

The human saviour

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[0 : 00] Good. So if you'd like to open your Bibles at Hebrews chapter 2.! So this chapter starts us off with that verse where he tells us why he wrote the letter, so that you don't drift away. You must pay more careful attention therefore to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. And what's the writer's answer to drifting?

It is first of all to focus our eyes on Jesus and then put our trust in him and in the word of God, the person of Christ. So we don't know who wrote it but we do know why it was written and it comes as a warning and an encouragement to us today also.

And so in the first chapter, the writer establishes that Christ must be a divine saviour, that's the glory of God, is the glory of God expressed in Christ, in Jesus Christ, and is higher than the angels, greater than the angels.

And now in this second chapter, he wants to tell us that it's necessary, why it was necessary for the Son, the eternal Son, to become a man. And this isn't something that sort of theological idea that was dreamed up as a sort of nice idea to sell the gospel.

In fact, as far as the writer to the Hebrews is concerned, it's a matter of logical necessity, that the Lord, that the Messiah must be both the image, the divine image of God, but also a man.

[1 : 38] And as he puts it, made lower than the angels. Quite an outrageous idea, of course, to the Jews, who didn't like it at all when they first met it from Jesus' own words.

But it was necessary, it's absolutely necessary for the gospel. In fact, he's going to show that the gospel doesn't make any sense, if this were not the case. And to make his case, he presents his argument with three pictures of the human Jesus in this section.

Well, actually four, if you count the brief mention of the priesthood. But he's going to expand on the priesthood much more later on in the book. So we only get a brief mention of it here. But he spends more time on these four, these three, sorry, pictures of the human Jesus.

And that's what I'd like to look at. First of all, the true man. Secondly, the pioneer. And thirdly, the faithful apostle. And then, as we've seen, the way he's structured this book, at the end we have another warning based on what has gone before, which also leads us in to what is to follow.

You can see how the warning from chapter 2, it warned us about what had gone before, that Jesus was greater than the angels, but it also leads into this new thought about him being made lower than the angels.

[3 : 03] It's a very tightly structured book. So we'll look now at this idea, sorry, not that. We'll look now, oh dear, what have I done? Right, it's bad.

Sorry, wrong key. We'll look now at the picture he presents us in chapter 2, verses 5 to 11, of Jesus as the true man.

And as we can see there, it's based on Psalm 8. And Psalm 8, in the second half of the Psalm, presents us with this picture of mankind as he should be, as it should be.

And to some extent, of course, still is. Humans are, in a sense, a little lower than the angels, in that we have the capacity to reason, we have the capacity to worship God.

The first few verses of the Psalm, as we saw, of course, is a hymn of praise to God. And mankind also does have the capacity to rule over creation, as the rest of the Psalm explains.

[4 : 12] And so what should be the conclusion of that? That mankind, man is crowned with glory and honour, should be glorious and worthy of honour. And to some extent, of course, even this is true in a sense, because mankind is capable of greatness in many ways.

But as the writer points out, there's a big but. And the but is that mankind is not really in control, does not really rule over the creation or indeed even over himself.

And what is the problem? What is it that limits that human, and destroys human greatness, whatever it is? Two things, isn't it?

Evil and the death that results. Evil corrupts and the death destroys everything that people aim to be. Whatever it is we set our hearts to do, in the end, well, our death means we don't benefit from it. And, of course, the evil that's in our hearts tends to corrupt everything. Other people don't benefit from it either. And remember what God said to Adam in Genesis 2, 16.

[5 : 33] The Lord commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat of it, you will surely die.

He didn't die physically straight away, but he underwent spiritual death. And in rebelling against God, Adam and Eve subjected themselves, and the rest of humankind, to frustration.

The world is out of control. Eve is told that she'll suffer pain in childbirth, but in fact we suffer pain in all creation, in all forms of creativity, don't we?

We struggle. And in the end, death, physical death and spiritual death, have the last word. What glory and honour mankind does achieve is corrupted and it's ultimately destroyed.

