

# Kingly Humanity

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 5th of January 2003. The preacher is Andrew Moody.

His sermon is entitled, Kingly Humanity, and is based on Psalm 8. Well, we don't need to go very far in our society to realise that we have a crisis about the value of human life.

When you switch on your radio, you're shorting here some debates about fetal stem cell research or euthanasia. If you switch on your television or drive out in your car, you'll be seeing advertisements which imply that human life is measured by how much money you have or how good-looking you are or what kind of car you drive or how thin you are.

If you watch the news, the implication is that people in the West are more valuable than people in the other parts of the world. A handful of Westerners dying in an accident is far more newsworthy than 20,000 Bangladeshis being swept away in a flood.

And we're confused about the relative values of people and animals. If you drive down to Burwood, you can see the RSPCA and the lengths we go to to protect animals from human abuse.

[ 1 : 2 8 ] And if you get back in your car, you can drive to Croydon where there's an abortion clinic dedicated to late-term abortions. Children which are perfectly capable of being born and surviving are dismembered and removed from their mother's wombs.

We are confused about the value of human life. And the reason why we are confused is not far to find either. The reason is that we're not sure anymore where we should be looking to evaluate human life.

All men are created equal, said the American Constitution, reflecting the kind of old Christian way of looking at the world. But if we can no longer agree that people are created, then where is the equality?

Some people are born more beautiful. Some people are born stronger. Some people are born stronger. Some inherit more money. Some are more popular. Where is the equality? The proper study of man is man, said Alexander Pope, reflecting the optimistic idea that we could get along and think about humans apart from God.

But the trouble there is, when we try and understand humans, by looking at humans, we get such a mixed reading. On the one hand, we see human brilliance, achievements of science and culture.

[ 2 : 4 5 ] We see that in our good moments, humans are capable of heroism or acts of great generosity. But of course, there's as much stupidity and greed in the human race as there is brilliance.

And when we look at humans by themselves, it's very hard to see how we're actually very significant in this universe. We're so small. We live in a tiny part of our galaxy, in a huge universe that goes on and on.

Our lives are so brief. They flicker and then they're gone. How can we be of any importance at all? Well, we are in crisis about the value of human life in our society.

But today we're looking at what the Bible has to say about the value of human life in Psalm 8. And there are three points. The first one is this. That a true view of human value starts with the one true God.

I wonder if you noticed when we read Psalm 8 before, how it begins and ends, not with reference to humans, but speaking about God. O Lord, our sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth, it says in verses 1 and verse 9.

[ 4 : 04 ] In the second part of verse 1, you have set your glory above the heavens. Now one thing to remember as we read this is the context in which it occurred. For all the other countries and nations around Israel, religion was something that was local and tribal.

Your tribe would have its gods and our tribe would have our gods. And your gods would look after you and our gods would look after us. And the gods were our religious practice was a way of ensuring that our tribe or our nation would succeed or have victory or prosper.

And if you want an example of this kind of thinking, you can have a look at 2 Kings chapters 18 and 19 where we see the Assyrian field commander of King Sennacherib.

He marches up to Jerusalem and says that the people of Jerusalem have no hope of standing against him because he's defeated so many other gods. He says, And if you have a problem with that, you take it up with your gods.

It's nothing to do with me. What have we in common? But the God that Israel worships, the God that David praises in Psalm 8, is a universal and transcendent God.

[ 6 : 12 ] O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth. God isn't a local god or a tribal god. He's the God of all the earth. His name is majestic in all the earth because he made every bit of it.

He's the God of everything and everyone, of all peoples. And the same goes for the heavens. You have set your glory above the heavens. God made the lot.

And what this does, of course, is it means that it's not just the humans of Israel that are important to God. God is an Israel's God.

He's not their pet or tribal deity. They belong to him. In fact, the whole world belongs to him. And that, of course, is why there's a great missionary emphasis in the history of Israel.

In Genesis 12.3, as God calls Abraham, he says, you will be a blessing to the nations, to all peoples. At the time of the Exodus, God said through Moses, you will be a nation of priests.

[ 7 : 14 ] In other words, the people of Israel are supposed to represent God among the nations. And, of course, Isaiah, the great prophet Isaiah, the chapters of his book end looking forward to a day when all the peoples of the world will flock together and worship God together.

There is no room for tribal religion in Israel. I think we need to remember that today, even as David reminded himself and the people of Israel in his day.

Because today, too, we are told that religion should be a tribal matter. We in the West, we Westerners, have our Christian religion. And other people from other parts of the world have their own gods and cultures and religions.

And it's a terrible thought that we should ever try to persuade people or try and convert people to believe in the God of Jesus Christ. But, of course, that's wrong.

If God is the God whose name is majestic in all the world, if he's the one who made the heavens, then everybody belongs to him, not merely Westerners, not merely Christians.

[ 8 : 20 ]     Everybody belongs to God and has a right to hear about him. Has a right to hear about the great news of who he is. To try and keep it to ourselves is a bit like the kind of selfish isolationism that some people have when they say, here we are comfortable in Australia with our wealth, but the rest of the world rot in its poverty.

