

SERIES: The Absolute Supremacy of Christ in Hebrews

SERMON: **How Human is Jesus?**

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2:5-18

SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black

DATE: November 8, 2009

Listen to this report from the Voice of the Martyrs newsroom:¹

Somalia: Christian Leader Killed

On Sept. 28 an Islamic extremist shot and killed Mariam Hussein, an underground church leader, after discovering six Bibles in her possession.

The day before the shooting, a leader of [an] Islamic extremist group reportedly sent his wife to visit Hussein's home. She pretended she was interested in learning about Christianity. During the visit, Hussein read passages of the Bible and told the woman that she could visit regularly to discuss God's Word.

The following day, the extremist group leader went to Hussein's house with several other men and requested a Bible. When Hussein gave one to him, he revealed that he was looking for "Christians who have defiled the Islamic religion" and ordered her to show him the other Bibles that she owned. When she handed them over, [he] shot her three times, killing her instantly.

In recent weeks, several Christians in Somalia have been killed because of their faith in Christ. The Voice of the Martyrs rejoices in the life of Mariam Hussein. Praise God for her faithfulness. VOM encourages you to pray that those who mourn for her will draw near to Christ for comfort. Pray that God will grant Somali Christians encouragement and strength as they face trials for their Christian witness. Also pray that God will draw persecutors into fellowship with Him.

Why do I read that this morning? Today is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church and we need to remember them in our prayers, but our passage this morning also has much to do with living in the face the persecution. The letter to the Hebrews was addressed to Christians who most likely were living in Rome. They too were being persecuted and the threat of death was real. Christianity was not a recognized religion in the Roman Empire, but Judaism was. In the face of serious persecution the Christians at Rome were being tempted to either abandon their faith or revert back to Judaism. They were discouraged and were maybe doubtful that the persecution they were facing would ever end. Even though they knew Jesus had come to save them from their sin, the world they lived in was still very difficult.

So, in light of their situation, the writer of Hebrews wanted to warn them to not fall away from their faith and to encourage them to persevere. And the best way they could avoid falling away was to look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith (Hebrews 12:2) who had promised to return. In looking to Jesus they would find a model for perseverance and a means of overcoming their temptation to drift away.

¹ www.persecution.com

In the same way, living out our faith in a fallen world is not easy. Many of us are tempted to drift, so we must also look to Jesus. That is what we will do today in Hebrews 2:5-18.

2:5-18 *It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁷You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor ⁸and put everything under his feet." In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. ⁹But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹²He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." ¹³And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." ¹⁴Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

The word of the Lord.

Sermon in a Sentence: *Jesus became one of us so we can become more like him.*

The title of my sermon is, "How human is Jesus?" The answer to the question is, "He is fully human." This morning I'd like to discuss why anything less than the full humanity of Jesus wouldn't be enough.

The full humanity of Jesus complements his full deity

This first point is really more of an introduction than anything; it's an attempt to show the connection between chapter 2 and chapter 1.

2:5 *It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking.*

In 2:1-4 the author took a brief detour from his argument that Jesus was superior to angels and gave a warning to not "*ignore such a great salvation.*" Here in verse 5 the author picks up the original argument concerning the superiority of Jesus over angels.

Let's review a couple things from chapter 1 to help us understand the flow of the author's argument in chapter 2.

Chapter 1 establishes clearly that Jesus is God.

1:3a *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word...*

Chapter 1 speaks of Jesus as the creator of the universe, to prove his deity.

1:2 *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

1:10 *He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

But while it is clear from Chapter 1 that Jesus is the Creator, chapter 2 shows how sin and the fall changed everything in God's creation. Humanity is not experiencing life in the way that it was intended at creation. And so the Creator, Jesus, comes into his creation; he becomes a human being, in order to redeem his creation.

Chapter 1 focuses primarily on the deity of Christ whereas chapter 2 focuses on the humanity of Christ. Both are necessary for God's plan in redemption! But the author anticipates objections from his readers and so he gives many reasons why the full humanity of Jesus is necessary in fully redeeming humanity.

Chapter 1 establishes clearly that Jesus is greater than angels. But if Jesus was human, how could he be greater than angels, since the Scriptures state in Psalm 8 that humanity is lower than angels? Chapter 2 makes it clear that the full humanity of Jesus in no way diminishes the greatness of Jesus; on the contrary, his glory is seen even more clearly because of his humanity.

In chapter 2 the main argument is this:

The full humanity of Jesus is necessary to fully redeem humanity. (5-17)

The author makes his argument in two parts. The first part, in verses 6-10, gives us the *big picture* of redemption from creation to the second coming. The second part, in verses 11-17, gives us the *details* of redemption specific to the incarnation.² Let's look first at the *big picture* in verses 6-10 which is built around a short sermon on Psalm 8.

