

How Great Thou Art!

An Exegesis of Psalm 8

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Introduction

When it rains, it pours!

Brothers, it doesn't just *seem* like it. Lately, Christ's sheep of St. John Lutheran, Victorville, your brothers and sisters in the High Desert of California, have been just pummeled with all kinds of difficulties. You name it we've suffered it. A one-month old sweetie-pie is rushed to emergency with what appears to be a urinary tract infection - rare but easily treatable; the ultrasound reveals a mass on her tiny kidney - oh, must it be, the sign of death on something so new and tender? A city councilman recites and sings his Savior's praises. Suddenly, the words spill out in a slur; one side of his face slides down. He's having a stroke in church! A hobbled old couple - she with a hip replacement that stubbornly refuses to recover, he with radiation burns and depression from mood-altering hormone injections for prostate cancer - get the phone call we all dread. Their first grandchild, a 21-year-old of arresting beauty, is found dead in the back seat of her car! A 42-year old mother of a high school senior and a college sophomore hears the paralyzing news from her doctor: "I'm sorry, but by our estimates you have about six weeks to live." After conference, I get to go back and sit with her and her family in their living room, as she breaks the news to them. All this and more that I'm leaving out has hit Jesus' flock whom I love and serve in about a two week span! All this on top of the ongoing struggles and sins afflicting the pastor and every person at St. John! All this as we enter the "busy season!"

With so many struggles pelting the people I love and serve, I confess to you, I feel beat down, fed up, and stressed out. It's getting to me. I'm aching. I'm tired. I'm scared - Oh, Lord, what's next? *Who's* next? I find the cross of self-denial pressing hard, like an 800 lb. gorilla on my back. I find it harder and harder throughout the day to deny my feelings and reason, and apply to my soul the truth I know: *Vivit!* He lives! I feel the questions of faith - that, nevertheless, because of my sinful nature, are stained with doubt - rising to the surface of me, like an upset stomach rising to my throat - Why, Lord? How Long, Lord? Or as the Psalmists say in Hebrew: *Ad Ana, Adonai!* Up to when, Lord! Enough, Lord! Enough, already! Uncle! Uncle!

Brothers, I know you can relate. I know that most of you have spent some quality time in the scalding cauldron of *tentatio* where the Lord forges his faithful theologians and hearty shepherds. Many of you may be in it with me now in your own desert, city, or valley, your own little corner of the kingdom. And if you aren't, you know that before all is said and done you'll be sweating it out there again. And, if you're still on your delightful honey-moon, as a vicar or first-year pastor, don't worry my dear friend, my brother, soon enough, it'll be your turn. The Lord, after all, wants to make a faithful theologian and hearty shepherd out of you too!

Still, I must ask you what I asked my own people: What are we to do at a time like this? Be on our knees, of course. Pray without ceasing, as Paul tells us. But, I tell you, now is also the perfect time to, yes, *praise* God, to marvel at his greatness for who and what he is, to count our many blessings from his almighty, pierced hand, to bask in the glory of his non-stop, stunning grace! I'm not kidding! Praise is one of the perfect remedies for getting through tough times. And you know what? You know what? King David thinks so too! If you read Psalm 8 in its context within the first 10 Psalms, Psalm 8 sticks out like a sore thumb, but in a good way. Psalms 2-7 and then 9,10 have a common theme running through them: God's people frequently and ferociously hounded and hunted by the enemy, and, of course, their fervent cry to God for rescue. So, think of Psalms 1-10 as kind of a solemn Lenten section of hymns. Up in the right-hand corner imagine the black print, identifying the section saying something like "Rescue." In the middle of *that* section either David or the temple's music director decided to place Psalm 8, this happy, boisterous hymn of praise. But that's like putting "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" in the middle of the Lenten or Good Friday section of our hymnal. Why

this placement, we're not told. But, it serves to make the point: when hard-pressed on every side by enemy and trouble, stop and praise God!

So, Brothers, guess what? That's just what we're going to do *right now!* We are going to meditate on David's Psalm 8, and, first, we are going to be strengthened, encouraged, uplifted, and invigorated in our day trouble and in preparation for that day, as the Holy Spirit works through David's hymn of praise to strengthen, encourage, uplift, and invigorate us! And, then, we are to going to praise the Lord for his glorious greatness and grace with all that is in us! So, without further ado, hear from King David how majestic is the LORD, *your* Lord, and may your heart, dear Pastor, dear Vicar, burst out in good times and in bad: ***How Great Thou Art!***

Text:

לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל־הַגִּתִּית מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

For the music director. According to [the genre of] gittith. A psalm by David.

NIV11: For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.

Vocabulary:

גִּתִּית - feminine adj. from the noun גֵּת meaning "winepress."

Commentary:

גִּתִּית - Psalm 8 stands out from the surrounding psalms already in its heading (verse one of the Hebrew text). עַל־הַגִּתִּית may well be David's instructions for the arrangement and playing of Psalm 8 in worship. גִּתִּית is a feminine adjective derived from the noun גֵּת meaning "winepress." Perhaps it's a reference to a genre of music developed in one of the cities named Winepress or Gath, or perhaps it's a reference to a genre of music developed for the grape harvest.¹ At any rate, given that this memo to the music director appears also in the headings of Psalms 81 and 84, and the overall content of those psalms is festive in nature, it is quite likely that the musical king is asking the music director to ensure that the mood of the melody matches the content of the words; David seemingly wants to do for Psalm 8 what Kermit Moldenhauer has done for that greatest of Easter hymns, "Christ Jesus Lay In Death's Strong Bands." If this, in fact, is what King David is calling for, we can only applaud his inspired directions and sing Psalm 8 in our hearts "according to gittith," that is, according to an exuberant joy because, as mentioned, in contrast to the tone of the surrounding psalms, Psalm 8 oozes festivity. Listen:

2 יְהוָה אֲדַנְיָנוּ מִה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ בְּכֹל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּנָה הוֹדֶךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם:

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Set this majesty of yours upon the heavens!

NIV11: LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.

¹ For more on this see Professor Brug's commentary, *A Commentary on Psalms 1 -72*, 170.

Vocabulary:

אָדִיר - adj. “The root connotes that which is superior to something else (often superior might or power) and, therefore that which is majestic.” (Theological

תָּנָה - imv. long form of נתן “to give,” “put,” “place,” “set.”

הוֹדָךְ - n. m. with 2nd p. m. sing. suf. - “your splendor,” “majesty,” “glory.”

Commentary:

יְהוָה אֲדִינֶנּוּ-- מֵ-אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ;

When David ponders the name of the one true God, the great I AM (יְהוָה), and what that name entails, why the man after God’s own heart can’t contain himself. He breaks out into a song of praise, extolling the utter greatness, the sublime superiority of the great I AM to anything and everything else in creation! The Hebrew adjective אָדִיר connotes exactly that: something that is superior. “Oh great I AM, how far above and beyond anything else in the world is your name!” See if you do not join David in his exuberant sigh and song of praise to the I AM who is your Lord, as he leads you in the rest of his hymn to consider what makes the name I AM (יְהוָה) so superior to everything else you have ever known and ever will.

אֲשֶׁר תָּנָה הוֹדְךָ, עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם

Consider the first praiseworthy set of characteristics of I AM to which David leads us. I AM is the God of unfathomable greatness, power, wisdom, and generosity! David leads us here, as he tilts our chins upward to consider one aspect of creation - the heavens - and has us ponder what those heavens declare to us of the great I AM, our Lord, who created them. Literally, David resounds, “Set this glory of your name in the heavens!” תָּנָה is an imperative. Grammatically, this is the most challenging phrase to try to make the Hebrew nightingale sing in English.² However, while, David’s Hebrew construction is challenging, his point is not - Look up at the dazzling array of heavenly bodies, and see in them the glory of I AM set like a gleaming jewel in a crown! Because of the difficulty of the Hebrew construction that has, frankly, baffled the most learned and wisest Christian scholars of all times, we’ll go ahead and relax our grip on the Hebrew construction, and allow the translators to bring out the point in the best English possible. Here the NIV does as fine a job as any. So, let’s run with it. “You have set your glory in the heavens.” Now, with these words let King David usher you inside the dome of an observatory. Relax your head against the headrest. Let David slowly dim the lights, and project the countless stars and constellations on the ceiling. Bask in the glory of your Lord that you see there. See, first, the mind-boggling vastness of space, and see this glory of I AM sparkle: “God is so great that he is in

² Professor John Brug provides an excellent analysis and thorough discussion of the grammatical difficulties of the Hebrew construction. He writes: “The form תָּנָה in the Hebrew text is the long form of the singular imperative of נתן. This form does not fit well into a relative clause. A literal translation of the Hebrew text is ‘which | set! | your glory | above the heavens.’ It is difficult to determine the syntactic relationship of these words. Many versions, including the NIV, translate as if they read a 2nd singular masculine verb, נָתַתָּה... “(you have set your glory above the heavens” or “you who set your glory above the heavens)...The diversity in the ancient versions suggest that they had the same puzzling reading which we have. The Septuagint has “because your glory is held up above the heavens.” The Syriac, Targum, Symmachus, and Jerome render it as a 2nd singular masculine verb.” Professor Brug notes other ways that translators old and new have tried to make sense of the construction. For more see, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72*, 171.

everything, while nothing holds or limits him. He is in time and space but not limited by time and space. He is present in all that is created but beyond the control of anything created...All created things have time and space and limits in time and space. Way out there, somewhere in space, space ends and so too does time. But not God. God is above all space and beyond all time, absolutely without limits of any kind - totally other and unique."³ Then, look out into the vastness of space and consider that it along with all matter and time he brought into existence out of absolute nothing *by sheer will power!* "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."⁴ Then, gasp again, as you recall that the LORD, our Lord, hung each one of those stars in place and created our beautiful little world in all its equally vast array merely by saying, "Let there be."