Do you remember the story of the Tower of Babel? Where people thought we'd build a tower up to God. We'd make ourselves divine by climbing up to heaven, building a tower up to heaven.

[6 : 41] And what went wrong, well it wasn't the engineering, they got the engineering right, what went wrong was themselves. They just weren't up, climbing up to heaven, and the, it says that the Lord came down and confounded their languages, in other words they just fell out with each other and disagreed, and split up and just couldn't complete what they had begun to do.

All our efforts to achieve divinity, to make progress, are undermined by our own fractious and fallible nature, aren't we? We learn more about how the physical universe works, and what do we do with it?

We contrive better ways of killing people, or we exploit the natural world and damage it, so that it's not looked after properly.

Our own fractious and fallible nature, destroys what we'd like to create, and what we'd like to make permanent.

But, says the writer to the Hebrews, there is a true man, a man who really fits this description.

[8 : 04] And that man was the man, Jesus Christ. And, um, look what he actually says here, in verse, if you look at verse 9, it's quite interesting the way, how does Jesus achieve this glory and honour?

He does it by taking on mankind's bitterest enemy, head on, doesn't he? He actually achieves glory and honour through his death. So, the whole thing that corrupts us, that is our ultimate enemy, Jesus takes on, and, um, actually achieves glory and honour through death, by taking on our bitterest enemy.

And the implication here is, this was the only possible route to victory. God cannot die. There's a hymn, isn't it, that says, it is mystery all the immortal dies, who can explore his strange design.

But, of course, the immortal can't die by definition, really. Um, Jesus had to be a human man, to suffer death.

So, Jesus is presented to us as the true man, the glorious man, the one that is really, has really glory and honour, but who also, through that, restores glory and honour to us.

[9 : 30] And, um, that leads him on to a further thought. Verse 10, well, verse 10 describes Jesus as the archehos, the archehos, Greek word there, of salvation.

That word presents translators with something of a challenge, actually. Because it has multiple meanings in Greek. And you almost pay your money and you take your choice.

I've listed some of the ones that are used there. The AV, authorised version, talks about the captain of salvation, which gives a sort of military flavour to it. But, um, certainly misses a lot of the meaning.

The old version, as it was read to us, of the NIV, talks about the author. Well, it can mean the author, but only the author in a fundamental sense, only the sense in which, um, Einstein was the author of general relativity.

Somebody who comes up with a completely new idea. Um, the Roman Catholic translations, for some reason, use the term leader, which again is a reasonable translation.

[10 : 43] The Jerusalem Bible uses the term leader. I've got another Catholic translation, actually, which, um, makes it a verb and says, Jesus leads us. Well, that is part of it. Um, but it's not the

whole meaning.

Um, the New English Bible, by the way, also uses the, um, the term leader. But none of those words really catch the full meaning, I think.

And, um, some translations, the Revised Standard Version, uh, the version that gets a little flack from evangelicals in one way or another.

But, uh, I think in this case, it's probably on the right track. It just, it uses the translation, the Pioneer.

Um, Raymond Brown, in his commentary, uses the Pioneer. And, in fact, the New, New International Version, also uses the translation, the Pioneer.

And I think that's a good translation, actually, because it has the same multiple meanings in English as the Greek word does. And, in fact, perhaps, you know, we shouldn't, we don't need to pick on one of those meanings, and we don't really know which one.

[11:56] Perhaps, in a sense, it means all of them. It means all of them. So, this seems to me like a good translation. And, um, of course, it links to that attack on death that we've just had described to us.

He's saying that he's the, the one who, who, um, through death, achieved glory and honour. And also, it links us onto the apostolic mission which comes later. So, if we think in terms of a Pioneer, that really holds the thing together.

So, what do we mean by a Pioneer? Well, in, um, it's a term, as I say, that's used in different fields of human endeavour. Um, in academic terms, in intellectual terms, you might talk about a seminal contribution, a contribution that, um, other, that changes the way we think about a problem.

