MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH To Know the Living God; The Majesty of God—January 16, 2011 Psalm 8:1–9 1

Tuesday: The Wonderful Thing David Saw Part I

We’re doing a series in which each week we’re looking at another one of the characteristics or the attributes of God. We’re doing one each week (the attributes of God according to the Bible). Therefore, we are literally doing theology, because theo-logy (which is God reasoning, God words) means we’re reasoning about and thinking about God, trying to understand who God is. That’s theology, doing theology. The underlying thesis of the whole series is that all of our problems stem from not knowing who God is or forgetting who he is at the moment. We’re trying to reveal that and roll out all the meaning of that thesis as the weeks go by. This week, we’re looking at one of the more famous and well-known attributes of God according to the Bible. That is that he created all things, or as the children’s catechism says, “God created all things for his own glory.” That’s what Psalm 8 is about. Let’s look at this very famous, beautiful poem (this psalm) by David, and let’s notice the wonderful thing David saw, the frightening thing David felt, and the amazing thing David learned. The wonderful thing he saw, the frightening thing he felt, and what was resolves it is (and what we need to see too) the amazing thing he learned.

The wonderful thing David saw Here’s what he saw. Notice in verse 3, he says, “I see your heavens, the moon and stars, which you have set in place.” That’s God creating. In verse 1, it says, “You have set your glory above the heavens,” which means, when David sees the stars and he sees the heavens and he sees the moon and the sun, he sees the glory of God. They express the glory of God. They tell of the glory of God. That’s another psalm (Psalm 19). The first thing David sees when he looks at the physical universe is he sees the reality of God. He says the universe speaks to him of God. By the way, it does. Joseph Addison wrote that great hymn we often sing in the morning services. It’s called “The Spacious Firmament on High.” It talks about the spacious firmament, the blue ethereal sky, the spangled heavens with all the stars. Then it ends this way. Talking about the moon, the sun, and the stars, he says: In reason’s ear they all rejoice, And utter forth a glorious voice, Forever singing as they shine, “The hand that made us is divine.” Over the centuries, a lot of people have found the glories of the heavens (the physical universe) have resounded in their reason’s ear, and they’ve looked up, and they said, “This couldn’t have caused itself. There must be a God.” Now plenty of people don’t agree with that, but it’s interesting that even today, the smartest people still have to write books about it. Stephen Hawking’s most recent book is basically saying, “The universe created itself. You don’t have to believe in God.” The reason he had to write the book is because of so many people who have made such compelling arguments, which he refutes in the book, that the physical universe is a proof or a testimony (or at least evidence) that there’s a real God out there. He has to write the book, you know, because even though he doesn’t agree with the argument, he knows there are an enormous number of people who do, which means, yes, the heavens tell us about the reality of God. But David doesn’t just see the reality of God up there. More to the point, he sees the magnitude and the magnificence and the majesty of God when he sees what God has created. Notice how he says it in verse 3. “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers …” The commentators all point out (interesting) it doesn’t say the work of his arm. It doesn’t even say it’s the work of his hand. It’s the work of his fingers. That’s how you make a model. Think about what we’re talking about here, everybody. If our galaxy (the Milky Way) was the size of North America, then our entire solar system would be the size of a coffee cup. The earth would be just barely visible as a kind of speck in the coffee cup. We know the Milky Way is one of at least a hundred billion galaxies we can see, and the universe might be way bigger than what we can see. God made all that with his fingers! If that is tiny compared to God, what is God like? No wonder David starts and ends the psalm with a praise to his majesty. He says, “When I look at … the work of your fingers …” “When I consider you made all this with your fingers …” “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” “I see your glory.” The first point, what David sees is the glory and the magnitude and the majesty and the magnificence of God because he has created all things with his fingers. He has created all things, everything … all the stars, all the planets, everything. We’re going to move on from this point because yes, it’s true God made all things. The main burden of this passage, this psalm, though, is about how God made us and what his relationship is to us. This is not like Genesis 1 where the text is about how God made all things. It’s