

OUR GREAT GOD

Psalm 104

Introduction:

It has been said that Christians should be the most passionate environmentalists. I believe there is a great deal of truth to that statement. However I am not talking about the radical ideas we hear so much today regarding global warming and climate change and other so-called environmental disasters from groups like Greenpeace and people like Al Gore. What I am saying is that we as human beings have been given the task of caring for the world that God has created. As Christians we should understand that responsibility better than anyone else.

Psalm 104 is focused on God's creation activities and His provision and care for his creation. When we look at what God has made and see how he cares and provides for his creatures, we cannot help but be overwhelmed by his power and majesty, and by his grace and provision.

This psalm also begins and ends with the call to worship that we considered last week. The psalm has no inscription indicating who wrote it, but whoever the psalmist was, he follows the example of David in Psalm 103 – "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" However, there is a very different focus.

Psalm 103 gave us a glimpse of the spiritual blessings and benefits God has showered on us – forgiveness, redemption, mercy and compassion, steadfast love and everlasting righteousness.

Psalm 104 deals more with the physical material realm – creation and the majesty of all that God has made; God's marvelous provision and supply for his creatures and for us as people.

I have again borrowed the outline and a fair bit of content for my message this morning from an adult SS Teacher's Guide from 1986. I thought the way the psalm was laid out was worth repeating. It is divided into 6 sections, all focusing on God. In the first section, vv. 1-4 we see God...

I. Majestic in the Heavens vv. 1-4

Read vv. 1-4 – The psalmist begins with a call to ascribe worth and praise to God, clothed as he is with splendor and majesty. His garment of light suggests the transparency of His integrity. People have a tendency to retreat from the light, as John said, because their deeds are evil. But God is light and he can see clearly into the darkest corners of our lives and hearts.

The first stanza of this poem speaks of God's heavenly glories. Beginning with the glorious light of God's nature and character, the psalmist moves on to the works of God. He has stretched out the heavens like a curtain and "...lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind." (Psalm 104:3 ESV)

I'm sure the hymnwriter was reading these words when he wrote the hymn, O Worship the King. Verse 2 says, "O tell of his might, O sing of his grace, whose robe is the light, whose canopy space! His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form, and dark is His path on the wings of the storm."

God's visible works reflect his majesty. In today's post-modern pantheistic view, people believe that God is in everything and that every created thing contains God. That is unscriptural, but the Bible does teach that all of creation is God's handiwork and reflects His eternal power and majesty.

God is majestic in the heavens. He is also...

II. Mighty in Creation vv. 5-9

Read vv. 5-9. The earth has been established by the mighty and powerful word of God. It is his power that upholds all things and keeps all things together. Col. 1:17 – "He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Creation is a convincing display of God's might. To lay earth's foundations (v. 5), to cover them with the oceans, like a garment (v. 6), to establish watercourses in the mountains and valleys (v. 8)—these acts called for omnipotent power.

God is the author of all natural law and order. He has set the limits with which all of nature operates. Even floods, fires, and other “natural disasters” are subject to His authority. He controls the forces of nature, and the One who channeled the waters of earth can also channel or direct the course of our personal life.

There is a parallel between Creation and salvation. Just as God brought light into being in the natural realm, so—in regeneration—He shines into dark human souls. The redemptive act of Calvary was a miracle just as great, and demanding as much power, as Creation. Heaven is filled with God’s glorious majesty; earth is filled with evidences of His power.

III. Faithful in Provision vv. 10-23

God’s majesty and might would be relatively meaningless to us except for His great faithfulness, which is expressed in His provision of such basic necessities as the water and food we need each day.

Water – read verses 10-13. Most of us here in Canada tend to take water for granted and use it lavishly. I read that the average daily consumption of fresh water in Canada is 266 litres per person. That is roughly 3 trillion litres per year, and that is just personal home use.

Water is one of God’s gifts, given to meet the needs of birds and animals as well as human beings. God provided water in abundance, but people have squandered it to the point that we are beginning to become concerned about our sources of fresh water.

Food – read vv. 14-15. Food too comes from the hand of God. He has provided enough vegetation for both man and beast. Cattle graze contentedly, and man cultivates an abundance of fruits and vegetables (v. 14).

Verse 15 mentions wine, oil, and food (“bread,” KJV). Wine was probably used in food preparation and was used by some as a beverage; oil was used not only for cooking but on the skin; and bread is “the staff of life.” The fruit of the vine reminds us of the fellowship and love made possible between man and God because of Calvary. Oil is a type of the Holy Spirit, and bread is a type of Christ.

Read vv. 16-18 – In these verses and following, we have a rather lyrical description of the natural creation. The cedars of Lebanon, filled with moisture and vitality, provide nesting places for the birds of the air. The stork makes her nest in the fir (cypress) tree. Craggy hills provide a refuge for wild goats, and cliffs make natural hiding places for rock badgers.