Next, be overwhelmed as your mind struggles to take in what your eyes see: countless shining stars and galaxies occupying the vast space along with our beautiful little world with its light, trees, sunsets, oceans, and butterflies, and gasp in awe at I AM, your Lord, as you think this thought: "Astronomers claim that there are one hundred billion galaxies and that each galaxy has more than one hundred billion stars."⁵ Shake your head in awe at the thought that is too wonderful for our grapefruit-sized grey matter: God knows absolutely everything about every star, even as he does every hair on your head and blood cell in your body! And he knew it all perfectly in eternity before any of it existed!

Then, fall on your knees in stunned adoration as you consider the most astonishing, yes, downright outrageous thought about each of the countless billions of stars and all of them put together: he made them all (drum roll, please)...*for you!* Yes, it's true! I AM couldn't help himself. He showed his hand in Genesis 1 even before saying, "Let us make man in our image." In Genesis 1 we hear how he created the heavens and the earth. Over the course of the next three days we see him create, shape, and fill that original heap of chaotic matter into a habitable world. The work that he's doing and the poetic way way the prose describes his work of creation naturally brings out the enquiring question: Ooh, what's He doing? What's all this for? Then, we get to day four and the LORD can't hide the delight of what he has in mind any longer. An inspired Moses tells us: "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.'"⁶ See? He made the sun, moon, and every star - all billions and billions of them - *for you and me*. Who else uses sun, moon, and stars to "mark seasons and days and years," to plant corn and make calendars? And so, as you stare at the Big Dipper and Orion at night, hear them declare this majestic thought to you: "Just as the LORD, your Lord, made us for you, the same goes for everything on the earth! It's all *for you*, including the ground on which you're standing to look up at us!" How amazing is that?

Before giving your neck a break from looking up, let the heavens proclaim to you one more treasured thought about I AM, your Lord. In looking at the heavens in the daytime you see blue skies and puffy clouds, you see countless multihued sunrises and sunsets, many of awe-inspiring beauty. In looking at the night sky you see the innumerable stars and constellations sparkling like sequins on a black satin dress. As you see all of that ask yourself: Why did God make *so much, so many* heavenly bodies, and of *such* beauty? Let that thought take you back down to earth, and ask: Why did God make *so many* wonderful flavors of food that I enjoy?

³ Deutschlander, Daniel D. *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*, 99.

⁴ Genesis 1:1.

⁵ Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1 -72*, 171.

⁶ Genesis 1:14.

Why did he give me *so* many amenities to make my life easier and more comfortable - more than any human beings of the past have ever enjoyed, in fact? I mean, did God have to make *so many* stars? Did he have to paint *so many* beautiful sunrises and sunsets, most of which go unnoticed by me, especially on a busy day? Did he have to give me the experience of *so many* wonderful flavors to enjoy? Did he have to enable the internet and smart phones? The answer, of course, is No. He could have put the sun and moon in the sky and just enough stars to enable the marking of time and seasons, and to enable early navigation! He could have made everything taste like chicken! He could have made a drab, monotone, monotonous world. But he didn't. He made all the stars and sunsets that he did and everything else, and he did it knowing that I would let many moments go without appreciating and thanking him for all he has given me in creation! He gave me all I own in life, knowing that in my fallen state, I will either worry about or idolize so much of it! So, why did he give us all that, for Pete's sake? He's just that extravagant in his generosity! Yes, he's so generous that so often his response to our ingratitude and perversity toward his generosity is a kind and continued giving of the beautiful and wonderful things that we take for granted and use to sin against him!⁷

Good heavens! How amazing is *that!*? How superior to any and every earthly father or philanthropist is *that!*? Who ever heard of such a thing? Can we contain ourselves any longer? No, we can't! Sing with King David; sing with me with all your heart: *O, LORD, our Lord, how great thou art! How majestic is your name in all the earth!*

But, there's more, much more, that shows the great I AM, our Lord, to be superior to anything and everything else on earth, making him worthy of and inspiring our hearts to sing of his majesty. Listen:

3 מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וַיִּנְקִים יִסְדַּתְּ עַז לְמַעַן צוֹרְרֶיךָ לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיֵב וּמִתְנַקֵּם:

Through the lips of children and infants you established a stronghold, on account of your foes, to put a dead stop to the enemy and the avenger.

NIV11: Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

Vocabulary:

מִן - "from," "out of" not just in the sense of direction, coming out of or away from something, but also a means idea, something out of which a thing is made. "This table is made *out of* oak."

עוֹלָלִים - "children" as distinct from adults.

יִנְקִים - "infants," those who are still nursing.

יִסְדַּתְּ - Pi. impf. of יָסַד "establish" or "found," "fix in place."

עַז - n.m. "strength," or "stronghold."

לְמַעַן - prep. and conj. "in view of," "on account of." (BDB)

⁷ This essayist is greatly indebted to Professor Daniel Deutschlander's insights in *The Narrow Lutheran Middle* for the thoughts in this paragraph. For more on creation demonstrating God's generosity see *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*, 168.

צוֹרְרִיךְ - n. m. pl. "adversary," "foe."

הַשְׁבִּיתָ - Hiph. inf. (purpose) of שָׁבַת "cease and desist from labor," "rest." In the Hiphil cause to cease," "put a stop to," "force to rest," "silence...*permanently!*" i.e. "destroy," "exterminate."

מִתְנַקֵּם - Hithpael ptc. of נָקַם "avenge," "take vengeance on;" the substantive ptc. "the avenger."

Commentary:

מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים, וַיְנַקֵּם -- יִשְׁדָּף-עוֹ

What is the next glorious characteristic of the great I AM that King David sets before us, showing us just how superior, just how majestic, his name is in all the earth? His grace and power in the means of grace to establish and build Christ's kingdom and to withstand and demolish Satan's! Dear fellow hearer and proclaimer of Christ-crucified and risen, be dazzled by the praiseworthy, praise-inspiring jewel of God's grace and power in the gospel, as David sets that jewel atop the black felt backdrop against which the jewel shines all the more - the utter weakness of those who declare the praises of God (עוֹלָלִים and וַיְנַקֵּם), and the fierce might of the enemies of the gospel (צוֹרְרִיךְ and מִתְנַקֵּם)! Yes, against that dark backdrop see the grace and power of the gospel sparkle from a number of angles, and may it inspire you to join David in his praise of God!

עוֹלָלִים, וַיְנַקֵּם

First, consider the glorious grace and power of the gospel in the obvious faith of the tiny praisers of Jesus! An inspired David, in full accord with Jesus and Paul, says it so beautifully and clearly:⁸ *children* (emphasis David's; עוֹלָלִים emphasizes the distinction of childhood from adulthood), declare the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light!⁹ Why, yes, even outright *infants*, (וַיְנַקֵּם literally describes those who are still nursing!) do the same in a mysterious way that easily goes beyond the reach of puny, fallen human logic but that God's all-knowing, all-holy mind grasps and loves full well! If children and infants declare the praises of God, what, of course, does that mean of them, first and foremost? It means that those children and infants are *believers*! In countless places and in many ways the Bible clearly sets forth the syllogism: "All true praisers are true believers."¹⁰ So, according to David here, as in the rest of Scripture, children and infants are as much believers as the greatest saints in Scripture and history; in fact, as you well know and can well quote, the humility and take-it-at-face-value faith of a little child is the ideal.¹¹ And so, it is just so true, *so* true: the majority of us can't remember a time when we didn't say "Christ is Lord;"¹² most of us have no memory of the first time we praised Jesus as our Savior and King. We simply were *too tiny* to recall! What is true of you, if you came to faith in infancy, is, of course, true of your children, grandchildren, and so many infants and children in your churches. The question you must never cease to ask - even though you

⁸ Literally, David says, "From the mouth or lips of children etc." This is an obvious case of metonymy. David is, of course, referring to that which comes out of the mouths or lips of (מִפִּי) children and infants, namely, their praises of God, as the translators of the NIV, among many others, capture well.

