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## **Psalm 8. English Standard Version**

- <sup>1</sup> *O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
you have established strength because of your foes,  
to still the enemy and the avenger.*
- <sup>3</sup> *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,*
- <sup>4</sup> *what is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?*
- <sup>5</sup> *Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.*
- <sup>6</sup> *You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under his feet,*
- <sup>7</sup> *all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,*
- <sup>8</sup> *the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*
- <sup>9</sup> *O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

## **Gospel of Matthew 21:12–16. English Standard Version**

<sup>12</sup> *And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."*

<sup>14</sup> And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, <sup>16</sup> and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read,

“ ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies  
you have prepared praise?’ ”

### **Acts 13:44–52. English Standard Version**

<sup>44</sup> The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. <sup>46</sup> And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

“ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

<sup>48</sup> And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. <sup>50</sup> But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. <sup>51</sup> But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

### **Chara.**

We struggle hard to find self-worth. We are pressured to achieve, to gain positions of power, to have a lot of assets – or at least to be perceived as having a lot of assets. But we forgot the oldest and the best reason to feel good about

ourselves – and Psalm 8 is a reminder of this. It’s clearly structured as a hymn, to be sung. It is unique in that throughout the Psalm, it refers to God in the second person: The Psalmist is speaking directly to God. Interestingly, the Apollo 11 mission left a disc on the moon containing messages from seventy-three nations, including the Vatican, which had the nerve to do something that the U.S. would never have done – and that was to include the entire text of this Psalm. In short, Psalm 8 is an eloquent declaration of the sovereignty of God and an affirmation of the exalted status of those creatures who were made in the image of God: us.

The Psalm addresses a fundamental question for the faithful: How can it be that mere humans can be of such a great concern for God? It turns out that we are placed at a very high level of prestige by God. The Psalm says that God has made us *a little lower than the heavenly beings* and *crowned us with glory and honor*. It also says that we have dominion over the earth, including *all sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea*.

Psalm 8 also points out that our authority is derivative and not ultimate. The reference to “heavenly beings” is often taken to mean angels, but the point is that we depend on God for our authority. The Lord gave us glory and honor, as the Psalm says, and put us in charge of the Earth, but all that we are and all that we have and all that we are in charge of – comes from God. This points out

something very critical. Although we have every right to have pride and confidence in who we are, independent of what we achieve in terms of money and power on Earth, we cannot do what we want with this planet and the life on it. We are in charge. We are custodians. We answer to God.

Now, there is something eerily similar between Psalm 8 and the Book of Genesis; Psalm 8 is an elegant, poetic overview of the creation story from Genesis. And like Genesis, Psalm 8 points out the central role of humility in God's plan for us. In ancient Israel, the people there knew that the mighty presence of God was revealed in the natural world, and they humbly praised and thanked God for this world. This psalm was sung at the beginning of the evening, as the sun was setting, with their eyes lifted up to the beautiful Middle-Eastern sky. The Psalm was an offering to God in acknowledgement of the story of creation. It's been called a Psalm for stargazers. It's a Psalm for those who thank the Lord for all that God has created and all that we have dominion over. At the same time, we look to the skies and accept our responsibility and our need to live modest lives.

Let's look at our second passage today. This is the famous cleansing of the Temple sequence, and we've looked at it before. This incident is described in all four of the Gospels. Biblical scholars and historians have noted that the area

around the Temple was huge and one person overturning some tables wouldn't have disrupted the daily operation of the money changers. Probably, Jesus' actions were limited and intentionally symbolic. He wanted to make a statement about people who exploit the faith of others to make money. Here's what the money changers were doing. They insisted that people making donations to the Temple do so in Jewish shekels. But the currency that most people had was Greek and Roman. So, the money changers exchanged Greek and Roman coins for shekels as people entered the Temple – and charged a hefty commission in doing so. It was the supposedly faithful taking advantage of the truly faithful.

This scene blends into another. In contrast to the callous behavior of the money changers, Jesus heals those who are sick and disabled. This causes people to acclaim the power of Jesus. Children shout *Hosanna* to him. It means *save us*. Jesus can cure those in earthly need and save those in spiritual need. When the religious leaders of the day reject this, Jesus says: "*Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?*" What's happening here? The money changers have defiled the Temple grounds, but Jesus turns it into a holy place where God has dominion. When Jesus refers to the children, he is saying that while the religious leaders of the day have rejected him, the children are the truly wise ones. They understand intuitively who he is.