And, uh, those who come after, once they've read this contribution, will never think about that problem in the same way again. And, so, Jesus is the Pioneer who gives a new approach to the problem of sin and death.

We had the, in the Old Covenant, we had the approach through the law of Moses, but it didn't quite do the job. And, so, Jesus comes and brings a new solution to this problem of sin and death.

[13:21] But then, it can also have a military meaning, can't it? We talk about the Pioneer Corps and so on. What does a Pioneer do in military tactics?

Well, the Pioneer is the one who leads the attack, isn't it? He's the one who is the first into the enemy stronghold. He's the one who finds the way in, finds the weakness, and finds the way into the enemy stronghold.

And, um, yeah, he's the one who leads the attack, but he doesn't do it merely to say, look, look at me, I'm the great hero. He does it in order to open the way, so that the rest of the army can come in and take possession.

That's what a Pioneer does. I remember reading many years ago of the Pioneer Corps in Bomber Command, who used to fly over in their mosquito fighter bombers and drop flares so that the other bombers would know where to attack.

They're the ones who lead the attack in and say, this is where you need to attack. And that's what a Pioneer does in military terms. The one who leads the attack is the first through the gate, the first to engage the enemy.

[14:36] But as I say, he doesn't do it on his own. He does it so that the army can come through and take possession. And we also talk about pioneers in civilian context, don't we?

Just think of the wagon trains rolling west, you know, in all those old films. Pioneer is kind of an explorer, but not quite the same as an explorer.

Because an explorer goes somewhere just to say, I've been there. So an explorer goes to the North Pole to say, I've made it there. Or a mountaineer climbs Everest. Why?

Well, they said just because it's there. But you're not intending to make your home on the top, are you? You're going to come down again. But a pioneer actually is rather different.

A pioneer is somewhere who breaks new territory, possibly hostile or unknown or difficult territory. But he does it in order to send back instructions about the way.

[15:38] In fact, he does it in order to make a new home for his family and his folk. That's what a pioneer does. And remember what Jesus himself said, I'm going to prepare a place for you.

And if I go, I will come back and bring you, receive you to myself. Jesus is the pioneer who goes through the realm of death to prepare a place, a way through, so that his family can follow after.

And Jesus bore the brunt of the suffering, but his family do have to follow after, to take possession of the land. And that might involve suffering also.

And I think that's the point that the writer is trying to get to here. If we copped out and said, no, it's too dangerous, I'm not going to go. Then that will be despised the work that Jesus has done, wouldn't it?

So if we're not going to follow him, then we're going to say, no, don't trust him. Don't trust the pioneers. You know, it's a fake, this map. Or there's, he hasn't told us about the dangers. But he has told us about the dangers.

[16:47] He's warned us that it's dangerous. But he has found a safe route. And he says we must follow him. We need to be determined to hang on to that victory that Christ has won for us.

Put our trust in that victory, as he says in verse 13. And how does that work? And in doing that, we are made holy. We are set apart from God. Just as the pioneer, when he takes his family through, they become set apart for that new land.

They have a whole new way of life in the new land where they've moved to. And he says that we are made holy, because he's the one who makes us holy, but we become part of his family.

That's what he says, isn't it? And so Jesus has a people to rejoice with. Verse 12, he talks about rejoicing to his brethren. And then actually in verse 13, in the end of verse 13, he quotes from Isaiah.

And he says, here I am, here am I, and the children God has given me. So he says, look, here I am in the new land, and here's my family with me.

[18:00] I brought them through. And they're taking possession of the new land. Here am I and the children God has given me. And if there are no children, then the pioneers' efforts are wasted, aren't they?

He's gone in to make and break out a new land, a new way of life, a new place to live. And if he has no children, then it's a waste of effort and a waste of time.

So, Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the pioneer, the one that changes everything. I didn't put the slide up there, sorry. The one who makes a new route in for his family.