⁹ 1 Peter 2:9.

¹⁰ Jesus' clear and vivid picture of a vine and its branches in John 15 is but one example of the aforementioned syllogism.

¹¹ Matthew 11:25; Luke 18:16,17.

¹² 1 Corinthians 12:2.

know the answer like the back of your hand - because of the praise-inspiring answer that comes is: How and why have the little ones, the עוֹלָלִים and יְנֻקִּים - that large group of tiny ones of which *you* most likely were blessed to be a part - how and why have they believed, and, therefore spoken?¹³ How and why have *you*? I mean, you know what the Bible says about the עוֹלָלִים and יְנֻקִּים! "Surely, I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."¹⁴ You know what the Bible says being conceived and born in sin means: it means that you and yours were spiritually still-born, door-nail dead in trespasses and sins.¹⁵ You and yours, me and mine, daily and in countless ways confirm the rotting deadness in which we were born by all the evil that we've done, the good we've left undone, yes, even all of the good things that we've done that are nevertheless stained by the corruption in which we were conceived and born. All of that is the undeniable sign that we are by birth, from conception, even, dead in trespasses and sins. How and why, then, have you and yours come to praise the LORD, the true God, and, therefore, believed in him, and, therefore, come into the divine and sublime fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that as עוֹלָלִים and יְנֻקִּים? This is how and why that happened: From eternity God looked at you, conceived and born with a sinful nature and covered in all the sins that result from that corruption and that prove it, and *still*...he loved you with every fiber of his infinite heart, anyway! His self-chosen, self-generated love for you sparked in holy God this outrageous, illogical desire: he found it his greatest joy to hold you in his holy arms, as his own child, yes, as if you were Jesus himself, and dote on you and adorn you with his lavish love for time and eternity! In that great love for you he sent his Son to wash away the guilt of the sinful nature in which you were conceived along with the flood of sins it has produced in the even greater flood of Jesus' holy blood. Then, the great, great, great I AM ruled over all of history and your personal one to see to it that your tiny head got wet with water in his triune name, and that your young ears and minds were filled with Christ in song - "The Lamb, the Lamb" - and sermon - "He died *for you!*" That's how and why the עוֹלָלִים and יְנֻקִּים in which you can see yourself and many loved ones are praisers, and, therefore, believers!

Then, be awed by this stunning grace God gives children and infants - and us and many of our loved ones from infancy to this very moment - in the praises they proclaim! In inspiring David to write of the praises of children and infants and the astonishing blessings and work God brings about through their praises it is so very clear: God is very pleased with them! He delights in their praises, as he does in their faith;¹⁶ yes, we might even say that this inspired verse is God's praise of the praises the children and infants (and finally all of his children) render him. But, ask the same question we did before: How and why is God delighted in their praises, in yours, child of God, when, as sinners, those praises - from the first one after baptism to the last one before death - are stained with sin? Again, because through the great good news of Jesus that was poured on them and you in baptism, that was spoken to them and you in church, Sunday School and at home, and that was fed to them and you in the blessed Supper starting at Confirmation, it gave and sustained the faith in Jesus, through which they and you are covered in his righteousness and sin-cleansing blood. But, why does God go so far as to praise our praises, and that since we were עוֹלָלִים and יְנֻקִּים? Good heavens, he's the one to give us the faith, the desire, the mouths, the opportunities, yes, even the Christ-praising, God-pleasing words to praise him! And so, why does God praise work that, at heart, depends so much on him for it being done at

¹³ 2 Corinthians 4:13.

¹⁴ Psalm 51:5.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:1.

¹⁶ Matthew 11:25,26.

every stage? In a word, *Grace*, grace showered on children and infants through the means of grace! It's as professor Deutschlander says in his insightful, inimitable way:

A father is teaching his little boy to ride a bicycle. He holds his son and the bicycle so that the boy does not fall off. He runs alongside for a time, even after he has let go of his son and his bike. The little boy squeals with delight when he has gone a way on his own. He looks back with a broad smile at his father, expecting his father to be proud and to share in his joy at his accomplishment. [And the boy is not disappointed]...Though it is all true, that the whole business would be nothing at all were it not for the father's efforts, nevertheless, the father will behave as though his son has done the greatest thing in the world. He will be pleased and proud. He will even praise his son, as though his son did it all on his own!...

And that's to a large extent the way God is with our good works. He knows, and so do we, that he gave us whatever ability we have to do good works. He knows, and so do we, that the desire to do them comes from him, from the desire implanted in us to respond to the gospel...He knows, and so do we, that he has in his providence provided us with just such opportunities to serve him as match the abilities that he has given us. But knowing all of that, he beams with pleasure and satisfaction when in our own faltering ways we love and serve him.¹⁷

Again, God gets to enjoy giving the gracious gift of praising the praises of his people from infancy and childhood to old age, because he makes those praises so pleasing to him through the means of grace!

מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים, וַיְנַקִּים -- יְשׁוּתָ-עַז

Then, there is this unfathomable gift of grace given children and infants in the praises God works and brings out of them: they get to build up Christ's church! King David says that out of the mouth of babes, by or through (a well established use of בָּן; see vocabulary notes above) their praises, the great I AM erects an indomitable stronghold - the Church - that Jesus says the very gates of hell can neither topple nor resist the mighty army the stronghold houses!¹⁸ How does God raise such a stronghold out of the praises of children and infants, of course? Because of the inseparably close connection between praise and proclamation!¹⁹ Ah, but what grace God showers on his tiny praisers, as they praise him by singing of the wonders he has done in Christ! Just imagine it: When your little voice, or that of your child, grandchild, or the kindergarteners in your church sang loudly and delightfully out of tune "Go, My Children, with My Blessing" you and they were given the privilege of gathering God's elect, building up Christ's eternal kingdom and simultaneously

¹⁷ *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*, 145. On the same page Professor Deutschlander also gives the preacher another endearing and excellent illustration to consider that makes the same point of God's grace in our praises: that of a mom putting up her little child's drawings on the refrigerator, and praising them as if they were better than the *Mona Lisa*.

¹⁸ Matthew 16:18. Many sound exegetes have brought out the point in Jesus' picture that his promise is of the futility of Satan and his forces to both extinguish the church and to keep her from making inroads into and demolishing his kingdom by the preaching of the gospel. Both are certainly valid and comforting biblical points.

¹⁹ All students of Seminary Professor, James Tiefel, are, undoubtedly, familiar with the equation, the syllogism he introduced in worship class: "All praise is proclamation; all proclamation is praise." While the validity of the word "all" is up for debate, since the praise of God encompasses much more than the voice, and while the word "is" is up for debate because the praise in the heart that wells up from the proclamation is distinct from the proclamation itself, still, the inseparably close connection between spoken and sung praises and the proclamation of the gospel is undeniable.

demolishing Satan's, and yes, doing even greater things than Jesus - saving souls far outside Israel!²⁰ And what does God promise all who faithfully hold out the word of life in the darkness of the crooked and depraved generation in which they live? They get to shine like the stars forever!²¹ That's the gracious blessing you, your son, daughter, grandchild, or little one in your church have gotten to enjoy spiritually, by holding out the word of life in song. And that is what you and they will get to enjoy doing in the most blissful way in glory! Why? Through the gracious gift of faith and its fruit the Holy Spirit gives by the means of grace he showers on the little ones!

לְהַשְׁבִּית אֹיֵב, וּמִתְנַקֵּם

Then, consider the unimaginable *power* of the gospel in Word and sacraments to raise the indomitable stronghold; see the gospel's awesome power all the more clearly by both the lowliness and littleness of the vessels that proclaim the gospel and the ferocity and power of the forces of evil that oppose it! Both צוֹרְרֵיךְ and מִתְנַקֵּם convey fierce animosity and hate. מִתְנַקֵּם even brings out an intent to hurt and harm - seeking revenge. When we think about who those bitter foes are, finally - not flesh and blood, but the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,²² i.e. the unholy trinity of the sinful nature, the sinful world, and the devil of hell - it's clear that God's children, beginning in infancy and childhood, have countless hateful, powerful forces within and without striving constantly to silence their praises, and, therefore, the preaching of Christ's saving name, even as the Pharisees on Palm Sunday tried to silence the little children's praises of Jesus! Just think about the little child's instinct when he is told to do something. "Now, sing louder, so that everyone can hear about Jesus," says the choir director. The instinct as you well know from telling that same child to pick up their toys is to say, at least, in his heart, "No! I don't want to." Think of the countless germs and accidents Satan and his minions set out each Sunday morning to keep kids from coming to church, and especially, on a Sunday when they are scheduled to sing. Think about the persecution that the red dragon breathes out against Christ's little ones - all the persecution to the truths our little children sing about that comes openly and subtly from our society, and to those of a really young age! And yet, in the face of all those many and mighty forces of evil and the littleness and helplessness of these tiny clay jars...the word of Christ continues to work powerfully in them to proclaim the gospel and through their gospel proclamation to build up the indestructible stronghold of the church to the glory of Christ. Don't you know it! One of the ways by which God permanently silences or puts a dead stop to (הַשְׁבִּיתָה) "the enemy and the avenger," those unwitting minions of Satan in the world, unbelievers, is by bringing about their conversion, in part, through the praises of children and infants!

