

One with God and One of us

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 0 0] Now we come to our Bible reading, which is in the letter to the Hebrews. Last week we began a study in this great letter, looking at the first part of it, where the author emphasizes the unapproachable wonder and marvel of the Son of God, his greatness and his glory.

Not least in relation to the world of angels and spirits. He is above them all. And now we're going to read chapter 2, verses 5 to 18. You can find that on page 1001.

Hebrews chapter 2, and we'll read from verse 5. Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.

It has been testified somewhere, What is man that you are mindful of him, or the Son of Man that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels.

You have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. Now, in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.

[1 : 1 2] At present we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, but we see him who for a little was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will tell of your name to my brothers.

In the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise, and again I will put my trust in him. And again, behold, I and the children God has given me.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

[2 : 3 2] For surely it is not angels that he helps, but the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he has to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at that reading on page 1001 and 1002.

And we'll have a moment of prayer together. God, our Father, we praise you for those great words spoken for the last days, those days in which we live, those days in which we are indeed bowed down beneath a weight of sin by Satan sorely pressed.

And we pray that this evening, these words spoken long ago to a group of Christians, we don't know where they live, we don't know very much about them, and yet words which come to us with power and relevance.

[4 : 0 0] And we ask indeed that you will lead beyond my human words and help me faithfully to expound the written word, and so lead us to the living word, Christ Jesus himself.

Amen. It was a still autumn of mourning in October 1881, when our funeral procession was making its way through the streets of London to Westminster Abbey.

And usually the streets were lined with hundreds of working people. Those were the days, of course, of hierarchy and social divisions, and you could tell what class of society, what job they did by the way they dressed.

This was the funeral of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the great Lord Shaftesbury, who had spent so much of his life helping to improve the lot of the poor and the disadvantaged, getting rid of dreadful scandals, like sending little boys up chimneys to clean them, sending children down mines, trying to alleviate the lot of these poor working people, whom most aristocrats of Lord Shaftesbury's class simply ignored or exploited.

As the funeral procession made its way to the Abbey, a working man doffed his bonnet, and with tears streaming down his face, spoke for them all when he said, He was one of us.

[5 : 4 1] The great Lord Shaftesbury, He was one of us. Now the author to Hebrews, in a far deeper way, is saying that. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word from the Father, the brightness of God's glory, the exact image of his person, is not only one with God, but became one of us, and is one of us still.

You see, it's so important that our Savior is both God and human. I need a Savior who's not me, because I can't save myself.

I need a Savior who is God. But I also need a Savior who is me, not me personally, of course, but a human Savior, and only in Jesus Christ, one with God, and one of us, is that Savior to be found.

Having established, beyond any doubt, the equality of Jesus Christ, the Lord, with God himself. Now he is going on to talk about his solidarity with us.

That's the great theme of these verses. And it's going to continue throughout the letter. Once again, notice his use of the Scriptures. It's not just proof texts.

[6 : 5 6] The devil is very good at proof texts. You read the story of the temptation in the wilderness, in Matthew chapter 4, for example, or is it 3? I can never get my numbers right. Matthew chapter 4, I think.

These stories of temptation, the devil is great at throwing out quotations. But this is the whole Bible is speaking, says our author, about the Savior.

It's all there in the Scriptures. Which is why it's so important for us to know and love our Old Testaments. We need to know our Old Testament to appreciate who the Lord Jesus Christ is.

and as we read it, we hear the Master's voice and we see the Master's face. Now, there are two particular threats to the carrying out of God's purpose, both of which are mentioned here.

One is the human threat, human beings, ourselves, and the second is the devil. These are going to be our two major points this evening. This passage deals, first of all, the destiny of humanity, essentially verses 5, essentially verses 5 to 13, and then the defeat of the devil in verses 14 to 18.

[8 : 1 3] So these are two big themes for this evening. The destiny of humanity. How is humanity going to make it, given what humanity is like? Now, it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come.

Now, remember this phrase, the world to come, doesn't just mean the world that doesn't exist, but one day in the far future will be revealed. It has already come in the coming of the Messiah.

Indeed, it's almost equivalent to the last days, the world to come of which we are speaking. It's already active, but only will come fully in the future.

God's blessings are already happening. God's kingdom is already growing. God's purpose is already being fulfilled, but one day it will be fulfilled completely.