really more about how God made us. Before moving on, let me remind you there is no fact about God that has more implications and applications than he made all things. There are too many to go into. I mean, in the past, when we went through Genesis 1 and 2 just two years ago, we spent a great deal of time on it. Let me leave you with two applications of this idea that God is the creator of all things. Just two applications. They’re very different. One is on how to regard God, and one is on how to regard the world. If God made everything with his fingers, first, how should you regard God? I can’t help but remind you of something some of you heard me say before. When I was a new Christian, a young Christian, at a camp in Colorado, I listened to a woman who was a great Bible teacher. In her teaching, at one point she said if the distance between the earth and the sun (93 million miles) was the thickness of a piece of paper, then the distance between the earth and just the nearest star would be a stack of papers 70 feet high. The distance between the earth and the end of just our galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high. Our galaxy is just a little speck of dust in the universe. If God created all that with his fingers and if God upholds it all according to Hebrews 1 with a word of his power (like his pinky) … a word of his power … she said, “Do you ask a God like that into your life to be your assistant? Do you connect with him in order to get him to do what you need? Do you ask him into your life to be your consultant, to be your assistant?” No, if you come into connection with a God like that, you are his assistant, if that. He has to be a king, not just something you bring in to add up, spice up your life, someone who you say, “When I need you, I’ll call you.” Oh no. See, if God is this God, how do you regard him? King. Center of life. Majesty. On the other hand, if God really made all things for his own glory, do you know what that means regarding the world?

Wednesday: The Wonderful Thing David Saw Part II

I don’t think any of us have really thought this out, but I know one person who has: Jonathan Edwards, an eighteenth-century Christian minister and great philosopher and theologian. If you look at his works (the Yale edition of his works, volume 11), there’s an entire volume called “Images of the Divine Things,” because Edwards read this and thought about it. What does it mean when the Bible says he made all things with his fingers? It means he is an artist. Every other ancient creation account that was written back before or around the time of the Bible always has the world being created out of a battle. There’s always some kind of struggle. There’s some kind of battle. As a result, somebody dies or something happens, and the world is created. Go take a look at them all around the world. Every other creation account is creation is the result of a battle … violent forces of powers coming at each other. But not the Bible. The Bible says our God is so all-powerful that he made the world as an artist. He made it with his fingers. He made it simply for the delight of doing it and the love of doing it. Here’s what we do know about great art. Great art always shows you the inner being of the artist. Therefore, Jonathan Edwards said everything about this world should be telling us about God. He had almost an ecstatic view of creation because he loved to walk around the woods in Connecticut. When he saw spiders … He wrote a very famous spider letter in which he analyzed very carefully in a very scientific way how spiders made their webs and then how they actually would use them to look like they were actually … They weren’t flying, but they looked like they were flying from one branch to another, etc. He talked about the delight of it. What does it show us about God? All sorts of things. The wisdom of God. The joy of God. The humor of God. He would look at the trees. He would look at the stars. He would look everywhere. In fact, there’s actually a very interesting place in one of his journals, a famous place, where he talked about what it means to be holy. To be a holy soul or a sanctified soul is to be a person who sees the entire world belonging to God and shot through with his glory. This is from one of his journals. At one point he said (this is, of course, old language, but listen), “… what a calm ecstasy, doth it bring to the soul! How doth it make the soul love itself … how do even the whole creation, the sun, the fields, and trees love a humble holiness; how doth all the world congratulate, embrace, and sing to a sanctified soul!” He sensed the trees singing to him about God, and he would sit around and think about it. “What do the trees show me about the Artist, about the One who made them?” What a way to live! What an attitude toward life! What an attitude toward everything around you, a world shot through with meaning, shot through the glory of God. Do you understand all the implications and applications of the fact that God made all things for his own glory? I don’t. That’s the first thing David saw.