So, here it is - and good God, I love it! *I...love...it*: My little girl sings of Jesus' blood and righteousness for me as I sit in the chancel, and I know right then and there that the iron gates of hell that the devil swings into her face to silence her cannot budge this 40 pounder! I know that the devil doesn't have a bar or chain thick enough to keep her little foot that is smaller than the length of my hand from kicking that door down, storming inside and snatching another little one from hellfire - turning an enemy of Christ into a praiser of his - and building the faith of her father and the flock of Christ he is privileged to feed and care for, helping to

²⁰ John 14:12. Fall down in awe and wonder and worship Jesus forever for the grace in this verse. As we, by Christ's power, carry out the mission to which he called us of proclaiming his name in our communities and, through our synod, to the farthest reaches of the globe, he gives us the grace of doing something more than he did in his earthly ministry: reach people with the gospel across the world he so loved and for which he came to save!

²¹ Philippians 2:15; Daniel 12:3.

²² Ephesians 6:12.

keep him and them from hellfire! And precisely, because it's my *little* girl, one of the עוֹלָלִים, who needs me to twist off a bottle cap and peel open the cellophane top on a cup of chocolate pudding because her little fingers are still too small and weak to do it on her own - yes, because of her weakness - I see the mighty power of the great I AM at work through the gospel proclaimed to me and that I get to preach, all the more!

Who can keep his lips from joining King David, and all believing children and infants, from singing the praises of the LORD, our Lord, with all his heart? Who can keep from rendering those same praises by holding to and holding out his gracious and powerful name to each other and to the world? Not you! Not me either! Sing it: *O, LORD, our Lord, how great thou art! How majestic is your name in all the earth!*

And now, like Tchaikovsky's rousing finale to the "1812 Overture" - cannon blasts and all - King David's inspired hymn of praise crescendos to a tear-welling peak, as he leads us to *that* glory of the great I AM, our Lord, that above all else shows him to be אֲדִיר majestic, superior to anything and everything else on earth, making him worthy of our highest praise and eliciting it! Listen, and may your heart forever boom, *O, LORD, how great thou art! How majestic is your name in all the earth!*

4 כִּי־אֲרָאָה שָׁמַיִךְ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבְעֹתֶיךָ יָרַח וְכּוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנְנִתָּהּ:

5 מִה־אֲנֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבְר־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ:

6 וַתַּחֲסֶרְהוּ מֵעַט מַאֲלָהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ:

7 תִּמְשִׁילֵהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ כֹּל שֶׁתָּה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו:

8 צִנְה וְאֲלָפִים כָּלָם וְגַם בַּהֲמוֹת שָׂדֵי:

9 צַפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וְדָגֵי הַיָּם לֵבֹר אַרְחֹות יָמִים:

Whenever I look at your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set firmly in place - [I think, wow,] what is mankind that you remember him, yes the son of man that you have such regard for him?

Yet, you made him a little less than the heavenly beings, and you crown him with glory and honor! You make him ruler over the works of your hands! You put all things under his feet - all flocks and cattle, yes, even the wild beasts of the field, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, [everything] that swims along (lit. pass through) the paths of the seas.

NIV11: When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?[c]

You have made them[d] a little lower than the angels[e]
and crowned them[f] with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;

you put everything under their[g] feet:
 all flocks and herds,
 and the animals of the wild,
 the birds in the sky,
 and the fish in the sea,
 all that swim the paths of the seas.²³

Vocabulary:

כִּי - “as” in the temporal sense. So, “when” or “whenever.”

כּוֹנֵנֶתָהּ - Polel pf. 2nd m. sing. of כּוֹן “be firmly established.” In the Polel “set firmly in place.”

תִּפְקְדֵנִי - Qal impf. 2nd m. sing. of פָּקַד with m. 3rd p. m. sing. suff. “pay attention to,” “be attentive to,” “have great regard for,” as a mother her child.

אָנוּשׁ - n.m. “man,” “mankind,” “humankind.” Some have claimed that אָנוּשׁ connotes mankind in its mortal weakness in contrast to the general term for mankind or humanity, אָדָם. This, however, is probably a case of finding in a synonym more than is actually there. The contexts in which אָנוּשׁ appear by no means always make that distinction clear. Especially, in a section of poetry “אָנוּשׁ may be used simply to create a parallelism with בֶּן-אָדָם”²⁴

תִּחַסְרֶהוּ - Piel impf. 2nd m. sing. with 3rd m. sing. suff. of חָסַר “lack,” “be in need;” or the flip side of the same coin the “decrease,” or “diminishing” which brings about the lack or insufficiency of something. So, my cell phone battery decreasing leads to a lack of battery power. In fact, the “earliest occurrence of this verb describes the decrease of the waters which prevailed over the earth at the flood.”²⁵ Here the piel form carries the sense of the hiphil - to cause the action. So, “cause to lack,” “cause to diminish/decrease.”

אֱלֹהִים - n.m. pl. Here very likely the first use of the word, of spiritual rulers “reflecting divine majesty and power...divine ones...including God and angels;²⁶ Many of the ancient translations including the Septuagint translate “angels” or “heavenly beings.” RV and other more modern translation translate “God.”

תִּעֲטֶרְהוּ - Piel (deponent verb) impf. 2nd m. sing. with 3rd m. sing. suff. of עָטַר “Crown.”

תִּמְשִׁלֶּהוּ - Hiphil impf. 2nd. m. sing. with 3rd m. sing. suff. of מָשַׁל “cause to rule,” “make him ruler of.”

²³ The NIV 11 includes the following in its footnotes: c. Psalm 8:4 Or what is a human being that you are mindful of him, / a son of man that you care for him? d. Psalm 8:5 Or him e. Psalm 8:5 Or than God f. Psalm 8:5 Or him g. Psalm 8:6 Or made him ruler . . . ; / . . . his.

²⁴ Brug, John. F. *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72*, p. 173. Professor Brug has an excellent discussion on the distinction of the four main words for “man” in the Old Testament on pages 173, 174 of his commentary. The reader is highly encouraged to read this section.

²⁵ TWOT, 708.

²⁶ BDB, 43.

Commentary:

So, just what is the highest glory of the great I AM to which David leads us on this “1812 Overture Finale” of his that are verses 3-8 (4-9 in Hebrew)? Why, it’s that jaw-dropping, mind-blowing, breath-taking love of his that only he could invent, that is part and parcel of his name I AM, that forever simply isn’t enough time for which to praise him: *Grace!* In these verses David holds up I AM’s grace in a marvelous three-faceted diamond that corresponds amazingly well to the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed! Dear pastor, see the awe-inspiring “Three Article” grace of the great I AM shining brighter than Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest star in space, yes, shining brighter than the noonday sun! Take it in, and be empowered and reenergized to hold it up to your people and the unbelieving world that the Lord has placed within your reach!

