

Out of the Mouths of Babes

Psalm 8:2 on December 8, 2024

(Kids Christmas Service)

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Luke 2 makes a really big deal out of the birth of one little baby boy, and so does our church each and every Advent season! We dedicate pretty much the entire month of December to commemorating and celebrating Jesus' first coming to this earth in the incarnate form of a little human baby. Today we've invited our children to lead us in worship.¹ Who better to help us emphasize the importance of "baby Jesus" than our own babies, children from right here in our own church? But some of us may be wondering why; why so much emphasis on the kids? Why not have them head downstairs during the sermon time, like they usually do? Well, there are lots of good reasons for us to have the children lead us in worship. Today's message zeroes in on one particularly good reason: there are some incredibly valuable lessons of faith that we adults need to learn from the children; things we can learn "Out of the Mouths of Babes."

Today's sermon title comes out of the *NKJV* translation of Psalm 8:2 which says,

"Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained *strength*,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger."

The *NIV* says it this way: "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a *stronghold* against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."

But how does God establish a stronghold through the praise of children? How does He ordain strength "Out of the Mouths of Babes"? Well, I'm going to be honest with you, I've tried to figure this out all week long, and I'm still not entirely sure what it means. In fact, frankly, it still sounds pretty strange to me! Apparently, somehow or another, the praise of children silences the enemy and the avenger; this is one of those passages that makes me go hum...

¹ The Kids Christmas program is one of my absolute favorite worship services of the entire year! Not just because the kids are so cute and entertaining to watch (which they are), but also because children have a lot to teach us adults. Children often have some of the most profound insights to share with us adults, if we'll only stop and listen to what they have to teach us, rather than assuming that, because we're the adults, we're always smarter and wiser.

Now, I did learn this week that the Scripture translators had their work cut out for them trying to translate Psalm 8:2. The *NIV* uses the word “stronghold” which is an unusual Hebrew metaphor for an “audible bulwark.”^{2 3} And a bulwark is simply a defensive wall. We sing about this in the opening words of the hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.”⁴ So we could translate Psalm 8:2 something like this: “Through the praise of children and infants you have established a defensive wall (*an audible bulwark*) against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.”

Now the broader context of Psalm 8 has to do with the majesty of God’s name; the Psalm begins and ends with these words: “LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! ...”⁵ (Verses 1,9) So, in some mysterious way, the LORD has linked the praise of children and infants, with the majesty and glory that is due His Name. The rest of the Psalm talks about God’s glory in the heavens, and His entrusted stewardship of this earth to human beings, which causes the Psalmist to ask in Psalm 8:4, “what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?”⁶ Indeed, we could just as well ask the LORD: what are human children and infants that you should establish a STRONGHOLD through their praises? My *NIV Study Bible* explains it this way: “The mighty God, whose glory is displayed across the face of the heavens, appoints (and evokes) the praise of little children to silence the dark powers arrayed against him.”^{7 8} Hum... so how does that work? Well, I’m not sure, but that is how God has ordained it to be.⁹ By His sovereign design...

² The *RSV* translates Psalm 8:2, “by the mouth of babes and infants, thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.”

³ Referring to the Revised Standard Version of Psalm 8:2, Kidner notes: “For founded a bulwark (strength, stronghold), the LXX, cited in Matthew 21:16, has ‘perfected praise’. Since the outcome of this praise is the enemy’s defeat, as in the Hebrew, the LXX wording is probably a paraphrase to show what the psalm means by its unusual metaphor of an audible bulwark.” Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, footnote #15 on the bottom of p. 83.

⁴ See #43 in our hymnal.

⁵ “The God whose glory fills the earth is OUR Lord: we are in covenant with him. His praise is chanted on high, yet acceptably echoed from the cradle and the nursery. ...the startling contrast of verse 2 makes the proper impact.” Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 83.

