

Look at the true man

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Date: 19 December 2021

Preacher: Benjamin Wilks

- [0 : 0 0] The reading is Hebrews chapter 2 from verse 5 to the end. It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking, but there is a place where someone has testified, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?
- You made them a little lower than the angels. You crowned them with glory and honour and put everything under their feet. In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them.
- Yet at present, we do not see everything subject to them, but we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone.
- In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.
- Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.
- [1 : 3 4] He says, I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters. In the assembly, I will sing your praises. And again, I will put my trust in him.
- And again he says, Here am I and the children God has given me. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity, so that by his death, he might break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.
- For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human 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.
- Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Amen.
- Most of us, I imagine, have had the experience at some time in our lives of being out in the middle of nowhere and staring up at the night sky. Maybe off camping or driving along a deserted road and decide to stop and to just look up and see what is there.
- [3 : 2 0] As long as you were there on purpose, rather than stranded in the middle of nowhere, wondering how you were going to get home, perhaps you spent some time staring up at the moon, staring at the planets and the stars.
- The rather dim projector doesn't really do these things justice, does it? But if you've had this experience, perhaps looking up at the sky and seeing the immensity of what is there, perhaps it caused you to wax philosophical.
- David, certainly, in his days as a shepherd, he would have had plenty of opportunities to sit and to look up at the sky. And he's probably reflecting on that experience when he comes to write Psalm 8.

I think maybe even more today than when David wrote these words, we have even more opportunity to be filled with this sense of awe and wonder. Maybe you've watched the programs on TV, maybe you've been to the planetarium and you've seen some of these truly astounding sights that are now opened up to us through the use of these telescopes and so on.

The amazing things that are out there in this universe that God has made. Sometimes you watch these programs and the presenter expresses some of that sense of awe at the scale of the universe.

[4 : 33] It even talks about the beauty of the stars and the nebulae and the galaxies. But for all that we see more of it today, few, I think, are moved to follow David in his wandering footsteps as he not only marvels at the stars in the abstract, but he looks beyond those stars and planets and galaxies and sees behind them their creator.

He recognizes in Psalm 8 that the heavens declare the glory of God. He exclaims how majestic is your name in all the earth. He considers the grandeur of what God has made.

And he looks at himself and he asks, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? I mean, as human beings go, David actually was probably pretty impressive as a human being.

Maybe not in physical stature. He's the least impressive of Jesse's offspring, though he's probably grown up a bit since then. But if not in his physical form, his power, his authority, his possessions, they're impressive, aren't they?

David's the king. He's impressive as human beings go, but still as he looks, as he considers his life, as he considers his lot as a human being.

[5 : 53] He knows he's nothing. Nothing at all. The astronomers and the physicists and maybe especially the climatologists, they sometimes reach this same conclusion, that on the scale of the universe, humanity is nothing.

So why should we be destroying our planet? Right. Now, caring for this planet is a good thing to do. We should, as Christians, be concerned about climate change and concerned about species becoming extinct and concerned about the rate at which we're using resources.

We should be concerned about these things, but not for that reason. It's not because we are insignificant that we should care for our planet, because having spent a few verses reflecting on the grandeur of creation and the comparative insignificance of mankind, David then comes to another perspective in the second half of the psalm.

You have made them a little lower than the angels. That's human beings, the them there. Human beings a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands.

You put everything under their feet, all flocks and herds and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

[7 : 08] See, human beings are contrary creatures, aren't we? Full of contradictions and weird decisions.

Tim Chester points out, every human being is an amazing creature, capable of incredible acts of ingenuity, kindness, sacrifice, creativity, fortitude, empathy and endeavor.

We're capable of these things, and yet the great paradox of humanity is that we're also capable of unbelievable acts of cruelty, pride, scorn, stupidity and indifference.

We see that strange mixture of the two in humanity at large. We look at the earth on the whole and we see these different things at play.

We see this strange mixture. And if we're honest, we see that same tension, that same strange dichotomy in our own hearts, that we are capable of amazing things, that we are capable of terrible things.

