

## ***Jesus: the Pioneer of our Salvation***

Hebrews 2:5-18

To those of you who've been away from Manhattan this summer, welcome back. Two weeks ago we started a sermon series in the book of Hebrews. The Christian life is depicted as an endurance race in which many things have the potential of slowing us down and even tempt us to drop out of the race altogether. The author's main concern is that we "run the race with endurance." He tells us that one of the core habits/disciplines we will need to cultivate is "fixing our eyes on Jesus." Instead of being fixated on ourselves, our sins, our circumstances, or anything else, we should be preoccupied with Jesus: who He is, what He **has** done, and what He **is** doing.

If you've never experienced the power and stability that comes from doing this, fixing your eyes on Jesus may sound like "positive thinking" at best or make-believe at worst. In other words, fixing your eyes on Jesus may just sound like a mental trick that keeps you from negative thinking. But the author of Hebrews had a very different conviction. He believed that Jesus is alive and is enthroned at God's right hand, the place of honor and power. He is arguing that if we are in relationship with Him and look to Him, Jesus will actually help us run the race with endurance.

Today's passage (Hebrews 2:5-18) is one more installment in this argument. This passage explains how Jesus is uniquely qualified to give us the help we need - especially when it comes to our weaknesses and fears and temptations. To prepare your heart to "hear" this passage, bring to mind the things that you think are most likely to dishearten you and tempt you to quit walking with Jesus. It could be a specific sin that has a death-grip on you, a specific relationship that's especially hard, or a difficult circumstance that just isn't improving. Or maybe it's just the cumulative effect of disappointments and heartaches. Keep these things in mind as we go through this passage; these are the very things Jesus can help you negotiate in this life.

The author first articulates ***humanity's problem*** and then teaches about Jesus as ***God's remedy*** for this problem.

***Humanity's Problem: We are not experiencing the "glory and honor" of those appointed over "the world to come." (Hebrews 2:5-8)*** We are not now living out our God-given calling. Remember the context. . . . The author has shown that Jesus is superior to the angels, and the angels are superior to humanity. In these verses, however, he will argue that humanity will ultimately have a higher status than the angels in "the world to come." Let's begin in verse 5.

5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.

Just as God never said to angels, "Sit at My right hand," (1:13), God never gave angels authority over the "world to come." This is a reference to the created order after the return of Christ (see 9:28). It turns out that humanity - not angels - are given authority in the world to come. He quotes from Psalm 8 to make this point:

6 But one has testified somewhere, saying,  
“What is man, that You remember him?  
Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him?”

When David (who wrote Psalm 8) looked into the heavens at the moon and the stars, he was amazed that God even noticed humanity. The heavens confirm that God is majestic and powerful; by comparison humanity seems weak and insignificant. Nevertheless, David understood from Scriptures such as Genesis 1 that God had given humanity dominion over the created world.

7 “You have made him for a little while lower than the angels;  
You have crowned him with glory and honor,  
And have appointed him over the works of Your hands;

If you read Psalm 8, the wording of the first line is a bit different. Instead of “You have made him for a little while lower than the angels,” it reads, “Yet You made him a little lower than God.” The author of Hebrews was quoting from the Greek version of the OT (the Septuagint) which translated *elohim* as “angels” instead of “God.” (How the NT authors used the OT is rather complicated at times.) In either case, in Psalm 8 David was making a reference to Genesis 1:26 where we read:

26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

In contrast to the animals that were created “after their kind,” God created man and woman in His image (in essence, after **His** kind). Being created in His image, God gave humanity the assignment of managing and caring for His creation. Verse 8 continues:

8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”  
For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

The author of Hebrews points out from Psalm 8 that God has “put all things in subjection” to humanity; nothing in the created order is exempt from our dominion. But the author is quick to point out that “now we do not **yet** see all things subjected to him.” When he looked around he didn’t see a well-ordered creation in which humanity skillfully and compassionately reigned. In our day we don’t yet see it either. Instead of skillfully managing the “works of God’s hands,” all too often we see environmental destruction and waste. Instead of being “crowned with glory and honor” (v. 7) we see sinfulness dominating humanity. It doesn’t appear that we have the capacity to fulfill our God’s given assignment.

