
The Crowning Glory of Suffering Death

Hebrews 2:5-9

Introduction Hebrews flows from the pen of its author into our lives to magnify Christ and to mature saints. To that end, the opening paragraphs declare the great supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- He is supreme for His is a greater revelation. That revelation is so great that Jesus is the final deposit of all the wealth of God's being and glory and self-disclosure.
- He is supreme for He is greater than angels. The angels were mediators of the Old Testament revelation. Jesus is greater in His Deity for angels worship Him and do His bidding.
- If Jesus is the final and full revelation of God and if Jesus is greater than angels because He is worshipped and served by them, then we have better hear and heed because we are faced with two immense dangers: that we will drift and that we will neglect our great salvation.

Now the author turns to deal with a question which probably not too many of us in our world and in our time would ask. You see for us, it makes all the sense in the world that Jesus would become human. Not just because we are on the fulfillment side of it but because we think so much of ourselves. For us the question is not, "Why in the world (or better in the heavens) would Jesus stoop to become human?" Our question to this text is, "Well of course, why not?" For you see, "the atmosphere of our age is too dense with man and too distant from the sweet sovereignty of God." (Piper)

But Jesus did become human. And even in the humiliation of becoming human, He is still greater than angels. Now the author wants us to see through to the end of chapter 2, how Jesus is superior in His humanity. Jesus is greater than angels for His humanity enabled Him:

- To regain man's lost dominion (v.5-9);
- To bring many sons to glory (v.10-13);
- To disarm Satan and deliver us from death (v.14-16);
- To be a sympathetic High Priest to His people (v.17-18).

Our Grand Prospect

(v.5-8a)

At first, it appears that this statement simply is an assertion that takes us off on a new track. Closer examination though shows us how it is connected to the context.

- The verse has in its beginning the word “for”. Some translations do not have it and that is unfortunate because we then lose a sense of its connection to previous paragraph. The central flow of thought runs like this, “Since all these things are true about the supremacy of Jesus, you better listen to the Word unless you drift (2:1) and neglect the greatness of your salvation (2:2) that is coming to you like an inheritance (1:14) because God did not put the coming age under the rule of angels. (2:5)” In other words, there is something about hearing the Word with diligence and holding our hearts to treasuring our great salvation that is related to the glorious age when our salvation reaches its consummation. Listen, it is not angels who will be ruling the world to come, so you better not drift and you better not neglect your great salvation.
- The first word in the verse is a negative. It would be like rendering this as saying, “NO, not to angels is the world to come subjected.” (Owen) In other words, the author is very emphatic. It is very important then that we think about and reflect on and even anticipate with real hunger the grand prospect this text is indicating.

And maybe the reason we drift and neglect the greatness of our salvation is that we really are not gripped by how great it really is.

Who Does Not Rule

(v.5)

I know that angels are glorious creatures. I know that their voices fill heaven’s halls with thunderous cascades of praise. I know that their serving hearts send them tearing across the cosmos at the slightest bidding of their Sovereign to serve saints. I know that they look down in wonder and amazed joy at what is unfolding in the drama of redemption. But I know that they do not rule heaven; they do not rule earth; and the Eschatological Age of the glory of Christ is not subject to them.

So who is it subject to? The answer to that tells more about why our salvation is so great and why it is so important that we do not neglect it.

Who Will Rule

(v.6-8a)

Who will rule is the great promise and prospect and purpose of God drawn from Psalm 8. There, David surveys the vast hosts of heaven, the sea of space and stars, the advancing arch of the universe, his face bright with the glory from the majesty enthroned above it all and suddenly wonders, “What is man that you would give attention to him and be concerned about him?” We are so small and so fragile and so weak in the light the greatness of all that is, why should God give us a day of His time?

But verse 7 is the hinge on which the Apostle's thought turns. Man is lower than the angels and is that by God’s design and purpose. Yet man is crowned with glory and honor because he is to have dominion over what God has created. So we may be lower in scale of being but we have been placed higher in privilege and position. Angels do not rule the world; man was created and designed to.