Thursday: The frightening thing David felt

There’s some tension in this psalm. You go down to verse 3 and especially 4. There’s something David felt that was frightening. Verses 1 through 3 are talking about the strength of God and the glory of God. “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place …” Then verse 4 says, “It makes me ask a question.” “… what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” Here’s what he is getting at at this point. This looks like a philosophical question, doesn’t it? It sounds like a seminar. “What are human beings? What are they, class?” No, it’s not a philosophical question. It’s a rhetorical question, and it’s a cry from the heart. He is saying, “When I look at all this, when I look at the vastness out there, I say, “What are we? We’re nothing.” He was looking at glory, and the glory made him feel, by comparison, worthless. He was looking at the vastness, and the vastness made him feel, by comparison, insignificant, negligible. We say, “Okay, I understand how he felt that way,” but I want you to see the question he is raising here is, if anything, more poignant for us than it was for ancient times. Very often, when you’re studying the Bible, you have to say, “Listen. It’s very important to understand that back then when people asked this question, this is what they meant.” Actually, this is a different kind of text. This is a text that’s probably more directly relevant to us than it was to the people he was talking to at the time. Why? If you believe in God but you believe this great God who made the world with his fingers doesn’t care about us, that makes you feel insignificant and worthless. David was saying, “How do I know that the power behind the universe cares about me at all?” Of course, you can believe in God and still wonder whether or not this great God even cares, but what about today? When you have a culture that, in a sense, is officially secular and when not most of the people but actually the people who write the books and people who teach you the courses and the people who are at the top of the cultural institutions actually all say, “As far as we know, we’re here by accident. Everything that happens has a natural cause. There’s no supernatural. There’s no creator God” … If you feel insignificant and worthless because you’re not sure whether the God behind the universe even cares about you, how much more reason do you have to feel insignificant and worthless when you know the universe doesn’t care about you, when you absolutely know it? See, let’s ask Bertrand Russell. He was a very, very prominent twentieth-century philosopher. Let’s say if there is no God, if there is no creator, if this world is not the work of God’s fingers, if there is no one out there who ever made it, what are we? What significance are we? Do we matter? Does anything we do matter? That’s the question to Bertrand Russell. This is what he says. He is being perfectly rational. He says no. “That man is the product of causes that had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms … that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system … Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.” Did you hear that? He says now that we know there is not a God who created the world, this means everything you do now, no matter what it is, is going to make no difference in the end, because the universe is blind, and it’s impersonal, and it doesn’t care. That means you could live a nice, good life, or you could be a serial killer. Do you realize in the end it’s not going to matter, because not only will you die, but everybody, the whole civilization, will die? It will be as if it never happened because the universe doesn’t care, because it’s blind and impersonal. What are you? Does anything you do matter? Are you significant? The only answer, he says, now is no. He says you cannot possibly live your life without building it on what he called a foundation of unyielding despair. Anything else is dishonest. Let’s ratchet it up to right now. Steven Pinker, who is a public intellectual who teaches at Harvard, recently wrote an essay called “The Stupidity of Dignity.” John Gray, who is a philosopher at the London School of Economics and Political Science, wrote a book called Straw Dogs. Do you know what they both said? They both said, “Look. I know you feel like human beings have dignity. I know you feel like there’s such a thing as human rights. The fact is, if you believe science, there is no such thing as dignity or human rights.” That’s what it says. What they’re going to say is, “If there is no God, of course you feel significant. Of course you feel human beings are all valuable and have dignity and are important. Do you know why you feel that way? Because your ancestors who felt human beings had dignity, that trait helped them survive. That’s the reason why it’s now hardwired into your genetic hardware. See, biology has programmed you to feel significant, but you’re not, because in the end, no matter what you do, it’s all going to go to nothing. It’s not going to matter. Nothing you do makes any difference.” What is man? When I think of the heavens, when I think of the