מה-אנוש

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” King David shows us the glorious grace of I AM that we confess with those words. From the observatory he takes us out to a dirt field, and he has us ask a simply but sobering question: What is man? What is a human being? What are *you* with regard to the essence of your physical make up? Then David tells us, “Kneel down, אָנוּשׁ, hold open your palm, put your fingers together, forming a spade, and bury your hand into the dirt, lift it out; cup your hand around the dirt; feel the dirt, dust, and silt seep through your fingers. *That* is what you are - dirt, earth (אָדָם)²⁷! Of course, that’s what we are! We remember well Moses’ words: “...the Lord God formed man (אָדָם) from the dust of the ground.”²⁸ We do well to remember that truth in the old Ash Wednesday prayer that puts it all so vividly. “In the mud you knelt down, O God. Into the clay you buried your hands. From the mire you pulled a human being - A dirt man... a clay man...a dust man...We come before you tonight...people of dirt; people of clay; people of dust.” And the most glorious, most precious, most regal, most high God *cares* for *that!*? And how much does he care for that which is essentially dirt? How much? So much that after shaping this dirt into its human form, kneeling down down, tilting its chin up, wrapping his lips around the lips and nostrils of the dirt man, CPR style, and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life,²⁹ he dedicates his entire existence to providing for and caring for that dirt man, attending to him and his needs and happiness, like a mother her newborn infant (פֶּקֶד)! A quick once-over of Genesis 2 reveals that!³⁰ Are you kidding me!? Who does that? Who loves dirt like *that*? Not you! Not me! Not anybody! In fact, we don’t really love dirt at all. When was the last time you chose to wrap your lips around dirt to all but give it an open mouth kiss? The only thing that you are mindful about when it comes to dirt is washing it away, washing dust and dirt off of your dust and dirt hands and body! You yell at your children for getting dirty. When dirt, earth, gets ground in and encrusted on your clothes, so that it can’t come out, you throw them away! You are not so mindful of dirt that you treat it like

²⁷ See the notes in the vocabulary section and the footnote noting that in this context אָנוּשׁ and אָדָם are practically synonymous, both view man from his lowly origins and makeup as dirt, dust and ashes.

²⁸ Genesis 2:7.

²⁹ Genesis 2:7. This essayist is painting an anthropomorphic picture based on Genesis 2:7 for vividness.

³⁰ In Genesis 2 we see the great I AM dedicate all his time and energies to constructing and providing a flawless, unbearably lovely home for that dirt man, and a wonderful, satisfying existence for that dirt man in working the beautiful garden he planted for man, in serving the perfect companion he provided for man, and in providing man the release valve for the natural pent-up desire with which he was created to love, worship, and adore his Creator: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil! This, as Luther brought out well in his commentary of Genesis, was the blessed altar and cathedral God erected for man to worship him in fulfillment of man’s natural desire to do so.

your newborn infant and dedicate your whole existence to carrying and providing for it! That's crazy! Even if you grew up on a farm, or are an avid gardener, you care about your dirt only *as a means to an end!* You till and nourish the soil only for the fruits and flowers you hope it yields, not for its own sake. So, to sum this huge thought up: we, who are dirt and earth, don't love it. But the great I AM, the most high God, who is infinitely, incomprehensibly greater than dirt, that's all he knows how to do - is love the dirt man, the clay man, the dust man, every single one on the earth from which they were taken, including, of course, the one who wrote these words, and the ones who are presently reading these words, yes, and the most high God, the great I AM, loves them with all his infinite heart! Who can even begin to plumb the depths of that!

מִה-אֲנוֹשׁ

Oh, but it gets even deeper and more mysterious still! David reminds us again of the glorious things we saw in our trip to the observatory in v. 1. As we are knelt down on one knee with dirt seeping through our fingers, David has us look up again with him to see the sun, moon, and stars. Then, David has us ask the same question as before, "What is man?" Only this time he wants us to consider what is man compared to that, or, better, in relation to that! And, then, with his clear allusion to Genesis 1:26b and 1:28b.³¹ he gives us the stunning answer. What is man compared to sun, moon, and stars? He was made to be its crown! He is the tippy-top of the totem pole with respect to all of that. David's phrase, "You made him a little less than the heavenly beings," as will soon become clear, is a double entendre. The first way we are to take this in context is as a poetic expression of man's prime position in creation, despite his outward smallness and lowliness with respect to it. It's as if David has us say to ourselves: "When I consider the awesome grandness of the heavens, I am floored that mankind occupies first place in your heart over it all! How amazing! I and the rest of humanity are just dirt men, clay men, dust men. What is dust and ashes compared to the sun, moon, and stars? Yet, in truth you made man only a *little* lower, a *little* (במעט) less than the very angels (אֱלֹהִים)³² who are higher and shine brighter than even the greatest visible things in creation - sun, moon, and stars! So, you crowned man with the glory of holding a higher place, yes, the highest place in your heart! You are more mindful, concerned, and attentive to him and his needs than to any of the countless billions of stars! At the original creation you crowned him with the glory of being, in fact, the crown jewel of it all, the one for whom everything else was made for his blessing and enjoyment, the master and ruler over all the works of your hands for whom everything else was made to serve!" Here is where David leads us to the astonishing grace of the great I AM in our creation, and original place in it. It's impossible to be reminded of man's position as the crown of God's creation and not at the same time be reminded of the truth that the dirt man holds that place *because* he is the special creature God made to enjoy his eternal fellowship and to lavish man with the indescribable bliss and blessings of being in his fellowship! To put it another way, we cannot think of man's top position in creation and not simultaneously think about the fact that he alone in all creation was made in God's holy image!³³ But, wait a minute, think again about the name of the triune Creator - I AM. I AM by definition means he is the God of absolute and perfect *independence*. When we hear God call himself I AM we naturally want to ask, "You are what?" The jarring answer that comes back is? I AM! He is. In other words, he

³¹ Genesis 1:26b: "Then God said...let man rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Genesis 1:28b: "Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves along the ground."

³² אֱלֹהִים, of course, most commonly means "God," and translations take it that way. As Professor Brug notes, Elohim can on occasion refer to angels or rulers, as we see in 1 Sa 28:13 and Ps 82:1. The writer of Hebrews, under inspiration, chose to follow the Septuagint's translation of "angels." We and the NIV choose to follow the inspired writer's take.

³³ Genesis 1:26a, 27.

exists all by himself without any cause outside of himself. The flip side of that is that I AM depends on nothing and no one to live, to be happy, to be content, to be complete, to be everything he was meant to be. And so, I AM needs nothing and no one, least of all you and me. And yet, already in eternity before a speck of dirt from which he made you and me existed, he planned and chose to make us for his fellowship and glory that is our indescribable bliss and happiness! But...but *why*? Why, if I AM says Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly happy, content, and complete in their unbroken, triune fellowship? The answer is...*Grace*! Because God freely chose to, that's why! For reasons that lie exclusively in his enormous, infinite heart God chose to make us for his fellowship and glory, and, therefore, to lavish us with the blessings Father, Son, and Spirit enjoy in their fellowship with each other. He chose to dedicate his entire existence to taking care of us, providing for us, and heaping one blessing after another on us! He chose to make the farthest star in the universe to the smallest seed in a garden all for us, and have it all be subject to and serve you and me, yes, even *you* and *me*!

Dear great I AM, my Lord, how great thou art! How majestic is your name in all the earth!

מָה-אֱנוֹשׁ

But now all of this brings us to the highest, brightest glory of the 1st Article grace. Again we must ask our question: "What is man?" This time we would add. What is man *now* in the wake of Genesis 3? The answer, of course, is that man is by nature, by birth, and, therefore, by occupation, *sinner*! So, here it is: this dirt man into whom God breathed the breath of physical and spiritual life, the *imago Dei*, on whom God lavished the ultimate dignity and honor, blessings and bliss of being the apple of God's eye chose to go against the grain of the holy nature in which he was originally created and rise up in rebellion against his Maker! Yes, this beloved clod of mud in perfect freedom chose to love and trust the devil more than his supremely good God. As a result, we don't by nature and never fully in this life, even as believers, give I AM the glory due him as our maker and provider; we don't by nature nor fully in practice recognize him as the Giver much less thank him for his gifts. In our idolatrous love affair with self we either cling to his earthly gifts to make ourselves feel secure and happy, to foolishly try to fill the God-sized, cross-shaped hole in our hearts with earthly things, or we complain and worry about the things God in mercy and grace gives us. And the God who did not need us, who was perfectly content and happy without us in the sublime fellowship of the Holy Trinity saw this already from eternity, and *still* he decided to make us, and crown us as #1 in his heart and in the universe!? *Still*, to this day he kindly sends his good gifts of sun and rain on these naturally rebellious, God-hating clods of dirt, be they believers in him or not³⁴? *Still* he daily lavishes us with the gifts we never deserved to begin with, and deserve even less because we are so often thankless for them, and either complain about them, or exchange them for the Giver, using them as means to worship self!

So, this is how it is: A young man I once knew is on a dinner date with his cute, but unbelieving girlfriend. The waiter sets down the plates. The young man bows his head and prays silently, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest..." She rudely interrupts. "Are you *praying*?" she asks in a mixture of disbelief and embarrassment to be sitting at the same table with him. "Yeah," he says, "Gotta' thank the Giver for the meal, you know." "Then, you should go to the kitchen and thank the chef," she snorts mockingly. So, what do you think happens next? Does she choke on the ravioli she ordered? No! God took the slap in the face, and in return extended his providential hand over her, so that she goes on to enjoy the fine \$20.00 plate that she did not appreciate as a gift from his hand, and that literally billions of other people in the world would never get to enjoy!