⁶ “In Psalm 144:3f, it mocks the arrogance of the rebel; in Job 7:17 it is a sufferer’s plea for respite; in Job 25:6 it shudders at human sin. But here it has no tinge of pessimism; only astonishment that *thou art mindful* and *thou dost care*. ...*Mindful* has a compassionately purposeful ring, since ‘God’s remembering always implies his movement toward the object of his memory’; and *care* (literally ‘you attend to’) similarly implies his action as well as his concern.” Derek Kidner citing Child’s in part, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 84.

⁷ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 864 footnote on Psalm 8:1b-2.

⁸ Psalm 8 “brings to light the unexpectedness of God’s ways in the roles he has assigned to the strong and the weak.” Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 82.

⁹ “It is certainly strange imagery to say that children’s words build a stronghold that deters God’s enemies. Yet that is precisely what the passage says. God takes these babblings and turns them into a stronghold that silences his enemies in their rebellion against him. It shows that God takes the weakest of all things and makes something great and strong from it.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 986 footnote on Psalm 8:2.

Children can teach us that...

1) ... God often works His greatest power, in and through the weakest and most vulnerable.

This lines up with what we read in 1 Corinthians 1:27, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the *weak* things of the world to shame the strong.” This also agrees with the Apostle Paul’s experience in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in *weakness*...” In verse 10 Paul then declares, “...For when I am weak, then I am strong.”¹⁰ You see, when it comes down to it, even the strongest of us adults needs to admit that we are ultimately weak and powerless on our own. We need to learn that God often works His greatest power in and through the weakest and most vulnerable.

The lesson of Psalm 8:2 doesn’t stop here though. Further light is shed on this intriguing verse by looking ahead to the New Testament, and how Jesus Himself uses this verse in Matthew 21.¹¹ Matthew 21:12-16 says, “Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.¹² “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’” The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.^{13 14} But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the *children* shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were *indignant*. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, [now referring to Psalm 8:2] “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?” New Testament Scholar D.A. Carson explains it this way: “Jesus is...not only acknowledging his messiahship but justifying the praise of the children by applying [Psalm 8] to himself - a

¹⁰ Consider Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 13:4, where he notes that Jesus “was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power.”

¹¹ Jesus refers to the beginning words of Psalm 8:2 while he’s in the temple courts, the day after He rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey for His “Triumphal Entry.” “From Matthew and Luke’s accounts we might assume that the clearing of the temple took place on Sunday, following the so-called “Triumphal” Entry (21:1-11). But Mark (11:15-19) clearly indicates that it was on Monday. Matthew often compresses narratives.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1627 footnote on Matthew 21:12-17.

¹² “The temple area occupied by the money changers was probably a fairly small corner of the court of the Gentiles. ...Jesus opposes the practice in the only portion of the temple in which Gentiles could come to pray to the God of Israel (cf. Isaiah 56:6-7).” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1974 footnote on Matthew 21:12-17.

¹³ “The unusual reference to the blind and the lame (Matthew 21:14) recalls Leviticus 21:18 and the prohibition there against such entering the sanctuary. By healing them, Jesus removes any barrier to them being within the temple.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1974 footnote on Matthew 21:12-17.

¹⁴ Consider the previous 2 footnotes. “Jesus wants all people – the sick, injured, [Gentiles], and even little children – to be able to praise God freely, as in Psalm 8:2.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1974 footnote on Matthew 21:14.

passage of Scripture applicable only to God.”¹⁵ In other words, Psalm 8 is written in praise to the LORD, to the one and only God, Yahweh. And yet, we find His praises coming out of the mouths of babes, and being directed toward Jesus, God’s Messiah.

In verse 16, Jesus asks these spiritual leaders a confrontational question: have you never read!? Well, of course they’d read it; it was right out of the Old Testament Psalms! But in this real moment of human history, they failed to see its immediate application to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But you know who didn’t fail to give Jesus the glory He was due? The kids, the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Rather than pausing to consider that these children might actually have something to teach them, these adults grew indignant! “Jesus, tell these kids to quiet down!” D.A. Carson says it well, “[in verse 16, Jesus] exposes the theological ignorance of the Scripture experts... the humble perceive spiritual truths more readily, than the sophisticated. ...[they lack] inhibitions and skepticism...arriving at the truth more quickly, than those who think themselves wise and knowledgeable.”¹⁶

Friend, Children can teach us that...

