

## SERMON

February 18, 2007

Psalm 8 / Job 25:1-5

### Starting with the Right Premise, Arriving at the Wrong Conclusion

Many things in Christianity are very logical, because Christianity itself is a very reasonable faith — in my estimation, the most reasonable and intellectually credible of all the religions in the world today. It makes the most sense and gives the best answers to the ultimate issues of life and reality as we know it to be.

That's one of the reasons that people like Blaise Pascal, and Jonathan Edwards, and C. S. Lewis, and Ravi Zacharias and other profound Christian thinkers were not only swayed to embrace the faith, but have had such a great influence in reaching out others of high intellectual acumen — because rightly understood, it makes so much sense.

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Yet having said that, I can also say that one of the first things I learned after my conversion to Christ (at 23 years old) was that using the skills of deduction that I had been taught growing up, (and especially during my 4 years at engineering school) did not tend work so well when it came to applying them to the sphere of spiritual truth.

"It didn't take one long in the faith to realize that our ordinary, natural, or cultural methods for deriving logical conclusions or deductions, when applied to many of the things pertaining to the faith, can lead us terribly, terribly astray."

The typical formula that we learned growing up — that  $A + B = C$  — when applied in the spiritual realms, can often lead us to the wrong conclusions. For instance, in this world, when we want to overcome some obstacle or get ahead in life, the typical answer we are so often given is simply to exert greater effort. We must simply try harder, and work more diligently, and crank up our human will-power, or muster up more emotional or physical energy. Meet resistance with force!

And maybe that IS the way to overcome many problems in the physical realms. If you're trying to move a boulder, or lift some heavy load, or train yourself for some athletic event, then that IS the way to go.

Extra effort, more willpower, discipline and practice CAN INDEED produce the desired results.  $A + B$  can, and often does, help you to arrive at C!

But in the realms of the Spirit, that is often the very thing one shouldn't do! For instance: According to Jesus, it is not the powerful who will inherit the earth but the meek. It is the poor and not the rich; the one who becomes like a little child, and not the powerful, self-confident, gate-smashing warrior who will enter or inherit the Kingdom of God.

In the world the greatest are those of wealth and power and authority, but in the Kingdom those who are the greatest are those who are the servants of all. / In the world one wins by crushing their enemy, but in the Kingdom one wins by loving their enemy, and turning the other cheek. In the world the way to be exalted is to exalt oneself, but in the kingdom the way to be exalted is to humble oneself.

In the world the way to salvation is to strive to save yourself, but in the Kingdom the way to be saved is to give up trying, and simply trust in what Christ has done to save you. The way to victory is to admit defeat, and the way to gain power over sinful compulsions and addictions is to acknowledge and confess your own powerlessness, and then simply trust God, by His grace, to do for you what you are unable to do for yourself.

They are values and concepts so foreign to our natural, logic-based ways of thinking and reasoning, that they take the reasoning of the world and turn it on end. They flip the world's values and concepts upside down.

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And today's passage is merely another example of that. For in verses 1-3 Bildad rightly and truthfully responds to Job by pointing out how splendid and majestic and awesome God is:

All power and dominion belong to Him (v. 2a). He establishes order in the heights of heaven (v. 2b). Or as we might say, "The whole universe declares His glory — the infinite wonders of His creative power, genius and wisdom."

It's a point the Psalmist makes in Psalms 19 and 29, and Paul makes in Rom. 1:20-21. And in that sense Bildad is right: God is great beyond our wildest imagination! Which means that to his rhetorical questions in verse 3 one can only respond with an unchallenged NO!

"Can His forces be numbered?" NO, they cannot! They're too immense! And to his second question, "Upon whom does His light not rise?" The answer, again, can only be, No one. His light rises upon everyone. No one can hide from it.

And as Francis Anderson points out in his commentary on Job, the phrase means, "Upon whom does the brightness and radiance of God's glory not throw a shadow of darkness?" Light in this sense being God's holiness and purity which by contrast reveals and exposes man's sinfulness and impurity, which is precisely what Bildad continues to contrast in verses 4-5.

And thus we can say that so far, Bildad is right. There is nothing even slightly off-base in anything he has said to this point. He is right in line with the rest of Scripture, and we would do well to agree with everything he has said.

