

Image restored in Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Let me welcome you all to this Lunchtime Bible Talk. If you've not been here before, a particular welcome. And there are still some sandwiches afterwards if you haven't had lunch beforehand.

Now, this is the last of our talks on the subject we've been looking at, what the Bible says about being human. We've already looked at the creation of humanity, created for God and created for each other.

We looked at how the plan went or seemed to go badly wrong in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Then we saw last week from Psalm 8 how even though people had gone wrong, God still cares, God still loves, God's purpose remains.

Our final talk is going to be in the letter to the Hebrews. And we're reading on page 1001 in the Bibles. This passage we're going to read actually picks up on Psalm 8 which we looked at last week.

And, of course, behind that to the Genesis story as well. The author, the unknown author to Hebrews, has been establishing the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 1 7] And he's begun by establishing his supremacy over angels. And that goes on really until chapter 2, verse 4. And we're going to start reading at chapter 2, verse 5 and go on to verse 18.

So, Hebrews 2, verse 5. Remember, he's been talking about angels, which explains verse 5. For 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 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.

At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels.

[2 : 2 6] 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 source. 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, Jesus himself 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.

For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he had 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.

[3 : 48] For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Amen. That is the word of the Lord.

May he bless it to our hearts. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the great story of salvation, the story of how you made this universe, you made this world in which we live, and chose it in which you could reveal your purposes of love.

You made us in your own image, and even when we rebelled, even when that image was spoiled, you still care for us, and you sent your Son, the true image of yourself, so that in him the image might be restored.

And so, encourage us, and help us, and challenge us as we read these words together today. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

On an autumn day in 1885, I think it was the 8th of October, a very distinguished funeral procession was making its way through the streets of London.

[5 : 05] The streets were absolutely lined with people, including working people who had been allowed a day off to witness the funeral, because this was the funeral of the great Lord Shaftesbury, who had spent his life helping the lot of ordinary people, getting rid of atrocities like sending little boys up chimneys, and improving conditions in the mines and in the slums.

The poor man's earl, he was called. And just as the procession paused at a corner, a man raised his cap and spoke for all of them and said this, He was one of us.

He was one of us. The great earl, this ordinary working man felt, had identified with them and had entered into their life.

Now, in a much deeper sense, Jesus Christ, the Lord, the glory of the Father, whom the author has been speaking about, is one of us, and is one of us still.

You see, we need a Savior who's not us, because we can't save ourselves. We need a Savior who is one with God. But we also need a Savior who is us, someone who is also human, who has taken part in our experiences, who has lived in a northerly human home and experienced ordinary human life.

[6 : 36] And that's what the emphasis of this passage is. And it's telling us that only in Christ, only in Jesus Christ, the image of God, can our image be restored?

And you'll notice the author quotes extensively from the Bible, particularly from the psalm that we read last week, but all sorts of other places as well, from the Psalms, from Isaiah, and so on.

What he's really saying is, if you read your Bibles properly, if you read particularly your Old Testaments properly, you'll find it's all there. where you'll find that it all points to Jesus Christ, who was one with God and became one of us.

Now, the problem, of course, is, as you know, there is the ideal, there is the goal, there is the true likeness of Christ.

But it doesn't look very like that at the moment, does it? It doesn't look very like it, either when we look inside our own hearts or look around at the world. And the author here is concentrating on two things which at the moment prevent the full image of Christ being realized in his people, and saying that when Christ returns, these things will be fully dealt with.

[8 : 01] There are two problems. One is ourselves. We are the problem. Somebody once wrote long ago to the Times, what is the problem with the world?

And Oscar Wilde replied, dear sir, I am. And in many ways that is true, is it not? We are the problem. Humanity is the problem. But secondly, there is the devil, the devil who tried to destroy the plan, who tried to crush the life of God.

And both of these are dealt with in this chapter. So let's look at both of these in turn. First of all, there's the destiny of human beings in verses 5 to 13.

Basically, our author is saying, he's already said that the gospel, the work of Christ is already active and will come fully in the future.

God's blessings are happening already, but they're only going to be fully realized in the future. Because they're happening already, we should not get disillusioned.

[9 : 12] But because they haven't fully happened, that prevents us from being complacent. God's original purpose will be fulfilled, and that's the point of quoting from Psalm 8, verse 6 to 8, quotes from Psalm 8, a kind of commentary on the creation story.

It seems rather vague. It has been testified somewhere. Now, I don't imagine for a moment the author of Hebrews did not know that this was Psalm 8.

But the whole point is, he said at the beginning that God has spoken in his son, and the human author, therefore, becomes less important.