**2) ...spiritual truth is often right in front of our eyes,
if we would simply embrace a more childlike faith.**

There was something simple and profound that these religious leaders were missing, and they needed to learn it from the praises of these children.¹⁷ Luke’s Gospel records a time when Jesus sent out 72 of His disciples, in pairs of two, to proclaim the Good News that the Kingdom of God had come near. Once they were finished going out to the surrounding towns and villages, they returned to Jesus, excited to report what God had done in and through them (*even demons had submitted to them in Jesus’ name*). Luke 10:21 says, “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.” Here’s the thing that we need to realize, when Jesus mentions “little children” here in Luke 10:21, he’s referring to *adults* whom He likens to little children. These “little children” are none other than the 72 adults that Jesus had commissioned to go out with the gospel. That’s worth thinking about...

¹⁵ D.A. Carson, *Expositor’s Bib. Comm., Rev. Ed., #9, Matthew*, Zondervan, Gr. Rapids, MI, 2012, p. 500.

¹⁶ D.A. Carson, *Expositor’s Bib. Comm., Rev. Ed., #9, Matthew*, Zondervan, Gr. Rapids, MI, 2012, p. 500.

¹⁷ So in Matthew 21, Jesus is highlighting that the children had a better understanding of what God was up to, than the chief priests and the teachers of the law. The theology of these little kids, was better than the theology of these learned adults, those who were older, those who were far more educated and those who should have been wiser. Acts 4:13 says, “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

This lines up with the verse on the front of this morning's bulletin: Matthew 18:1-3 says, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you CHANGE and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."¹⁸ Friends, there are significant kingdom truths that we need to learn from little children, from listening to their praises, and from becoming more like them in our faith.

For me, all of this brings to mind a riddle that many of us have probably heard before. The riddle goes like this:

"What's greater than God, and more evil than the devil?"

Poor people have it, rich people need it, and if you eat it you'll die!"

When this riddle first came out, a lot of us adults were initially stumped by it. In fact, I'll have to admit that I myself was more than a bit perplexed at first. However, most children solve this riddle quickly, because they don't overthink it, or overcomplicate it, the way we adults tend to. You see, when we adults are given a riddle that asks, "What's greater than God?" we sit there and ponder the answer. But children don't need any time to think about the answer: "What's greater than God kids?" ... "Nothing!" ("Nothing" is the answer to this riddle. If you eat nothing, you'll die!)

Psalm 8:2 declares, "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." In light of what we've considered from Matthew 21, and as we compare it alongside of Psalm 8:2, I hope that we can all admit that there certainly seems to be a place for inviting our children to lead us in worship. In fact, not only should we be open to it, but we should realize that there's a biblical basis for it.¹⁹ Whatever Psalm 8:2 is driving at, Jesus referred to this verse in order to highlight that the Lord of Heaven has called forth praise, from the lips of children and infants. So this morning, we've set aside our Sunday worship service so that our kids can shout, and sing, and declare the praises of God. And perhaps, if we adults listen closely, and if we resist any temptation to grow indignant, perhaps then we'll get a glimpse into what Psalm 8:2 is driving at: Through the praise of children and infants, the LORD our God has established a stronghold against His enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.²⁰

¹⁸ Verses 4-5 go on, "Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

¹⁹ This morning we find a "biblical basis for letting the children go on with their exuberant praise." D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bib. Comm., Rev. Ed., #9, Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2012, p. 500.

²⁰ By the way, if we'd had more time, I would have loved to add a 3rd point to this sermon, something like "Children can teach us that... 3) ...praising God is a powerful weapon against our enemies, so we should put our full faith and trust in God above." I would have loved to dive into the amazing story of faith in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30 where King Jehoshaphat defeats Moab and Ammon. Especially consider verses 3-4, 12-22, and 29.