Which means his next two questions are also legitimate questions: "How then CAN a man be righteous before God?" If humans are sinful, and thus everything that proceeds from them is tainted by that indwelling sin, thus being unclean, and unacceptable to God as it is, how can one be righteous before God? How can they, or what they do be acceptable to God, if it's polluted by the sin that indwells them?

Or as he goes on to ask, "How CAN one born of woman be pure?" And the answer, of course, as we know from Psalm 51:5 is that one can't be! "We are sinful from birth," says David, "sinful from the moment we were conceived." That's precisely why we need to be born again! Because NO ONE is born righteous, or born acceptable to God.

"We are by nature objects of wrath," says Paul in Eph. 2:3. "There is none righteous, no not one," he says in Rom. 3:9. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

Which is why every person should, at one time or another, ask the same question Bildad does: "How CAN a man or woman, being impure and sinful from conception, be righteous before God?" Which is essentially the question Paul answers in the remainder of the Book of Romans! In fact, the wonder of the Gospel is precisely this: It tells exactly how it is that sinful people who are conceived in sin, and impure, and unable to free them-selves from the polluting effects of that indwelling sin, can still, in spite of that sin be accepted and loved, and counted righteous, and be esteemed pure in God's eyes by simple faith and ongoing trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, again, up until this point Bildad is on right track. Everything he has said is totally orthodox, and few who know and affirm the teaching of the Bible would have any disagreement with anything he's said. It is good, solid, biblical theology! Better, in fact, than the warm fuzzy theology I've read in some evangelical circles!

But this is where our agreement with Bildad must end. For Bildad takes those good, valid, spiritually solid points of truth, and using them, comes to the most monstrous of conclusions!

For after considering the infinite power and greatness of God which exposes man's littleness by comparison / after highlighting the divine genius and orderliness of creation which exposes the disorder of man and his ways by comparison / after speaking of the blinding radiance of the light of God's holiness which exposes man's darkness or sinfulness by contrast (which are all good and valid points or premises) he then goes on to draw the most unbiblical of conclusions — that what all those things point to is the fact that we by contrast must therefore view ourselves as maggots, or worms!

Verse 5: "If even the moon is not bright and the stars not pure in His eyes, how much less man, who is but a maggot — a son of man, who is only a worm."

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You see, there are few errors people are more likely to embrace, than ones arrived at by using logical deductions based on correct presuppositions, yet failing to realize that in the spiritual realms —  $A + B$  often fails to equal  $C$ ! For as my sermon title declares: "The Grandeur of God Does Not Make Man a Maggot!"

Though it IS easy to see how a person using the basic formula Bildad appears to be using (that  $A + B$  must equal  $C$ ) then it's hard to deny there IS some degree of validity to his conclusion. If we, like Bildad, plug in as "A" "God is infinite in immensity, power, wisdom and holiness," and then add as "B" the fact that "Man is infinitely small, weak, unwise and sinful by comparison," then it's easy to see how he could indeed arrive at the conclusion that "C" has to be, "People must therefore be, by contrast, little more than maggots and worms — the smallest, most insignificant, and even most detestable of creatures."

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It's the same type of reasoning people still use today and arrive at the same conclusion! A theological perspective sometimes labeled as "Worm Theology."

A theology held (in most cases) by those who like Bildad have a very scriptural and thus awesomely majestic view of God, a similarly biblical view of man as totally depraved (or corrupted by sin in every part of their being), and therefore lean toward adopting the same wrong conclusion that Bildad does — that man must be a mere worm by comparison.

I even mentioned to someone not long ago, that you can know when a preacher holds to such a theological perspective, because you leave the service each week feeling like a “worm”! Like you’re a hopeless case, insignificant, unlovable, despicable, worth-less, and irredeemable. A nobody whom God merely puts up with, is always disappointed with, views as a failure, irritation, problem, or burden, and would rather squish like a worm if it weren’t for the fact He’s bound by His promise in saving grace to show believers mercy.

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And as much as it pains my heart to say it, it is often Calvinists (like myself), who are often the most susceptible to it. Yet it’s not just Calvinists, nor is it just preachers. It’s anyone who has an awesomely majestic view of God, a correspondingly low view of humanity or themselves, and then instead of turning to divine revelation to arrive at their conclusion about man, turn instead to human logic or reasoning.

