

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 10.

Psalm 8 – A Praise Psalm

20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everyone. We're diving deep into Psalm 8 today. You know, the one about God's majesty, creation, and how we humans fit into it all.

And joining us is biblical scholar Dr. Bruce Waltke to help us really unpack it. It's always exciting to dig into this Psalm. It's powerful imagery.

Absolutely. It really captures that sense of awe and wonder. Yeah.

And Dr. Waltke points out something interesting about how the Psalm starts and ends, you know, that same declaration. Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth? That's it. He suggests it's not just a call to praise.

It's more like the earth itself, I-S, praising God. That's a cool way to look at it. Like creation itself can't help but declare God's glory.

Exactly. And the way the Psalm moves back and forth between praising God in creation and then praising him for how he works in history, particularly in overcoming evil, is fascinating. Yeah, that back-and-forth structure really stands out.

One stanza focuses on the heavens, that image of the sky, like a crystal dome. Right. And then the next stanza shifts to God working through his people to overcome evil.

Even using that metaphor of the mouths of children and nursing infants, you have ordained strength. That's always been a tricky image for me. What's Dr. Waltke's take on that mouths of babes imagery? He explains it as this combination of metaphors and metonymies.

So, like, the mouth actually refers to the prayers and praises that are offered to God. Okay, I see. And then children and nursing infants.

Well, they represent the humility of God's people, the idea that we rely on God's strength, not our own. Not about literally fighting battles as babies, more about God's power working through the faithful, even those who seem weak. Exactly.

It's that reminder that God often chooses the unexpected to achieve his purposes. It makes me think of that challenge Dr. Waltke gives us to consider the sheer vastness of the universe. All those amazing discoveries we've made through science.

Oh, absolutely. Like the things the Hubble telescope has revealed. Our galaxy alone is what? 100,000 light-years across? 100,000.

It's mind-boggling. And from the edge of our planetary system, Earth is just the size of a pixel. Yeah.

It could definitely make you feel pretty small. But Dr. Waltke doesn't see it as a negative. He sees Earth as this stage where this huge drama of good versus evil plays out.

That's a great point. It's like the size of the stage doesn't diminish the importance of the play. Exactly.

But that brings us to a big question that Psalm 8 grapples with. What is man? Right. What is a mere mortal that you are mindful of him? The psalmist asks.

And Dr. Waltke points out how differently Psalm 8 answers that question than some secular philosophers do. It's a stark contrast. Like Aristotle, who said man is a political animal.

Or Schopenhauer, you know, from his pretty bleak perspective, he wished he even knew who he was. And then there's E.O. Wilson, who believed scientific progress actually made us lose our dignity. That's pretty depressing, right? Yeah.

Definitely not an uplifting view of humanity. But Psalm 8 gives us this radically different perspective. You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor, it says.

It's like humanity gets this huge promotion, placed so high in creation, made in God's image, given dominion over the earth. Yeah. It flips the script completely.

We're not just another species lost in a vast and different cosmos. We have purpose, meaning, significance. You know, it reminds me of C.S. Lewis's reflections on Queen Elizabeth's coronation.

He saw that heavy crown as a symbol of the massive responsibility God has given to humanity. A responsibility we certainly aren't equipped for without his help, I'd say. Which leads us nicely to what theologians call the cultural mandate, right? From Genesis 1.28, God's command to 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.

Exactly. And Dr. Waltke is careful to point out that it applies to both the physical and spiritual realms. We're called to cultivate both.

And he argues that in the physical realm, we've seen some incredible progress. Think about communication, energy, medicine, travel. Huge advancements.

Absolutely. But he also suggests we might have fallen short in the spiritual realm. Well, yeah.

It seems like for all our amazing advancements, there's also this potential for them to be used for destructive purposes. A constant tension, right? He uses the example of the internet. It's this tool for global connection.

But it's also become a breeding ground for things like misinformation and hate speech. It's like this wrestling match with an S, capable of great good, but also prone to destructive impulses. Exactly.

And that duality is even reflected in the creatures listed in Psalm 8, isn't it? You've got your flocks and herds, wild animals, birds, fish. And then there's the one that swims the paths of the seas, which Dr. Waltke believes is probably Leviathan. Wait, Leviathan, the symbol of chaos and evil? That's the one.

But according to Dr. Waltke, even Leviathan has a place in God's plan. He points out that this list includes both sources of life- you know, the domesticated animals, the birds, the fish- and sources of death: wild animals, Leviathan. So it's all part of the grand tapestry, even the starry stuff.

Right. And our mandate is to rule over all aspects of creation, the good and the bad. It's not just about cultivating beauty and harmony.

It's also about confronting and overcoming the forces of darkness. That's a pretty tall order. It makes you wonder if we're really up to the task.

And that's where the idea of partnership comes in. God doesn't expect us to do it all on our own strength. He wants to work through us, through our weaknesses.

So how does that understanding that we're partners with God change how we see our lives and actions? It feels like Psalm 8 is calling us to something much bigger than ourselves, to be part of this cosmic struggle between good and evil. That's a question worth wrestling with, I'd say. What if every choice we make, every action we take, is part of this larger drama? How would that change the way we treat each other, care for the earth, use our gifts and talents? It really is a lot to think about, isn't it? That we could be part of something so much bigger than ourselves.