It's not. Not even somebody as great as David. It's that God has spoken. And also, the other thing is, he assumed his readers would know their Bibles. One of the reasons we find books like Hebrews and Revelation so difficult is not just because they are difficult, but because they don't know our Old Testament well enough.

We know our Old Testament's better. So much of these difficult books would actually not be made easy, but would come more alive. He's speaking to a group who know the Scriptures well.

[10 : 27] And he wants them to have a truly biblical idea of humanity. Now, let me say for the final time that he's warning against two dangers.

One is danger of making out humanity to be God. That's why he says, lower than the angels. Indeed, in the Hebrew passage, it could be translated lower than God.

We are not gods. We are not divine. And the problem is that as humanity becomes more civilized, more sophisticated, as we learn more and more, as we are able to do more and more things, then we tend to imagine that we are a kind of, we are almost like gods, don't we?

Now, I'm enormously grateful for the advances of the last century or so, not least in medicine and hygiene. I mean, these are great advances. But the trouble is that these are derived from the life of God, not from ourselves.

And when we've all seen and shuddered, I'm sure, these horrific pictures of starving children in Kenya and Somalia and Sudan and Ethiopia, why is that happening in the ultra-civilized 21st century?

[11 : 52] Because humanity is fallen. Because humanity is selfish. Because humanity does not care enough. So humans are not gods.

But secondly, humans are not demons either. Humans are not evil in themselves.

Some humans sell themselves to evil. Humans are fallen. Humans are sinful. And there are some individuals, indeed, sometimes whole communities, who sell themselves to evil.

Well known, for example, that Hitler spent a great deal of his time with black magicians and so on. And this added fuel to his neuroses and hatreds.

No, the point is, humanity is created by God to be stewards of the earth. And this will be fulfilled only in Christ. Because it's he who fulfills Psalm 8 perfectly.

[12 : 55] As I say, it seems mocked by actual experience. Verse 8 again. At present, we do not see everything in subjection to him. Now, that is certainly true.

No one can claim for a moment that everything is subject to him. Because sin and evil and fallenness continue partly irresistible.

And you'll notice, for the first time in the letter, it uses his human name, Jesus, showing that he totally identified with us. He became human. But also, as the last add-on, he defeated death.

Basically, death, he might destroy the one who had the power of death. Verse 14. And in verse 9, notice it says that he tasted death for everyone.

Now, the word taste, of course, suggests a total experience, doesn't it? It doesn't just say he died. It says he tasted death, which shows the awful nature of the experience.

[14 : 06] And it was fitting, says verse 10. In other words, wholly consistent with God's character and purposes. Now, you see how the story develops. God creates humanity.

God creates humanity in his image to rule the earth, to be lords and stewards of this world that he has made. We fail, but the purpose remains and will be fulfilled as Christ reigns, because he's at the very heart of creation.

And he is the one who is not only the Lord of creation, but he is the creator. He is the founder, the champion, and the one who guarantees that others will come with him.

Verse 10 again, the founder of their salvation. Now, when it says made perfect, that does not mean that he was not perfect. That does not mean that he was sinful.

What it's suggesting is made complete. He completely entered human experiences. Now, let's not be pedantic about that. He obviously did not enter every single human experience that's possible.

[15 : 18] What it means is that in his earthly life, he understood what it was to be a human. He accepted the limitations of being human.

There's silly stories that you get about the boy Jesus and his friends playing with clay pigeons, and Jesus breathed into the clay pigeons, and they become real pigeons and fly away.

What a spoil sport that makes, and doesn't it, apart from anything else. The point is, Jesus Christ, the Lord, grew up as a human being. He learned things.

Even though, as God, he knows everything from eternity to eternity. He experienced it, and we get a tiny glimpse of this at the end of the second chapter of Luke, when we read that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man.

An exact quote from the story of young Samuel centuries before, increasing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man. And we have another three quotations, verse 10, I will tell of your name to my brothers in the midst of the congregation.

[16 : 31] That's from Psalm 22, the psalm which begins, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And talks about the death which accomplishes salvation. And then Psalm 18, in verse 13, I will put my trust in him, David's great song of triumph and thanksgiving, of rescue.

And then, Behold, I and the children God has given me, comes from Isaiah 8, the section that talks about the child Emmanuel, God with us, and the one who is the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

So, how is humanity going to be rescued? It's only going to be rescued by the one, one with God who became one of us without ceasing to be God.

And that's the great paradox. It's a mystery. We can't understand it. How without ceasing to be God, he became completely human and remained, remember, Christ in glory is still human.

That is the point. Behold, his hands and side, those wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified. He's in heaven.

[17 : 44] He is still Jesus Christ, the man, as well as Jesus Christ, who is God. So, that's the first thing then. Humanity on its own can't make it.