vastness, what are human beings? Are we significant at all? Do we matter at all? The answer of today is not a bit, because the power behind the universe does not care. It does not know you. Where does that bring us? See, David is bringing up a feeling he has even with belief in God. “Maybe the power behind the universe doesn’t care.” That makes you feel insignificant. But what if you believe in a universe in which it is absolutely blind, absolutely impersonal, and it’s going to devour you? See, the secular understanding of the universe without God is it’s going to devour you, and it’s going to devour all of your loved ones, and it’s going to devour all of your hopes. It’s going to just devour you into a black hole. It will be as if none of you ever existed. Nothing you do counts. Nothing you do makes a difference unless there’s a creator God. Even if there is a creator God, maybe he doesn’t care either. Do you have the intellectual integrity to admit this is true? You need evidence that there’s a God to really believe that there’s any significance to human beings. Even if you believe there’s a God, you need evidence that he cares and is mindful of you. Samuel Beckett, in the mid-twentieth century, was a playwright, and he wrote a play called Breath. It’s 35 seconds long. By the way, you can see it on YouTube. There are several versions of it. Have you ever heard of it? It’s 35 seconds long. There’s nothing on the stage but trash. There’s nothing but trash, and it’s dark. When the play starts, the light starts to come on. It’s kind of dim, and you hear the cry of a baby. You hear someone inhaling. Then it gets brighter, and you see all the trash. Then it starts getting dimmer, and you hear an exhale. You hear a gurgling cry of somebody dying, and the lights go off. It’s 35 seconds. What is that about? You’re trash. Yes, for a while you breathe, and you feel significant, but that doesn’t matter. You’re still trash. Life is trash. You say, “Well, that’s kind of looking at things negatively.” Here’s what I want you to consider. Recently, there was a book. It was reviewed in the New York Times Book Review called All Things Shining. It was written by a Harvard professor and a Berkeley professor. They were saying, “Now that we know there is no God, how do you find meaning in life?” They were concerned, because even though at this point the number of people who say they don’t believe in God is growing rapidly, it’s still not a majority. The number of people who are really secular is still not the majority, but it’s working its way. They said a nihilism is working its way through our culture, and it is. There’s a deep cynicism. We have to make fun of everything. We can’t lift anything up. We can’t really keep a straight face. You see? If anyone holds forth, we want to tear them down. He says there’s a nihilism. There’s a sense of meaninglessness that’s working its way through the culture. Do you know what they suggest? They suggest we go back to the classics. You know, when it was reviewed in the New York Times Book Review, the reviewer says, “Yeah, but the classics all believe. Yeah, they’re written by the Greeks and the Romans. They’re written by people who don’t believe what we believe about the universe. Of course they believed in nobility and right and wrong and heroism and all that stuff. Of course they did. Of course that shot their lives filled with meaning, but we can’t do that anymore. What are you going to do?” Here’s what you can do.

Friday: What David Learned

You see what David learned. What did David learn? David here is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we believe. So he is not just writing as an ancient writer. He is also writing as a person who is getting things revealed to him, not fully but partly. I would like you to see a couple of interesting things that show him God does care and will show us the power behind the universe is mindful of you and does care for you, which can shoot your life filled through with meaning instead of what the secular culture around you is going to be doing as you live. If you don’t have what David has, I’m afraid it’s just going to very slowly, kind of unconsciously, kind of subliminally just suck the meaning and joy out of your life. 3. The amazing thing David learned Here’s what David learned. First of all, he learned God cared because of creation. It says, “… what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” Then immediately what happens in verses 5–8? It says, “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet …” This is a recapitulation of Genesis 1 and 2 in which the Bible says human beings are made in God’s image. These are amazing terms. Glory? Honor? Dominion? Crowned? These are attributes of God in the Bible, and yet they’re ascribed to us. This is David’s recalling what the book of Genesis 1 and 2 says. That is, when God created us, he put his image on us. He made us rational. He made us moral. He made us self-conscious. He gave us a soul and many other things. Therefore, every human being is infinitely precious. God cares about them and cares how they’re treated. This doctrine of creation in the image of God is very important. In