Now, I said last week, this is a community where I'm probably rather disillusioned. A third generation group of Christians who had lost the fire of their early founders, which is why the author reminds them to remember what your leaders who spoke the word of God to you said.

[9 : 21] And this is tremendous news for them, that the kingdom is already working. But also, since it hasn't already come, it's a warning against complacency.

We mustn't say of the church on earth what is only true of the church in the world to come. So, what's our author saying then? The destiny of humanity is greater than the destiny of angels.

I think that's important. It was not to angels that God subjected the world to come. God's original purpose will be fulfilled. And that's why he quotes Psalm 8 in verses 6 to 8, which is a kind of commentary really on the creation story in Genesis.

Notice the rather vague, it has been testified somewhere. I'm sure our author knew perfectly well that it was Psalm 8. But this is characteristic of the way he talks about scripture.

The point is, it is the word of God. The human instrument is less important. Not the human instrument doesn't matter, but the important thing is, these are the words of God.

[10 : 30] And he's also speaking to a group who know the scriptures well. You'd say, as most of you, I've no doubt said, oh, that's Psalm 8. I'm not going to go around and ask you how many of you realized it was Psalm 8.

But, anyway, it has been testified somewhere. And this is a passage about humanity before God. Now, Edward touched on some of these things this morning, and I want to say a bit more about this.

It's vitally important that we have a true biblical view of humanity. Humanity as coming from the hand of God to be stewards of the earth.

Coming without sin, coming without flaw, and put in the earth to subdue it. It's also important to realize that that purpose has never been set aside.

Humanity, redeemed humanity will rule over the new earth. And when we think about ruling over the new earth, forget all about marble thrones and wearing negligees and gold crowns.

[11 : 34] Ruling is taking up the task that Adam failed in, to be stewards of the new earth. And that is only fulfilled in Jesus. man is fallen, humanity have fallen, humanity are under the curse, but humanity have a destiny.

And when we realize that, we'll avoid two errors. One error is to make human beings almost to be divine. Now this is an idea that's been growing for many centuries, particularly after the so-called enlightenment in the 18th century and so on, the scientific advances.

We're discovering more and more and more about the universe. We can control more and more of the material world around us. Therefore, there's no need for God. There's glory to man in the highest, said the poet Swinburne in the 19th century, for man is the measure of all things.

And parallel to that, of course, there was growing with the views of Darwin, that term of gradual evolution of species. Now that translated itself into a kind of social view as well, what's sometimes called social Darwinism.

Just as animals evolved from lower to higher species, so humanity is evolving away from its brutishness, from its crudity, from its violence, and becoming better and better and better.

[13 : 02] And that was a view that was widely held in the late 19th century in the West. Well, a hundred years ago, when the guns started to boom on the Western Front, you'd have thought that view would perish.

Two of some of the most civilized nations in the world went to one of the most savage wars of history. Man had not come of age. The same violence, the same sinfulness, the same fallenness, the same curse.

But it's amazing, some people still believe that. And some people still believe it, even after events like the events in Paris last week, even after seeing the evil in the human heart and the evil in our own hearts.

Now, remember, the Bible's view is not negative about progress. It's not negative about technology and scientific advance and the arts and so on.

And I think we need to be all very grateful. I'm extremely grateful for the advances in medicine and hygiene in recent times. But the trouble is, the idea developed.

[14 : 10] So what people need is education, not transformation. Now, I've been in education all my life. I'm utterly committed to education. But it's not education that changes people's hearts.

It's not education that changes people's lives and outlook. It is transformation. It is passing from death to life. So we'll avoid that error. The Bible does not say people are a little lower than the angels.

The word there is Elohim, the word for God. In the hierarchy of things, humanity is created. Interesting, the Genesis account, three times created, created, created.

Word used sparingly in the chapter up till then. And just as God is holy, holy, holy, humanity is created, created, created. It will also save us from a second error of demonizing humanity.

The philosopher Nietzsche says earth has a skin and that skin has diseases. And one of these diseases is called humanity. Now that is a very cynical view, a view which leads to despair, a view which leads to agnosticism, and a view which leads to feeling there is no prospect for humanity at all.

[15 : 29] So we must avoid both these views. Humanity made as God's stewards, but will only fulfill this in Christ. What our author is saying is without Christ there is no future for humanity.

Outside Christ there is no future at all. Notice how he slightly paraphrased, you have made him for a little while lower than the angels.

