

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

May 30, 2009

What is Humanity?

**Ps 8 & John 16:12-15
(Hymns – 332, 712, 333, 301)**

This is a pretty fundamental question
for those who want to live a flourishing life.
Just who are we?
What is the core or essence of our humanity?
When you raise the question of basic purpose,
of reason for being, of calling or vocation,
what is it that human beings share in common
at the very heart of their being?

Psalm 8 has a clear and concise answer to that question.
There are three dimensions to living a flourishing life:
recognize that we are created for a purpose by God;
companion with God in that purpose, which is governing the creation; and
praise God for the well-being you and others – *WE* - enjoy as a result.

There is a simple ABC in those three dimensions –
attitude, behaviours, and consequences.

The essential attitude for a flourishing life
is one of humble gratitude to your creator.
In the Christian way of understanding,
our creator is also our redeemer and our sustainer.
Our creator has remained faithful to his original intention for us,
that we companion with him in governing the creation,
and has redeemed us from our follies in Jesus Christ.
Once redeemed, we are sustained by God's Holy Spirit
in a life that expresses God's original blessing
through living the fruits of the Spirit,
just as God did in the flesh in Jesus Christ.
This humble gratitude is the attitude
that arises and is constantly nurtured
by recognizing the we have been created for a purpose by God

Those fruits, you will remember, are
love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.
These are the behaviours that flow from the attitude
of humble gratitude.

Christians measure their gratitude to God
by the consistency with which they practice these behaviours,
day by day, even breath by breath.

Christians are aware and attentive
to the opportunities they enjoy
in every situation they encounter in their lives
to be more loving, more joyful, more peaceful,
more patient, more kind, more generous,
more faithful, more gentle, and more self-disciplined.

I don't think God is looking for perfection in our self-discipline
in practicing these behaviours.

I think God is looking for intention and attention
to continuously improving the consequences created
by living this attitude and these behaviours,
from being humbly grateful to God
for all the gifts we have been given to govern and care for
and to pursue that purpose with love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.

The key consequence is that we will contribute
to the well-being or *shalom* of the creation.

In our own unique and essential ways,
we will all be ambassadors of the reign of Jesus Christ
in this world.

It's not primarily by what we say.

That comes when our presence has attracted attention to what we are doing
and generated interest in why we behave this way.

What we say is important, but it is only truly powerful
if it explains what we do,

if we are really serious about maturing in the ways we walk our talk.

God is looking for growth and improvement,
not perfection.

We are already perfect in God's eyes through the work of Jesus Christ.

What the Spirit is doing is provoking us,
calling us forth,
to grow into that perfection without fear of failure.
The Spirit is cultivating those gifts and fruits in us
with faith in flourishing.

Think for a moment about the difference
in those two sources of motivation.

If we do everything out of fear of failure,
where is the possibility of joy and praise in that kind of attitude?
We are constantly held down by the weight of anxiety and timidity.
What will happen if I do this?
What will people think?
How can I get hurt?
If your attention is on those possibilities,
your energy will be drained and your intention will be stuck in protecting yourself.

If we do everything out of faith in flourishing,
how can we not experience joy and express praise
in the richness of soul-satisfying behaviours
we engage in.
What can I do it help?
How will people benefit?
How can I spread healing and health?
If your attention is on those possibilities,
your energy will be renewed like the eagles
and you will thrive in the joy of praise and thanksgiving.

But that *is* the choice we confront as Christians with every breath we take.
How will I govern myself and the gifts that God has entrusted to me?
And the Word of God is pretty blunt
in laying out the consequences of our choices.

When Moses was standing before the people of Israel
as they prepared to cross into the promised land
after 40 years of preparation in the wilderness,
he said these words to them:

*See, I have set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity.
If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God
that I am commanding you today,
by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways,
and observing his commandments,
then you shall live and be numerous,
and the Lord will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.
But if your heart turns away and you do not hear,
but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them,
I declare to you today that you shall perish;
you shall not live long in the land
that you are crossing the Jordon to enter and possess.
I call heaven and earth to witness against you today*

*that I have set before life and death, blessings and curses.
Choose life so that you and your descendants may life,
loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; ...
(Deut 30: 15-20a)*

Throughout Moses final address to the people of Israel,
but in these words in particular,
the heart of the covenant between God and his people
is expressed in terms of the choice to remain loyal,
a choice on both sides,
God remains loyal to the people and the people remain loyal to God.
In the technical language of Near Eastern treaties,
love means to act loyally and honour the commitments in the treaty.

This is what it means to have been made “a little lower than God,”
to have been “crowned ... with glory and honour,”
to have been “given dominion over the works of [God’s] hands.”
(Ps 8:5-6)

We are companions with God in governing the creation
in ways that enable it to flourish,
because in its flourishing we will find our own.

We do this by expressing the gifts of the Spirit breath by breath –
breathing out gratitude for the grace we have breathed in
by expressing love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.

And all of this is rooted in our praise of God,
in our joyful loyalty to the majestic Source and Sustainer
of flourishing throughout the creation.

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