

Finally. A True Human

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[0 : 00] The biblical text before us today is the same text we began to inhabit last Sunday. The text is the first and second chapters of the New Testament document we call Hebrews.

Both chapters, chapters 1 and 2 together, always together. As we noted last Sunday, Hebrews is a sermon.

One of the most eloquent sermons we will ever hear. One of the most carefully, artfully crafted sermons ever written. And composed in such a way that we really do not hear chapter 1 without hearing chapter 2 and vice versa.

We really do not hear chapter 2 without also hearing chapter 1. Now in Hebrews 1 and 2, we hear God speaking about and to Jesus.

And we hear Jesus speaking about and to God. Or more precisely, in Hebrews 1 and 2, we hear God the Father speak about and to Jesus the Son.

[1 : 13] And Jesus the Son speaking about and to God the Father. Still more precisely, in light of what is revealed in Hebrews 1 and 2, we hear God the Father speak about and to God the Son as one of us.

And we hear God the Son as one of us speak about and to God the Father. So now listen, as Lilac, Chris and Peter read for us the opening section of the theologically, rhetorically exquisite Sermon to the Hebrews.

In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom also He made the universe.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

[2 : 36] So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.

Or again, I will be His Father and He will be my Son. And again, when God brings His firstborn into the world, He says, Let all God's angels worship Him.

In speaking of the angels, He says, He makes His angels spirits and His servants flames of fire. But about the sun, He says, Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.

A scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

He also says, In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain.

[3 : 51] They will all wear out like a garment, but you will roll them up like a robe. Like a garment, they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

To which of the angels did God ever say, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

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 are mere mortals that you are mindful of them?

[5 : 11] Human beings that you care for them. You made them a little lower than the angels. You crowned them with glory and honor 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 honor 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 are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. 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.

[6 : 29] 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 his brothers and sisters 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. Did you hear again all the references to angels?

Angels this, angels that, angels here, angels there, eleven times, angels, angels, angels. Now why does this author, who is so obviously educated and intelligent, refer to angels so much?

And what do angels have to do with hearing God speak to Jesus and hearing Jesus speak to God? As we noted last Sunday, the people of the first century lived in a universe filled with angels.

[7 : 54] So do we. It's just that they knew it. Except the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in angels or the resurrection, which is why they're sad, you see.

I just thought I was just going to lighten things up a bit. For people of the first century, angels served as the agents of communication between God and humanity.

For people of the first centuries, angels were a kind of delivery service. It was thought that angels both brought God's word to humanity and brought humanity's word to God.

So again, imagine the diagram. God way up there, humanity way down here. It was thought that God mediated his relationship with humanity through the angels.

Angels carried God's messages to humans and angels carried humans' messages to God. Now the author of Hebrews, wanting people to realize that maybe that worldview is still true to some extent, wants them to realize that in the coming of Jesus, something has changed.

[9 : 00] Jesus now mediates this relationship between God and humanity. Jesus is the one who brings God's word to humanity and who brings humanity's word to God.

Jesus is the one who carries God's messages to humanity and carries humanity's messages to God. Jesus is the one final sufficient mediator between God and man.

That's what being high priest is all about. Jesus, the high priest, comes to us from the presence of God and then draws us into the presence of God.

He's the only priest who can do that. He's the only priest we need. He's the only mediator we need. So the author of Hebrews begins his sermon with good news.

Chapter 1, verse 4. Jesus has become as much superior to the angels. Superior to the angels. Why? Why is Jesus a superior mediator to the angels?

[10 : 01] Why is Jesus able to serve this role of mediator better than angels? Answer? Jesus is the superior mediator because unlike angels, Jesus knows what it is like to be God and he knows what it is like to be human.

Jesus can mediate God to us because he knows God and he knows what it is like to be God. And Jesus can mediate us to God because he knows us and he knows what it is like to be us.

As I pointed out last Sunday, the Latin for priest is the word pontifex. Pontifex is an engineering term. A pontifex builds bridges.

A priest builds bridges. A mediator builds bridges. Now, in order to build a bridge, the builder has to know both sides of the canyon over which the bridge is to go, right?

Jesus is the great bridge builder because he knows both sides of the canyon very well. He knows the divine side because he's divine and he knows the human side because he's human.

[11:11] Jesus is superior to the angels because Hebrews 1, he is God. Jesus is superior to the angels because Hebrews 2, he is a man.

The man. Well, let me briefly review what we heard God the Father say to Jesus last Sunday. Hebrews 5, 1.

You are my son. Today I have begotten you. Begotten, not made. I want to stress that again. Begotten, not made.

What God makes is not God. It's an expression of God, but it is not God. Psalm 19. The heavens are telling the glory of God, but the heavens are not God.

Neither are elephants or eagles or humans. What God makes is not God, but what God begets is God.

[12:11] Humans beget humans, and God begets God. You are my son. Today I have begotten you, not just an expression of God, but God.

Hebrews 1, 5 again. I will be his father, and he will be my son. The most intimate relationship in the universe, and the source of all other relationships.

Hebrews 1, 6. Let all the angels of God worship him. The Father is telling us that this urge we feel in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth, this urge to adore him, is right.

It's wholly appropriate. It's wholly holy. When the Magi's come from the east to Bethlehem, looking for the king, they fall before him, just an infant.