other places we’ve talked about it, but let me just consider a couple of things for you. Some years ago, there was a medical resident. He is now a doctor, but he was a Christian man who was telling me he was a medical resident. The other residents were doing their psychiatric rounds. At one point, they had looked at a particular patient. This patient was very depressed, and he hated himself. He didn’t like himself at all, and he was suicidal. The doctor was sitting there with all the residents, and they were working on the case. At one point, one of the female residents said, “What we have to do is we have to show him he is a valuable person. He is not trash. He is not nothing. He is really important. He is valuable and very important as a human being. Every human being is valuable.” Do you know what the doctor who was leading the residents said? “How do you know that? We’re scientists. What scientific basis is there for saying that?” I imagine that was a Socratic method, but he was pushing them. I remember what my friend who told me about it said is, though all the residents disliked it and were very uncomfortable with what he was doing, he was trying to say, “Oh yeah, you have all these wonderful little feelings about how everybody is very valuable. What scientific evidence is there that human beings are worthwhile?” He was just pushing them. They were all pretty upset, except the Christian resident who said, “But I know he is made in the image of God. Therefore, I know he is not junk. It doesn’t matter what Samuel Beckett says. It doesn’t matter. He is not junk. Nobody is.” Whether you’re mentally handicapped or brilliant, you’re in the image of God. Whether you’re black or white or Hispanic or Asian, no matter what your race is, it doesn’t matter what your class is. You’re not junk. You need to be treated with dignity. Every human being! It’s an enormous resource for not only psychological self-worth but also social justice. It also means that every person you ever meet, no matter who they are, must never be treated with disdain. It has enormous implications for you psychologically, sociologically, socially, and relationally. Do you believe this, that this is how God made every human being? What David is saying is it’s creation. The way we were created in the image of God is one of the major evidences that God does care. As great as he is (so big that he made all this with his little fingers), he cares for you because he put his image on you. Therefore, every single person is of infinite worth and value. Every human being! That’s not all David learned. If you look carefully (which I’m about to show you), in the psalm, David has hints not only of God’s creation but also of the doctrine of God’s redemption that proves he cares. First of all, in verse 4, if you have a King James Bible, it says this: “What is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him?” The Hebrew word translated care in a more modern translation is a word that actually means go out and find. To visit someone means you care enough to go out and find them, to move. That’s the reason why literally, “What is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him?” What is David thinking? David says, “What are we that we fill your mind and that you visit us? You’re so great, so big that even all this vastness is small to you, and yet we fill your mind, and you visit us!” How does he know that? My guess is he probably doesn’t know what that meant. He was inspired. He probably doesn’t know what that meant. You say, “Well, maybe visit is figurative. Maybe it just means God looks down.” No, the New Testament tells us God did visit us, and he came down. Now we begin to see the ultimate proof that the Power behind the universe cares, because when Zechariah in Luke 1 was told by an angel that not only John the Baptist, his son, was going to be born but he would be a forerunner of the Messiah, do you remember what he said when his tongue was loosed in Luke 1? Zechariah said, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.” When he heard the Messiah was coming … “You have visited your people.” David has a hint that is happening. That’s how you know this enormous universe is not vast and empty and is going to just eat you alive and all your hopes, but that it cares, and the Power behind it cares. It goes beyond that. Look at verse 2. Probably when you read through Psalm 8, you kind of skip over verse 2 because it doesn’t make any sense. Don’t you do that? When you’re reading the Bible and you get to a crazy verse … just a crazy verse … you go, “What?” Then you’re on to verse 3, and then it makes sense, and on you go. Don’t you do that? You’re going, “Huh? What? Oh!” That’s the way I read. “Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay.” You get to the end, and you really say, “Well, I’ll have to look that up in a commentary,” and you never do. Verse 2 is actually extremely important. Do you know why? Because it’s the only part of Psalm 8 that Jesus himself ever quoted. Oh yeah. It says, “Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.” That word avenger, by the way, is not positive. It’s a negative word. It means a vengeful person