³⁴ Matthew 5:45.

But, no, this is also how it is: day in and day out goes by and the great I AM gives us refrigerators, faucets with running water, clothes, car, computers, dear people to walk with us in faith and life in our family and church members. And yet, day after day goes by when we take it all for granted; we hardly pause to see God's gracious providential hand opening up to provide us these things, let alone thank him for them. What we often do is complain about how this is old and that doesn't work right, and "We need a new this or that" in frustrated disdain for what we have, and our kid or that member is being such a pain. Now, I AM saw this all ahead of time. But in his love for you and me, to make sure we still have good things that make our life more comfortable and enjoyable, he takes our slap, and continues to give us those things anyway. So, just as today, most likely tomorrow, you will still have a fridge, running water, MNF, your children, and the unknown-to-you prayers and appreciation of the member you complain about!

How wonderful is that? How wonderful is the LORD, your Lord? Too wonderful to fully take in! How majestic is he? More than anything in all the earth! Oh, praise him, won't you? Sing with all that is in you: "O LORD, our Lord, how great thou art! How majestic is your name in all the earth for such sweet 1st Article grace toward a sinful clod of dirt like me!"

בְּ-אָדָם... תְּחַסְּרֵהוּ מֵעַט, מְאֹלָהִים

And now David brings us to the summit of I AM's glorious grace for you and me: his 2nd Article grace, his grace in Christ Jesus, our Lord. To begin to see the glory, we must recall how in the Hebrew way of thinking the middle is most often the central thought or theme. Think of the Hebrew organization of thoughts like a target. The middle thought is the bulls-eye. So, for instance, the "Book of Comforts," Isaiah 40-66, is 27 chapters. Those 27 chapters are pretty cleanly divided into 9 chapters a piece. The middle 9 chapters are, likewise, divided into 3 chapters a piece. What's in that middle 3 chapters, the middle of the middle of the "Book of Comforts"? What's the bulls-eye that an inspired Isaiah wants us setting our sights on and focusing on? You know. "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him...a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering...he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for iniquities etc."³⁵ Guess what? An inspired King David arranges his hymn *in the exact same way!* The middle verse of Psalm 8 is verse 5. What's in the middle of verse 5, the middle of the middle of Psalm 8? What is the bulls-eye an inspired King David wants us zeroing in on? You got it: בְּ-אָדָם, "son of man"! Coincidence? I doubt it.³⁶

Ah, but to truly see the astonishing 2nd Article grace the term בְּ-אָדָם must refer to the Savior. This is the crux! This lies at the heart of both seeing the 2nd Article grace of Psalm 8 in its full blown glory and

³⁵ Isaiah 53:2-5.

³⁶ This essayist is indebted to Professor Brug for noting this point. He comments on the central placement of "son of man," saying, "This is very likely an intentional placement, designed to point to the theme of the psalm." *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72*, 175.

translating the Psalm in a way to let the readers see that full blown glory! What do we know so far? We know, as mentioned, that “son of man” is pretty much a direct synonym of בְּנֵי־אָדָם , and so it refers to mankind in terms of the lowly material from which I AM formed him - dirt. Of this there can be no question.³⁷ But Scripture also clearly uses “Son of Man” as a title to refer to the promised Savior. It, in fact, is an especially beautiful and powerful title for Messiah.³⁸ In pigeonholing what an inspired David means by “son of man” we need to ask, as always, not what *can* a term mean in Scripture, but what *must* it mean in the given context? So we ask: What must “Son of man” be referring to here? The answer in context is clearly...*both!* “Son of Man” must refer to mankind in the prime position he held at creation, despite the lowly material from which God formed him, as noted; but *it must also* be referring to our dear Savior Jesus in the lowliness of his humiliation! This is implicitly clear, even apart from the commentary on Psalm 8 given by the inspired writer in Hebrews 2:6-9. That inspired text cements the point beyond question; but, had the Holy Spirit never given us Hebrews 2:6-9, David’s context insists that “son of man” cannot *exclusively* refer to mankind; it also - and, we would say, *ultimately* - has to refer to the Son of Man in Daniel, Jesus, our Savior. Note well the five imperfect tenses! Now, it’s true that the Hebrew tense system is not as precise as it is in Greek as far as emphasizing specific types of action. So, where Greek expresses an action or event that is bound to happen with a future tense, an ongoing action with a present tense, a completed action with ongoing results in the perfect tense, Hebrew can express any of those types of actions with an imperfect; context determines the flavor. This is not to mention the fact that we’re dealing with poetry, a genre that often takes great liberties with syntax. Having said all of that, the imperfect tenses do paint a clear picture: that of this “son of man” who is “made a little lower than the angels” - here it is - *at present* ruling over all things and having all things subject to and serving him! At what time and in what place does nature and creation, in whole or in part, place itself under the glad and willing submission and servitude of mankind? Nowhere, no time, no way, and to nobody! When mankind fell into sin, he simultaneously fell off the throne God originally placed him on in Genesis 1:26,28. From the moment we rose in rebellion against our Maker, sinking our teeth into the forbidden fruit, nature rose up in rebellion against us, and often tries to sink its teeth into us. King David knew that by experience and quite literally. He had stood face-to-face with the lion and the bear, as he stood in the gap between them and his sheep. David knew that at that precise moment he couldn’t exactly tell the lion, “Hey, kitty-kitty, why don’t you run on home,” or tell the bear, “Aw, you big teddy-bear go back to hibernating,” and expect them to bow before him,

³⁷ “Son of man” is often how the Lord addresses his servants, the prophets, who are mere men. In Ezekiel, for instance, the Lord refers to the prophet by the title “son of man” 93 times! Some commentators end up interpreting “son of man” in Psalm 8 as referring *exclusively* to Christ, by interpreting the quote of Ps 8 in Hebrews 2:6-8 that way. However, that seems to be a case of falling into the opposite ditch as those who see “son of man” in Psalm 8 as referring *exclusively* to mankind. Those who see only Christ here force an unnatural sense on both texts, even as those who only see mankind here fail to bring out the full sense of both texts.

³⁸ The term “Son of Man” became a well-established title for Messiah coming from Daniel’s vision in Dn 7:13-14, where he looks up and sees “one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven” (Dn 7:13). This vision in its clear context of Judgment Day vividly shows the victory and glory achieved by Messiah in his dual nature. As “a son of man” we are clearly pointed to his true humanity; in the glory he shares co-equally with “the Ancient of Days” we see his true divinity. Jesus, of course, being the promised Savior often referred to himself by the title “Son of Man.” In fact, this was the title Jesus preferred over the actual messianic term, “Messiah” or “Christ.” Recall how he often told his disciples not to tell anyone that he was “the Christ.” The reason was that the term “Messiah” or “Christ” had unfortunately gotten saddled with the baggage of the Savior being mainly an earthly, political savior for the nation of Israel. The term “Son of Man,” taken from Daniel’s vision, however, carried no such baggage, as Daniel’s vision clearly showed the Savior in terms of a spiritual and eternal victory; Daniel sees the “son of man” coming in blinding glory on the clouds to judge the living and the dead, because he first came in stunning lowliness in a stable, on a cross, and out of an empty tomb to justify all men.

say, "Yes, my lord," and obey. David had to kill the lion and the bear, before they killed him! What David knew, you do too. Is there a season that goes by when we don't hear of the earth whipping up batches of tornados, fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, pests, and germs to hurt and kill many of those who in Eden were her masters? And so, it is clear as day, the picture David paints in vs. 6ff. of the rule of "the son of man" and the subjection and servitude of all things to him can really only refer to two things and do: mankind at the original creation, and Christ Jesus, who, in his humanity and by virtue of his humiliation has "been exalted to the highest place,"³⁹ "far above all rule and authority, power, and dominion...[and now has] all things under his feet and [is] head over everything."⁴⁰ The writer of Hebrews, under inspiration, adds his "Amen" to David's implicit but clear sense that "son of man" refers also to Christ. Whether, one takes the "him" in Hebrews 2:6-8 to refer exclusively to Christ,⁴¹ or not, (and actually not would be the more natural reading), the writer clearly states in He 2:9 that the "son of man" in Ps. 8:5 does, in fact, refer to Jesus. τον δε βραχυ τι παρ αγγελουσι ηλαττωμενον βλεπομεν ιησουν δια το παθημα του θανατου δοξη και τιμη εστεφανωμενον. "But we see Jesus, the one who for a little while was made somewhat lower than the angels crowned with glory and honor, because he suffered death..."⁴²

Having clearly and beyond question established that "Son of Man" here refers to Jesus, even as it does to mankind, bask in awe at the glorious grace of I AM for the likes of you, dear "son of man." Again, recall the great I AM's stunning grace - his great love completely independent of any cause in you - in creation. Even though, according to his very name I AM, the Lord did not need you and me for fellowship - never once did Father, Son, and Spirit ever turn to each other in eternity and say, "You know, after being with you for all eternity, it sure would be nice to have someone else to talk to" - even though that was never the case, Father, Son, and Spirit in eternity and perfect freedom decided to enjoy our fellowship, and give us the enjoyment of his, anyway. And so, he got down and dirty; he knelt down into the ground, the mud, plunged his hand in and sculpted you and me. Then he gave us the kiss of life! He breathed into us physical life, and most importantly, the spiritual life of being made in his holy image! Then, he dedicated himself to work for our maximum good and happiness. "Dear man and woman, apple of my eye, I give you your plush new home, Eden!" "Oh dear man, I present you, you're beautiful wife, flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone, to serve, honor, and cherish to your great delight! My dear woman, here is your stud of a servant leader to submit to and serve as you would me." "What's that, my joy, my life, my crown? What's that? In your holiness and righteousness you want so badly to worship me that if you don't you're just going to explode? Alright, alright already, here's your church; here: Don't eat of this tree, or you shall surely die!"

