

Inconceivable Psalm 8

In 1884, a British schoolmaster by the name of Edwin Abbott wrote a novella entitled Flatland. The book was about a two dimensional world inhabited by 2 dimensional geometric figures like squares, triangles and circles. I want you to imagine Flatland for a moment. A flat universe would be like a sheet of paper. The inhabitants of Flatland could move forward or backward or side to side, or diagonally, but they could never go up or down, because a third dimension doesn't exist. They have no concept of up or down. There is no word in their vocabulary for up or down. It just doesn't exist.

Now suppose an apple came along and wanted to interact with the inhabitants of Flatland. Suppose the apple hovered above Flatland and cried out, "Hey there, inhabitants of Flatland! Look up here! I am an apple!" Well, the inhabitants of Flatland might hear some strange noise, but they would not be able to look up and see the apple because...there is no up! Maybe, the apple then floats down and lands on Flatland. Still, the squares and triangles and circles would only be able to see that part of the apple that was touching Flatland. They still can't look up and see the rest of him. They might interpret the apple to be a circle. But they certainly can't comprehend all that the apple is because he is of another dimension.

I give you that little thought exercise to help you understand the difficulty we have of comprehending all that God is. God is other than us. That is one of the definitions of holiness--its an otherness. We are human beings living in a three-dimensional world. We are confined by time and space. God is not confined by space and time. As our creator, God must be greater than, other than, the creatures He makes. There are aspects of God that we think we comprehend, but like the geometric figures in Flatland, we have no idea how much more there is to God that we can't fathom. Paul says in Romans 11, beginning in verse 33:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

**34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”**

**35 “Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”**

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

- I entitled my message Inconceivable. My purpose was to encapsulate our inability as humans to fully grasp all that God is. In the Princess Bride (you're welcome, Pastor Jason), Vizzini uses the word inconceivable quite often. In fact, at one point, Inigo says to him, "You use that word a lot. I do not think it means what you think it means." With that in mind, let's define the word. Inconceivable means not being able to be imagined or grasped mentally. Certainly, God has revealed Himself to us in many ways. He has revealed Himself to us through the things He created. He has revealed Himself to us by creating us in His image. He has revealed Himself to us through Scripture. And most spectacularly and clearly, He has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It would be like the apple, in trying to reveal himself fully to the inhabitants of Flatland, actually became one of them, actually became two-dimensional like they are. Here's what the writer of Hebrews says in the opening words of his epistle:

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and

the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

So, God has revealed Himself to us in a number of ways and yet, because we are human beings and we are limited in how we can perceive Him, understanding everything there is to know about God is beyond our grasp. The totality of His existence is inconceivable to us.

Often, we are told that when we read Scripture, we should ask questions about it. One such method encourages us to ask what a passage tells us about God, what it tells us about ourselves, and what it tells us about our relationship to God. Psalm 8 fits this method perfectly. Psalm 8 exults in the glory and majesty of God. Psalm 8 exults in our status as humans. And Psalm 8 exults in our relationship to Him and the purpose He has set out for us. With that in mind, let's pray and then dig into this psalm.

David doesn't leave it up to us to figure out the main theme of Psalm 8. He bookends the entire psalm with it. Notice the first and last verses are identical.

8 O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The first "lord" is that capitalized version that represents the covenant name of God, Yahweh. "Oh Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth." In the book, Knowing God, J. I. Packer tells us that the word majesty comes from the Latin word for greatness. When we ascribe majesty to someone, we are acknowledging the greatness of that person. He says that the word majesty, when applied to God, is always a declaration of His greatness and an invitation to worship. God is far beyond us in greatness, and therefore is to be adored.

Here in Psalm 8, David says the Name of God is majestic. God's name in the Bible almost always carries more meaning than just what we call Him. To praise the Name of Yahweh is to praise the greatness, the majesty, the

power, the wisdom, the love, the righteousness, the justice of God. He is great and He is great, it says in verse 1, in all the earth. Whether or not people in every corner of the earth recognize His greatness does not diminish His greatness. He is great, and one day His Name will redound in praise from every corner of this universe. He is the creator of this world, He is the redeemer of mankind, and the entire world is subject to His sovereignty. He transcends us in every way--in wisdom, in power, in moral purity, in freedom, in justice--God is other than us. Higher than us. The totality of God is inconceivable to us.

