

“But We See Jesus”
Hebrews 2:5-16
May 23, 2021

INTRODUCTION:

The author of Hebrews is writing a small house church facing such severe persecution and opposition that they are being tempted to backtrack on their commitment to Christ. If Jesus is the Son of God with all power and authority, why do his people have to suffer so? The author deals with this question through a combination of warnings and encouragements. He constantly warns them against the danger of falling away from Christ, but then quickly encourages them with reminders of all they have in Christ. Last week’s passage was one of those warning passages (2:1-4), so today’s text is an encouragement passage.

This pattern of warning and encouragement is designed to help them feel their danger that they might strengthen their hold on Jesus by faith. To use an analogy that I mentioned last week, it is like someone driving their car on a high mountain road with a steep drop-off mere inches from the edge of the pavement. This car is on the outside lane closest to that steep drop-off, and the driver begins to feel his danger. His natural response is to strengthen his grip on the steering wheel and to be hyper-vigilant in making sure to keep the car in the center of the lane. Similarly, our author wants us to feel our danger and to keep our grasp firmly on Jesus. To that end, he wants us to see Jesus as our all-sufficient Savior, and that’s his purpose in today’s passage. As we’re going to see, he approaches this by reminding us of the Bible’s view of our design, a design possible for us only through Jesus.

I. God’s Design for Humanity – v. 5-8

Our author begins with a big picture statement about God’s original design for humanity. **“Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come”** (v. 5). He then goes on to quote from Psalm 8, which is something of a commentary on Genesis 1-2. That psalm is an eloquent statement of the vastness of God’s creation. The psalmist had been gazing at the night sky and marveling at its glory. That led him to ask, **“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?”** Though Jesus gave himself the title, “Son of Man,” the term in this psalm refers to humanity, of which Jesus is the truest example. In light of the vastness and the splendor of the heavens, it would seem that humanity is of little consequence. Not so, says the psalmist. Though he was made for a little while lower than the angels, God has crowned him with glory and honor. And what is man’s glory and honor? Man and woman have been made to be God’s image bearers who rule as he does. God has put **“everything in subjection under his feet”** (v. 8). They are kings and queens who have been

given by God complete authority over this earth. The author elaborates on this by saying, **“Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control”** (v. 8).

This is God’s original design for us. It is who we were made to be. We were designed to be little assistant kings and queens under the authority of the ultimate King and Ruler of the universe, God himself. This is the story we were designed for. If we are not living in that story, life just will not work. Let me give an example. Do you remember the 2009 movie, *The Blind Side*, about the football player Michael Oher? Imagine that I was somehow given the role of playing Michael Oher in this movie. The problems with that are many and obvious. Michael Oher is black, and I’m white. Michael Oher is six feet four inches tall and weighs 315 pounds, larger than me by three inches in height and 150 pounds in weight. Every time a football scene is shot when I’m supposed to block some gorilla of a defensive lineman, I just end up on my back as he goes through me like I’m not there. The director is constantly saying, “Cut, let’s do that scene again.” But for some reason, the director won’t do the obvious thing and get rid of me and hire an actor more suited to this story. He just keeps trying, resulting in increasing frustration for everyone. I would be frustrated because this is not the story I was created for. If there were a movie about old guys riding bicycles, that would be more the story for me.

After the quote from Psalm 8, we read in verse 9 that our current human condition is that we are all in the wrong story. We are all 170 pounders trying to play the role of a 315 pound football player. We were created by God to rule this world as God’s assistant kings and queens. But when humanity rebelled against God’s authority in the sin of Adam, the whole human race embraced a different story. The result is that **“we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.”** That’s a bit of an understatement, isn’t it? The list of things in this world beyond our control is a long one. We can’t control the weather, the animal world, viruses and bacteria that bring sickness, the balancing of supply and demand in economies, the prevention of poverty, and a long list of other factors outside of our control. The original readers of this book couldn’t control those who wanted to persecute them. Most tragically, we can’t even control ourselves. Addicts realize that they are on a path of self-destruction but seem unable to do anything about it. Actually, all sin is self-destructive, but we are powerless to avoid it. We are in bondage. We are in the wrong story but can’t seem to get out of it.

