned with His own glory and honor. Do you know what that means?

Everybody in this room needs to hear this in the depths of your souls. It's the only way you're ever going to get a sense of personal value and coherent identity that goes beyond what you acquire or what you feel or beyond what you simply invent.

We need to know that someone sees us as so special and so precious that their minds are *dominated* with us. And this tells us God is "mindful" of us. We are so precious and so unusual and so magnificent that we dominate the mind of God. Remember what Adam Smith said about the human need to be observed or taken notice of? That's the foundation of capital improvement.

William James was the first professor to teach a psychology course in the US and is known as the "father of American psychology. He too saw the centrality of mindfulness. Listen, "No more fiendish punishment could be devised than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned around when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met acted as if we were nonexistent things, a kind of rage and impotent despair will before long well up in us from which the cruelest bodily torture would be a relief." (*The Principles of Psychology*, 1890)

We need to know someone is *mindful* of us. There's nothing worse than to go away and to realize nobody missed you. That need is so deep. Well, look at *this*. Talk about fulfillment. Talk about identity. Talk about value. The only mind that matters is filled with you. The great and ultimate mind is mindful of you, and until you know that, you will never treat yourself with the dignity you deserve. You're a work of art. A piece of art is valuable. A piece of art is precious, and a piece of art is an expression of the inner being of the artist. The artists gaze, they aspire, and they long over their artwork.

And that is how God looks at you. **V.4-5**, "*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 can't live any old way you want, can you? Oh no, it's by obeying God that you find yourself. It's by coming to God that you see yourself.

You see it in the opening and the closing verse. The more *majestic* God is to you, that's His royalty. The more majestic God is in your mind, the *greater* He is, the more of His royal presence is in your life, the more you will understand your own glory and honor and how He is mindful with you. Now, one more thing, Old Testament Psalm 8 isn't sufficient without New Testament Hebrews 2. Psalm 8 tells us we were

all made to be these great creations. We were made to take care of the earth, to rule over and to cultivate the earth. And we were made to be these great triumphant beings, but here's the problem.

If you just stop with Psalm 8 and try to work on your own identity and your own sense of self-worth with Psalm 8 *as it stands*, you're going to run into a problem because you're going to say, "I know I *want* to be this glorious person, this rational, eternal, creative person. I know there's a lot about me that's great. I know I'm not an animal. I know I'm not a piece of junk. I know I'm not an accident, and yet I *don't* see myself crowned with glory and honor. I've made a real mess of things. I *continually* make a mess of things. Humanity has made a mess of things. So how in the world can the Bible come and say we're these great, radiant, wonderful, incredible creatures?"

Well, do you know what's interesting? The Book of Hebrews anticipates our problem. In Hebrews 2, it quotes Psalm 8. It says, **Hebrews 2:6-8**, "*But there is a place where someone has testified: 'What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.'*" We just read that, but look at what the writer adds at the end of the verse. Get this, this is amazing! **(V.8b)** "*Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them.*"

Yeah, we look at ourselves, and we say, “We’re a mess, and the world’s a mess. How could we be these great, wonderful things the Bible says we are?” Look it. It says, “But we do not see everything under our feet.” But then the payoff in v.9, “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*”

Do you see that? What it’s trying to say is, “Look at yourself. Look at ourselves. We’re not crowned with glory and honor, but Jesus is.” Hebrews says, “*He was made a little lower than the angels.*” He came down. He became a little less. He became like us, and he lived a perfect life, and he died a perfect death for us so, if you receive him, you receive the crown in him. *He’s* crowned with glory and honor. *He* is the perfect humanity, and when you receive him as Lord and Savior, you receive that in him.

Do you see what it’s trying to say? It says if you just look at yourself and say, “I know I’m a wonderful person. God made me to be a wonderful work of art.” You keep looking at yourself and say, “But I don’t see myself crowned with glory and honor. I do not see everything under my feet...but I see Jesus...who *is* crowned with glory and honor because he came down, he became a little lower than the angels, and he tasted

death for us.” Now do you live in holy consciousness of that every day?

Do you remember that? “In Christ I *am* now crowned with glory and honor.” Do you remind yourself of that every day? Or else do you say, “Gosh, nobody is asking me out,” or, “I should have been promoted by now. My career is going nowhere? I can’t afford a fancy couch. I must not matter?”

Isn’t the honor of being in Christ enough? Don’t you know? Don’t you fill your mind with this? Look at the majesty of God – the majesty of the cross and the resurrection – until you find the only identity you’ll ever need. I’m a child of the King of Kings and the Master of the Universe.

Let’s pray...