The apostle's comment on this in verse 8 extends the verse to all things. The future that our salvation will bring us to is that of being vice-regent over creation with God. That hope is part of our great salvation—that someday those who have held fast to their great salvation will be revealed as the children of God and all creation will serve them for joyful ends.

Our Current Problem

(v.8b)

But all this is not what we see now. That which we are supposed to be ruling with joy now ravages us with sin, sorrow and sadness. What was to be a glad chorus of harmony is now a terrible jumble of discordant noise. What was to be a great fruit of our walk with God has fallen to be a grinding frustration of our union in Adam.

Why is it that what was promised as a wonderful prospect in the creation and in Psalm 8 simply is not so.

We Do Not Rule

Everywhere we look, if we are realistic, we are not victorious over the natural world we live in; we are victims to tornadoes and hurricanes, and floods and diseases. We are subject to the creation in all sorts of dreadful ways. We strain to persuade ourselves that we are gaining ever more control over our fate. We think our technologies will bring us the dominion we seek. We create computers and lasers and heart valves and exotic drugs. We do genetics and make much of cloning and dream in our science fiction that we will not only rule here but in worlds and over peoples not yet known.

And the brutal reality is that we are finding that our solutions to the disasters of the curse are only breeding worse enemies. We now have viruses and bacteria that not only are resistant to our medicines but actually feed on them. We think we have eradicated one disease and we pour billions into efforts to beat cancer only to wake up one day to know that only a very few cancers are beatable.

Further, all our technologies cannot hold back the rains that come at just the right times to cause rivers to swell and sweep away our hopes and dreams and the fragile bubble of material things on which we have banked our hopes.

Death Rules Us

All the ways in which creation is not subject to us eventually lead us to the problem that most concerned the writer of Hebrews, *death*. Whatever we have been able to conquer as human beings, we have not conquered death. It is a simple and inevitable reality that everyone dies. Death triumphs everywhere. It strikes all ages. It scoffs at our medicines and surgeries and diets and vitamins and exercise programs. When all is said and done, men and women, boys and girls die. Period.

Death is not subject to man. And therefore *nothing* is ultimately subject to us. It is only a matter of time and change and decay until what we think we have mastered will be ripped out of our hands by the cold specter of death. This is what we are brought to be painfully aware of in the end of verse 8. The Psalm says that and Hebrews confirms that we have a destiny so great that it boggles our imaginations. But not yet...not yet.

But even in the midst of all this disaster, death and potential for despair, there is one little word that is a telescope to see the far horizons of when all this will be different. That is the word “yet”. We do not *yet* see this now. That brightness of that hope sometimes makes the shadows we live in bearable.

But how does that *yet* come to pass? How does the author rescue this great prospect and glorious promise and the meaning of Psalm 8 from the ravages of our cursed reality and the despair of death?

Our Glorious Provision

(v.9)

By looking to Jesus. What we cannot see as true for *us* now, is actually true for *Jesus* now. What we see in Psalm 8 has been fulfilled for Jesus. Man’s wonderful prospect and God’s thrilling promises are now resting in the Amen, the “so be it” of the crucified and resurrected Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Seeing Jesus (2:9), and considering Jesus (3:1) and fixing our eyes on Jesus (12:2) is how He is magnified and how saints are matured. When all seems lost, when we are failing and falling, we must set the gaze of the eyes of our soul in Jesus Christ. This shows us two things we are to understand when we see Jesus.

The Purpose in Christ’s Humiliation

“We see Jesus ranked for a little while lower than the angels so that by the God’s grace He might taste death for all or every [one].”

Here is one reason—and there will be several more to come in this chapter—that Jesus in taking on humanity become lower than angels. He did so that He might taste death. Jesus in His Deity could not die. He is life itself. But in taking on His humanity, He became subject to death. It became a possibility.