Perhaps you’re thinking to yourself, “Pastor, you said at the beginning of this sermon that it contained strong encouragement. But all you’ve given us so far is discouraging news. Where’s the good news of encouragement? It begins in verse 9, which brings us to our next point.

II. God’s Deliverer of Humanity – v. 9-10

We don't see this world in subjection to humanity as God intended. We seem stuck in a story to which we are ill-suited. But there is something our author wants us to see that will change everything for us, and he speaks of it in the first phrase of verse 9. **"But we see him..."** It is clear that the "him" is Jesus. We don't see everything under humanity's control as God intended, but we see Jesus. The story of Jesus is the only way we can be delivered from the wrong story and put in the right story, and the author traces out how that happens.

It begins with Jesus' incarnation, when he **"was made lower than the angels."** We got into the wrong story by a man, the first Adam, and we will only be able to get into the right story by another man, the last Adam. So Jesus, the second member of the Trinity, became fully human while also not ceasing to be fully divine.

Next, we see the sufferings of Jesus culminating in his crucifixion. The author has much to say about this, and he will say far more about it in the remainder of this book. At the end of verse 10, he says something that is confusing to many, that Jesus, the founder of our salvation, was made **"perfect through suffering."** The confusion of this comes from the fact that it sounds like he is saying that Jesus was less than perfect and needed a little improvement before being able to fulfill his role as our Deliverer. We know that's not true, though. Jesus was born perfectly holy and sinless and stayed that way his entire life. What then does this mean? The word used here was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, to signify the act of consecrating a priest to his office. The word is translated "ordain" in our versions of the Old Testament. So the idea is that suffering was an essential part of Jesus' service as our priest.

When our text speaks of the suffering of Jesus, it's not talking about the general suffering of his life, though his life certainly was one of suffering. It's speaking more specifically of the suffering of death by crucifixion. This death lies at the heart of the entire Bible. It is an atoning, substitutionary death. Jesus died in our place, suffering the curse pronounced upon the human race through the sin of Adam. That's why verse 9 concludes, **"so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."** To say that Jesus "tasted" death doesn't mean that he just sampled it. Rather, it's a Jewish way of saying that he experienced death. And this experience of death was "by the grace of God" because it brings life to those who trust in Jesus. Through the death of Jesus, our sins were paid for, with the result that we are forgiven and pardoned.

After the death of Jesus, he was **"crowned with glory and honor."** That speaks of his resurrection and exaltation. As one commentator expressed it, "Death was not the victor over Jesus Christ, but rather the victim." The death of Jesus is the death of death. The exaltation of Jesus is not something that is true only for Jesus. Through Jesus' death, resurrection and exaltation, he brings **"many sons to glory."** This statement would bring great encouragement to a small house church as they are persecuted by the mighty Roman government.

They might be suffering now, but such suffering is not the end of the story for them just as it wasn't the end of the story for Jesus. The suffering of Jesus was in the masterful, wise and sovereign plan of God. He has not lost control. Rather, he is bringing many sons to glory. These persecuted Christians, along with all of us who worship Jesus, are destined for glory. This glory, among other things, includes the restoration of God's original purpose for humanity, the purpose of ruling over all this earth as God's assistant kings. The apostle Paul writes that we will even judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3).

III. God's Description of Humanity – v. 11-16

The last few verses of our passage describe the kind of people God is making us to be. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have not only forgiveness of sins but also transformation that suits us to live in the right story. This transformation makes us into the people God created us to be. There are five features here that describe what it means to be truly human.

To be human means first to be holy. Verse 11 says, **“he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.”** To be sanctified is to be holy. To be human is to be holy. Or to say it negatively, sin dehumanizes. The Bible's call to live a holy life is not a call to unhappiness but just the opposite. Holiness is the way we were made to be. It fits us and positions us to become all that God intended for us. It is the story we were designed for.