He's beginning now to talk not just about human beings, not just about you and I, but about the proper man as Luther calls him, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true human under whose feet everything will be under subjection, and under him we shall carry out the original mandate.

So, only fulfilled in him. But the second thing is this seems mocked by actual experience, and once again we looked at a bit this morning, that's the point of verse 8, at present we do not yet see everything in subjection under him.

You see, when you think of all humanity's achievements, some of which I've talked about, and then you think of the awful violence, you think of how we cannot conquer death, or we can maybe delay death with modern medicine more than we might have done in other generations, we still don't know the answer to the big why questions.

[16 : 56] We know much more about the how, and that's the key to it, is that it is the proper man who is going to do this. Verse 9, we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, Jesus crowned with glory and honor.

Now that's said about humanity in Psalm 8, you have crowned him with glory and with honor, and that uniquely is fulfilled in Jesus. See, in the later chapter, in chapter 11, he's going to talk about the city which is to come.

Once again, of course, that's like the world which is to come. The city already exists. When Abraham struck out into the unknown to look for the city who was builder and architect was God, the city was already there.

It wasn't just going to be created sometime in the far distant future, but it's not going to be built by humanity's efforts. There's not a lot of sentimental drivel written in the 19th century about a lot of hymns about seizing the whole of life and building the city there.

The idea that we will build the city by our efforts. Revelation makes it very clear that that city comes down out of heaven from God. We're not going to build it on earth.

[18 : 15] Sin and evil continue apparently irresistible, and for the first time in the letter, the author uses the human name Jesus, focusing on his humanity and his true vocation.

So, as we look at the destiny of humanity, we're saved both from conceit and despair. We see it's only going to be fulfilled by Jesus, and we see, thirdly, as the last Adam, he is going to defeat death.

Oh, loving wisdom of our God, when all was sin and shame, a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came. And verse nine, he tasted death.

This word taste is a very powerful word. The full experience of death was his. He tasted death. This grim lord who haunts the whole of human life.

It's interesting, when Paul talks about sin and death in Romans 5, he personifies them, essentially. Sin and death are these two great actors which tread onto the human stage and basically are the end of all our hopes, all our joys in this world.

[19 : 35] God. So, this Jesus comes at the right time as the founder, as the champion who guarantees that salvation will be completed.

It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. He was perfect, of course, but it means here, taking on himself the full experience of humanity.

He was a real human being. Let's not teach our children to sing, little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes. That is sentimental twaddle. And if we teach them that, it's not surprising they'll grow up and banish little Lord Jesus to the nursery, along with Santa Claus.

He is truly human. He entered humanity. He tasted death. It's a great mystery, but it's the very heart of the gospel. This is underlined by three other Old Testament quotations in verses 12, 13.

Two of them come from the Psalms. The first is from Psalm 22. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise. That's the psalm that begins, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[20 : 52] Psalm that points to the cross, and yet which ends in the glory of the resurrection, which is the death, and the resurrection, which accomplishes salvation. The second, Psalm 18, verse 2, David's great song of thanksgiving, the rescue from his enemies.

And the third quotation, I and the children God has given me, is from Isaiah. Part of that cluster of passages about Emmanuel, God with us, about the child who is born, and the son who is given.

So, all through these scriptures, you see what our author is doing, he's not just simply, he's not just simply opening a kind of promise box and taking out a few verses with a tweezer, he's saying if you read the scriptures, you will find this pattern here, this pattern of the one who tasted death for his brothers, the one who rescued us from our enemies, and the one who came to us as Emmanuel.

So, in Jesus Christ, and in him alone, is the destiny of humanity to be fulfilled. But then, secondly, the second main point, verses 14 to 18, the defeat of the devil, because the present state of humanity is not simply due to our own sinfulness, not simply due to the curse and fallenness.

By the way, it's useful to distinguish these things. Fallenness is the curse over creation, much of which is not directly our fault. Into that comes illness, including depression and so on, which happens to Christians as well as the people who are not Christian.

[22 : 31] Illnesses which come not because we have ruined our body with drink and drugs, but simply come as part of our fallenness. A baby born with the AIDS virus in Uganda is clearly not responsible for that, but because she is born into a fallen world.

Sin is our own deliberate taking our own way. But in addition to fallenness and sin, there is evil. There is the devil himself, the grim lord who has to be dealt with, or the purposes of God cannot triumph.

