

Sermon 5: Hebrews 2:5-9: Seeing Jesus For Who He Is

OUTLINE

The Last Adam
The reigning King
The suffering Savior

INTRODUCTION

Suffering, with all of its raw nerve endings is one of the most common things that can cause a believer to doubt spiritual truths. Not only because the felt world 'feels' more real because we are in pain and that takes all of our attention. No, but also because certain truths like, I am God's child, He loves me, He has a wonderful plan for my life, He is wisely choosing my path for me, sin has been defeated, the devil lost at the cross, Christ is the ruler over all things right now all seem to be contradicted by the world of pain, and doubt, and defeat, and death that I am living in right now. The Bible teaches us that God uses these trials as refining fires to purify our faith, to teach us to walk more by faith than by sight. 1 Peter 1:6-7, 'In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' It is as we battle with our doubts, as we preach truth to our own hearts, as we remember God's faithfulness to His promises, as we look to the hope we have secured for us by Christ's resurrection. It is as we train ourselves to live by God's truth that our faith is strengthened.

Picture the struggle of these believers being written to. Jewish Christians who have believed that Jesus is King, that He is their conquering Messiah. When we are under pressure we tend to scrutinize various aspects of our faith more closely. You can almost hear them speaking to themselves, 'But if Jesus is the Messiah, why did He have to die?'; 'But if Jesus is the long awaited one who will deliver His people, where is He, why isn't He here, why is there still so much evil in the world, why do we His people seem to suffer the worst?' You can imagine the doubts. Add to that the apparent appeal of Judaism, the OT is God's word after all, the Jews have all sorts of promises from God after all, the law was given by angels after all. When we are struggling we can go back to what we know, what is familiar.

The book of Hebrews is written to remind us of who Christ is, what He has done, where He is and what He is doing right now. Chapter 1 was one of the great chapters of the Bible that puts on display the glory of Christ as greater than angels. His divine and human natures, His humiliation and exaltation; He is work in Creation and Salvation overwhelmed any comparison. Last week we heard the first exhortation to pay heed to what has been spoken by the Son, and we now go on to look at the next section which continues to compare the angels with the Son. V9 is key, 'But we see him who for a little while 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.' Things don't look or feel great right now, the claims that He is ruling all things don't seem to square with experience, but here is what we can see. And these will be our three points, we see Jesus as the Last Adam, 'made lower than the angels';

as the reigning King 'crowned with glory and honour'; and as the Suffering Saviour who by the grace of God tasted death for us.

The last Adam

V5, 'For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.' The author has one basic point, the Son is more superior to angels because it was not to angels that God intended to subject the world to come. It is the Son who has been put over the work of God. Now what is this world to come? V5 indicates that Jesus has already been put over it, in other words, the enthroning of Christ at God's right hand is the accomplishment of this. When Jesus said all authority has been given to Him He is indicating that what we thought was only a future reign has already begun. We call this the kingdom of God inaugurated but not consummated, the already but the not yet. The author gives three arguments to show this. Firstly, he goes to the OT to show that God intended a man, Adam to rule over His creation, and Christ has succeeded where Adam failed; secondly, that Christ has come into His kingdom, but the nature of His kingdom is one of inauguration not consummation; and thirdly, it was because of His obedience in suffering in order to save us from sin that He has been exalted to this position. To prove his first point he quotes psalm 8.

V6-8a, '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." Why Psalm 8? Firstly, Jesus Himself applies psalm 8 to Himself. You will remember when He triumphantly entered Jerusalem before He was crucified the crowds were shouting out Hosanna to the Son of David. The Pharisees did not like this and wanted Jesus to stop them. He quoted Psalm 8:2, Matt. 21:16, 'and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?" Jesus said, I will not stop them from praising me. I know many modern scholars want to say that Jesus nowhere said He is God. This is ridiculous. Firstly, because it predecides how He is allowed to say, and secondly because it refuses to recognize those times He does. Jesus calls Himself by the divine name, I Am. Jesus made Himself equal but distinct from God by referring to Himself as the Son who shared in God's prerogatives. Jesus accepted worship, we saw that with Thomas and here too. Jesus spoke about Himself as David's son and Lord, and much more. It is as if Jesus was shouting out, 2+2=.... Every Jew knew the answer. Jesus said enough to be clear, so much so they wanted to stone Him for making Himself equal with God. But some will say, 'He did not say 4.' The implication of what Jesus said and did are clear and clearly understood by His hearers. Only those who impose their epistemological standards upon the Bible insist that Jesus did not present Himself as God. The author of Hebrews goes to Psalm 8 firstly because Jesus taught us to see that He is in it. Secondly, Adam is a type of Christ and David was reflecting on Adam. Paul says as much in Rom. 5:14, 'Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.' Thirdly, the reference to 'son of man' a title in Daniel that points to a Messiah figure, and the way that Jesus referred to Himself, likely helped see this as a messianic psalm.

