

## IN GOD WE TRUST

### Psalms 8 & 33

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Today our text is from the moon. Yes, the moon. Psalm 8 has a number of noteworthy distinctions: it is the first hymn of praise in the Psalter; it is the only hymn in the Old Testament composed completely as direct address to God; and it is the first biblical text to reach the moon, when the Apollo 11 mission left a silicon disk containing messages from seventy-three nations, including the Vatican, which contributed the text of Psalm 8.<sup>1</sup> This psalm reads:

O LORD, our Lord,  
How majestic is Your name throughout the earth,  
You who have covered the heavens with Your splendor!  
From the mouths of infants and sucklings  
You have founded strength on account of Your foes,  
to put an end to enemy and avenger.  
When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
the moon and stars that You set in place,  
what is man that You have been mindful of him,  
mortal man that You have taken note of him,  
that You have made him little less than divine,<sup>2</sup>  
and adorned him with glory and majesty;  
You have made him master over Your handiwork,  
laying the world at his feet,  
sheep and oxen, all of them,  
and wild beasts, too;  
the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea,  
whatever travels the paths of the seas.  
O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name  
throughout the earth! (Tanakh Translation).

Astounding! Amazing! God actually uses the weak and seemingly insignificant human creature (that's you and me!) as a partner in caring for a creation that is constantly

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<sup>1</sup>James Limburg, "Who Cares for the Earth? Psalm 8 and the Environment," *Word and World Supplement Series 1* (1992): 43. Limburg's source is NASA News Release No. 69-83F (July 1969).

<sup>2</sup>For many, the more familiar translation is: "You have made him a little lower than the angels" (see KJV and NKJV). The word *'elohim* in v. 5 may refer to "the sons of God" or heavenly beings who, according to the ancient pictorial way of thinking, surround God in the heavenly court. The LXX reads "angels" at Ps 8:5, and this interpretation is adopted in Heb 2:6-8 where the psalm is quoted.

threatened by chaos. God, who is the sovereign ruler of the world, has conferred on humanity royal status and has bestowed on humanity sovereignty. God and humans are partners in the care of creation, because God has made the choice to share His power with us! The psalmist is astonished that the great Creator of the cosmos should invest so much and risk so much on the feeble human creature.

Like the creation story of Genesis 1, Psalm 8 affirms that human beings are made for *relationship with God*, a relationship that elevates us above the natural world and that enables us to have dominion over the natural world. There is, however, no guarantee anywhere in scripture that we human beings will use our royal status and our delegated dominion to fulfill God's purpose for His creation. No assurance is anywhere given that we will be the human beings we were created to be. This is the perplexing and painful problem to which the opening chapters of Genesis speak: human grandeur and human misery, the high calling and the lost opportunity. Adam and Eve in their desire to dethrone God, instead dethroned themselves. In their effort to be more, they became less; and in their attempt to have it all, they lost it all. Our world is in a mess, and it is because we humans messed it up.

But . . . there is hope! Psalm 33 is "a new song" about a new world. It reads:

Sing forth, O you righteous, to the LORD;  
it is fit that the upright acclaim Him.  
Praise the LORD with the lyre;  
with the ten-stringed harp sing to Him;  
sing Him a new song;  
play sweetly with shouts of joy.  
For the word of the LORD is right;  
His every deed is faithful.  
He loves what is right and just;  
the earth is full of the LORD's faithful care.  
By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
by the breath of His mouth, all their host.  
He heaps up the ocean waters like a mound,  
stores the deep in vaults.  
Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
let all the inhabitants of the world dread Him.  
For He spoke, and it was;  
He commanded, and it endured.  
The LORD frustrates the plans of nations,  
brings to naught the designs of peoples.

What the LORD plans endures forever,  
what He designs, for ages on end.

Happy the nation whose God is the LORD,  
the people He has chosen to be His own.  
The LORD looks down from heaven;  
He sees all mankind.

From His dwelling-place He gazes  
on all the inhabitants of the earth—  
He who fashions the hearts of them all,  
who discerns all their doings.

Kings are not delivered by a large force;  
warriors are not saved by great strength;  
horses are a false hope for deliverance;  
for all their great power they provide no escape.

Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,  
who wait for His faithful care  
to save them from death,  
to sustain them in famine.

We set our hope on the LORD,  
He is our help and shield;  
in Him our hearts rejoice,  
for in His holy name we trust.

May we enjoy, O LORD, Your faithful care,  
as we have put our hope in You (Tanakh Translation).

God has powerfully uttered the world into existence, like the commanding utterance of a royal ruler. He is in control of His creation! Therefore, the only appropriate response is confident and joyous praise to the maker and monarch of a world that is full of His unfailing love. No other power can possibly prevail in a world where God is Lord.