And yet, He is **our** Lord. He is Yahweh, the covenant God. Look at verse 2.

**2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.**

YOU have established strength because of YOUR foes. Not “He” and “His”, but “You” and “Yours”. He is a personal God and we are in covenant with Him. He is our Father and we are His children. The mixture of awe and reverence with familiarity and intimacy in this Psalm is remarkable. That such an amazing, awesome God is OUR God, OUR Father, OUR covenant-keeper should cause us to want to fall on our faces before Him in worship!!! It’s practically inconceivable!

And isn’t it just like our gracious God that He chooses to silence His enemies not with His own might and power, but by His power working through the weak. God could silence Satan and all of His minions in the blink of an eye by the sword of the Spirit coming from His mouth. But instead, He establishes strength in the mouths of little babies--little babies like us, to put His foes to shame. He chooses the weak things of this world; He chooses cracked clay pots to silence the enemy so that the power can be shown to be His. It results in praise for the glorious grace of God.

The Psalms often appeal to creation to demonstrate the glory of God. Psalm 19 starts this way.

**19 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**

Psalm 19 goes on to say that day after day and night after night the heavens are pouring out speech and knowledge about the God who created them. And so here, in verse 3, David talks about the heavens, the sun and the moon, but what I want to point out is that they are the works of His **fingers**. Not the works of His hands. Not the work of His mighty arms. The work of His **fingers**. Now the moon would weigh 162 sextillion pounds if you could put it on a scale on earth. That's 162 with 21 zeroes. And the sun would weigh 4 with thirty zeroes behind it. I don't even know how to say that number without scientific notation. That's how heavy the sun is. And yet, God moved those things around with his **fingers**. That's how powerful God is.

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all of the earth. David is rejoicing in the exaltation of His mighty, all-wise, majestic, covenant God, David doesn't stop there. As he is thinking about the wondrous glory of God, it causes him to ponder his own humanity and the status of mankind before God. Look at verses 3 and 4.

**3 When I look at 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,
and the son of man that you care for him?**

David says to God, You've created all of these amazing things, out of nothing, by the Word of Your mouth. You have a host of angels in the heavens, to worship and adore and serve you. In light of all of that, what is man? And why do you care about us? Why would a Being, so infinitely

wonderful, care about us? Why would He even give us a second thought? It's a humbling thought. But David answers his own questions in verses 5 and 6. God created us in a unique position, with unique qualities, for a unique purpose, to perform a unique role. Look in verses 5 and 6.

First in verse 5, **Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings**. There's some debate about the meaning of this passage. It centers around the phrase "heavenly beings" and the word "little". Some ESV Bibles have a footnote by the phrase "heavenly beings" that says or God. But God, referring to our Almighty Creator, doesn't seem to fit the context. Some theologians have argued that it refers to the pagan gods, but since the OT leaves no doubt that these are powerless idols, that doesn't seem to fit either. The writer of Hebrews takes the interpretation of the Greek translation of the OT, and interprets the phrase to mean "angels", which seems the best interpretation. It's doubtful that humans in their current fallen state have the power and mental capacity of Adam and Eve, and yet even they were not endowed with the power of angels. It seems man was created to be, at least in this age, lower than the angels.

The word little could be a comparative word as in, the angels are up here and we're a little bit lower than they are. But again, looking at Hebrews 2, the writer interprets it to mean "for a little while". Going with that interpretation, it would mean that God has made us for a little while lower than the angels, which would seem to indicate that at some point, we will be elevated to a higher status, perhaps because the gloriousness of God's grace is bestowed on mankind and not on the angels. Or perhaps because mankind is created in the image of God. Either way, what we have is a gift from God and not earned. We should be humbly grateful for our position in the created order and not arrogantly proud.