And then again, just in case you might have missed the point, he repeats it all in verses 14 to 18.

Jesus, he tells us that Jesus has destroyed the power of the devil, in verse 14, by facing up to his temptations, in verse 18.

And he says that the pioneer was made like his brothers and sisters. Verse 17. Made a man, perhaps, is what he means there. So that we can be made like him.

[19:09] So that we can be the children that he has given, that God has given him. And so he has mapped out the route, so that we can follow.

But it is still dangerous. And only by following carefully his instructions, and the route that he has mapped out, can we be kept safe.

So Jesus is presented to us as our pioneer. And thirdly, in chapter 3, verses 1 to 6, Jesus is presented as the faithful apostle.

Remember that his readers probably were largely from a Jewish background. And they might well have responded, well, yes, I do see your point.

We do need a pioneer. But we've already had our pioneer. Our pioneer was Moses. He was the one who led us through the desert. And he was the one who obtained the law on Sinai, and that was what made us holy.

[20:19] So surely we've already got our pioneer. We don't need another one. They might have been thinking that way. So how does the writer respond to this? Well, it's with a yes but, isn't it, in verse 1.

He says, you should be thinking about Jesus, not Moses. But still, if you want to think about Moses, let's think about Moses for a bit. He was Moses.

Certainly he was somebody who was sent by God as a leader and a messenger. That's true. But Jesus is the appointed representative, the apostle.

The apostle was somebody who was sent as a representative, not just somebody who delivers a message, but it's like an ambassador. Somebody who almost has the authority, or a viceroy or a vice-regent or something like that.

Somebody who really carries the authority of the king with them. Not just somebody who delivers a message. Jesus is the apostle, the appointed representative. Or he says, let's look at it another way.

[21 : 23] Moses certainly was the steward of the house, the one who looked after the household for a while. But Christ is the owner and builder of the house. That's what he says.

Moses was a faithful messenger, but Christ is the faithful apostle, the one sent with the full authority of God. So, says the writer, it's not that I'm decrying Moses.

Moses indeed is worthy of honour. He was a faithful servant in his time. But Christ is worthy of greater honour. Moses himself never claimed to be giving the last word.

Verse 5, And in fact, the reference here is perhaps to Deuteronomy 18, where we can read these words of Moses himself. You needn't look at it if you don't want to, but it's Deuteronomy 18, 15 to 19, where Moses himself says the following, The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers.

You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb when you said, Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God, nor see this great fire any more, The Lord said to me, What they say is good.

[22 : 48] I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

Now we don't know how much Moses understood of what that meant. He may have just been thinking of the Old Testament prophets would be raised up, but surely we can see that the prophet that God really sends is the Lord Jesus, as the writer has said at the beginning of the letter, in various ways in the past as God has spoken, but now he has spoken through the Lord Jesus.

So Christ is the true prophet and Christ is the true architect of the house. And what is the house he is talking about? Well he tells us that in verse 6.

The house is indeed the church of God, the people of God. So, he is telling us here that it is not Moses who built the house, although he did do some preparation work as it were, but the true architect and builder and owner of the house is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then that leads us, leads the writer at least, onto the second warning. Second in a sense, it's the second one in the book, after the one at the beginning of chapter 2.

[24 : 20] And this warning is based, it's slightly longer, and it's based on Psalm 95. And it continues, he says, okay, we're thinking about Moses.

Let's think about Moses a bit more. Let's think about the Exodus. And what do we find? And he says, well Moses' faithfulness wasn't matched by that of his followers, even though he had led them out of Egypt.

And what was the result of that is it says in Psalm 95, that God was angry with them, and so they died in the wilderness. They weren't able to enter the rest of the promised land, because they had neglected to listen to God.

Those who had followed Moses, seemed to be the inheritors of the promised land, didn't they? Look, look like they'd made a good start. They all escaped from Egypt.

They seemed to be covered by the Passover blood on the, on their doors so that the firstborn was not killed. They all ate manna in the desert. And they all appeared to have received the law.