It's a religious form of that kind of smug selfishness. A true view of human value starts with the one true God. God's greatness is the guarantee of universal human value.

God is everyone's God. The second point from Psalm 8 is that a true view of human value leaves no room for pride. The danger, of course, with worshipping the one true God is that you can feel pretty self-satisfied with having picked the one true God.

How clever of me and my family or our church to have hit upon the secret behind the universe. How clever of us to, out of all the religions of the world, have the right one.

Well, we must be pretty smart. We must be pretty wise. They do it pretty good. Well, Psalm 8 deals comprehensively with that smug conceit.

[ 9 : 36 ]     Look at verse 2. Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes to silence the enemy and the avenger. Now, what exactly David is talking about when he talks about founding a bulwark is not really clear.

The word, of course, means a strong defence. What does it mean to found a strong defence out of the mouths of babes? Jesus quotes it on Palm Sunday when he rides into Jerusalem.

And in the temple the children are crying out, Hosanna to the son of David. And the chiefs and scribes are waving their fingers and saying, how outrageous that anybody should be praising a man like this.

It has its fulfilment there. We don't know exactly what it meant when David wrote it to him. But what we do see very clearly is the kind of people that God chooses to accomplish his purposes in the world.

That much is very clear. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes to silence the enemy and the avenger. The kind of people that God chooses to achieve his purposes in the world, the kind of instruments that God uses to establish strength or defence, are the weakest of things, babes and infants.

[ 10 : 52 ]     He uses the words that come out of the mouths of children that can't even speak properly. These are the faltering instruments of God's action in the world.

And of course this is a great theme in the Bible. It's part of Israel's own history. In Deuteronomy 7 verse 7, as God leads the people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, Moses says to them, the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples.

For you were the fewest of all peoples. That was Deuteronomy 7.7. In Deuteronomy 9.6 we get the same thing. Understand then that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

God chooses the weak and the stubborn. These are the people that God uses to be his people and his instruments in this world. The same is true in the New Testament as well.

The Apostle Paul says that God goes to length to exclude the people who think that they are wise and who will only have religion on their terms by arranging it so that the message that is preached in the nations is one that embarrasses people like that.

[ 12 : 05 ]     It's a humiliating message of the death of Jesus Christ. He says in 1 Corinthians 1.21-24 For since the world in its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Jews demand miraculous signs, and Greeks look for wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The people God chooses to accomplish his purposes in the world, the people he chooses to serve him, are the weak, are the tiny, are the insignificant, are the foolish.

But of course this is generally true of humanity as well. As we read on in Psalm 8, we see the pattern that is established in verse 2 is also true of all people. Verse 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them.

It's the picture that Warwick described for us just before, isn't it? You go out and look up at the stars, and you think of the distances and the numbers of stars, and the time, and of course we realise this even more now that we know so much more about the way the universe is put together, and we realise how tiny we are.

[ 13 : 35 ] How on earth can humans have any significance in this enormous and almost endless universe? Here we are on a tiny little planet, in a tiny corner of a galaxy in an enormous universe.

Little bags of blood and bone and bile that have vanished before even the outer planets of our own solar system have gone round the sun once. We are so tiny and so brief.

How can we have any significance in this universe at all? But David says, What are human beings that you are mindful of, the mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Though we are small in ourselves and insignificant in our own strength, we are the people that God has chosen to rule his world. What we lack in ourselves, God has given us by making us important in his purposes.

[ 14 : 50 ] Small compared to the stars, but we are important in the eyes of the one who made the stars. Why does God do this? Why does God pick the weak and the infirm and the tiny to accomplish his purposes?

Why does he choose tiny humanity out of all the universe? Why does God have this seeming bias towards mediocrity or incompetence?

Well, part of the answer must be in verse 2, mustn't it? You have said, Out of the mouths of Satan, since you have founded a bulwark, because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. The secret is that God is opposed to human pride.

God knows how willing we humans are to set ourselves up as important, how keen we are, how eager we are to look at ourselves and find good things in us that we can hold up and say, Yes, I'm important because I have this, or I have done this, or I'm better than such and such, or so and so, at this.

God knows that human pride is our chief weakness, that we would do anything to exalt ourselves, even over God. God knows this, and to silence it, he chooses those who are least likely to be able to claim these things.

[ 16 : 09 ] He chooses those who are least accomplished, those who are the smallest, the weakest, babes and infants. This is a great contrast to other religions, of course, isn't it? All other religions and philosophies are really about finding ways to feel good about ourselves.

If you learn this about yourself or about the world, if you study hard and come to a certain realisation or level of awareness or meditate a lot or do certain tasks or be a really good person or better than the average person, then you can feel good about yourself and you'll be good in God's eyes as well.

Well, not in the religion of Psalm 8, not in the religion of Christianity, not in the faith that is set up by the true and living God. God uses the weak and the infirm, the infants, to establish strength to achieve his purpose in this world.

What a warning and what an encouragement for us. Let me ask you, when you look at yourself, are you tempted towards pride or towards despair? When you look at yourself, do you feel good about the things that you've done?

Are you basically pleased with yourself in comparison to other people? Are you happy with who you are in yourself and proud of the things that you are and have? If so, then there is a great warning here.