Definitely makes you pause and reflect. And it makes you think about that word dominion, right? It's not about just sitting back and observing. Dr. Waltke uses words like subdue, dominion, even put everything under their feet.

So more like being actively involved, taking responsibility. Exactly. It's like the effort it takes to train a horse or to cultivate a field.

It requires skill, patience, a willingness to overcome challenges. I get that. But when we talk about ruling over the spiritual realm, how do you even begin to do that? It's not exactly tangible, is it? That's where that metaphor of putting everything under our feet comes in, I think.

It's about confronting darkness with light, with truth, with love, with forgiveness. So less about outward conquest and more about an internal transformation. You got it.

Letting God's spirit work through us to bring healing and restoration to the world. Because let's be honest, the world needs it. Definitely.

And that brings us back to that mouths of babes idea, doesn't it? Dr. Waltke, who was really emphasizing that it's not about brute force. No, it's not. It's about the power of prayer, the humility of those who rely on God's strength instead of their own.

So those quiet prayers we whisper when we're desperate or hopeful, you know, maybe they really are shaking the foundations of darkness. Now there's a thought to ponder. And it all circles back to that powerful declaration at the beginning and end of Psalm 8, right? Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth? It gives me chills every time.

And the point is, God's majesty isn't confined to some distant heaven. It's here now, working through us. We're not just meant to admire the cosmos from afar.

We're meant to be actively involved in God's redemptive work. That's a great way to put it: to be agents of healing and restoration. It really is a powerful message, especially in a world that can feel so, I don't know, overwhelming sometimes.

It is. But this Psalm reminds us that we're not alone, that we're part of something bigger and more enduring. Something with real purpose.

And that actually connects to another point that Dr. Waltke brought up: a connection between Psalm 8 and the New Testament. Do you know the author of Hebrews actually quotes Psalm 8 when talking about Jesus? Oh, yeah. It's Hebrews 2.6-9. You made him, for a little while, lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor.

Right. It's like the author is using Psalm 8 to make this profound point about Jesus, you know, fully God, but humbled himself to become human, to experience our limitations. Exactly.

And through his sacrifice, he defeated sin and death. He fulfilled that mandate to put everything under his feet in a way we could never do on our own. He really takes that cultural mandate to a whole new level.

And he shows us that true power isn't about dominating others. It's about serving them, even laying down your life for their well-being. Powerful stuff.

And it raises this crucial question for us as followers of Christ. How do we participate in that kind of dominion? How do we live out that same humility, love, self-sacrifice? That's something we probably wrestle with our whole lives, isn't it? But even though Psalm 8 was written thousands of years ago, it still speaks to the challenges and opportunities we face today. It does.

It calls us to this higher purpose. To a life that really makes a difference, to become partners with God in this incredible story of redemption. And as we've seen, that partnership includes both joy and struggle, the awe of creation's beauty and the willingness to confront its brokenness.

It's not an easy path, that's for sure, but definitely a path worth taking. We'll be back in just a bit to reflect on the lasting legacy of Psalm 8 and its message of hope for all of us. And we're back.

Psalm 8 has really been a journey, hasn't it? So much depth and meaning packed into those few verses. It really is incredible. And you know what keeps coming back to me is how much Psalm 8 points forward to what we see in the New Testament.

Oh, interesting. How so? Well, that whole idea of humanity being God's representatives on earth. It's basically the role of the church, isn't it? Carrying on God's work in the world.

It's like those verses about ruling over creation were planting the seeds for a whole theology of mission and service. Exactly. And when you combine that with the whole mouths of babes concept, it becomes even more powerful.

God often uses the humble, the overlooked, to accomplish extraordinary things. It's not about us and our own strength. It's about letting him work through us.

Right. So it's not about building empires or chasing after worldly success. It's about partnering with God to bring healing and restoration to the world.

To be channels for his love and grace. Beautifully put. And that's where the hope of Psalm 8 really shines through.

Even in the midst of all the chaos and darkness, even when we mess up, there's this unwavering belief that God is still in control, working through us to accomplish his purposes. It's such a powerful message, especially in a world that can feel so overwhelming at times. It really is.

Psalm 8 reminds us that we're not alone. We're part of something much bigger, something that will last. It's a call to live with purpose, isn't it? To embrace the responsibility of being made in God's image.

To use our unique gifts and talents to truly make a difference. So as we wrap up our deep dive into Psalm 8, what's the one thing you hope our listeners will take away from all this? I think it's this. We're invited to see ourselves as God's partners in this incredible story of redemption.

Every choice we make, every action we take, it all matters. It can either help creation flourish, or it can contribute to its brokenness. It's a challenge to live with intention, with awareness, with gratitude for the gift of life and the incredible privilege of participating in God's work.

And never underestimate the power of even the smallest acts of love, kindness, and compassion. Those seemingly insignificant things can have a ripple effect, creating hope that spreads far beyond ourselves. Absolutely.

Well, thank you so much for joining us on this deep dive into Psalm 8. We hope it's challenged you, inspired you, and maybe even left you with a renewed sense of wonder and purpose. It's been a pleasure. And may the words of the psalmist stay with you.

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.