But humanity in Christ can and will certainly make it. But the next part of the chapter, verses 14 to 18, talk about the defeat of the devil.

Now, the present state of humanity is not simply due to our own sin and weakness, although there's plenty of that around. It is due to an outside enemy.

The devil himself, we read about that a few weeks ago in Genesis 3, the evil power which came into the infant world and tried to destroy everything.

And unless he is dealt with, the purposes of God cannot triumph. That's the point. So, first of all then, the Son of Man needs to confront the devil, not just as God, but as in flesh and blood.

[18 : 49] Verse 14, since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of these things. The second Adam, wisest love that flesh and blood which did in Adam fail should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail.

We sang that a few weeks ago. The proper man, as Luther calls him in his great hymn. And the children, what that follows on from the Isaiah quotation, that's God's people, the humans, who, and he becomes human to defeat humanity's enemy.

But another question arise, how powerful is the devil? What kind of power does he actually have? Now notice it says, the one who has the power of death.

Does that mean the devil has, the devil has control over death? death. Now it cannot mean that because death remains in the control of God.

He is the one who brings into the world. He is the one who decides how long we're in the world and when we leave it. And it's interesting, two occasions, Enoch in Genesis 5 and Elijah in 2 Kings 2 go to heaven without dying.

[20 : 12] And that shows us that even in the fallen world, death only operates under God's permission. That's a very important thing to realize. But, we are threatened all our lives by death.

Death is a terrible thing and death is one of the ways in which the devil uses to terrify us. Angels do not suffer from the fear of death.

Human beings do. And the devil, while not being able to cause death, is certainly able to haunt us, trouble us, and make us fear death.

And, of course, we do fear death. Even Christians fear death. It's not, we mustn't pretend and be super spiritual and say we are not afraid of death because we are.

it's the ultimate, it's the ultimate frontier post, isn't it? Draws a line across all our hopes and fears.

[21 : 16] And it is something that even after the resurrection we fear. I think it would be true to say when a loved one dies, what we're longing for at that moment, moment of loss, is not the assurance that we'll meet them again, which we probably do believe.

We want them back, don't we? We want them back in this life with us. Death is dreadful. Death is an ogre. Death is, death in no way can be watered down or pretended that it doesn't exist.

That's why Paul says the last enemy will be destroyed is death. death. Not, not just that nobody will die, but nobody will be afraid of death because there'll be no possibility of dying.

So, in this, in the, in the future, Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ will trample death under his feet.

But, as the, as the chapter ends, he's not just talking about the future, he's talking about the present. You say, well, that's very well, yes, fine. There's often a criticism of the gospel, it's always jam yesterday and jam tomorrow, but never jam today.

[22 : 38] Is there any jam today? Well, there is. Look at verse 17. He had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest.

he is able to understand our, our falling, our sinfulness, and the things that make us despair. He's able to understand our fear of death because he's gone through death and, and conquered it.

And, the author here introduces the picture which should be a dominant one the rest of the letter. He is the great high priest, the one who, when our sins threaten to overcome us, the one who, when the devil tests us beyond we imagine endurance, he is the one who represents us to God.

And this word propitiation here, this means he stands between us and God's anger. Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied and all my sins on him were laid.

That's the, that's, that's what Hebrews is saying. Now, you may well, some people have said, well, he's got an advantage, doesn't he? He's God as well as man. That's rather like if you're, if you're drowning in the river and somebody on the shore throws you out a rope.

[24 : 03] You say, oh no, I'm not going to take the rope. You've got an advantage. You're on land. It's because he's on land that he can help. And it's because Jesus Christ has not only walked with us, but he has overcome and is seated at the right hand of God that he can help.

And he can, because he is, verse 16, he himself has suffered when tempted. He is able to help those who are tempted. What are you tempted to?

Now, this is a rhetorical question. Please don't answer because I'm not going to tell you either. But what are you tempted to? Temptation is not sin because Jesus Christ, the Lord himself, suffered temptation.

And because of that, when we are battling and struggling with the world, the flesh, and the devil, he is alongside to help us. Because of that, one day, we will be like him.

One day, we will see him as he is. And today, from day to day, when we're not at all like him, and whom we do sin, we have a great high priest who has gone into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God.

[25 : 19] Therefore, let us come with confidence to the throne of grace. Amen. Let's pray. And God, our Father, as we come to you conscious of our sinfulness, our fallenness, our weakness, conscious of the ceaseless temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, we thank you for the one, one with you, who became one of us.

We pray that we will increasingly depend on him, increasingly look to him, and increasingly come with confidence to the throne of grace. And we ask this in his name.

Amen. Amen.