

07/24/2016 - Psalms of Orientation: 8, 46, 104

“Creation and the Orientation Toward God” - Rev. Seth D. Jones ©

Last week, we looked at how the Psalms rationally oriented us to God through teaching and wisdom. This week, we take an experiential approach, an intuition-guided understanding of how not only the Psalms, but all of creation, orient us toward God.

The Psalms, and most of the ancient world, assume the world was created by a god. In the ancient world, the only question, really, is which god created the world and how. But it isn't just about who created the world, it is what it means. More than any other creation story in the region, in the Genesis story, it is very clear there is a Creator and everything else is created by the creator, and nothing more so than human beings.

The Psalms reaffirm this perspective, making it very clear that our position in relationship to God is very much as His Creation. But because that is the case, all of nature speaks to the presence of God. Romans 1:19-20 on **page 152** says,

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they (those who deny God and Christ) are without excuse...”

Nature itself bears witness to God and to Christ, according to Paul.

If this is so, wondering who we are in the natural world and what makes us different seems a good question to ask. It is a Psalmist question. Turn to **page 492** and look at Psalm 8:4:

⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

It is a lovely question, and much of the Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible) and the Psalms testify that

“The Lord is the cosmic sovereign whose majesty is visible in the whole world” (James Mays, Psalms, quoted in Interpretation: Bible Studies by Jerome FD Creach).

If that is true, then the answer to “what are we, as human beings” is “not much”, or rather “no different than the plethora of creation” expressed in Psalm 104 (**page 554**).

But look at what Psalm 8 says in answer to the question.

“Yet you have made them a little lower than God (elohim), and crowned them with glory and honor” (vs 5).

Let me ask you a question - **what makes us different from the rest of creation?**

(Wait for answers)

I am working my way slowly through a book called “*Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*” by Frans de Waal, who is a great ape and primate scientist in Denmark. He says that, no, we are not smart enough to know how smart animals are, because each animal is smart in its own way, so we can only know how smart an animal is relative to our measure of intelligence as a human being. He is a committed atheist, like so many scientists, and so his answer to this question is that nothing makes us different from the rest of creation. What is surprising to me is that his answer to the question **what makes us different from the rest of creation?** is the same answer that Genesis and the Psalms give - nothing makes us different in quality from the rest of creation.

What does make us different from the rest of creation, though, is what God asks us to do. We are given a responsibility, an office, if you will. This is what angels have - a divine office - and this is why we are made a little lower than God and the angels - because of the office we have been given, not because of some essential quality that makes us different from the rest of creation. If you turn to Genesis 1:27-28 on page _____, you will see what our office is.

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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’

Psalm 8 picks up that language of dominion in verses 6-8 (492). Before we go further, let me issue a corrective in how we understand the language here. Most of us, I believe, hear the word “dominion” and think of its root word and believe it to mean something about domination and control and power over something or someone. This is a tragic misunderstanding of the Biblical idea of ‘dominion’. Whenever you hear *dominion, king, ruler* in Scripture, think of how Jesus was with the disciples and how he is in your prayer life. Whenever you hear that word ‘dominion’, if you think ‘stewardship’ and ‘caretaker’, you will be very close to understand what Genesis and Psalm 8 mean by ‘dominion’. If you bring Jesus into it and add the word, ‘servant’, to the meaning, then you will have a full understanding of what God demands of us in our ‘having dominion over’ all things. (Look at Philippians 2:5-11, also).

See, if you turn to Psalm 104 on **page 554**, and look at verse 23, it says,

“People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening”.

What is our work, according to Genesis? To tend the earth that the Lord has given us. Notice also that this statement about people in Psalm 104 is just another listing in what other creatures and aspects of nature do. The birds build nests, because that is what birds do. The moon marks the seasons, because that is what it is there for. Lions roar for their prey, their food, because that is what lions do. The sun rises, then sets, so that everything can sleep, because that is what the nature of the sun is. People work in the fields of creation for the glory of the Lord, because that is

what they are commanded to do. The earth is full of God's creatures because that is why God made it. There are creeping things innumerable (vs 25). The sea is for ships, and what? The playfield of Leviathan! (vs 26).

