

Made For Majesty

Series: Patterns For Prayer

by Steve Zeisler

Over the course of the next couple of months we're going to be studying a psalm each Sunday. The Psalter, as you probably know, is the prayer book of the Bible. These ancient and magnificent prayers have been well -- loved by every generation of believers. I'm convinced that as we begin a new year, we can have no better focus than to be galvanized toward renewal in our prayer lives. Psalm 8 is where we'll start our study this week.

In the book of Daniel, King Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, gave a feast in honor of himself. Belshazzar was an arrogant man. At the height of his feast he brought out the implements that were stolen from the temple of God in Jerusalem so that his concubines and friends could use them to get drunk, deliberately promoting themselves with that which belonged to the Lord. In the midst of all this revelry and arrogance, a mysterious, ghostly hand appeared and began writing on the wall. Daniel 5 says this:

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lamp stand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

He called out for someone to interpret this dramatic, frightening event. Eventually, as the story goes on, Daniel, the elderly prophet and man of God, was brought before him. These were Daniel's words:

This is the inscription that was written:

Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin

This is what these words mean:

***Mene:* God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.**

***Tekel:* You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.**

***Peres:* Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.**

God himself, by this mysterious handwriting and later by the mouth of his prophet, publicly evaluated Belshazzar the arrogant and his life. He said he had examined Belshazzar's reign. He had weighed what Belshazzar amounted to in life on the scales that he alone controlled, and had found that Belshazzar's life was not what it ought to be. It was a failure. Belshazzar's days had been numbered, and they would come to an end. His kingdom was lost to him and his own life forfeited shortly afterward.

Evaluation time

We're at the time of year in our culture when we examine how we've lived for the last year. We number our days. We make resolutions to do better at certain things and reform ourselves. We want our lives to count for something. More profoundly, we're at the beginning of a decade now, and near the end of a millennium, and our willingness to look at who we are and what we're becoming is perhaps greater this year than in previous years.

My wife Leslie, our 10 -- year -- old son David, and I went to a very different kind of feast earlier this week at the home of a woman named Marion, a member of our body who had become too crippled with arthritis to make it to church services. Since she hadn't been able to take communion among other Christians, she asked us to come and share communion with her. Marion was born just after the turn of the century, and in a few days she will be 91 years old, just as the 1900's are. She was reflecting on her life, weighing to a degree the things that had happened to her, and numbering the days that God had given her. No hand appeared to write

on the wall, but if one had, I'm convinced that the message would have been the exact opposite of Belshazzar's message: "Here is one with whom God is pleased!" Marion's life has been one of service to others, joyful responsiveness to God, and a desire to know him better. She's committed herself to Bible study in her latter years, and she's excited to know the Scriptures. She's the most winsome, sweet-spirited, delightful person I can think of. Examining her 91 years, as people are prone to do at this time of year, produces not the anxiety of Belshazzar but an awareness of the approval of the Lord.

A place of prayer

Being committed to prayer, rejoicing in prayer, and being changed by it are characteristic of people like Marion and like King David, as we'll discover in Psalm 8, who have lives that are weighed in the scales and found to be approved by God. In contrast, Belshazzar was an arrogant man who thought the things of God were for his own pleasure and whose life was forfeited as a result. What will make the difference in whether we are found to be approved, I suggest to you, is our learning to value prayer more. Let's look at this prayer in Psalm 8 now.

There is great theology in this prayer. It is quoted by Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is also quoted by the writer of Hebrews in explaining the nature and destiny of man. There is wonderful poetic but powerful insight into both the nature of God as creator and the nature of man as his creation. But the point I want most to make this morning is that this is not written as theology, but as a prayer. This was a discussion David was having with God, not with his people. He wasn't attempting to persuade anyone of anything. He was rejoicing in conversation with the Lord.

The psalm begins, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" It ends with exactly the same phrase. Let's read the whole psalm:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

**You have set your glory above the heavens.
From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.**

**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?
You made him a little lower than God
and crowned him with glory and honor.**

**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.**

**O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

(Your version of the Bible may have something different from "a little lower than God" in verse 5, but this is the best translation, for reasons I'll not go into now.)

I want us to look closely at the opening and closing phrase, the one in which David is saying something about

God. But before we do that, let's look at the rest of the psalm. David is saying he has thought about life, he has considered God's heavens, and he has paid attention to history. He has looked at the way God works, and that gives him content to praise God about. It informs his understanding so that when he relates to God, he's speaking to someone he knows well and can appreciate at greater depth.

Triumph over enemies

David says two things. First, he looks at the way God treats his enemies and he finds praiseworthy and wonderful what he sees. Then he looks at the way God treats his children: What is man, that is, a redeemed man who knows God; what is his life like? When David looks at the way God treats his enemies and the way he treats his children, he finds himself overwhelmed at the God whose name he is praising. David does an interesting thing in both of these cases. When he is speaking of the enemies, he looks first at the heavens, and then he looks down and observes things on earth. He does exactly the same thing when he is wondering about the nature of a man who is rightly related to God: He first looks at the heavens, and then he looks back down at the world; in fact, he looks beneath his own feet. The greatness of man, as he discovers, is that all is placed beneath his feet.

Let's take the case of the enemies first. The second half of verse 1 says, "You have set your glory above the heavens." David is looking up. God's glory is so great that it is above the rim of the heavens. It is greater than the stars in the firmament. The glory of God is so remarkable that it defies description. Now, if his enemies are presented before him, how should such a glorious and powerful God deal with them? Shouldn't he slay them with his breath, step on them, or flip them aside with the back of his hand? He is so powerful, his glory so great, and his majesty unchallenged!

