

Who Am I?

Our Old Testament Scripture reading today is **Psalm 8**:

- ¹ *O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.*
- ² *Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.*
- ³ *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?*
- ⁵ *Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.*
- ⁶ *You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*
- ⁹ *O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

One of life's most important questions is verse 4, "What are human beings?" It's been answered variously by philosophers, scientists, anthropologists, social scientists, psychologists and a host of scholars, artists and writers down through the ages. Some more famous answers have come from Darwin ("a highly developed animal"), Freud ("an underdeveloped child") and Marx ("an economic factor"). Whatever the experts say, who I think I am is *more important*, to me, at least.

So, who am I?

Since the loss this past summer of my wife of 48 years, I'm faced with this question anew. Without a faithful partner, even though she was severely compromised in recent years with her dementia, I find it necessary for me to discover a new identity. Now as a widower, who am I?

This psalm offers a new understanding of who we are. It does so, not with sociological, psychological or philosophical speculation, but simply, who does God say we are? It's a hymn of praise to God, who has created us as the crown of his creation. Whatever our view of the process and age of creation, we know we're not the product of chance, but are willed and designed by a God we can know. David praises the Lord, using his personal name, Yahweh, by which he

introduced himself to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). This name, Yahweh, is the name with which God personally introduced himself, making himself accessible to us. We have access to the God of the New Covenant by calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:12f).

Through the work of astrophysicists and astronomers we can know more of the unimaginable vastness of the universe than did David and his first readers. The universe is something like 150 billion light years wide (the distance covered by light, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, for a period of 150 billion years). On a clear night we can see a few thousand individual stars with the naked eye. With just a modest amateur telescope we can see millions more. The stars are gathered into galaxies, such as the Milky Way, to which our Sun belongs. There are about 100 thousand million stars in the Milky Way alone, and outside of that, there are millions upon millions of other galaxies also. To number the stars would be like numbering the grains of sand along the seaside.

From praising God for the creation of the universe David moves to praising the Lord God for creating humankind as the crown of creation. When he contrasts the vast universe with a human being, David thinks, how can you even be aware of, much less care us as we roam about on earth, on this tiny speck of a planet that seems lost in the vastness of this universe?

I've had similar reflections when riding in an airplane as it rises in flight over a city like Chicago at dusk, when lights flicker by the millions from houses, skyscrapers, factories and autos. These millions of people, as well as the billions on the earth, are all known to omniscient God. You and I are known by him and are created in his image. We're "fearfully and wonderfully made," embodying remarkable complexity. We're the crown of all creation; and our purpose is to know and work with God in ruling over the rest of his creation. The image of God includes a likeness to God and his very character. He's made us "a little lower than God" (5). God created us as the objects of his special love and favor, to share in his administration of his created world order.

To be in the image of God is to be an immortal soul. Animals, even those like the primates that share biological similarities with us, have an instinct for survival, but we have a God-implanted yearning for immortality (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This psalm reflects the fall of Adam, which resulted in the marring of the divine image. God gave us dominion over his creation, but we've failed miserably. Instead of enjoying the perfect order of creation, we've seen creation's demise and devastation, with ecological crises and natural disasters.

Although we were crowned by the Creator with glory and honor, we through sin and rebellion have dragged that crown in the dirt and marred the image of God. But the story of redemption through Christ tells us God hasn't abandoned us in our fallen and lost condition. The image can be restored.

But, who am I?

The Book of Hebrews tells us Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of this 8th Psalm. Being the Son of Man, who in his incarnation was a “little lower than the angels,” Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection regained for us the possibility of dominion over creation (Hebrews 2:5-9). When we receive his grace through repentance and faith, we’re given the Holy Spirit, who begins the work of restoring this cracked image of God in us. We’re enabled to become involved in God’s work of restoring a damaged creation, which some day will share our full redemption (Romans 8:18-25).

The Greek word “eikon” for “image” in the Septuagint translation (LXX) of Genesis 1:27 is the word used by Paul for Christ, the perfectly glorious “eikon” of God (2 Corinthians 4:4). Paul says also that we, though we are cracked “eikons,” are being remade and restored by grace to being “eikons” that reflect more of God’s image and glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). To become like Jesus is to be come more like the Perfect Eikon. Our hope and our destiny is to become perfectly like Jesus, thus fully restored eikons (1 John 3:2).

Our text looks beyond the present to the glorious future when we’ll once again be restored to the whole image of God and will have dominion over God’s creation as Christ’s vice-regents. Our hope is to reign with Christ in our resurrection bodies, on this restored, remade, fully redeemed creation. We’re created by God but also re-created, being made into God’s new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). God considered us important and loved enough to pay for us with the “precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18f).

As I ask, “Who am I?” this psalm tells me I’m created by God and I’m created for God. Although this psalm raises the question, “Who am I?” it’s really not about me or my self-identity. This psalm is a doxology, a hymn of praise to God. Thus, it’s really about him. The only path to authentic self-understanding and a sense of self-worth is not through introspection but rather through the worship of God. So, who am I? I am one created for God and for his glory as his image bearers.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers the question, “What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” God created us for his pleasure and he is please most when we find our greatest joy and pleasure in him. I’m created for God to serve his purposes in a way that brings glory, honor and pleasure to him.

The scope of this psalm moves breathtakingly from the majesty of God and his vast creation to the lips of children and infants that express his praise, which silenced Jesus’ enemies and foes at his Triumphal Entry (verse 2 and Matthew 21:16). Once again we are reminded that God accomplishes his kingdom purposes, not through our strength, but through our weakness—the eternal Son, Co-Creator of the universe, rode into the city on a donkey, being praised by little

children. God continues to choose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak of this world to shame the strong. This is the way God brought us salvation, through the weakness and apparent defeat of Christ's cross (1 Corinthians 1:27ff). Part of my identity in being called into God's purposes is the call to serve with him, not by my ability and strength, but by his power at work in and through my inherent weakness.

This psalm pictures the glorious reign we're to share with Christ. That reign doesn't wait for the future resurrection of the body when heaven comes to earth. We begin to reign with Christ now. And Paul, in quoting from this psalm, notes how that Christ is reigning now and that he will finally put an end to his last enemy, death, at the time when we are all raised bodily to reign with Christ in a redeemed heaven and earth (1 Corinthians 15:25f). We'll enjoy an everlasting reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12).

When I ask, "Who am I?" I must remember that I'm one who has been made a child of the King and am called to reign with him even now, as I walk with him and join him in his kingdom work.

In the year 1936, the Duke of Windsor, Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David Windsor, was crowned King of Great Britain and Ireland. He reigned for less than a year, from January 20th till December 10th. King Edward VIII abdicated the throne to marry Mrs. Wallis Simpson. I don't know if that was a good tradeoff or decision or not. I don't know anything about Mrs. Simpson and I don't know anything about their life after marriage.

But I do know that I was created and am being re-created as a child of the King, to belong to his royal family. And as part of his royal priesthood and holy nation, I'm called to "declare the praises of him who called me out of darkness into his wonderful light." I should live like one of God's royal family.

We can't ask, "Who am I?" without asking also "Whose am I?" which becomes the more important question. We can experience times in our lives when it's difficult if not impossible to know exactly who we are. These are times when we are under stress or in the midst of severe trials that disappoint us or lead us to be disillusioned with and unsure of ourselves. I believe that our text is telling us that the only way we can understand who we are is to come before God in worship. Then he will remind us, not so much who we are but rather whose we are.

Even now as a widower, I can rethink and reestablish my identity, not in my circumstances, but in my being God's royal child. After all is said and done, you and I can answer the question, "Who am I?" and say, "I am his and he is mine."