We live in this responsive world, where the creatures themselves know God to be their provider. The natural world points all things to God because the living things within the earth all understand their total and complete dependence on God. Let's read verses 27-30 together in Psalm 104...

Job, in the midst of all his suffering, recognizes what we are learning today - that creation itself orients toward God. He says in chapter 12, verses 7-10, on **page 462** :

*⁷ 'But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
⁸ ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
⁹ Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?
¹⁰ In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.*

Creation includes us and, like the creeping things of the earth and sea, the lions roaring, the goats in the mountains, the great Leviathan, the birds and the fishes, the sheep and the oxen, we are completely and utterly dependent upon God for our very breath of life. And, we are responsible to tend to that very creation we are a part of as well.

So what do we do with this knowledge as Christians? If God orients us toward Himself through Creation itself, what does Christ have to do with all this? This was a concern of the New Testament writers as well. If Jesus is the incarnation of God on earth, and Jesus has come to save the world, not judge it, as John 3:17 says, then Jesus is Lord and God, and the Holy Spirit is the one who communicates this truth to us in all ways. You can see how rapidly the idea of the Trinity must, by necessity, arise by the very claims of the Gospels.

Look at how John 1 handles these concerns. Turn to **page 91**, in the New Testament. Verses 1-5 lay the foundation, showing that the Word is God and created the world. Then, in verse 14, we see the Word become Christ, ratified in verse 18. God is Christ and Christ is God and therefore, Jesus was there at the creation of the world.

Hebrews 2:5-9 on **page 219** does an interesting thing as well. By quoting Psalm 8, the writer shows us that Jesus shares our office in order to take on death for everyone and thereby redeem the world. And when I say *world*, I mean, and believe Scripture to mean, all of Creation.

Then Colossians 1:16-17 on **page 200**, we see that the entire purpose of Creation is for Christ's sake. That is a strange idea, isn't it? Look at verse 17. Christ is before all things *and in him all things hold together*. We do not know Christ except through the created order, since he is the only thing that holds creation together.

So through God's teaching and wisdom, we rationally orient the mind to God and God alone. God is the 'prime directive' which models our lives and how we act in the world and with others. And through God's creation, we, by our very physical experience of life on this frothing, thriving, crawling planet, we, like all the creatures and plants, humbly recognize God's provision to and for us. But we have a divine office in this knowledge. We must tend, steward, and govern this created order, not as we think, but as God and Christ would do.

Who are we, then, in God's creation?

We are **created beings** who have been formed by a Creator God, the same God who created all the other creatures and natural things that compose our earth and universe.

To that end, we are **ecological and environmental beings**, subject to the melting glaciers and rising seas and warming atmosphere, to the droughts and floods, to the life and death that comes to all living things. As Genesis 3:19 says, *You were taken from the ground; for you are dust (adamah), and to dust you shall return.* We are completely dependent upon God and upon the ecology and environment the Lord has provided to us.

And we are **holders of divine office**, responsible for the stewardship, tending and governing of all that God has given - not just us, but all living things. When we read our divine office in Genesis, and see ourselves as ambassadors of creation itself, we see that we are responsible to God and also to the dust and world from which we have been created. This is certainly part of what Paul means when, in 2 Corinthians 5 on **page 181**, he calls us "*ambassadors of Christ*".

Last week, we discussed how Psalm 131 was a corrective to the pride that can arise from misunderstanding our participation in the righteousness of God. This week, Psalm 46 on **page 517** acts as our corrective to taking our divine office as caretakers as some kind of lordship. If we know God to be our refuge and our strength, and that we are the created, ecological, divine officers of creation, we need not fear the changes in our world. Read verses 10-11.

Jesus Christ takes on the mantle of this material physical world for the sake of our souls *and our bodies*, for the sake of all the creatures and created things. There is no escape route from the body and this material existence. If that were true, why would Jesus resurrect *into a body that can eat and bleed*? Like the little creatures whom St. Francis of Assisi fed on a daily basis, we humbly accept that we only exist by the grace of God alone.

The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way:

God rules in such a way that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else come to us not by chance, but by God's fatherly hand.

Amen.