[8 : 15] And yet, yet despite our insignificance, despite the paradox of our character, yet still God has chosen to crown humanity with glory and honor, has chosen to make us rulers over all creation.

This goes right back to Genesis, doesn't it? Human beings created in the image of God, given this mandate as rulers and stewards of all creation. And the writer to the Hebrews is very clear here in verse 8, very clear that this is comprehensive.

God left nothing that is not subject to them. That's a weird choice, isn't it? Because there was a group more obviously suited to the task.

Why didn't God put angels in charge? Why did he not give them the authority? Well, he chose not to. He chose to set his love especially on humanity.

He chose us. So now, having established in chapter 1 that Jesus is superior to the angels because he's truly divine. We thought about that a couple of weeks ago.

[9 : 35] Here now, the writer to the Hebrews gives another reason why Jesus is superior to the angels. Jesus is superior to the angels because he is fully human. Jesus did not become an angel.

The miracle of Christmas is, is the Christ child born of the Virgin Mary, not of the angel Gabriel? Jesus took on humanity. True humanity.

And he has not taken it off. Doesn't that blow your mind? The creator of the universe didn't come and briefly adopt humanity.

Didn't come for a holiday on earth. Didn't come and take humanity and kind of put it on like a set of clothes to then be taken off again at the end of the day. No, having become incarnate, being made flesh, being made human, he has not ceased so to be.

He is still human today. The second person of the Godhead remains truly and fully human. Maybe you've sometimes thought of Jesus as kind of semi-human and semi-divine.

[10 : 45] You know, you take half of divinity and half of humanity and put them together and you get a whole, a sort of hybrid. You know, the car that runs on electric, sometimes petrol, other times it kind of gets some of the characteristics of each.

Or the, you know, the animal crossbreeds, the lager, the growler bear. Yes, you can cross a grizzly bear with a polar bear. Now, Jesus is not a weird hybrid. Jesus is not half of one thing and half of another and smush them together.

No, he is fully and completely both at one and the same time. Fully human, fully divine. All that it means to be human and all that it means to be God together in one person.

No, I do not know how that is possible. I don't know how it works. I cannot wrap my head around it. But I have to accept that it's true. That Jesus is not partially human.

That he's not an approximation to humanity. That he's not something close to what we are like. No, the truth is, if anything, Jesus is more human than any other human being that has ever lived.

[11 : 59] Jesus demonstrates for us what humanity should be. He truly and fully embodies what humanity is and was called to be.

He fulfills, he completes, he restores our humanity. He shows us what it is to be human. So as we fix our eyes on Jesus, we see not only God, we see also what it is to be truly human.

We see the model human being. And whilst we cannot and should not imitate all of his actions, we can and should seek to imitate his character.

Would that we have the compassion of Christ in our dealings with one another. He is truly human. How do we know this?

Well, because he's the one who actually does what human beings were meant to do. Look again at the second half of verse 8 and following. In putting everything under human beings, God left nothing that is not subject to them.

[13 : 07] Yet at present, we do not see everything subject to them. But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Do you see the problem that the writer's presenting us with? It's supposed to be the case that everything is subject to human beings or creation. But a simple look at the world around us shows us that isn't true.

Creation is not subject to human beings. We're reasonably successful at domesticating certain animals and training them to do as we wish, but there's glaring exceptions. And even the ones that we invite into our homes, they're hardly fully under control, are they?

To say nothing of our ability to control the oceans and the plate tectonics and the whatever and the whatever, we are not in control over creation. We don't have to look far to see that, do we?

Chester again, he points back to Noah coming out of the ark. God said to Noah, be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground and on all the fish in the sea.

[14 : 25] They're given into your hands. So there's an authority there, isn't there? These animals are given into Noah and his descendants, given into their hands.

There's also fear and dread. Human beings permitted to use animals for food, but animals taught to mistrust human beings, not least because we lack the restraint that we surely should have.

We lack proper controls on which animals we kill are when. Psalm 8 says God honored humanity by placing everything under our feet. Hebrews says that is not the present reality.

We are not in control, but that's not the full picture because, verse 9, we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death.