[ 17 : 25 ] The people that God uses, ultimately, are the weak. Are the people who are weak in themselves, babes and infants, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

But if you're tempted to despair as you look at yourself, then there is great news and great comfort here, isn't there? Because if you realise in yourself that you are weak, so much the better, so much easier is it for you to throw yourself on God's mercy and be strong in his purposes and plans.

He's the one who wants to achieve things through the weak. If you despair, if you look at your own moral failing, so much the better, so much more ready are you to throw yourself on God's mercy and receive the forgiveness that he offers through Jesus' death and resurrection.

God works despite us. He works despite our weakness to overthrow our pride. A true view of human value leaves no room for pride.

That's our second point. The third point is humanity's future, sorry, humanity's future glory is seen in Christ. It's important to realise as we read of the rule of humanity here in Psalm 8 that David is not speaking of human achievements.

[ 18 : 42 ] When we read, you have given them dominion over the works of your hands, you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen and all the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the parts of the seas.

It's easy, perhaps for us, Westerners, living in comfort with the products and benefits of science and technology. You believe that we have conquered the world, that we are at least on the cusp of solving the world's major problems.

It's an illusion, of course. We don't actually control the world or we are still beset by droughts, even in rich and affluent Australia. The world is chaotic and spins out of our hands.

We are half rulers of the world, but at the same time, we are frustrated in that rule. The picture is that we kind of control the world, we kind of fulfil this destiny that God has set out for us, but at the same time, there's frustration everywhere.

Our science damages as much as it creates. We still go to war against each other and kill each other. We can't control ourselves. We can't control the planet.

[ 19 : 53 ] And, of course, one by one, we die, either by natural causes or at the hands of one another. We are not actually in control of ourselves or the world.

We have not actually fulfilled the destiny that is being described here in Psalm 8. But the Bible goes on to say that there is one man who has achieved everything that God intends for humanity.

Although we strive and are frustrated, there is one person who has already been crowned with glory and honour. Have a look with me at Hebrews 2, verses 5-9, if you've got a Bible handy.

It's on page 971. It would be great to have a look at it. Hebrews 2, verses 5-9, page 971 in the Pew Vipers. Hebrews 2, verses 5-9.

Now, God did not subject the coming world about which we are coming to angels. But someone has testified somewhere. What are human beings that you are mindful of them or mortals that you care for them?

[ 21 : 05 ] You have made them for a little while lower than the angels. You have crowned them with glory and honour, subjecting all things under their feet. Now, in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control.

As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them. But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

You see the picture that Hebrews 2 gives us is that it quotes Psalm 8. Yes, humans have been placed in dominion and rule over the world, but we don't see it yet. There's something wrong with the picture.

Humans are frustrated in their rule, but we do see one human who has achieved this. It is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the first member of a new humanity.

He is the first one who has restored the relationship between humans and God. And he even now enjoys the fruits of that restored relationship, glory and honour.

[ 22 : 16 ] And one day, when he returns to bring justice and restore the world, he will restore all things under the control of humans as it was meant to be at the beginning too. Because you see, this is the destiny of the world to be under the control of humans who reign it under the control of God for God's glory and honour.

And the great thing is that Jesus offers to share this with us if we put our trust in him too. Did you see in that last verse 9 of Hebrews 2 there, but we see Jesus who for a little while was made low of the angels now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Jesus is not merely the first member of a new humanity. He is the one who goes before us and invites us into that same humanity. He, by dying in our place, deals with the sin and the rebellion against God which separated us from God and caused all the trouble in the world and the disruption between our relationships between God and us and each other and the world.

By tasting death for everyone he offers it to restore us and all our relationships and one day will if we put our trust in him. Humanity's future glory is seen in Christ and if we belong to Christ we'll one day be seen in us.

So there's our three points. A true view of human value starts with the one true God. A true view of human value leaves no room for pride and humanity's future glory is seen in Christ.

[ 23 : 49 ] In the end there's only two ways to think about humans or in the abstract or think about ourselves in particular. That is, do we begin with ourselves looking at our own achievements our own selves and our own characteristics or do we begin with God and his purposes and plans?

Do we try to understand ourselves by ourselves or do we understand ourselves in the context of the God who made everything and whose name is majestic in all the earth?

The first way of trying to understand ourselves in our own strength is destined to failure, isn't it? We're just not big enough. We're not strong enough. We don't last long enough. It ends in failure and despair.

But the way of understanding ourselves and our humanity which acknowledges our smallness and our weakness but realises how great we are and can be in the plans of God is destined for glory in Christ Jesus.

Let's thank God for that. Thank you so much Lord God that you have given humans such a high place in your world even though we are so weak. thank you that even though we are flawed and fail and we are so morally compromised and so unable to live out the great destiny that you've laid before us in Jesus Christ you have restored our relationship with you and in Jesus you have already shown us what humanity can be and will be if we put our trust in you.

[ 25 : 21 ] Please help us to see ourselves in the context of your plans. Please take away our pride and help us to glory in you because your name is majestic and you are so great and so kind.

We thank you for all these things in Jesus name. Amen.