Read vv. 19-23 - The sequence of night and day described here is interesting. The moon and the sun have their orders from God, so to speak, and operate on the schedule given them. After sundown, people would—in those days—seek the shelter of their homes, where they were relatively safe as the wild beasts emerged to seek food. When the sun rises, the beasts go back to their dens (v. 22), and it is safe for man to go to work until evening (v. 23). Spurgeon says, “The sun . . . is the true lion tamer.”

God is majestic in the heavens... mighty in creation... faithful in provision. He is also...

IV. Wise in Variety vv. 24-26

Read v. 24 - God is an infinite Being, and it is not surprising that His works and ways manifest an infinite variety of detail.

We live in an age of mass production, when everyone from artists to furniture makers and clothing manufacturers put out thousands of items that are all identical. That is not the way God works. He is not limited to a single pattern of operation, and the diversity of His creation is vast. His wisdom is evidenced in a multitude of ways. Truly, the earth is full of His creatures.

Read vv. 25-26 – The variety of creatures, not only in the sea but also on land, is both amazing and incredible. (Discuss briefly the incredible variety of creatures God made.)

From the tiniest of algae, to the monsters of the sea, the great whales, God has made such a variety of creatures. It is the same with plant life – the variety of tress, grasses, flowers...

The psalmist certainly got it right: “O Lord, how manifold (many) are your works!”

V. Judicious in Supply vv. 27-30

Read vv. 27-29a - Animals in a zoo always know when it is time for the keeper to appear with their next meal. The psalmist pictures the creatures of the sea as waiting upon the Lord for food. The psalm implies that the animals recognize that God is their Provider (cf. v. 21). This may be poetic license, for animals have no God-consciousness that we know of—but as human beings, we should be aware of God as our Provider, but many times are not.

A little girl from a non-Christian home was having lunch with Christian neighbors. "Why do you do that?" she inquired after the blessing. ""We thank God because our food comes from Him," the hostess explained. "Oh," said the young lady. "We get our food from the store."

We would never say that, but how often do we act as though we believed that.

The Psalmist implies that God shows a certain discretion in His supply of food. There are times when He opens His hand wide and the animals have plenty. At other times He hides His face and they are troubled (v. 29). Food shortages may result from droughts and other "natural disasters," or from man's interference with the delicate balance of nature, but behind the scenes God is always working out His purposes.

Read v. 29b-30 – even the cycle of life and death is a part of God's purpose and is under his control.

VI. Eternal in Glory vv. 31-35

Well, we have one more. God is...

Read vv. 31-32 – Just as an artist, writer, or musician delights in what he has painted, written, or composed, so God Himself enjoys the work of His hands. He rejoices in the intriguing beauty of His material creation—and certainly there is no reason why we should not do the same. An earthquake and a volcanic eruption (v. 32) are gigantic events to us, but to God—so vast is His power they could result from a look or a touch.

The psalm concludes on a note of joyful thanksgiving: read vv. 33-34. It is hard not to think of how the Apostle John heard the widespread praise of creation when he stood in the Spirit before the throne of God.

The hosts of heaven were joined by the voices of all creatures on earth and in the sea as they proclaimed the worthiness of Christ (Rev. 5:11-13).

Read v. 35a - The time will come when those who oppose God and desecrate and destroy his creation will have no more part in it. God's love is now giving people every opportunity to forsake their sin and accept His full and free pardon. Eventually, though, the time of opportunity will be over, and God will purge His universe of all that offends. Then nothing will hinder full enjoyment of His blessings. No wonder the psalmist ends (v. 35b) on a note of exultation: "Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!"

Conclusion

I began this morning by saying that Christians should be the best environmentalists, because we have a concern for the beauty that God has created for our enjoyment.

In his book, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical*, Sherwood Wirt writes: "The Christian who builds his life on the Bible looks for the Lord Jesus Christ to come in power... and to establish a new heaven and a new earth. Meanwhile—and the whole problem of the evangelical's social conscience is bound up in that word 'meanwhile.' For whether he likes it or not, he is bound in stewardship to take care of this earth until he gets a better one.

Do you truly appreciate the beauties of nature? Perhaps we need to cultivate a greater awareness of God's handiwork in the universe around us. To walk under twinkling stars on a crisp autumn night, to contemplate a spectacular sunset, to watch the moon come up over a lake—these are exercises that many of us need. To study what God has created, with a heart open to His voice, will humble us and fill our hearts with praise to our wonderful Lord.

Close with salvation application. God created all of this for our enjoyment. But he also created us to have a relationship with him. One day the time of opportunity will be over, and God will purge His universe of all that offends. Today is the day of salvation...