or a hater. Verse 2 says this world is filled with evil. Foes, enemies, see? Hateful people. It’s filled with enemies. What is God going to do about the evil? Very enigmatically, crazy almost, after verses 1 and 3 are talking about this incredibly glorious God, so huge that he has to stoop down to look at the heavens he made with his fingers, he says the way he is going to deal with evil in this world is out of the mouths of babies and infants. What? In Matthew 21, Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem. See, people expected the Messiah. They hoped for the Messiah, but they assumed when the Messiah showed up, he would ride in on a warhorse as a general followed by all of his soldiers, and they would take over. Instead, on Palm Sunday, Jesus rode in on a little donkey, and the people who shouted, “Hosanna!” we’re told were the poor and the blind and the lame. The respectable people, the Pharisees and the religious leaders, came to Jesus and said, “Listen to that rabble acclaiming you. Tell them to be quiet! These people shouldn’t even be here! Why do you even associate with such people?” Jesus says, “Don’t you know the Scripture or understand the Scripture? Haven’t you read the place where it says, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength …’?” What is Jesus saying? Don’t you know this is how God deals with evil in this world? As great a God as he is, he deals with it through weakness. He deals with it through suffering. He deals with it in a way so differently than you can conceive. This is the reason why back in the beginning of the Bible … Go to Genesis. Through whom does God always work? Always the unwanted woman, always not the son who is favored but the son who is rejected, not the beautiful and the wanted woman but always the rejected woman. Over and over again, why does he do that? Then he chooses Israel to be the vehicle by which to bring salvation to the world. Why does he do that? He tells you in Deuteronomy 7. God actually says so. He says, “I want you to realize why I chose you: because you’re the weakest, smallest, baddest nation out there.” Why does God do that? Because it was a way of pointing to the future. Because in the ultimate example of verse 2, in the ultimate example of how God’s glory and power manifests itself against the evil of this world, God became a baby. God became an infant. He was born in a manger, and he grew up. Instead of taking power, he lost power. At the end of his life, he went to the cross. Why did he go to the cross? To die for our sins. Why did he die for our sins? Because he was mindful of us. He went to the cross. We filled his mind. Where? Look at John 13 through 17. All that was the night before he died. At one point, he said “Father, for their sake [talking about us], I sanctify myself.” That word sanctify means, “I set myself apart. Why am I going to the cross? Why am I taking on this suffering? For them.” There’s the ultimate proof that the Creator of the universe … you fill his mind. Little you. Little you! You fill his mind so much that he was willing to come and become a baby and become weak and die on the cross for you. When you understand the gospel, that can change you so much. Why? Because now you know you’re not junk. Now you know nobody else is. You know, we live in a culture in which in a psychology class, it will tell you your problem is a lack of self-esteem. In the philosophy and biology class, it will tell you you’re nothing. You’re just an evolved amoeba. Well, that’s the way it is. How do you keep those two things, because there’s no way …? We no longer have that coursing through our veins. Instead, we say, “How does all the world … the trees, the fields, the sun, the moon, the stars … sing to us about the glory and joy of God?” That’s what we’re in for. You can live a life of meaning. You can live a life of hope. You can get that down deep in your own psychological makeup so it creates well-being. It can make you a person who cares about social justice instead of saying, “Oh, you know what? It’s all going to burn up in the end anyway.” “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” Let’s pray. Our Father, we thank you for this wonderful psalm. We thank you for the great thing David saw, the frightening thing David felt that is now permeating our culture. It sometimes comes in on us, but we thank you for the wonderful things you taught him by revelation. We know you love us. We know you have visited us. We know we fill your mind because you were willing to go to the cross for us. That’s how we know. We thank you for all these assurances. We pray you would let them reshape the way in which we look at ourselves and you and our world. We pray this in Jesus’ name, amen. THE UNCHANGING GOD The Holy Spirit—January 23, 2011 Psalm 102:1–4, 18–28 1 Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you. 2 Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. 3 For my days vanish like smoke; my bones

Timothy J. Keller, [*The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*](https://ref.ly/res/LLS%3ATMKLLRSRMNRCHVJ/2023-10-12T00%3A22%3A22Z/40786996?len=32342) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).