

Psalm 8

Romans 11:33-36

March 2, 2014

What Matters Most: The Majesty & Sovereignty of God

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

AND SO WOULD WE

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

On Christmas Eve 1968, astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell, and William Anders orbited the moon ten times in twenty hours. Apollo 8 was the first manned mission to leave Earth's orbit, reach and orbit the moon, and return to Earth.

On the ninth orbit, the Apollo 8 crew transmitted live pictures to Earth. At the time, this was the most watched TV broadcast ever. After Commander Borman introduced the three astronauts, each crew member described what he was seeing as they flew over the surface of the moon and sent back pictures of the Earth and Moon as seen from Apollo 8.

Then Lunar Module Pilot William Anders said, "For all the people on Earth the crew of Apollo 8 has a message we would like to send you." *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light': and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."*

Next, Command Module Pilot Jim Lovell read, *"And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.' And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."*

Commander Frank Borman finished the message with these words: *"And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear': and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters he called the Seas: and God saw that it was good."* Borman then added, "And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you - all of you on the good Earth."

Abraham Lincoln said, "I see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God."

Isn't that exactly what David says in Psalm 8, "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

At 5:15 a.m. on Sunday, June 23 of last year, I was 1100 miles south of the equator, in Lusaka, Zambia. I was standing in Dustin and Sherri Ellington's backyard, waiting to get in Dustin's car for a three hour drive south to the Zambezi River. When I looked into the heavens, I saw the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, and there it was – the Southern Cross! You can't see the Southern Cross in the Wallace, NC night sky or from most places in the northern hemisphere. It was magnificent!

Think about looking up into the night sky and seeing the moon and the stars that God has established. On a crystal clear night, you might find yourself wondering the same thing as David, "God, who am I that you remember me, that you care for me?"

When you calculate the vast distances and numbers of the stars in the sky, you can feel overwhelmed. My favorite constellation is the Pleiades, also called The Seven Sisters. It is in one of the star clusters nearest to our Earth – it's only about 2400 trillion miles away! Astronomers estimate this star cluster is about 100 million years old and that it will survive only another 250 million years. So, I plan to look at it as much as possible before it disappears!

We live in The Milky Way Galaxy which is 100,000 light-years across. That's about 6 followed by 17 zeroes miles! Astronomers estimate there may be between 100 – 400 billion stars in the Milky Way, with as many planets. Our home galaxy is estimated to be one of between 350 – 500 BILLION galaxies in the universe.

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

As I was writing this sermon, I was listening to some music on Pandora on my iPad. When I stopped and paid attention to the song playing, I realized it was "This Is My Father's World," a piano solo by Chris Rice. Do you remember the opening verse? "This is my Father's world, And to my listening ears All nature sings, and round me rings The music of the spheres. This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas; His hand the wonders wrought."

There is a sign hanging in a Sunday School room at the Little Chapel on the Boardwalk Presbyterian Church at Wrightsville Beach. The sign says, "YES, THERE IS A GOD. IT IS NOT YOU!" In a sense that's a good summary of both Psalm 8 and Romans 11:33-36. David put it this way: "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" The apostle Paul said this: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."

One of the core beliefs that matters most in our Reformed Presbyterian faith is that God is God and we are not. Here's a story that gets that point across: One day a group of scientists got together and decided that humans had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell God that they were done with him.

The scientist walked up to God and said, "God, we've decided that we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things, so why don't you just go on and get lost."

God listened very patiently and kindly to the man. After the scientist was done talking, God said, "Very well, how about this, let's say we have a human being making contest." To which the scientist replied, "OK, great!" But God added, "Now, we're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam."

The scientist said, "Sure, no problem," and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt. God just looked at him and said, "No, no, no. You go get your own dirt!"

We could look at the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars that God has established, calculate the mind-boggling distances in our universe, and very logically come to the conclusion that we are nothing. But that's not the answer to David's question, "What are we that you remember us and care for us?" Remember what he said? "Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." God has given us a place of honor and responsibility in this marvelous creation, the work of his fingers. Even as the vastness of the universe overwhelms us on a starry night, we can be amazed and thankful that the God who made the moon and the stars that are trillions of miles away from us, this God is the same God who promised, "I shall be **your** God and you shall be my people."

For four summers I worked for a man named Mel Davis at two different presbytery summer camps. Each year during staff training before the campers arrived, we would learn about creation care and how to teach the campers to respect and take care of God's amazing creation. One week, in our staff worship service, Mel said, "I'm going to begin by reading the creation story." Of course, we were all ready to hear, "In the beginning . . ." And that's exactly what we heard, but not from Genesis 1. Instead, Mel read from John 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." A little later in John 1, we hear, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son."

In his psalm, David celebrates God's majesty and says, "How majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens." But, as the gospel of John reminds us, we have seen God's glory revealed in Jesus of Nazareth – in how he lived his life, in what he taught and did, in how he lived among us as one of us, and in his death on the cross for our sins. In the glory of the heavens, the work of God's

fingers, the moon and the stars that God has established, we most definitely see God's majesty and glory. In Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we most definitely see, not only God's majesty and glory, but also God's love and mercy and everlasting care for you and me.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote these wonderful words:

*The stars shine over the earth,
The stars shine over the sea,
The stars look up to the mighty God,
The stars look down on me;
The stars will live for a million years,
For a million years and a day!
But Christ and I shall live and love
When the stars have passed away.*

As I prepared for and wrote this sermon this week, I listened to numerous versions of Tom Fettke's song, "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name" on YouTube. The Wednesday morning Bible study group even gathered around my computer to listen to one particularly moving performance by a men's chorus.

But I couldn't wait to hear our choir sing praises to God this morning with this wonderful anthem. When we go outside and look at the night sky, when we look at the world around us, when we consider the works of God's hands, when we come to worship God our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, let us join in with all of creation that sings:

*O Lord, Our God, the majesty and glory of Your name
Transcends the earth and fills the heavens.*

O Lord, Our God, little children praise You perfectly, and so would we.

*Alleluia! Alleluia!
The majesty and glory of Your name.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

And so would we . . . and so would we!

Let us pray: New every morning is your love, great God of light, and all day long you are working for good in the world. Stir up in us desire to serve you, to live peacefully with our neighbors and all your creation, and to devote each day to your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.