So, how do we know that Bildad’s conclusion is wrong? That God doesn’t view us as mere worms or maggots, and that we shouldn’t either? THREE ways, which all require that we go by faith and divine revelation instead of mere human reason.

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**FIRST**, we know His conclusion is wrong by virtue of the fact that Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that Man, or Humanity was created in the image of God. As human beings we bear in our make-up the very imprint of the nature of God Himself!

And yes, it is true that everything God has created bears the imprint of the divine nature on it to some degree. “God’s invisible qualities — His eternal power and divine nature — has been clearly seen being understood by what has been made,” says Paul in Romans 1:20. All creation declares the wonder and majesty of God, as Psalm 19 tells us. “The heavens declare the glory of God...” “The whole earth is filled with His glory.”

Yet regardless of how, or to what degree everything else in all creation displays God’s nature, qualities, wisdom and power, it was to MANKIND ALONE that God said: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, and all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in His image, in the image of God he created them, male and female He created them.” (Gen. 1:26-27) Mankind, therefore, and mankind alone, is the apex of God’s creation, or the crowning jewel of all that He made. No other created thing or being had such an honor bestowed upon it as to bear in their being — the likeness and image of the Creator.

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Yet often it doesn't seem that way. In fact, oftentimes the only way we can be sure that it's true is to accept it as divinely revealed truth, by means faith alone! Because often times, we see God's eternal nature more in a beautiful sunset, or standing before a beautiful, towering, snowcapped mountain, or in the bright and vivid colors of a Spring morning with the trees in bloom, the radiant flowers of a Summer garden, or the spectacular yellows, reds and oranges of a forest in Autumn.

You see, sometimes, when we look at humankind, and see what people often do to one another, and to the creation, we are tempted to say that mankind CANNOT be the image bearers of God! It just can't be so! Man cannot be created in the likeness of God and do the things he does! In fact, SOME would go as far as to say that SIN has so marred God's likeness in man, that it has been TOTALLY OBLITERATED!

One man even told me, "I see more of the image of God in my dog than I often do in people. He's more kind, and gentle and loving."

Yet there is a world of difference between saying, "It is marred beyond recognition on occasion," and saying, "It has been totally obliterated." And it's the people who would fall into the second category of either adopting, or coming very close to adopting the concept that that the divine image was totally obliterated, that tend to have the perspective called, "Worm Theology."

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But don't think they are alone. Because since the creation of man in the image of God must be accepted in faith, many non-religious or scientific secularists also hold to a similar view.

Not worm theology, but germ theology! The belief that man is little more than a freak accident of nature, a profound mistake or an immense improbability. As Charles Colson put it in his book "How Now Shall We Live?":

"The naturalistic belief is that life arose from the primordial sea through a chance collision of chemicals that over billions of years of chance mutations, gave rise to the biological accident we call humans. Millions of people today accept this basic presupposition that we are little more than grown up germs..."

Oliver Wendell Holmes for one held to such a view and expressed it this way:

"I see no reason for attributing to man a significance different from that which belongs to a baboon, or a grain of sand."

It's the secularized version of "worm theology." Man was not created by God. He does not bear the divine image. He's a freak biological accident, and thus no more significant than any other animal—including baboons, mice, monkeys, ants or maggots.

That's essentially what our children are taught in secular science classes. Then we wonder why we find more and more people in our society who have no problem at all aborting infants, euthanizing the elderly, randomly killing their classmates at school, or taking a person's life over a watch or a pair of sneakers. They're just living out what they're taught. For if man is the result of nothing more than an insignificant chance mutation of cells, or a biological accident spawned when a bolt of lightning hit the primordial sludge (instead of the crowning jewel of God's creation, purposely and intentionally made in His image to display His glory) then it's easy to see why people nowadays have such little regard for human life.

People aren't dummies! They know that you CAN'T LOGICALLY say that humans are the result of an unintentional biological accident, followed by millions of other accidental mutations, and then somehow declare (against all that you've just told them!) that they are special, valuable, significant, and precious!