That's what he turns to here. Verse 14, since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, children picked up from Isaiah, the people of God, the children whom God has adopted into his family, he himself took part of the same things, that through death he might destroy him, that has the power of death.

So the son of God, the son of man, here needs to confront the devil as flesh and blood. Oh, wisest love, that flesh and blood which did in Adam fail, should strive afresh against our foe, should strive and should prevail.

As Luther says in that hymn, I refer to a word will quickly slay him. But on the other hand, it needed the son of God to take a body, to become human, to share in our life and to taste death for us.

[24 : 02] He had to become human to defeat humanity's enemy. But an interesting question, how powerful is the devil? I think it's very important, we don't misunderstand the last part of verse 14.

Destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil. Now, strictly speaking, the devil does not have the power of death.

Death remains in the control of God and of God alone. He is the Lord of life and of death. The stories of Enoch and Elijah show us that even in the fallen world, death only operates under God's permission.

That's only twice, twice is enough to show that God is in total control. But the trouble is because we in Adam and Eve, because we succumb to the devil's temptations, we put ourselves in the devil's domain, which is a domain of slavery, a domain of fear, a domain which is subject to death and to the fear of death, the lifelong slavery that's talked about here.

Death is a great enemy. Paul says this, doesn't he, 1 Corinthians 15, the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

[25 : 27] It's the grim frontier post against which all our hopes, all our ambitions, this world run up against. That doesn't mean we need to be morbid and be thinking every moment of every day about death, but the psalmist does tell us to number our days when we apply our hearts to wisdom.

Believe me, as you get older, you tend to think about it more than when you're younger. There is no way we can avoid death, but in Christ Jesus, he has destroyed the one who has the power.

death. Anyway, the deeper magic from beyond the dawn of time, death itself working backwards.

The son of man takes human flesh and defeats our enemy. He destroys him who has the power of death. So while death is still an enemy, while it is still frightening, while it is still dark, we know that beyond it, there is the glory of resurrection.

And then in verses 7 to 18, Christ is fully able to help and understand us. Now we're coming to a theme that's going to be very, very prominent through the rest of the letter, that he is a merciful and faithful high priest.

[26 : 51] Notice both these words, he is both merciful and faithful. In other words, he is merciful when we go to him bowed down beneath a load of sin and by Satan sorely pressed.

We can be sure that in his grace he will listen to us. He is also faithful. He doesn't just brush away our sins and pretend they didn't happen. So he neither glosses our faults nor makes us despair.

To make propitiation, this word that takes us into the worship of ancient Israel, on the Ark of the Covenant, there was the mercy seat, the atonement cover, and on the great day of atonement, God forgives the sins of the people.

His anger turns away. And he is able, he himself suffered when tempted. And you are battling with temptation.

Remember this, Jesus, the Son of God, battled with temptation. That's what this passage says. Of course, you might say, well, of course, it was different for him.

[28 : 06] He had an advantage. He was God as well as man. That's what I like saying, if you fall into a river and are struggling, and a man on the shore throws out a rope, you might say, well, I'm not going to take the rope, because he's got an unfair advantage.

He's standing on the shore. It's because he is standing on the shore he can help. It's because this merciful and faithful high priest, tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.

It's because of this, he can help us. We're not going to go to him, and we, you know, there are some people you go to and you made a mess of things, and you really wish you'd never opened your mouth, because you get such a disapproving, tut-tutting thing.

You feel these guys have been sanctified by vinegar. You're never going to get that at the mercy seat. The one who sits on the mercy seat is the one who understands our temptations, and yet the one who is determined not to leave us wallowing in the mud of those temptations, but to bring us out of them.

So we can trust God to fulfill his purposes. The destiny of humanity is secure, God to deliver, because Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God, has defeated death and the devil.

[29 : 31] And our daily lives we can trust, because we have an advocate with the Father. We have a great high priest who has gone into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God.

So let us come with confidence to the throne of grace. Amen. Let's pray. When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt, within upward I look and see him there, who made an end to all my sin.

Oh, Father, we are sinners. Not only do we sin, but we often enjoy sinning. We are weak, and we would never make it on our own.

And so we come, as we are about to meet around your table now, we come once again to the mercy seat, asking for your forgiveness and for grace to help in time of need.

Amen. Amen.