Secondly, still in verse 5, we see the unique qualities God has given us. **God had crowned mankind with glory and honor**. Out of all His creation, God created only mankind in His image. And although that image is

tarnished because of sin, we still bear His image. He endowed us with attributes that reflect Him. We are able to think. We are able to communicate. We are moral creatures. We are creative. God didn't communicate all of His attributes to mankind and those that He did fall far short of His own attributes. For example, although we can think, none of us is as wise as God. Some of us are quite creative but none of us is as creative as God. But it is glorious and honorable to be created in the image of God. But whatever glory and honor we have is given to us by God. God gave us a longing in our hearts for His glory. But, because of our sin, we seek glory and honor for ourselves apart from God, but it is always short-lived, disappointing, and meaningless. True and lasting fulfillment, true and lasting glory, true and lasting honor is found only in being what we were created to be and doing what we were created to do: honoring and glorifying God.

In verse six, we see the unique task we have been given. **You have given him dominion over the works of your hands.** This harkens back to creation in Genesis 1, beginning in verse 26.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

**27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.**

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "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." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and

every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God gave mankind dominion over the earth. We are to subdue the earth and we are to be caretakers of the earth. This is the job for which we were created. No other creature was given this privilege, this responsibility. At the present moment, because of sin, we see creation groaning along with us, longing to be released from the cycle of death, weakness, and pain. Because of sin and the curse, we haven't attained what we were created to do. We await our redeemer to come. We await the new creation. We await the time when we will once again be caretakers of a new earth and this time, because of Christ, we will be able to do the job we were created to do.

And fourthly we see the unique role we have been given. Look at the second line of verse 6 and following. **You have put all things under his feet, ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.** Mankind has been given authority over the animals and yet we find that they are not all in subjection to us, again, because of the fall and the subsequent curse. We repeatedly try and fail.

But there is Someone to whom has been given all authority in heaven and earth. The writer of Hebrews wrote a commentary on Psalm 8 in his epistle. Turn to Hebrews 2, and let's read beginning in verse 5.

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere,

**“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?**

**7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,
8 putting everything in subjection under his feet.”**

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The writer of Hebrews points to Jesus as the perfect man. Morally pure, yes. But more than that. Jesus is the man who has perfectly fulfilled the role that man was created to have. Jesus is the one man who was, is, and will be all that He can be. He is humanity at its best. Jesus fulfills all the purpose, the qualities, the task and the role of mankind that we see in

Psalm 8, verses 5 and 6.

- He took on humanity and therefore was made a little lower than the angels for a short time. Philippians 2:5-8. **5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**
- He was crowned with glory and honor. Continuing on in Philippians 2. **9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.**
- He has been given dominion and authority over everything. Matthew 28:18. **18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**

- While Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth, Hebrews 2:8 tells us that we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him. But Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that when Jesus returns, He will destroy every rule and authority and power that is in opposition to Him and that He will reign until He has put every enemy under His feet. At that time, Philippians 2:10-11 tells us that **¹⁰ at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Jesus defeated sin, Satan, and death by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave. And in His victory, all of those who are in Christ, all of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and salvation from the wrath of God, are renewed in Spirit. We can begin to share in His glory by being conformed to His image. We can share in His authority over our enemies by acting in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can participate in the subjection of the world to Him by proclaiming to the world, to our community, to our friends and family that salvation is in His Name alone. And when He returns, He will renew our dead and decayed bodies to fully realize our destiny as human beings. And we will spend eternity doing what we were created to do.

As inconceivable as God is, as inconceivable as it is that He would be mindful of man and care for Him, it is even MORE inconceivable, to my way of thinking that this glorious God would become like us so that He could further reveal Himself to us in the Person of Jesus Christ, and that He would suffer on our behalf so that we might share in His glory. What amazing grace!

I want to close with this prayer from Ephesians 2:15-23. I pray this for all of you, for all of us.

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for

you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.