If nothing else, people who treat human life as insignificant and worthless are at least being consistent and living out in their actions what naturalistic science ultimately leaves them to believe. For in reality, the message they hear is:

"You're a mistake. You're an accident. You're no more important or significant than a baboon, a maggot, or a grain of sand. You have no intrinsic worth or value. But, of course, we do have to make the best of where these countless accidental mutations brought us. So try and persuade yourself that you are important and do have value even though in reality you don't!"

You see what a difference simply believing we were intentionally created with a purpose, by a God who made us in His divine image, makes all the difference in how we view ourselves, what value we place on life, how we treat others, count them as worthy of love and respect, see ourselves as significant to God, or even able to be loved by Him.

But I stress again — it is something that one must believe on the basis of revelation, and not deductions made from reason or observation. For just as no one can prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that God exists, so also no one can "prove" intellectually that we were created by God and bear in our being His divine image. Such things must simply be accepted on faith.

Then **SECOND**, we know what Bildad says is not true, because once again, God's revelation to us in Ps. 8 counters the conclusion that we are like worms or maggots. Though in verse 3 (please open your Bibles to Psalm 8 and follow along)—in verse 3 the Psalmist seems like he's heading in that direction!

He considers the vast heavens that God has made, the work of His fingers; the moon and stars which He has set in place, and in light of such an immense creation, and what it implies about God who must be infinitely more grand than the sum total of all He has created, he says in verse 4: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

And if the answer to David's question were arrived at by logical observation, he would surely be forced to go on and say: A God who is so Majestic couldn't possibly be mindful of us, or care about our personal concerns and burdens. Man is nothing! He's so small and insignificant in comparison to the vastness of the universe and the immensity of God that God couldn't possibly even notice him, never mind care for him!"

But he doesn't! Because he makes his conclusion based on divine revelation and not logical deductions made from observation and reason. And thus contrary to what we think he is going to say, he actually goes on to say: "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor."

Interestingly enough, you know what the verse really says? Not that God "made us a little lower than the angels," as the King James, and the Living Bible wrongly trans-late it. And not "a little lower than the heavenly beings," as the NIV and the English Standard Version incorrectly put it! No, it actually says, "you have made him a little lower than God," as the NASB rightly translates it! Or the Good News Bible which captures the idea well when it translates it: "You made him inferior only to Yourself." (It's God, HUMANS, angels / not God, ANGELS, humans)

It's NOT what one expects David to say after V. 4! In fact, it's such an exalted view of Mankind, that the translators of the KJV and other versions could not bring themselves to translate it AS IT STANDS in the Hebrew! For David A + B did NOT = C! God's Grandeur, and man's comparative minute-ness did not lead him to the conclusion that man is a maggot!

**WHY?** Because he drew his conclusion from divine revelation, rather than human reason or deductions based on what he saw.

And YOU must do the same: If you are Searching for Significance, you WILL NOT find it by observing nature / or turning to the discoveries of science / or by scanning humanity's past or

present record / or even by comparing us to God. Those methods will only lead you to a sense of greater insignificance.

You must find your value, and significance, and worth, in believing what God has said about you, or never truly find it at all (other than, like the naturalist, in attempts at purposeful self-deception).

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Then **LAST** we know Bildad's conclusion is wrong because the Gospel declares it to be wrong! / It is true that compared to the infinite immensity of God we are so very, very small. / And it is also true that compared to God's unspeakable holiness and spotless purity we are impure and sinful. That cannot be denied.

But again, we can't let "logic" take us to where all that seems to point, for in the Gospel (which does admit those two things) we are told that our infinite, grand and holy God, who IS more pure than to even look upon sin, loved us, and driven by that love for us, sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

"He loved us" says Paul, "while we were yet sinners" "When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him by the death of His Son."

He didn't wait till after we cleaned up our act! He didn't even make our repentance and moral reformation the condition of His love. WHY? Because even ungodly sinners have value and worth to God!

Though it barely needs to be said, I do NOT believe God would send His Son to die for maggots and worms; baboons or pieces of sand! (Incarnation - did Jesus come and take the form of a maggot to die for maggots and worms?)

But He DID send His Son to die for us and to impart to us once again the honor and significance and sense of worth and life-transforming power that comes from knowing we were made "In His Image."