But such a world—a world where God is indeed Lord—seems far removed from the world in which you and I live. Why? Why do we read Psalm 8 as a depiction of what could have been rather than as a description of what can be? Why do we read Psalm 33 as a promise of a world that will be rather than as a portrayal of a world that can be? Why do we long for the day when God will be Lord rather than expecting God to be Lord today? Why do we forget the past, forsake the present, and focus only on the future when the Psalms speak of a day when the earth will be filled with the righteousness, justice, faithfulness, and love of the Lord? Why?

One of the reasons is that we have come to accept the world as it is, believing that this world as it is is all that this world will ever be. Contrary to Psalm 33, we do believe that

nations are saved by their great armies and that security is found in the tools of war, and this faith has been and still is the cornerstone of the foreign policy of the United States and every other nation in the world. The root question, then, is this: Whose power will govern the world? Whose policies and plans will prevail? Psalm 33 declares that it is the way of the Lord to frustrate the design of nations who set out to make themselves the center of the world and who set out to build their own “new world order.” We forget that God rules this world and that we do not.

What should we do about Saddam Hussein? Now that he has been deposed, what should we do about Iraq? What should we do about terrorism—both domestically and internationally? What should we do about Iran and North Korea and the threat of nuclear war? What should we do about peace in the Middle East? Before any answers can be given to these questions, the “we” of these questions must be identified. Who is the “we” in these questions? The “we” in these questions is most often, one may safely assume, the United States.<sup>3</sup> Herein lies the problem. Even as Christians, we ask such questions assuming that it is a nation rather than God from whom we expect an answer. As a result, the sovereignty of God gets shelved as irrelevant to the real concerns of the world. And as a result, political entities are expected to act rather than the people of God. We have sold our divine birthright for a pot of nationalistic delusions.

Someone may object by saying, “But Royce, now you’ve gone to dabbling in politics! You need to stick to the Bible and stay out of politics! After all, religion and politics don’t mix.” Who said they don’t mix? Who said that religion should concern itself with what is private but let politics concern itself with what is public? Who said that politics is none of God’s business? I am not trying to be political; I’m just trying to be biblical. And the psalmist, along with the witness of all scripture, declares that God is sovereign over all creation, over every nation, over all peoples, over every human being—that He is sovereign over everything! Now, it seems to me, that God is either Lord of all or He is Lord not at all.<sup>4</sup>

Without God we humans cease to be humane. The history of humanity is the story of

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<sup>3</sup>See the discussion of Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Brazos Press, 2003), 43-46.

<sup>4</sup>I have adapted the words of Augustine: “Jesus is either Lord of all or Lord not at all.”

our striving to be more than merely “a little lower than the angels.” The history of humanity is the story of our seeking to be our own god. This is the essence of idolatry: the failure to let God be God. And our disregard of the divine nature has led inevitably to the distortion of our human nature. Without God we have not only been less than divine, we have been less than human.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am thankful to live in the United States of America. But I am not an American Christian; I am a Christian who happens to live in America. America is not the sovereign shaper of history. America is not the savior of the world. America is not the judge of all the earth. Nor is any other nation sovereign, savior, or judge. The sovereign savior and judge of all the earth is the Lord God Almighty! Let the people of God say,

We set our hope on the LORD,  
He is our help and shield;  
in Him our hearts rejoice,  
for in His holy name we trust.  
May we enjoy, O LORD, Your faithful care,  
as we have put our hope in You.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the author quotes from Psalm 8 and draws this conclusion:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (Heb 2:9, NIV).

The New Testament takes the royal vision of humanity and uses it to identify and to characterize Jesus. The “human being” of Psalm 8 becomes none other than Jesus Christ. This forces us to reread the psalm, for its application to Jesus transforms the meaning of glory, honor, and dominion. Jesus, the one who perfectly embodies Psalm 8, exercises power and dominion by taking the form of a servant and dying on a cross!<sup>5</sup> He becomes Lord by becoming a servant; He conquers by surrendering; He reveals to us God by showing us what it means to be human; and He invites us to follow Him. Jesus, He was more than the exact representation of God; He was the exact representation of a human being. He became like us that we might become like Him.

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<sup>5</sup>Mark 10:41-45; Phil 2:5-11.

Jesus said,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” . . .

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” . . .

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 5:38-39, 43-45a; 7:12, TNIV).

There are those who believe that these words are not realistic, that they simply will not work in our world. But Jesus believed that they would work, and He died to prove it. Jesus believed that the world as it is can be something other than it is. Jesus believed that the will of God can be lived in this world. And He did it. Jesus believes that I can follow in His steps. I am not sure that I believe all the things that Jesus believes, but I believe in Him. I pray that He will help my unbelief.

What would Jesus do? When we, the people of God, begin to take this question seriously, that will be the day when the power and dominion of Jesus will be unleashed to turn this world upside down. Perhaps I should say to turn this world right side up. We human beings have already turned this world upside down. Jesus came to turn it right side up. He believed that this could be done—done today, not solely done on some distant tomorrow.

What would Jesus do? He would set out to transform the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God. And He would do it by turning the other cheek, by loving His enemies, and by doing unto others as they should have done unto Him. What will we, the people of God, do? The answer depends on whose power we believe will govern this world.

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