Second, to be human means to be in relationship. Jesus died and was raised again in order that he might bring **“many sons to glory”** (v. 10). Jesus **“is not ashamed to call [us] brothers”** (v. 11). We are designed for relationship with God and with one another. We are in a family, and our elder brother is Jesus. All Christians are our brothers and sisters in this family. To be cut off from meaningful relationships with others is dehumanizing. In their book, *Becoming Whole*, Brian Fikkert and Kelly Kapic report the following:

Researchers have found that when prisoners are placed in solitary confinement with little human contact and minimal sensory stimulation, severe psychological and physical issues often ensue: depression, anxiety, hallucinations, impaired brain functioning, paranoia, psychosis, uncontrollable rage, weight loss, hypertension, gastrointestinal problems, self-harm, and/or suicide. (p. 46)

Haven't we all witnessed something of this with COVID and the diminishing of relationships that has accompanied that? Jesus restores and makes whole these relationships, both with God and with others. Hebrews is going to talk more about that later.

Third, to be human is to worship God. The author quotes from Psalm 22, a messianic psalm, **“I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the**

congregation I will sing your praise” (v. 12). If Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm, and it clearly is, then this is Jesus speaking. Imagine what it would be like if Jesus were bodily present in our worship service, worshipping with every ounce of his strength. In doing so, he is showing us that the worship of God is an integral part of being fully human and fully alive. Actually, we can't help but worship. It's only a matter of who or what we worship. We were created to love and worship the true God. These last two points are yet another reason for us to put behind us as quickly as possible worshipping via livestream. We need relationships and we need corporate worship just as desperately as we need food and water.

Fourth, to be human is to trust in God. **“I will put my trust in him”** (v. 13) is not a direct quote from Psalm 22, but the idea of trusting God permeates the entire psalm, even though Jesus in this psalm is experiencing severe suffering. Though God designed us to rule and reign, he intends that we do so as dependent creatures. We will always be dependent upon God, even in the state of glory when sin is no more. Trusting God is a great source of joy for us because it brings us close to him. A person dependent on an external source of oxygen in order to stay alive will keep that oxygen close by at all times. We are just as dependent on God.

Finally, to be human is to be delivered from all fear, which keeps us in bondage. The greatest of all fears is the fear of death. The text tells us that Satan uses this fear to keep us in bondage. Ironically, the very beings created by God to rule and have dominion end up cowering in fear. But Jesus, through his death, has destroyed the power of Satan and has delivered **“all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery”** (v. 15). John Piper has an interesting illustration of this verse. He says that life in this fallen world is like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute. We all have a limited amount of time before our bodies strike the hard earth at terminal velocity and our physical lives are ended. Some may respond to that reality by living in fear, others by denial. But in every case, there is a bondage involved in this. What a wonderful gift from God that we need no longer fear death. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it has been turned from an enemy to the transition into everlasting joy. John Calvin writes of this verse, “Although we must still meet death, let us nevertheless be calm and serene in living and dying, when we have Christ going before us. If anyone cannot set his mind at rest by disregarding death, that man should know that he has not yet gone far enough in the faith of Christ.”

CONCLUSION:

Our need is the same as that of the first readers of this book. We need to remember the true story of Jesus' death and resurrection and all it brings to us. Are you living in that story?

Small Group Discussion Questions
Hebrews 2:5-16

1. Someone has summarized the book of Hebrews, with its combination of warnings and encouragements, with the statement that God afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted. Can you think of times in your life when you have needed some affliction to shake you out of your comfort? Can you think of times when you may have needed God's comfort in your affliction?
2. God has designed us to rule and have dominion, but that has been frustrated by the curse on this world due to sin. What lack of dominion is most troubling to you? For example, it may be frustration at work, the existence of poverty, relational troubles, etc.
3. Verse 9 presents Jesus' death and resurrection as the solution to this poor fit between who we were created to be and the world we find ourselves in. By his death and resurrection, Jesus brings "many sons to glory" (v. 10). What about this verse encourages you?
4. These verses describe the five elements of being fully human. Can you think of an application of each one?
 - To be fully human is to be in relationship with God and others, seen in the statement that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers.
 - To be fully human is to be holy (note the word "sanctified" in verse 11, which means holy)
 - To be fully human is to worship God corporately (v. 12)
 - To be fully human is to trust God (v. 13)
 - To be fully human is to be no longer in bondage to a fear of death (v. 14-15)