Why should He taste death? How is it possible that He could taste death? What should sustain Him at the moment of death? He tasted death for the same reason we all do—sin. Now not His own sin. But our sin. The sins of the many sons He planned to bring to glory. He took their penalty and punishment and bore it on Himself on the cross. He stood in front of the wrath of God and shielded His children from it. He passed through the cold, dark waters of spiritual and physical death.

What was it that both brought Him to this and sustained Him through it? The grace of God. Don’t miss this. It is because of God’s grace that man is saved through Jesus death. And it was through God’s grace that Jesus was sustained through death. And so we must pay close attention to the Word and not neglect the greatness of the salvation which brought Jesus to death and sustained Him through death all so that we might not see death and might see the fulfillment of our glorious dominion

Now I come to a sticky point. Because I want to ask a question about the purpose of Christ’s humiliation and His tasting death. For whom did Christ taste death? Well, you answer, everyone. In what way did He taste death for everyone? I believe—and I am utterly convinced that the Bible fully teaches this—that Jesus tasted death for saints in one way and for everything and everyone else *in an entirely different way*. Jesus tasted death for sinners and it brings them laughter, and warm rain, and finan-

cial prosperity and temporal blessings, but not salvation. Jesus tasted death for all creation that now stands on tiptoe in breathless anticipation of a full restoration to God's original and final purpose and design when Christians are turned from caterpillars to butterflies (Romans 8:18-25). And Jesus tasted death for His own to redeem, propitiate, reconcile, regenerate, justify, adopt, restore and to deliver them from the bondage of spiritual and physical death.

And that is why, if we are not to neglect the greatness of our salvation, we had better come to grips that Jesus will bring every one of these many sons to glory—no more and no less. And the greatness of our salvation does not lie in the temporal blessings we receive but in the eternal pleasures we are brought home to enjoy.

The Preeminence in Christ's Exaltation

"We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor because He experienced the suffering of death."

All of our attention on the humiliation and condescension of Jesus must bring us to His exaltation. We must not only see the cross of Jesus but His crown as well.

But look at the wording carefully. Now He is crowned with glory and honor *because* of the suffering of death. The emphasis of the writer is on what was suffered. And because of what was suffered, we now can see Him crowned as a victor. He has received the victor's wreath having overcome death by virtue of His resurrection.

So Jesus has gone through the suffering that sin and death brings and has already received the glory and honor as the victorious conqueror. Now He has everything put under His feet, though we do not see it yet in its fullness. But, O, the day is coming. And when that glorious day comes, we will rule and reign with Him.

And now we can understand why it is that Psalm 8 begins and ends with these familiar words, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth." Not just because of the magnificent destiny and majestic dominion promised to the saints, but also because, when it seems hopeless because we are so helpless, we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth."

- Be very diligent over your heart to hear and heed the Word. So many of us are in danger because we are drifting. We are drifting into unbelief and sin. **Conclusion**
- Do not neglect the greatness of your salvation. You are destined by the grace and gladness of God for the glory of God to rule and reign with Him. All things will serve your great good. All things, without any mixture of pain or sorrow or regret will manifest the glory of God to you and through you.
- Put your faith in the promise of this great grace—that what you can only see dimly in Christ today will one day be seen and experienced by all. Fix your eyes on Jesus, not on the pain and futility and frustration and sickness and death of this age. They will not have the last word. Jesus is the final conqueror. Think on Him. Consider Him. Look to Him.
- In the face of every calamity and every frustration believe that Psalm 8 is your destiny. Believe it because it is true. Believe it because you can see that Jesus has made it true.
- Jesus is utterly supreme. Though He has become less than angels by becoming human, He was enabled to suffer death by God's grace. And now we see Him by faith crowned with glory and honor.
- Worship Jesus. Worship Jesus because He superior to the prophets. Worship Jesus because He is the superior revelation. Worship Jesus because He is superior to angels in His deity and humanity. Worship Jesus so that we do not drift. Worship Jesus so that we do not neglect the greatness of our salvation. Worship Jesus.