Hebrews consistently points out that we are living in the overlap of the two ages - the present age and the age to come. We have begun to experience the power of the age to come, but it hasn't yet been fully realized. The kingdom is already here, but it is not yet consummated. And so how are we going to get from here to there? How are we going to become the type of people who can reign with Christ in the world to come?

***God's Remedy: Jesus took on flesh and blood, becoming the "pioneer" of our salvation. (Hebrews 2:9-18)***

After mentioning what we ***don't*** see (i.e. all of creation subjected to humanity), the author mentions what we ***do*** see: We see Jesus Christ blazing a trail for us to follow (see 6:20 where Jesus is called a "forerunner"). These verses describe Jesus becoming one of us so that we might fulfill our calling to reign over all of creation skillfully, creatively, and compassionately. In these verses the author does something rather fascinating: he picks up several features of Psalm 8 that originally referred to humanity and says that Jesus fulfilled them. As a man Jesus became what we were supposed to become. He not only serves as an example, He leads us into our appointed roles as sons and daughters of God.

9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

The author is careful to point out that Jesus' status of being "lower than the angels" was only temporary. He was made "for a little while" lower than the angels. But now we see Jesus "crowned with glory and honor." The author picks up this description of humanity from Psalm 8 (which he referenced in verse 7) and attributes it to Jesus. It is true that Jesus had glory and honor before the incarnation, but the author is talking about the glory and honor Jesus was given after His crucifixion. He says "because of the suffering of death" Jesus was crowned with glory and honor. He also says that He "tast[ed] death for everyone." He's hinting that Jesus died as a substitute and that His death had implications for humanity.

This is made explicit in verse 10:

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Notice that the goal or purpose of Jesus' death is to "bring many sons to glory." Through Jesus our glory will be restored so that we will have the capacity to live out our calling to reign over creation. [Of course he's talking about men and women, boys and girls when he uses the term "sons." Sons had a status in that culture that daughters didn't have; the Scriptures regularly use the term "sons" to denote males and females who each have an exalted status in God's kingdom.]

The author says that in bringing many sons to glory it was fitting/appropriate for God to “perfect the author of [our] salvation through sufferings.” The term translated “author” is used again in 12:2 where Jesus is called “the author and perfecter of faith.” The term had the connotation of a leader or a pioneer or a trailblazer. Jesus’ intention was always that we would follow Him and live the same type of life that He lived. We fix our eyes on Jesus in order to learn from Him how to negotiate this life.

We read here that it was fitting for God “to perfect the author of [our] salvation through sufferings.” Given what the author has already said about Jesus in chapter 1 (e.g., the Son is “the radiance of God’s glory” and “the exact representation of His nature”), he’s obviously not implying that there was anything deficient in Jesus in terms of His essence or character or morality. In the context I think the author is saying that Jesus was perfected or completed in His new vocation as our High Priest. Jesus wasn’t our High Priest before His incarnation; He was equipped for that office by suffering in the flesh. Being our High Priest will involve Jesus offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice and then empathetically helping us through this life. We’ll see this at the very end of the chapter.

Verses 11 through 13 point out how Jesus willingly identifies with us. The author quotes from three OT texts (Psalm 22:22, Isaiah 8:17, Isaiah 8:18) attributing each of them to Jesus when he writes:

11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*;  
for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,  
12 saying,  
“I will proclaim Your name to My brethren,  
In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.”  
13 And again,  
“I will put My trust in Him.”  
And again,  
“Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.”

Much could be said about these three Scriptures, but the point is that Jesus fully identified with humanity and considers us brothers and sisters. Jesus relates to us as family. He was and is willing to do whatever it takes to lead us safely through this life.

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Whereas chapter 1 (vv. 2-3) stressed that Jesus was fully God, these verses stress that He was fully man. Since we (“the children”) are flesh and blood beings, Jesus took on the same so that He might fully identify with us. Through His death on the cross Jesus did two related things. First, Jesus “rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” That might seem like an overstatement; Satan seems to be anything BUT powerless in our lives and in this world. But the NT teaches in numerous

places that at the return of Christ Satan will be exposed as powerless in the lives of those who trust in Jesus. Here and now Satan is powerless in our lives to the extent that we trust in Jesus.