There is some argument among scholars as to who this Psalm refers to when it says in verse 6, "What is *man* that you are mindful of him, the *son of man* that you care for him?" Is it really man that he is speaking of or is it Jesus? There is no doubt in my mind that in its original context it referred to man; the Psalmist didn't have Jesus in mind at all. However, many people believe that the author of Hebrews is referring to Jesus when he uses the Psalm. I disagree with this conclusion. I think the writer of Hebrews is referring both to man and Jesus when he uses the Psalm.

² The language for this division comes from Carson's sermon "As a Man, He Bypasses the Angels" (April 2002).

The author of Hebrews is showing a human progression as he explains this Psalm in light of the life of Jesus: Human Destiny, Human Failure, and Redemption.

2:6-8a *But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁷You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor ⁸and put everything under his feet."*

The Psalmist speaks here of the first part of this human progression. He stands amazed at the universe God has created and he also stands amazed at humanity's destiny; humanity was given a special role in the created order. Even though God created humans a "little lower than the angels" they were given glory and honor and a critical role in ruling over God's creation (Figure 1). According to verse 8 man's destiny was for "everything [to be] under his feet; ... God left nothing that is not subject to him."

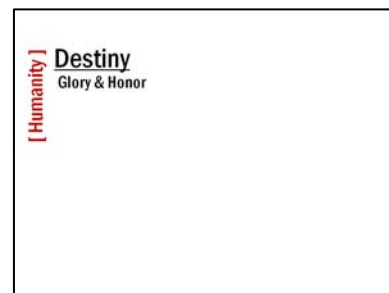


Figure 1

But as the writer to the Hebrews points out, in the second half of verse 8, human destiny was followed by human failure - sin and the fall (Figure 2).

2:8b *In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.*

Humanity was created with a great destiny. But we don't see that destiny being played out at present. Instead of seeing everything subject to man we see frustration in this life, pain, hopelessness, death, and fear of death.

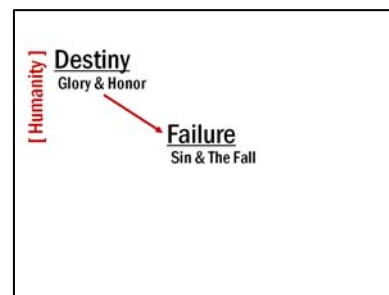


Figure 2

We know that millions die of the AIDS virus every year. We know that in the 20th century 100 million people were killed, apart from war and disease. Almost 200 thousand Christians were martyred last year. There are 143 million orphans in the world. Things aren't the way they are supposed to be; we don't see everything under man's feet, we see everything out of control.

Many of you have lost loved ones recently or have experienced significant health challenges. Marriages are falling apart all around us. People have lost their jobs. Children are abused, and women are abused. People live in bondage to addictions, and people are depressed and discouraged. Things are not the way they are supposed to be. We do not yet see everything under man's feet. But...

"We see Jesus," as verse 9 says; Jesus is the solution to the Human Problem (Figure 3).

In verse 8 the author applies the Psalm to man's progression from destiny to failure, but in verses 9-10 the author applies the Psalm to Jesus to show us that He is the solution to human failure. Watch how Jesus' progression parallels the human progression.

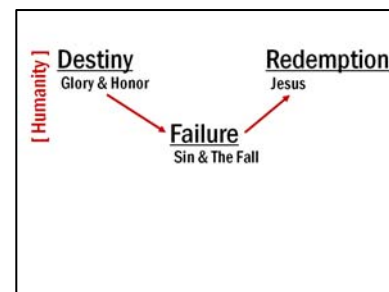


Figure 3

In chapter 1 the author established that Jesus was exalted above the angels (1:4-14) (Figure 4). But look at...

2:9a *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels...*

Jesus was also made lower than the angels. What this means is that Jesus became a man. This verse speaks of the incarnation (Figure 5). Although Jesus was exalted high he humbled himself and became fully human. But his humiliation is not the end of the story.

2:9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

Jesus is now crowned with glory and honor (Figure 6). Jesus has fulfilled man's destiny. He became a man and is now experiencing the Psalm 8 vision of life for man. But he not only lived the life that we were intended to live, he also died to pay the penalty for us failing to live the life that we were intended to live.

2:10 *In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

One of the reasons the text says, "It was fitting" is because Jesus is the Creator, *through whom everything exists*; so it was fitting that he would lead his creation to the goal for which they were created. But another reason the text says, "It was fitting," is because man was created *for Jesus*; the goal for which man was created was to bring glory to God. Man couldn't be in relationship with God or bring glory to God while lost in sin and so God chose to redeem man. Jesus leads "many sons to glory," but he does so for the sake of his own glory.

