

"WHAT IS MAN?"

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"
Psalm 8:4.

God's Word repeatedly asks questions which sound the depths of man's soul. The Scriptures vibrate with questions which challenge the best thought and demand the soundest judgment if they are to be answered with any satisfaction. Our text is such a question. This question is certainly one which no thoughtful person can forbear answering. It is asked three times in the Scriptures—once in the presence of Nature, once in the presence of History, and once in the presence of Life. Nature, history, and life are the three sources of knowledge; from them our theories are deduced, with them our practice is concerned.

In composing this Psalm from which our text is taken, David was under the influence of two distinct currents of thought.

One of these found its source in his contemplation of the vastness of the material universe. Surveying the outspread canopy of heaven in the stillness of the night, the Psalmist was overwhelmed with awe at the beauty and grandeur of the vast expanse with its starry glories.

With all the glories of these heavenly manifestations of God before him, the Psalmist turned his thoughts to frail and apparently insignificant man. He marvelled that God should consider him at all, and even more that He should make him the crowning manifestation of His glory. Overwhelmed by this current of thought, David exclaimed, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" The word that the Psalmist used for man is very remarkable. It is not the word which is usually embraced to signify humanity. Rather it is a word which signifies a being in himself frail, weak and mortal.

In thus calling our attention to the littleness and feebleness of man, he inquired, What is man that God should think of him, have anything to do with him or care for him? Compared with the majesty, splendor and permanence of the heavens, man is lowly and frail and his existence is brief. In view of this vast and magnificent universe, man appears as a speck, an atom or a vapor that appears and then vanishes.

David's question was colored by humility. It was asked in that spirit which indicated that surely man cannot claim to be much. But now, in some quarters these words have taken on an arrogant meaning. Instead of looking upward to God and saying, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?", suggesting human littleness in contrast with His Divine Majesty, some people have impudently reversed that and seem to say, "What is God, that man should be mindful of Him?" How tragic!

Apparently a second current of thought was flowing through the Psalmist's mind, alongside the one which we have just considered. Evidently he had a vivid perception of the greatness of man in what he was and in what he might become. In comparison with the material universe, man is insignificant; yet, in him there is something which responds to the voice of God, and he alone possesses faculties with which he may intelligently and eternally serve Him.

"What is man?" He is a special creation. He was created in the image of God. He is a spiritual being. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Genesis 2:7. In our text the littleness and the greatness of man are set before us in powerful contrast. God is picturing the glory of the heavens, the moon and the stars, and the majesty of His marvelous creations as a background to show the place and importance of man, the crowning piece of His creation. In other words, He is saying, "If I have given such consideration in creating things, crowning them with beauty, wrapping them with the mantle of majesty, over-arching them with the canopy of heaven, planting the earth with trees, carpeting it with grasses, embroidering it with flowers, bedecking it with jewels; What is there that

I would not do for man?" "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor." Of course, this applies to man as he is rightly related to God. Although little in himself, man is divine in his origin, and, though he is weak and frail in the present life, he is capable of a glorious future, and God has that future in store for him. There is something in man which separates him from all other creations, something which enables him to think of God, to know God, to love God and to serve God.

I. God Has Done Much For Man.

1. He created him.

Man is a product of the divine thought and love and power. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Genesis 1:27. There is nothing which gives such dignity to humanity as this. If we only appreciated the fact that we are God-made how it would elevate our conception of manhood and womanhood, how it would dignify our lives, and how it would deliver us from worthless thoughts, mean motives and ungodly acts.

God made man the crowning achievement of all creation. He laid foundations for greatness within him. He endowed him with the ability to think, dream, hope, aspire, reason, grow, invent and build. The rest of creation accepts the world as it is, but man undertakes to make it what he thinks it ought to be.

2. He gave him dominion over the created things on the earth.

No wonder man has ribboned the earth with railroads and highways, charted the oceans, whitened all the seas with commerce, built powerful, pulsating, throbbing cities, perfected inventions harnessed the airwaves, and caused nature to serve him in a thousand ways. This is what God intends for man to do. We are not just to play; we are to work. Our function is not to obstruct; our function is to construct.

God has given man dominion over his environment. An individual is not responsible for the environment into which he is born; he is responsible for the environment in which he lives. Some of the brightest chapters of human history have been made possible by the fact that men and women have risen above and beyond their environments, converting the swamps of sin into beautiful rose gardens. It is amazing what an individual can do when linked to God.

3. He has cared for him.

For him the sun shines, and the stars appear; for him the birds sing, the brooks babble, and the zephyrs blow; for him the seasons come and the earth yields her abundance, her beauty, and her fragrance. He meets our deepest needs, disciplines our follies, and educates our noblest traits. Being mindful of us, He cares for us every day. His works for us display amazing wisdom, power and goodness.

4. He has saved him.

Parents have done much for their children. They give to the limit of their love, ability, ingenuity, etc., in order that their children may have a fair chance in life. They get great joy in the sacrifices they make for their children. Our Heavenly Father has done more than any earthly parent can do. His love is broader, His interest is more intense, and His sacrifice is greater. He sent His Son into the world to seek and to save the lost. No good gift will He withhold from those who trust and follow Him.

To Him Who saved you, my friend, you are of tremendous importance. Once an old scholar, shabby and unimpressive, was involved in an accident and carried to a hospital. He lay on the operating table, and those around, not knowing his identity, said something about "this worthless fellow." The old man understood. Knowing the story of the wondrous Cross, he startled them by saying: "Call not that man worthless for whom Christ died."

5. He has given him the ability to overcome poverty. Some years ago there was a brilliant young preacher who was a student in college. His parents were poor. When he was in college all funds were exhausted. He came to the end of one term without any money in sight to pay his bills or fees for the next term. At the close of the term he went home. His mother met him at the gate of that country home and kissed him. He took her hands in his and noticed that they were stained and very rough. A little later she took him aside and showed him a large pile of walnuts that she had hulled with her own hands for the purpose of putting them on the market. A little later she placed in his hand seventy-five dollars that had come from the sale of walnuts and like labors of love, and with a smile she said, "Son, you are going back to college." That is an example of the overcoming of poverty. But being poor did not keep that young man from crawling out and climbing up the ladder of usefulness and success. You, too, can overcome poverty, get an education and make a success if you want to bad enough.

A contractor and his pastor stood before an open window, looking down on the busy street ten stories below, when the former said to the latter, "Do you see that building across the street?" "Yes. What's peculiar about it?" asked the preacher. "Well, it's like a lot of people I know. It was planned, originally, as a ten-story structure, and the foundation was put in for such a building, but something happened after the work was started and only the first two stories were completed. There it stands--a two-story building on a ten-story foundation." The contractor was right; all about us stand two-story lives on ten-story foundations.

II. God Expects Much From Men.

1. He expects man to be saved.
He gave His only begotten Son to die on behalf of man and in order that man might be saved.
2. He expects man to practice self-denial.
Doubtless you know the difference between the Greek, the Roman and the Christian philosophy of life. The Greek philosophy is, "Know thyself." The Roman philosophy is "Control thyself." The Christian philosophy is, "Deny thyself." Our Lord is displeased if He does not find in His professed followers the self-denying spirit.
3. He expects man to be busy for Him.
Christians are His representatives. He expects them to represent Him conscientiously, constantly and consistently.
4. He expects man to be faithful to Him.
God's Word places strong emphasis upon faithfulness. Christ said, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." Faithfulness is recognized and appreciated. It is appreciated wherever it is found. Our Lord certainly has a right to expect us to be faithful and dependable servants.