Second, Jesus freed “those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” Those who experience salvation through Christ are freed from the fear/terror of dying. We can live this life to the fullest, realizing that death isn’t the end; death is a transition into the very presence of Christ for eternity (see Philippians 1:21ff).

In verse 16 we see that the author is still thinking about Jesus being made lower than the angels. And so he points out:

16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

Jesus never became an angel in order to redeem fallen angels. Fallen angels are apparently have no means of turning back to God. Jesus’ commitment was to humanity:

17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Given His mission as the pioneer of our salvation, Jesus **had** to be made like us in all things. Being fully human Jesus could also become “a merciful and faithful high priest” for us. We’ll talk at length about Jesus as our high priest in coming weeks. Basically a high priest represented the people before God. The high priest had several functions, but his core responsibility each year was to represent the people before God on the Day of Atonement. On that day he entered into the holy of holies with the blood of an animal and made atonement for the people’s sin for one more year. As our great high priest, Jesus brought his own blood into the heavenly holy of holies to make atonement for our sins permanently. Here the author says that he “ma[de] propitiation for the sins of the people.” Propitiation means that the wrath of God was satisfied; the wrath that our sin deserved fell upon Jesus. This was possible because Jesus was fully God AND fully man.

18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

We learn here that **as Jesus suffered** He was tempted. When we read in the gospels various ways that Jesus suffered, we can imagine that He was tempted in many different ways. Think of the ways Jesus suffered:

- The relational pain of being betrayed by Judas.
- The personal disappointment of having Peter deny Him three times.
- The internal agony of His impending crucifixion the night He was betrayed.
- The physical pain and the humiliation of being flogged and eventually crucified.
- The agony of bearing our sin on the cross.

We can imagine that as He suffered in these ways that Jesus was tempted with fears, anxieties, disappointment, and vengeance. We're told in 4:15 that Jesus was tempted "in all things as we are, yet without sin"; He bore the full brunt of temptation because He never gave in.

Because He successfully negotiated these temptations, "He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." In other words, He is able to give us tangible help as we are tempted in the things we suffer in this life. Jesus has an experiential knowledge of what we're experiencing. As we saw earlier, Jesus is perfectly equipped to lead us through this life to our eventual glory.

We need to think carefully about the type of help that Jesus gives us. God **can** do anything: He can take away the desires of my flesh; He can wipe out all of my enemies; He can preempt every physical, financial, and relational disaster that looms out there. He **can** do those things, and I'm sure that He sometimes **does** do those things. But the fact of the matter is that He didn't do those things for Jesus (or Paul or Peter), and so He doesn't **have** to do those things for us. The assurance of the book of Hebrews is that if we let Him, Jesus will help us **in the midst of** these types of sufferings.

We aren't given five easy steps to dealing with temptations. We are given a Person, Jesus. Jesus doesn't always deliver us from suffering; but He does deliver us from temptations in the midst of suffering. How are you suffering? What are the ways you're being tempted in those sufferings?

G.K. Chesterton was standing on a street corner in London when he was approached by a newspaper reporter. Chesterton was well-known in London and had recently become a Christian. The reporter wanted to have some fun with him and so he asked:

"Sir, I understand that you recently became a Christian. May I ask you one question?"

"Certainly," replied Chesterton.

"If the risen Christ suddenly appeared at this very moment and stood behind you, what would you do?"

Chesterton looked the reporter squarely in the eye and said, "He is."

(Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*, p. 99)

Chesterton "got it." He believed that the risen Christ was literally there with him. Not physically present, but literally present through the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The way I think about it, these things are either true or they're not:

- Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of God
- Jesus now has an experiential knowledge of what we're going through
- Jesus is willing to help us in the midst of the temptations we face.

If these things are true - if Jesus is with us (if this isn't merely positive thinking or make-believe) - shouldn't we actually turn to Him and expect Him to help us suffer well? I'd encourage you to make this your prayer this week in the midst of your temptations:

"Jesus, help me."