But Jesus isn't just making these words about children up, as most people reading this passage think. He's actually quoting Psalm 8, verse 2: *Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.* This passage from the Psalm needs a little explanation. It means that the way a child might marvel at all of Creation is the truest way of worshiping the God who made all of Creation. It also means that the grace of God often is most evident in the innocence of children. Further, the weak, the small, the most unlikely are often those who speak the loudest for God. Putting both of our passages together, the verse from our Psalm and the verse from Matthew, we see that children are often far more dependable as the voice of God than corrupt adults who propret to be the servants of God, including those who during Jesus' time were God's priests. This is a reinforcement of the need for humility as expressed in Psalm 8. It's children who are more likely to reflect both the honor that God has given us as well as the modest way we must live. For us today, we are reminded that children have truer perception because they are not blinded by the temptations of a consumer-oriented world where power and possessions are how we judge each other.

Let's move to the third quote. It comes from Acts, in which Luke – the same Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke – tells us the story of the Apostles and

Paul, after the resurrection of Jesus. They are carrying the word of God to the Jews of Israel and to the Christians of the Middle East and what is now Europe. In our third passage, Paul and Barnabas are out evangelizing. They are successful. Then, as our quote tells us: *The Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.* <sup>51</sup> *But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.* <sup>52</sup> *And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.* Interestingly, this passage is similar to our second passage.

In both our second and third quote, the leaders of the day have a lot to lose when the teachings of Jesus Christ begin to spread. Paul and Barnabas, like Jesus before them, are undaunted. They are driven out of town but are filled with the Holy Spirit and joy. The Greek word for joy that appears in the original Scripture is *chara* (χαρά) – pronounced khar-ah'. Paul and Barnabas were filled with both the Holy Spirit and *chara*. Now, *chara* in the Bible describes a feeling of deep inner happiness, a rejoiceful-ness. This word refers to a joy that is based on one's spiritual state and not on what happens in the physical world.

In sum, God made us *a little lower than the heavenly beings*. This is what brings us *chara*, a joy that is far deeper than the happiness that we feel when earthly things go well. It is more than making a lot of money, obtaining a position

of respect or power. It is something that the children of Jesus' day realized, despite the fact that the religious and secular leaders of his day did not accept this. That joy, that *chara*, is what we have as believers. It is within us every day.

This word, *chara*, is related etymologically to the word *charis* (χάρις), (khar'-ece). It is the word for grace – a word that means a lot to Christians. It is God's grace, God's unearned gift acting within us, drawing us toward God, toward faith, that ultimately brings us this joy. This joy is independent of anything – good or bad – that can happen in the physical world. It's a point that's hard to appreciate when we can't read and understand Scripture in its original language. To someone reading the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, these words *chara* and *charis* are far more powerful than the words joy and grace – because they speak of the world of spiritual belief, of God, of Jesus Christ. They are related words. They are, in a sense, one in the same. Grace is why we feel joy. When we feel this joy, we are feeling God's grace within us. When God created us a little lower than the heavenly beings, God filled us with grace and allowed us to have this sense of joy that we cannot say in modern English.

*Chara* is why I retired early and went to the seminary, why I'm a pastor and a chaplain. It's why I want to build a virtual reality church to accommodate those who don't have the ability or inclination to attend a physical church. It's why God

has been in my heart since I was a little boy. *Chara* is the big reward for believing in God. We were made a little lower than the heavenly beings and we have a joy in our hearts for which we don't even have a modern English word. There are many, many people who have a lot of money and other stuff that they can't take with them. But we have *chara*, and we can take it with us.

At the hospital where I'm a chaplain, I spend a lot of time in the Behavioral Health Unit, where psychiatric patients stay. I spoke recently with a man who was suffering from some sort of psychosis and was having delusions that people were hanging around the places where he worked and lived, planning to attack him. He proceeded to tell me about his past, about losing his father at a young age, having his fiancé break off their marriage, getting arrested for multiple violent crimes and spending time in prison, and of course, having mysterious people plotting against him. Then he told me that he had been spending a lot of time recently reading the Bible. We talked for a while about Scripture and it was clear that he really had been studying the Bible. He even told me that he didn't like the New Living Translation – the one I use so much in my sermons. Then he said that there's a reason why he knows he's going to be okay. God has gotten him through everything bad that has happened. He said that he felt sorry for the people who were plotting against him, because they didn't have the joy of knowing God.