But that isn't what it says. David says he has learned something interesting about his God. God deals with his enemies by using weak and lowly vessels. It's not the strong, powerful people that he uses as his instruments to defeat his enemies, but the mouths of children and infants, the little ones. Janet Weiner shared with some of us who were praying before the service this morning. She said that there are unbelieving members of the Weiner family, and when they come to visit it's the little ones who talk about the Lord, who get through to them. The children have insinuated themselves into the lives of the unbelieving family members, and they are making sense, tearing down strongholds. Children don't care much what people think; they're going to talk about the Lord they know and love. They'll sing Bible songs and find themselves penetrating strongholds that others can't.

Our Lord wasn't born a king in a palace; he was born in a stable. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He was executed on a cross, and yet it was he who overthrew the strongholds of the enemy. It is always the small, the quiet, the unseen, the little people-- infants and children, ordinary folks-- whom God uses as instruments to advance his kingdom and to destroy what is arrayed against him, whether it is Satanic, the evil that has penetrated this culture, or, finally, the evil that has penetrated our hearts. Our own flesh is defeated by the quiet penetration of the word of God.

Human greatness

Now David again looks up in verse 3: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is [a good] man that you are mindful of him?" That is, what would one surmise about a man who knows God? David has seen the glory of the heavens; how could God highly value one fly-- speck of a man, whose life is short and whose stature decays over time, who is insignificant even among other men let alone the starry heavens? Having looked at the heavens, he now looks down. What does he see? What he sees is small and insignificant, but what he knows is that God esteems humanity above all else. God has made us just a little lower than himself. He has crowned us with glory and honor and has placed everything under our feet. It is God who has made being human the most glorious calling of all. Having created us, he has redeemed us, and there is nothing more important than to be a human being, a man or woman who knows God and who has become a vessel for the Spirit of God.

Our 14-- year-- old son Jeff was sitting at the table the other night, and we were talking about high school dances. The subject of Sadie Hawkins dances came up, where the girls ask the boys; they take place once a

year at some schools. He commented, " What a terrible idea that is!"

"Why?" I asked.

" Well. what if you didn't get asked?" he replied. He likes the system where if he's too shy or he doesn't want to go to a dance, he doesn't have to ask anybody and he doesn't feel rejected. But what if they had this dance and no one were to ask him to dance? That would be awful!

Both his mother and sister leaped up and responded, "Aha!" at the same time, because the other 364 days of the year that's the way it is for the girls. That is a terrible system, isn't it? What if you don't get asked?

The point is that it would be terrible not to be chosen, terrible to have to live life without knowing that you were important or cared for, without having a sense of approval. But David's observation in Psalm 8 is that God has already approved of us. With a God-- given awareness of his own value David looks at the heavens and at the earth. Everywhere he sees the activity of God and the majesty of God, and he finds himself breaking into prayer, finally: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

There are three points I'd like to bring out in this sentence. First, this one to whom we pray is our Lord. He is not a distant, impersonal power; he is our Lord with whom we have come into a relationship; there is a covenant between us. In addition, he is not as much my Lord as ours-- David realizes that, having given himself in relationship to the living God, he is all of a sudden in relationship to everybody else who is so related. We become a community because we all belong to our Lord.

The second point in that sentence speaks of the majesty of the name of God: "How majestic is your name." Jesus, when he taught his disciples to pray, began the same way: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed [holy] be your name." Now, in the Hebrew way of thinking, a name has profound meaning. It gathers up all that the person stands for and is. It's a very intimate notion For a person to have an excellent or majestic name means that he himself is invested with worth and honor. What David means here is that all other rivals are set aside. It is God's name that is excellent- not our name, the name of the company we work for, nor the name of some pleasure or hobby that's captivated us. He doesn't say, "Self, my Self, how majestic is your name in all the earth." Nor does he say, "Money, my Money, how majestic is your name in all the earth." But he says, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" It is the person of the living God who has defeated all opposition and captured him utterly. This is the name he values.

The last point in the sentence is that the majesty of his name is "in all the earth." It is not just in religious spheres, or on occasions when you meet for Christian worship, not just in Christmas carols and Easter services, not just when somebody is born or somebody dies, or in some other circumscribed way where religion is allowed to enter in. The majesty of the Lord is everywhere, all the time -- "In all places, all days, all events, all the earth, how majestic is your name!"

Pray Continually

In closing, the glory of this psalm is that it's a prayer. David talks like this to God! We have the same opportunity to live our lives so that when we encounter difficulty at work tomorrow we can say to God, " your name is majestic, you're present with me, you are my God with whom I am intimately related, and you understand what I'm going through. I can esteem you highly or I can give way to something else. But God, help me in this." It becomes the pattern of life to talk to him about things, to think the way David did-- to walk around looking at the stars and talking to God, seeing the created world, seeing the foes of God defeated by infants and ordinary folks. When you worry about who you are and what you stand for, you

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can think the way David did and then speak to God and be open to hear from him. You can have a life that is filled with a dialog as a lifestyle, not just at set occasions. That's what 1 Thessalonians 5:17 means when it says, Pray continually." It doesn't mean that every utterance is a prayer; it means that there is nothing that isn't prayed about. Our lives are filled with dialog with God about everything.

I love the movie Fiddler on the Roof. One of my favorite things about that movie is Tevye the milkman's prayer life. He walks along and talks to God about his cow, about the milk, about whether he's going to be rich or not, about his daughters. His whole life is a dialog with his Father. He complains sometimes, and he says thank you sometimes, but everything about life is part of the conversation. And David had learned to think about life in a way that moved him to address his thoughts to God. That's my concern for myself and for all of us- if we hear the psalms, what these prayers are about and why, the struggles and the opportunities, we will find ourselves more and more frequently, more deeply, and more profoundly speaking to God.

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