In order for the Destiny-Failure-Redemption progression to play out fully in our lives Jesus had to go through the Exaltation-Incarnation-Exaltation progression. Without Jesus' full humanity we would still be lost in our sin. But because of Jesus the brokenness of our lives will one day be fully restored to glory and honor, if we put our faith in Him.

The text calls Jesus the *author* of salvation in verse 10. This word has two meanings. On the one hand it means that he is the champion of salvation. Verse 9 tells us that "he is crowned with glory and honor." This word *crowned* refers to a victor's crown – it is the crown one gets for winning a race. Jesus is the champion of the human race; he has run the race before us that we have failed to run. But on the other hand the word *author* means that he is the pioneer of salvation or the trail blazer. In the first half of the human progression (destiny-failure), man blazed that trail when he sinned. Because of that, Jesus followed us in his Incarnation. In his humanity, however, he didn't fail; he blazed the trail for the rest of us to follow. He has made it



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

possible for fallen and sinful humanity to experience *His* victory over sin and death and be restored to the glory and honor that was intended for them in creation, all for the sake of his glory.

This teaching was intended to be an encouragement to the Christians that the writer of Hebrews was addressing. The readers would have known all of this about Jesus, but they needed reminded. For the fact remained that even though Christ had lived a victorious life and was now crowned with glory and honor they were still being persecuted and they were discouraged. Even though Jesus had secured salvation for them they were not experiencing the full effects of his saving work.

Hebrews 1:13 and Hebrews 2:8 both speak of “*everything being put under his feet.*” But we all know that this life is still full of difficulty because of sin and the curse. And in the midst of difficulty there is a temptation to drift away from the faith and try to deal with life on our own. This is called the “already/not yet” tension of the Christian life (Figure 7). Even though we are “already” saved, we are “not yet” experiencing full redemption. And full redemption will not occur until Jesus comes back.



Figure 7

But in the mean time, while we are suffering, we need to do like Jesus did and “*endure for the joy set before us*” (Hebrews 12:2). The temptation during this “not yet” season of life is to look to something other than Jesus. But that is precisely what the author of Hebrews was warning his readers to not do and that’s what we must not do. When we’re discouraged we have to keep our eyes on Jesus. We will be brought to glory just like Jesus if we have put our faith in him, but we need to keep our eyes on him in the mean time. If we’re focused on the discouragement of living in the “not yet” then we will miss out on the joy of living the “already” of the Christian life as we eagerly await his return. Life is hard, but if we look to Jesus we can have joy in the difficulty.

We’ve looked at the *big picture* of redemption from creation to the second coming. We’ve seen that we have to keep a *big picture* perspective if we are to live the Christian life with hope. Let’s now turn to verses 11-17 to look at the *details* of redemption, as they relate specifically to the incarnation. This close up look at the incarnation will further develop the author’s argument that the full humanity of Jesus is necessary to fully redeem humanity.

2:11 *Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.*

What does the word *brothers* mean in this verse? This is simply reiterating what has already been established; Jesus became a man. God took on flesh and blood. And that is very important, but this word *brothers* also has a second meaning. God is holy, but we are sinners who have turned our backs on God and rejected his authority in our lives. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection we have forgiveness of sins and are declared righteous. Verse 11 says we are made holy by the one who himself is holy. Jesus became one of us; and so we are brothers with him in the sense of sharing in his humanity. But through sanctification we are brothers with him in the sense of sharing his holiness as well.

This is truly amazing. This is why angels long to look on the things of redemption. The thought that sinful humanity could be made holy is incredible. The fact that the Holy One says that he is not ashamed to call us brothers is unfathomable.

I don't think it is a stretch to say that at times many teenagers are ashamed of their younger siblings. Sometimes they are simply embarrassed by them. But sometimes they don't even want to be seen with them or associated with them, especially if their reputation with their friends is at stake. Some teenagers don't want their siblings talking to their friends. And in fact some don't want their siblings to talk at all; they are flat out ashamed of them.

But adults can be ashamed of their family as well. Are there certain members in your family that you are ashamed to be identified with? Maybe they're the black sheep of the family. Or maybe they just don't live up to your image and so when they come around you're embarrassed to claim them. We know these attitudes aren't right, but we have to confess that all of us have been guilty at some point of being ashamed to be associated with a family member for one reason or another.³

Wouldn't it be perfectly appropriate for Jesus, the Holy One, to be ashamed of us? But he isn't. The text says, "*He's not ashamed to call [us] brothers.*" Instead of being ashamed of our sinfulness and brokenness, he has chosen to redeem us.

