



Sermon delivered by
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"Nursery Rhymes & Protest Songs" (Psalm 8)

It may have been the same for you when you were young and could not sleep. In my childhood, there were nights when I summoned my mother to my bedside, and I explained to her that for reasons beyond my control I could not sleep. There was something under the bed, there was something in the closet, and there was even something looking in from the outside. All of those “somethings” prevented me from falling asleep, and, of course, it had all become part of a well-rehearsed bedtime routine. Mother would come in, sit on the edge of the bed, inquire as to why I could not sleep, and then she would begin to sing. She would sing certain songs, childhood songs, songs that would comfort and ease my mind, and which did, indeed, help me fall asleep. It didn’t take long for sleep to come. And, if I was still awake when she finished her songs, there was that prayer mother and I would pray, together, and you know that prayer: *Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.* Some of us still pray that prayer. But, the great comfort were the songs, the songs of faith, the songs of trust, the songs that reassured me that God was with me, and God would be the One Who do battle with whatever was under my bed.

In the 8th Psalm we read these words: *Out of the mouths of babes and infants You have founded a bulwark because of Your foes.* The psalmist is describing a particular defense system: a “bulwark” against one’s enemy. And what, of all things, is that bulwark, that spiritual defense system? Amazingly, the bulwark are the words, the lyrics, the songs of little children, really, nothing more than nursery rhymes, hymns of faith lifting up praises to God, thanking God for being a God of majesty and unquestioned goodness. In the 8th Psalm, the only defense mentioned are the gurgling sounds and songs uttered by mere infants. That’s the defense that keeps the enemy, that keeps evil at bay, that keeps you and me so well-protected. *Out of the mouths of babes and infants,* God’s glory is announced, and you and I need not fear anything or anyone.

Now, note this, and don't forget this: there is no singing in Gehenna, in hell, in the underworld. There is agony and moaning, there is regret, there are tears and gnashing of teeth, but there is no singing. Singing is for the victors, not for the defeated, not for the ones who have made the wrong choice. George Fredric Handel composed his great masterpiece, **Messiah**, inspired by all the singing that is found in the Bible and which goes on right now, *present tense*, in Paradise. **Messiah** was Handel's attempt to compose something comparable, something close to what the angels sing in heaven, not just at Christmas and Easter, but *all* the time. Note this, as well: the Christian faith is defined in large part by the music and the songs that tell the news of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. The hint, the clue, the big giveaway to the importance of music and song to the Christian faith comes when? On the night Christ was born. Luke records for us that on the night Christ was born, there was a multitude of the heavenly host, not wringing their hands or worrying their wings. They were singing, they were praising, they were glorifying God: *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors*. You don't whisper good news. You shout it out, you make it known. Lest you be misinformed, evil hates such music. To evil and to the enemy, hearing songs of praise and glory, hearing our victory chants and shouts is to be compared to fingernails on a blackboard. But, on a Sunday morning in a sanctuary like this one, there is plenty of music, and you and I sing those songs all written to glorify the Name of the Lord. In Matthew's gospel, we learn that after the Passover meal, which becomes our Lord's Supper, Jesus and the disciples do what? They sing a hymn, and only then do they venture out to the Mount of Olives. My take on that reference to singing a hymn before Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane is that that hymn was a reminder, a foreshadowing of God's victory, no matter the betrayal, no matter the punishment, no matter the crucifixion that awaited our Lord. That hymn after supper was a reminder that God's will in Christ was a done deal, and there will never be an exception to that rule of faith, not for Jesus and not for you and me.

Psalm 8 is no less our reminder that God's goodness and God's love and God's mercy shall prevail *always*, no *ifs* or *buts* or *maybes*. Even the very stones on the ground will sing out praising God if you and I somehow fail to make known God's victorious glory. I am thinking now of that Christmas Eve of 1914 when the opposing German and British armies called a truce because someone started singing the Christmas song, *O Holy Night*. On that holy night, the singing of that song caused both sides to pause long enough to stop the killing, and perhaps to realize that war was not the answer, that someone, some politician had been

sold a bill of goods believing that war was the answer, but it wasn't, and never will be. Surely, the song those soldiers sang had to have reminded them that there is an answer, and the Name of that answer is Jesus Christ, the One Who just happens to be the Prince of Peace.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants is to be found our sure defense against the foe, against those who believe that war and terror and hatred and betrayal are acceptable answers to life on earth. Well, they aren't, and that will never be the case, and by faith we know that; matter of fact, we have learned that lesson more than once. And high school graduates, listen up. Don't let your world be defined by the wrong answer! By faith, you know the answer. By faith, live that answer, and make it known that this life was created to be a life of faith, hope, love and peace, not war, not terror, and not hatred.

In the 8th psalm, the one singing that song is making it known that the life we want, the life worth living is available only from the One Who is behind the creation of creation; the One Who created the human spirit, and did so by creating us just a tad lower than that of the angels. No wonder the songs have been written. No wonder the songs are still sung, no wonder we teach them to our children whom we baptize and who grow up to be graduates and who, then, teach them to others. What the God of Jesus Christ has done is worth, *worth* singing about, the God Whose glory silences the threats of the enemy.

Years ago, I taught a young friend the song, *Jesus love me this I know*. We would sing that song in the car, and sometimes I would hear that song even without my urging or suggestion. Once, we were going into Canada, and we stopped at Customs. When the Customs officer looked into the car, he asked, *Who is in the back seat?* In response, someone began to sing, *Jesus loves me this I know*. At which point, the Customs officer replied, *for the Bible tells me so*. Isn't that how it ought to be? We sing the praises of God as God's people, no matter the borders or the races or the tribes or the nationalities or anything that divides and separates us, one from another. All people, all human beings of all nations, have been created just lower than the angels, and such creation causes us to make known Gods' majestic Name is in all the world. The mission and witness of the church is unite all people to sing the same song, to make it known that as human beings we are all on the same page. We want all people to know of God's unsurpassed glory, a glory that is not up for a vote or to be decided or challenged or reconsidered. God's glory **IS**, and the meaning of that word **IS** is that God is faithful, all the time; and all the time, God is faithful, and such faithfulness is our sure defense. It is our bulwark against the enemy, against those who would have us believe that the God of Jesus Christ is somehow inferior, inadequate to task of being in charge.

Out of the mouth of babes and infants that spiritual fact, that cosmic truth is made known. The vanquished, the defeated, the losers do not sing, cannot sing; they have nothing to sing about. Only the victors, only those on the winning side have a song to sing. Only those who see an empty cross and an empty tomb know why there is something to sing about. No wonder at Christmas and at Easter, we sing our hearts out. No wonder we fill this room with the victory songs of our faith. No wonder some of us will forget our names long before we forget the songs that proclaim the news that *Jesus loves us this we know, for the Bible tells us so.*

Out of the mouths of babes and infants, God has made it clear, so very clear that in Jesus Christ there is no defeat, for Christ is risen. Thanks be to God! Glory be to God in the highest heaven, and peace, good will to all.

Let us pray: Teach us again, O God, the songs of faith that inspire us and are to us our sure defense against evil and every foe. With the love of Christ Jesus, may we sing out Your glories for all to hear and for all to join in with us. Amen!