How did we return such stunning goodness and grace? As we already said and as you already know: we neither trembled at the threat of his law; nor fell over wowed by the stunning grace of all he had done for and given to us, so that we chose to free ourselves from his lordship, and we shook our fist, made of dirt, in his

³⁹ Philippians 2:9.

⁴⁰ Ephesians 21,21. (We do note that we see clear reference here also to how things are for us and the elect now by faith in Jesus, because of his providential rule over all things for ultimate good and eternal salvation and on the Last Day in the new heavens and new earth; this will be the point under discussion under the 3rd Article glory. Still, this sweet gospel reality is only to be found *in and not apart from* "the Son of Man," our Savior.)

⁴¹ As noted previously, some commentators take the "him" in Hebrews 2:6-9 to refer exclusively to Christ and take mankind out of the picture. This is unnecessary, and seems to be a rather forced interpretation.

⁴² Hebrews 2:9.

face and told him, “Hey, I AM, You’re not my Lord anymore. No...I am. I am my own God and Lord from here on out. You hear me, I AM?”⁴³ and chose, thereby, to place ourselves under the lordship of sin, Satan, hell, and death. The original slap of that ancient sin has so thoroughly corrupted us that to this day you and I have plenty of moments when we neither tremble at God’s threats nor are stunned by his grace so that we rebel against his lordship and return his grace with a slap! We do so in many ways, not the least of which, in this way: we fail to take up our cross and deny ourselves in the ways Jesus calls us to in his word. How often hasn’t it happened that even though you know God’s promises that he is ruling everything *for you* so that everything must work for this one goal: to conform you to the likeness of his Son (perhaps you have just even read that or preached that to others), but then fail to deny your fallen reason, so that you stress, worry, and doubt in the face of that ominous sign of trouble up ahead, that sleep-depriving deadline looming ever closer, or that stomach-sinking sorrow, instead of cling to the promises of the great I AM, whose name also says, “My word never fails”?⁴⁴ How often hasn’t it happened that you are pouring over that text study, that sermon, that Bible Study (and perhaps the theme is self-sacrifice and service), and the phone rings or the wife calls, and it’s all you can do to not blurt out the word that rhymes with sit because someone dared to get in the way of something you were doing, and can’t they see how busy you are, how important your work is, and how you just have to get this done? Or how often hasn’t it happened that the Lord has blessed you with a great sermon, a great worship, a great class, and you thanked him later that day by tolerating some evil in others, or, worse, indulging in the sin your flesh finds delicious? And I AM saw all of it and more that we don’t ever see, and saw it all perfectly, as if it was taking place right in front of him, from eternity, and what’s this? What’s this? *Still* he decided to kneel down in the dirt and make us?! No, no, no, more, much more! Seeing all of that the great *I AM* decided to do something really crazy in love for us: he decided to take on a nature whose original physical make-up is - you got it - *dirt!* Holy, sinless, flawless dirt, to be sure, but finally, dirt, nonetheless! God became a “son of man,” a dirt man, that is, a true, full human being! The Most High God decided to become “a little less than the angels;” that is, he decided to willingly and gladly forgo for a time the full enjoyment of his powers and glory as God that he had every right to enjoy without interruption! He decided to do all of that just to get to be *your* Lord and mine again, just to be able to take you and me into his arms and bring us into the sublimely sweet fellowship of the Holy Trinity, there to enjoy his indescribably great blessings forever!

And so, that’s just what he did! For *you* God became the “Son of Man” and at the same time “became a little lower than the angels,” when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a teenage peasant! For *you* I AM “made himself a little lower than the angels” when he lay helpless, swaddled like a tiny mummy in a feeding trough caked with the spit of sheep and reeking of animal urine and feces! For *you* I AM “made himself a little lower than the angels” when he perfectly overcame Satan’s temptations, which we failed to do in Eden, and in his exhaustion in some mysterious way needed and got the assistance of angels! For *you* I AM “made himself a little lower than the angels” when he lay face down, clutching and pouring bloody sweat on the dirt from which made us, fighting and winning the war of love between his own life and yours in the Garden: Father, I don’t want to die! Father, like you, I want them to die, even less! Your will be done!” and again collapsing into the arms of an angel! For *you* I AM “made himself a little lower than the angels” when no

⁴³ The original fall has been pictured in several ways: unbelief, taking Satan’s word over God’s; all of that can and has been well summed up by saying that the original fall was a breaking of the 1st Commandment, a fall from the heavenly peak of being in the presence of God in worship of him to falling to the hellish depths of the worship of self!

⁴⁴ I AM proclaims that God is eternal. If he is eternal he is unchanging. He was I AM yesterday; he is I AM today; he will be I AM forever. Since he does not change, neither does his word. So I AM means the God of absolute faithfulness to his word of law and gospel!

angels came to his assistance as he stumbled to the cross, and when he was abandoned by all the angel hosts who had worshipped him for all eternity, along with his Father - "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - so that you could join the company of saints and angels forever! For *you* I AM "made himself a little lower than the angels" when two "angels of mercy" named Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea wrapped his dead body in linens and laid it in the tomb!

כבוד והדר תִּעָטְרֶהוּ

Shhh! Don't say anything! Just stand there in awe as you take in the great glory of 2nd Article grace all for you! Then, burst into joyous shouts of Alleluia! For *you* the Son of Man became higher than the angels again - he triumphantly took back the full and free use of his power and glory as God, and in his humanity was crowned with the glory and honor he shared with the Father and Spirit for all he eternity! Yes, for *you* he rose from the dead and ascended up to the highest place, to the right hand of the Father, because he had fully justified the world of all sin, and, therefore, fully acquitted *you* of all sin by his sacrifice on Calvary!

Here is a good place to pause and answer the original questions for which this section of Scripture was assigned: Is this portion of Scripture a typical or direct prophecy? Does the modified translation of the NIV 11 correctly convey this prophecy's meaning, allow for a correct understanding of this meaning, or does it prevent a correct understanding of this meaning? To answer the first question, please briefly recall what we mean by "typical" and "direct" prophecy. Normally, a typical prophecy is one where there is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy either at the general time of the prophetic writing or at some point in the Old Testament future, but finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ and/or his New Testament kingdom. So, Isaiah's prophecies of a return from captivity and glorious restoration where bubbling springs and Eden-like foliage sprout in the desert is a typical prophecy. The prophecy was partially fulfilled in the Jewish captives' return from Babylon. The glory Isaiah paints, however, finally refers to a rescue and restoration that is far more than the thousand mile trek by foot over the hot Arabian desert. His picture finds its ultimate fulfillment in the work and fruits of Messiah. A direct prophecy, on the other hand, is one that can only refer to the Messiah. So, Isaiah's sign to Ahaz, "The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son," can only be speaking of Christ. Working with these definitions of "typical" and "direct," it's difficult to put this text in either category. I would classify this section as an atypical typical prophecy. "Man" and "son of man" here are obvious synonyms and you have to squeeze your eyes and ears shut to not see an allusion to Genesis 1:26,28. On the other hand, because of the fall into sin and mankind's consequent fall from his throne over creation, where creation resists and rebels against his rule and submits only by force, "son of man," can now only refer to Christ Jesus.