How does this psalm talk about Jesus? The original psalm was a psalm of worship to God as David was reflecting on creation and genesis 1-2. It is a tremendous psalm that helps our worship immensely. David is thinking about how creation testifies to the majesty of God. How creation in itself speaks of God

as eternal, powerful, independent, who is able to exist without anything and able to make everything else exist by the word of His power. As he cast his mind over the endless aspects of creation and how each became another argument for the majesty of our Creator. He is suddenly quieted as he comes to consider the creation of man. 'What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him.' How can we who are so small have anything to do with God who is so great. What wonder is it that God would concern Himself with us, seek a relationship with us, care for, give gifts to, intend for His best gifts, us! If it is a marvel that God would condescend to have fellowship with sinless humanity, how much more of a marvel should it be to us that God would concern Himself with, suffer for, and die for sinners. And to care, to love us as His children.

David was reflecting on the creation of Adam in the garden, he alerts us to the fact that Adam, even as a sinless human being was made lower than the angels. At first the psalm seems to simply be describing Adam as sinless, Adam as vice-regent of God over creation. The language of being crowned sounds like Adam as prophet, priest and king; and all things being under his feet sounds like the dominion God gave him over all things. But the author of Hebrews helps us to see that Adam is a type, that it is ultimately pointing beyond Adam to something greater. The author opens up the meaning of 'little' which can mean either little in degree or little in time to mean little in time, 'little while'. With this Christological translation we suddenly see a chronology of Christ's experience confirmed as He was incarnate, 'made for a little while lower than the angels;' being coronated as the Son of David at His resurrection and ascension, 'crowned with glory and honour'; and exalted to the throne of David over all things in heaven and earth, and from this throne will come again to judge. This perspective forces us to go back to Adam and to ask was there an intended chronology there too. Was Adam created lower than the angels, under probation as a part of the CoW? And then was He to obey, and By His obedience enter into God's Sabbath rest, and not only enforce God's reign over the garden but over the whole earth, finally to bring all of creation back to God as a God glorifying culture? Heb 2 and its reading of Psalm 8 helps us to open up what was conflated. It gives us the Christological and covenantal lens to go back and better appreciate what we missed in Adam. Understanding the archtype of Christ helps us to better reflect on the type who was Adam. This perspective helps the original recipients in several ways. Firstly, don't get hung up on the fact that someone human is exalted to suggest a prestigious position, even Adam who was only human, not a God man was intended to have a prominent role. Secondly, a progression from being lower, to then having authority over all things is not a new idea but an idea God forecast through prophetic types, this was His plan from the beginning. Thirdly, His departure from earth to God's right hand is a good and necessary move. Fourthly, it is not permanent but a step towards the final fulfillment of all of God's plans for us.

Let us stop and appreciate this connection between Adam and the Son for a moment. Adam was appointed by God as a covenant head to represent a people. He was put under a law as a probation, a law that He was by virtue of his original righteousness able to keep. God in His kindness appointed that the perfect and perpetual obedience that Adam owed to God simply by virtue of creation would be granted a reward greater than the obedience rendered. The tree of life, and the Sabbath were signs that if Adam worked, obeyed and passed the test he would gain access to the tree of life, and enter into an eschatological rest. He could have obeyed and won this reward for all of his offspring but

instead he sinned and plunged us along with him into death and sin. But David beheld the glory of another Adam, the last Adam. He too was for a time to become lower than the angels, but he was obedient. Not only did He obey the law of God as Adam should have; more than that He also obeyed the law to satisfy payment for our crimes against the law of God. Adam did not have to die for there was no sin, but Christ as a savior of sinners did. He inherited the crown Adam had but failed to confirm and have glorified. And He is now seated over God's creation ruling all.

The reigning King

V8a, '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.' We said earlier that there is a paradox that the Christian faces. Christ is victorious, but evil is still present. Or to put it as it is articulated here. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, having inherited the name above all names, all authority in heaven and on earth is His, but the final judgement is not yet, the final overthrowing of evil is not yet. This is a vital perspective for a suffering people. This verse spells out the pain that we presently feel. Some have wrongly taken this to be proof that Christ is not who He said He is, or that He failed, or that we have believed a lie. No, where the Jews originally expected a Messiah to come and in one act end all enemies and deliver His people God has done something inconceivably greater. All of those terrible enemies that we longed for justice against, God intends to save a people for Himself from His enemies. Just as He had mercy on you He has mercy on a numberless people. What you thought was God neglecting to act we can now see as an intentional withholding. What you thought was God not loving you, you now realize God has left you here, in a battle field to embody the humility of Christ as you serve the unworthy, as you bring the words of life, as you are promoted into a rank where you get to be heralds of the King and invite other rebels to receive amnesty. What looks like sin winning, is sin being used by God for His own purposes one of which is to refine His people.