We see Jesus, the true human being. Jesus, the second Adam. Jesus whose emotions don't lead him to excess. Jesus whose compassion not only for humans but all of creation is perfect.

[15 : 32] Jesus who has come to reverse the effects of the fall. We sang it last night, didn't we? Adam's likeness now efface, stamp thine image in its place. He comes to make his blessings flow as far as the curse is found.

He comes to reverse the effects of the fall. In Christ, the commission given to Adam, what Adam was told to do is now fulfilled. The effects of the fall are being erased to the very ends of the earth.

The curse is being undone. We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. Crowned, why? Because he suffered death.

Because he went willingly to the cross. Because he sacrificed his own life for others. Because by the grace of God, he tasted death for everyone. Our present efforts to save the planet, they're all well and good.

We can and should do better. But even if we did ten times better than the most ambitious planet-saving target that anyone has ever laid out, it will not ultimately save the planet.

[16 : 42] If we want to save the planet, what we need is a truly and fully restored humanity. What we need is human beings in the place that we're designed to have.

It's probably true that human beings are at present a major part of the problem. But free from the power of the devil, free from fear of death, with our true humanity restored, with Christ's likeness stamped on us, which is the likeness of God and the likeness of true humanity, humanity.

Well, then we'll be the solution as we take our rightful place with all creation subject to us. That's what we need and that's exactly what God has done.

God has, in fact, freed us from death and atoned for our sins. In Christ, he has done it. Christ died and rose again. The promise of a new beginning, the first fruits of a new humanity, the first among many brothers and sisters.

And so, no longer are we, and the whole earth with us, no longer are we on a trajectory towards death. It has been reversed. Life and glory will be our end.

[17 : 59] Do you see that here? Do you see in verse 10 this desire to bring many sons and daughters to glory? Folks, that's you and me. The sons and daughters being brought to glory.

That is the purpose of almighty God in sending his son to be made man in order that we might be glorified. We were created, if you like, with a kind of original glory made in the image of God.

God. And as it's the only thing in all creation of which that's true. Created with an original glory, but we fell away from that glory.

That image is marred. Marred by the sin of our first parents, marred by our own actions, defaced almost beyond all recognition. But Jesus comes to bring restoration, and that restoration is to the fullness of glory.

Indeed, restoration to a greater glory than was theirs in the garden. Why was Jesus born as a baby? Well, we're given the answer right there in Matthew 1.

[19 : 04] She will give birth to a son in year to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus was born in order that he might die, bringing salvation to mankind.

Christmas makes sense when it's seen under the shadow of Easter. But there's more going on here than just salvation. Or perhaps better, salvation encompasses more than we're sometimes inclined to think it does.

Because the goal here is not just more of the same but with a vague sense of guilt in the back of our minds taken away because our sins are forgiven. It's more than that. No, the goal includes bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

Verse 10. Because Jesus was humiliated, we can be glorified. Our life comes because he tasted death.

Verse 11 tells us the one who makes people holy, that's Jesus, and those who are made holy, that's you and me, are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, to come and to share in his glory.

[20 : 15] Jesus took on flesh. He became, if you like, part of our family. Became part of our family by taking on flesh. In order that, we might become part of his family. In order that we might share in his glory.

And we're told, verse 10, he is the pioneer of our salvation. He walked the road. He showed the way. He declared to us the way that we must go. So we see Jesus made for a time lower than the angels.

And we see him crowned with glory and honor. My friends, look to the true man. Fix your eyes upon Jesus, the one who is truly and fully human.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you that you did not reject humanity.

that you were not ashamed to come and to be called our brother. That you willingly laid aside your glory, your majesty, your power and authority in order to be made man.

[21 : 30] To be one of us. To call us brothers and sisters. To be truly, genuinely and fully part of the family of humanity.

humanity in order that we might be part of your family. That we might come as those riding your train, coming into glory in your wake.

With your likeness stamped upon us, restored to what we should be. Given glory and honor at your side. Lord Jesus, thank you for the richness, the depth of what you have done in us, for us.

Be glorified, we pray. Amen.