This naturally gives us our answer to the second questions. The NIV translators have done us a disservice in translating the masculine singular direct object suffixes that correspond to "son of man" with "them" and "their" in the text, and footnoting the masculine singular "hims" and "hes." In doing so, the text as it stands only allows us to take "son of man" as referring to mankind; gone from *the text*, at least, is the clear reference to Christ that is there by context and by inspired commentary from the writer of Hebrews in 2:6-9. The best rendering in English to bring out both mankind and Christ is as had been translated in the 1984 edition. The argument from the NIV translators' side, as I understand it, is that King David would not have thought of, and, therefore, used the phrase "son of man" as a reference to Messiah, since David predated Daniel from whom the term "son of man" came to be a Messianic title. Furthermore, they say, we haven't lost anything. The writer of Hebrews brings out the Messianic flavor of Psalm 8 well enough. This writer might ask, "How can we be so certain of what either David had in mind or had revealed to him, or not, as he wrote this Psalm? Did he not know and understand, at any point, that his Psalms were inspired Scripture?" As I noted, David knew the doctrine of sin by experience; he knew that man's rule which he wrote about was not a

present reality because of the original Fall. But that's almost beside the point. The simple fact is, by God's will and grace, we *today* have the full light of the New Testament to cast on the Old. And so, because of Hebrews alone, to say nothing of the context of Psalm 8, the best way to translate this precious Psalm is to bring out the Messianic sense that is clearly there! Now, is the NIV translators' choice here a "deal breaker"? I would say no, because the footnotes still contain the preferred reading. Will it weaken or shipwreck faith in Christ in future generations? Again, I would not say that because Christ continues to shine through in many other sections of the NIV 11? Does it lend itself to a method of translating that makes us feel uncomfortable about where this whole thing is heading? Given the reaction synod-wide, you bet. My main beef with the NIV 11 in this text, however, is that it's not the *best* translation. And when it comes to God's word, we always want to strive for what's *best*! Just think about all of that rich, sweet, awe-inspiring, faith-building 2nd Article gospel that we just basked in, which we would we have missed had we only taken "son of man" to mean mankind! And missing that awesome 2nd Article gospel we would also miss the gems of 3rd Article gospel that are the fruit of our Savior's work.

Speaking of which, let's conclude our essay with the glorious 3rd Article grace beaming from seeing Christ in the "son of man"...

תַּמְשִׁילֶהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יְדָיָהּ; כֹּל שֶׁתָּה תַּחַת-רַגְלָיו

Well, from the peak of the great I AM's stunning 2nd Article grace, where do we go from here? Once, you're at the top, there's seemingly only place to go, as they say, and that's down. But, no, from the summit of God's 2nd Article grace, we get to stay at the top; we just move to another side of the panorama to catch a new vista of I AM's glory. This vista of his glorious grace is a consequence of his 2nd Article grace: his magnificent 3rd Article grace! Every time you hear David chant and you chant with him in Psalm 8, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands! You put everything under his feet!" always, always ask, Who is to be the beneficiary of the "son of man" being made ruler over the works of God's hands, and having everything under his feet as subject and servant? When you think about the "son of man" at creation - mankind - the answer is mankind is the beneficiary! By being made ruler over all creation, mankind would have enjoyed the fulfilling, meaningful, and satisfying work of ruling all things in service of his Maker. By being ruler over creation and having everything subserviently place itself beneath his feet, like man's best friend, Fido, mankind would enjoy the blessing of having all of God's creation willingly serve his happiness and meet his physical needs! When you think about the "Son of Man," mankind's Savior the answer to our question is exactly the same. Who is the great beneficiary of the "Son of Man" being made ruler over the works of God's hands and having everything under his feet? *You*, son of man! *Me!* Let David's inspired words here take you to Paul's inspired words at the end of Ephesians 1. As in Psalm 8, in Ephesians 1 Paul shows us the Son of Man becoming higher than the angels again, casting aside the *μορφη δουλου* and taking up in his manhood the *μορφη θεου*⁴⁵ that was essentially his from eternity, as God exalted his Son. "...he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion...And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything."⁴⁶ And then, Paul gives the reason for Christ's resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God, and it wasn't to bask in his own glory like some egotistical, prima donna NFL wide receiver. No, Paul doesn't say it was for him, but for you and me, God's elect, his holy nation, his royal priesthood, his dearly loved people. God raised and seated the Son of Man at his right hand, giving the Son of Man, his only Son, "total, complete, and full rule over time, over

⁴⁵ Philippians 2:7 and 2:6 respectively.

⁴⁶ Ephesians 1:22.

history, over governments, over sickness and death and hell itself,"⁴⁷ Paul says, "for the church!" All things are subject to and serve him, whether they want to or not for your benefit and blessing, and mine and that of every fellow member of the church! And what is that good and blessing for which Christ rules all things and has all things at his beck and call? It includes everything from ensuring we have the next meal and change of clothes⁴⁸ to making sure we get to the heaven he elected us for in eternity and for which he paid the ultimate price!⁴⁹

And so, this is how it is, dear pastor. Yes, this is how it is for you and the precious people you are privileged to serve: your beautiful Savior, Son of Man and Son of God ascended to the right hand of the Father, and rules over all time and circumstances, all history, including your personal one, to ensure that his word and sacraments have reached your ears, head, and mouth, and the Holy Spirit worked through the good news of him in Word and sacraments to bring you into, keep you in, and grow your faith in him. And now he rules everything that is beneath his feet, whether they want to be there or not - the traffic, the next presidential election, the next cold bug, the next canceled flight, the next terrifying diagnosis, the next divine call and the present one you hold with all its joys, struggles, and heartaches, the consequences of your sins and the sins of others, yes, the devil of hell, himself - all of it and everything in between Jesus rules for your benefit and blessing now, and especially for the ultimate benefit of keeping with his purpose for you and your people: that of being conformed to the likeness of Christ, that of being raised incorruptible, immortal, imperishable, that of shining like the stars forever in the luminous glow of I AM's grace and having the ultimate joy and fulfillment of praising him and being lavished by his love for endless ages!

And you know what that means, don't you? Yes, you know what that means! That means that in Christ, everything, absolutely everything is subject to you now and must serve your best interest, whether you see it or not, whether those things want to or not! It's true! Since everything has Christ's sandal-print on it, and since he rules over everything for you and every other member of his Church, then everything, even now, is subject and servant to you, and must serve your best interest! What is true now by faith invisibly but oh-so-surely will be manifest forever, beginning the day Christ returns in glory to the earth he rules!

This brings us to one final gleaming facet of I AM's 3rd Article grace. Hopefully, it knocks your socks off in awe from this day forward for the joy and confidence of life and ministry. Exactly why has the Son of Man gone to such lengths to elect, create, redeem, sanctify, and preserve us in him by his rule for time and eternity? Because, for reasons that lie only in him, in perfect freedom he chose to look at you and me with exhilaration and teary eyes full of love, and speak the Jerry Maguire line: "You complete me!" That's the shocking grace Paul proclaims in Ephesians 1:23! There he tells us that all things are subject to Christ for the church - here is the clutch phrase - "who is his body, (and, therefore, is) the fulness of him who fills everything in every way." What!? Who can begin to fathom that? The great I AM, the perfectly independent God who needs nothing and no one to fill and fulfill him, yes, the one who, in fact, is the fulness and fulfillment of all things, chooses to feel *incomplete* without us, so that he calls us "his body," and so, if he were to lose any of us, his elect, it would be like a perfect God being an amputee! Yes, and because we know that it is impossible for a perfect and almighty God, who loves his body more than his Head even, to allow himself to become an

⁴⁷ Deutschlander, Daniel D. *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*, 61.

⁴⁸ Matthew 6:30-33.

⁴⁹ Romans 8:28-30; Romans 5:9,10.

amputee, we know that he will rule over all things to make sure that he never loses any of us, but is a God who ends up with all his fingers and toes!

King Louis XIV of France died in 1717. As you are aware, he took on the title "Louis the Great!" and boasted, "I am the State!" His was the most magnificent court in Europe, and his funeral the most spectacular.

There lay his body in a *golden* coffin. To make it all the more dramatic and impressive, Louis had given orders for the cathedral to be dimly lit with only one special candle set above his coffin. The thousands of people in attendance waited in silence. Then Bishop Massillon began to speak. He slowly reached down, snuffed out the candle and said, "Only God is great."

In our day of trial and temptation may we find our comfort and strength to face another day, another struggle, another challenge, to bear our cross in that fact, "Only God is great!" That is, he is the greatest, the most majestic in all the earth, because of his ways, his promises, his blessings for you! Pastor, you have seen again how great and glorious in power and grace the great I AM is for you! May you recall for the rest of your ministry and life, both of which will be full of joys and sorrows, ups and downs, cross and comfort, temptation and triumph, just how majestic the LORD, your Lord is for you and the people you serve! And may that move you to join King David and your partner, Dave Salinas, to sing with ever-increasing joy:

יְהוָה אֲדֹנָיִנוּ: מֶה-אֲדִיר שְׁמֹךְ, בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ

To Him who alone is good and great be the glory and praise! Amen.