We do not see it now, but we will see it one day. As surely as Jesus is risen from the dead so surely shall we rise. As surely as death has met its end in Christ's body so death must be swallowed up in victory on the last day. It is amazing, we have already seen signs of our King's coronation. His resurrection is proof. We can see that His reign has begun as He has poured out His Spirit upon all flesh on Pentecost. The message of Christianity has swept through the world, it has been salt and light that has shaped western civilization. Imagine how encouraging it would have been to these Jewish Christians if we could have shown them how the gospel would go out into all the world. That that little harassed people in the first century would become an army of love. If we could show them the millions of Christians that have confessed faith, the many martyrs over the years, the millions that are alive even just in this one moment of time. So yes, we do not see the devil or death overcome, we do not yet see war overcome and the sin in our hearts vanquished forever. But we do see sinners saved, churches planted, Christians pursuing holiness, Christian marriages, children, institutions impacting society. We have so much more than that first generation to be encouraged by. Not everything is in subjection but some things are.

The suffering Saviour

V9, 'But we see him who for a little while 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.' Paul helps the Jewish mindset see that the death of Jesus, which from one perspective can appear to look like Jesus being accursed by God, He did not suffer that curse because He was sinner but for us. Jesus apparent defeat and succumbing to death was not proof of Him being a liar, nor of failing, but was the very obedience He rendered to God on our behalf to save us from sin. Several points can be made. Firstly, this is the first mention of the name Jesus in the letter to the Hebrews. The Son is the main designation so far, and Lord and God. But now that His obedience is in view, as another Adam, now that He is said to die, His human name is added right here. This glorious name means YHWH saves, and it is not merely a promise or a title saying something about God bearing the name as any other human being would bear it, but profoundly true as concerns Himself. He is YHWH come to save us.

Secondly, and we have hinted at it already, Jesus not only had to render the obedience due to God as Adam did, His obedience had the added responsibility of dying to save us. Not only did our Last Adam have to fulfil the original terms of the CoW but also all that was necessary to save a people from sin. We must note that the way in which the gospel is presented here is the way the NT speaks about how Jesus saves sinners. He, as our representative, died, paying our sin debt to satisfy the requirements of God's law, the wages of sin is death, that by His obedience we are saved. We are not saved by our obedience but His, not by us paying for our sins but Him. this act of salvation on God's part we are told is because of God's grace. We are not saved because we are worthy, or because we deserve it, we are sinners who would be rightly condemned if judged. God because of His goodness and mercy to the unworthy took the initiative and bore the expense. What was the expense? Look at that awful statement He tasted death. Don't be confused by the word 'taste' it does not mean a sip but a full participation like 'Taste and see that the LORD is good.' This language of taste reminds us that Christ drank the cup of God's wrath. Is. 51:17, 'Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.' Christ did not only taste the reality of death, but a torment, and not just a natural process as His body faded but a merciless wicked and cruel death; but more than what we will feel if we were murdered slowly, He also bore the mysterious and impenetrable horrors of becoming sin before the Father, of being treated as if He were us, of His holy soul having to endure God's unrelenting undiluted judgement day wrath, hitherto unseen, and will only be seen again on judgement Day when God gives sin its full desserts.

Thirdly, we must not miss how God employs suffering. The crowning came after the suffering. Exaltation came after humiliation. Suffering is not a sign that God is not on the throne and we are not in His plan, suffering is also part of what God employs to fulfil His purposes. One of the major messages of this letter is that the suffering they are going through is not unique, the Son who is God and does not deserve to suffer learnt obedience through suffering; that God is not indifferent to suffering but sympathizes with us in it; that we should view our present suffering even the wicked and unjust treatment related to persecution as discipline; that we should imitate Jesus and be obedient, persevere looking to the joy before us.

Suffering can cloud our judgement but we can see clearly when we see Jesus as He is. He is our last Adam having finished the work God gave Him to do; He is the reigning King who will see God's plan and our salvation through; and He is the suffering Saviour who has done all to secure our final salvation and we can follow in His footsteps. As someone has said. If Christ can call His sufferings for us His glory; we can call our sufferings for Him our glory.