Let's look further at what Jesus' death has accomplished for us.

2:14-15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

One of the main reasons that Jesus' full humanity is necessary to fully redeem humanity is that if he wasn't fully human he couldn't have lived the life that we failed to live. But another reason that the full humanity of Jesus is necessary to fully redeem humanity is that if Jesus wasn't fully human then he couldn't have died. Angels don't die. Humans die. Jesus had to be fully human to die.

And his death accomplished two things for us according to these verses. It destroys the power of death and it frees us from the fear of death. We will all still die (unless Jesus returns first), but we no longer have to fear death. It seems that the people the book of Hebrews was addressing were afraid of persecution that would lead to death. But because of what Jesus did by his death and resurrection Christians have no reason to fear death because they know what is on the other side of death – glory and honor.

I don't think we fear death as Christians in America the way that Somali Christians do or the readers of Hebrews did because we don't have the same threat of death. There are Christians whose lives are at stake, but for most of us our lives are not currently at stake because of Jesus. But what is at stake? Is our reputation at stake, our comfort, our financial advancement,

³ This illustration was adapted from Carson (2002).

something else? What do you fear you may lose if you're sold out for Jesus? I recently heard someone say, "I believe in Jesus, but let's not take it too far." Is fear tempting you to not take your faith too far? In light of the life we have in Jesus we shouldn't fear anything. And because Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers we should not be ashamed to identify ourselves fully with him. We should live out our faith with boldness and perseverance.

2:16-17 *For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

There is a lot that we could unpack in these two verses, but I'm not going to say much here. I have two reasons for my decision. First, verse 16 is for the most part simply summarizing what this whole chapter has been saying all along: Jesus became a man to die for humans, not angels. Second, verse 17 serves as a bridge to many other themes that will be developed as we continue on in Hebrews, especially the theme of High Priest which will be addressed in the coming months as we cover chapters 4-10.

But I will comment on one thing in these two verses. That is the significance of the word *atonement* in verse 17. One of the main doctrines of the Christian faith is the doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement. Jesus is our substitute, but it's important to remember that He is our substitute in two ways: 1) Jesus actually lived the life that we failed to live; and 2) Jesus died to pay the penalty for the life that we failed to live. We often think of the second aspect when we think of atonement; Jesus died for our sins. This is the aspect of substitution that is explicit in verse 17. But we sometimes forget the first aspect of substitution; Jesus actually lived the life that we failed to live. This aspect of substitution is seen in the whole of chapter 2. Both are needed to satisfy the wrath of a holy God; both are needed to make atonement for our sin.

Why do I emphasize this and nothing else in these 2 verses? Because I feel that it summarizes this chapter and therefore this sermon: *Jesus became one of us so that we can become more like him.*

Jesus' death and resurrection save us, but we aren't just saved from death, we are saved to eternal life. We get to participate in the life Jesus lives. And we get to do that both now and forever. This hope sustains us now until he returns or we are called home, which brings me to my last point.

The full humanity of Jesus gives us hope and an example to live by. (18)

Although the author's argument in chapter 2 is complex and the theology of the incarnation is very deep, this chapter was written primarily to encourage believers to live out their faith with boldness and perseverance. Verse 18 makes this plain. This whole argument in verses 5-17 about Jesus' full humanity was designed to encourage the readers to not drift away. Let us not lose sight of that.

2:18 *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

There is a temptation to drift away from our faith in Jesus; a temptation to ignore our great salvation. It becomes easy to drift away when troubles and pressures come in life if we don't have our eyes fixed on Jesus. We have to keep an eternal perspective. Jesus is our means of salvation and our hope for eternity.

But Jesus is also our model of how we are to live now. Jesus persevered in the face of suffering and persecution. Jesus was bold. Jesus focused more on his future in glory than he did on the opposition he faced. Jesus lived his life in complete conformity to the will of his Father. If we are to live life to the fullest we will do the same, but we can only live the life Jesus lived with the help Jesus gives.

Jesus became one of us so we could become more like him. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and run the race with perseverance and boldness. In doing so we will become more like him as we await his return – all for the sake of his glory!

References

- Carson, D. A., Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1992.
- Carson, D. A. "As a Man, He Bypasses the Angels." Sermon, Jesus Is Better: Six Studies in Hebrews, April 23, 2002.
- Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993.
- Guthrie, George H. *Hebrews*. The NIV application commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.
- Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1974.
- Lane, William L. *Hebrews*. 1-8. Word biblical commentary, v. 47A. Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1991.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *Hebrews: A Guide*. London: T & T Clark, 2006.