[25 : 39] But in fact, most of them did not. And how do we know that? Well because when it came to the crunch, when it came to the test, they flunked it.

They didn't actually follow the Lord into the land. They fell as we might say at the last jump, the last hurdle. All that they'd seen in the desert. All that they'd seen in the Lord leading them.

Yet when they came to the borders of the land, all they could see the report that the spies brought back, there were giants in the land. Can't do this. Can't be done. And so having, you know, the fact that they'd been led out from an even greater military power in Egypt didn't seem to have crossed their minds almost.

They said it can't be done. They didn't believe the Lord could give them rest in the land. They didn't hold on firmly to the end as the writer tells us we must do in verse 14.

Verse 14 actually is a bit strange if you look at it. Have you noticed the odd use of tenses in this verse?

[26 : 55] It says, We have come to share in Christ in the present, only if a future condition is fulfilled. Philosophers and logicians will tell you you can't do that.

You can't put the effect before the cause. And yet that seems to be what is given here. Cause and effect appear to be reversed. He says you have shared in Christ if you carry on to the end.

What's the point he's trying to make here? He's saying that the evidence that we have truly submitted to Christ is that we will hold on. In chapter 4 verse 1 the same thought is put in the past tense.

Next slide. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first. And then in chapter 4 verse 1 says the same thing again.

Have you already fallen short? You seem to have been progressing there but maybe actually it was all the sham. Perhaps you've already fallen short and we just didn't notice.

[28 : 06] So it's the same idea really isn't it? The evidence that we really have trusted in Christ is that we do hold on to the end. The authorised version and the English standard version said it do you seem to have failed.

Saying there's a different, slightly different way of putting it. Have you, you know, it looked as though you were doing all right but now it looks as though it's all gone wrong. Possibly.

So that was the fate of those who heard Moses words wasn't it? And they had heard Moses words, they listened but they hadn't really listened to them.

Tells us in chapter 4 verse 2 that they had had the gospel preached to them. The good news preached to them. It wasn't of course the good news of Jesus but the good news that there was a Sabbath rest, that there was a land to go to.

They had heard that, they'd been told that by Moses. But it didn't, that message didn't do them any good. Why didn't it do them any good? Because they didn't combine it with faith.

[29 : 16] They didn't put their trust in it in the end. And so they died in the desert. And the point he's making of course is how much worse for those who have heard the words of Jesus but who failed to believe.

If those who heard the words of Moses and didn't take any notice died in the desert, how much worse for those who have heard the words of Jesus but failed to take them seriously.

Will you die in the desert or will you believe what God has said and enter the promised land, the rest that is promised. Now this Sabbath rest of course is the subject of chapter 4 so we'll come to that next week.

But we could come to the warning. Let's just remember the warning. You want to think about Moses. Okay, think about Moses. Think about the people who heard the word of Moses but in the end didn't believe it.

And their bodies were strewn across the desert. How much worse for us if we who have heard the word of Jesus failed to hold on to it and believe it.

[30 : 24] So let's close this part of our service at least by singing hymn number 199, The God of Abraham prays. God of Moses could be the God of Moses prays but it actually is the God of Abraham prays.

And great thing about our version here is it has verse 3 in. So many hymn books leave out verse 3. In many ways to me it is the best verse. I've looked in several of them, even hymns of faith that doesn't have it. I've looked in congregational praise and one or two others.

It doesn't have verse 3 in. But I think it's the best verse in many ways. And let me just read it to you before we sing. Though nature's strength decay and earth and hell withstand, At his command we fight our way to Canaan's land.

The watery deep we pass with Jesus in our view, And through the howling wilderness our path pursue. I think the original Charles Wesley's version says that we press our way to Canaan's bounds.

[31 : 38] Something like that. Quite a good rewriting of it here. At his command we fight our way to Canaan's land. Through the howling wilderness we don't give up, but our path pursue.

So let's sing 199 together and then I'll hand over to Chris.