They fall before Jesus, and they worship him. Their hearts get it. Worship my son. Hebrews 1, 8. You, your throne, oh God, is forever.

[13:14] Oh God. The Father addresses Jesus, oh God. I am still stunned by that line. Hebrews 1, 10. In the beginning, oh Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth.

The Father addresses Jesus as, oh Lord. The Father declares that the world in which he takes such great delight is the work of his Son. Jesus is the creator of all things, oh Lord.

And then, Hebrews 1, 13. Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. Sit, Jesus. Sit. Because your work is completed.

Your death has accomplished everything I said it would. Now today, let us listen to then Jesus speak about and to God the Father.

Or more precisely, let us listen to God the Son as one of us speak about and to God the Father. Notice how I put that.

[14:14] I've been very careful to put it as accurately as I can. Listen to God the Son as one of us. As one of us. For that is what the author of Hebrews is emphasizing in chapter 2 of his sermon.

One of us. He who is God, oh God, becomes one of us. A human being. A real human being. A fully human, human being. Indeed, he becomes the human being. He becomes the representative human being.

Not just one of us. He becomes us. Now, before listening to Jesus speak about and to God the Father, let's take some time and observe how this author demonstrates the real, full humanity of Jesus.

It's rich. this text is so rich taking us into deep mysteries of the gospel. I really should take 10 Sundays on this text.

[15:22] But we're going to do it all today. Not all. Just we're going to hit highlights. The author begins by quoting Psalm 8, which we read together earlier in the service.

What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you would care for him? The poet, King David, is standing out under a starlit night.

And he stands in awe of the fact that the awesome maker of the stars recognizes and pays attention to us puny little creatures on this small planet in the universe.

In Psalm 8, we have a kind of biblical theology of humanity. In Psalm 8, we have God's original design, so to speak. A little lower than the angels.

I made them a little lower than the angels, says God. In the Hebrew of Psalm 8, it is a little lower than God.

[16:27] The term is Elohim. Elohim is the plural form of the noun El, which is the kind of garden variety word for God. The Greek translation, which the author of Hebrews quotes, renders this Elohim not as God but as angels.

Either way, the text is pointing to the greatness of us puny creatures. Some of you might remember the movie *Roots*, where American slaves are retracing their African ancestry.

In one of the scenes, I think it's in Kenya, a grandfather is standing before his newly born grandson. He takes his grandson in his hands, lifts him up toward the sky, points the child's face toward the God of heaven and says, Behold, the only thing greater than you.

Just a little lower than the angels. Crowned with glory and honor, we were made to reflect the glory of God.

We were made to reflect the nature and character of God. Crowned by God to be God's royalty, princes and princesses in the castle we were made to be.

[17:45] Everything under their feet, says the psalm, created to rule with God in the world, created as vice regents, created to run and run in the castle on behalf of the great king.

The author of Hebrews adds, In putting everything under humans, God left nothing that is not subject to them. God's co-carers, co-creators in the garden and in the castle.

Yet, Hebrews 2.8, Yet, yet, at present, we do not see everything subject to humans.

something's gone wrong, a fact with which we are all to war. Every time an epidemic sweeps through a human population, every time a drug dealer sells his poison, every time a woman's body is exploited on the internet, every time a doctor says to us, I'm sorry, I can't do anything more, we hear the, yet, we do not see everything subject to humans.

Something's gone wrong. The French mathematician philosopher Blaise Pascal puts it so well, he says, all the miseries of man prove his grandeur. They are miseries of a dethroned monarch.

[19:10] But, Hebrews 2.9, but, but we do see Jesus in the midst of the garden that has become a cemetery, in the midst of the castle that has been taken over by alien forces, we do see one human being crowned with glory and honor.

Now, here is where realizing that Hebrews 1 and 2 belong together comes into play. According to Hebrews 1, who is this human of Hebrews 2?

According to Hebrews 1, who is this human? In Hebrews 2, he is God. The human, we see in the midst of all the wreckage, is God.

The man is God. You shall call his name Emmanuel. That means God with us, or more literally, the with us God. A little lower than the angels, says the author of Hebrews, down where we are, with us lower than the angels.

Amazing. He who made the angels and the stars comes down lower than the angels and the stars. Sharing our flesh and blood, says the writer of Hebrews, really one of us, fully like us, not a phantom, our flesh and our blood, tempted in every way as we are, says the author of Hebrews.

[20:40] tempted in our broken world not to believe, tempted to live with the self at the center, tempted to live an autonomous life, tempted to live a self-directed life, hungry, thirsty, tired, lonely, betrayed by friends, abused by enemies, tempted and tested in every way we are, if actually to a greater degree than we are.

God the Son, really one of us, really one with us, Emmanuel, going through all the stages of physical, emotional and mental development, has a 12-year-old boy, he finds himself in trouble with his mother because he wants to be obedient to his father.

Later on, he's in the desert, 40 days without food and water, face to face with this evil that seeks to destroy his father's world, and later in the garden of Gethsemane, wrestling with what he knows he must do but he does not want to do and trembling at the consequences, tempted in every way as we are.

Says New Testament scholar Oscar Kuhlman, this is the boldest assertion of the complete humanity, the human character of Jesus in the New Testament.

Tasting death for us, the author of Hebrews goes on to say, Hebrews 2 9, so that by the grace of God, he may taste death for everyone.

[22:13] For me, this is the boldest assertion of the full humanity of the Son of God. Taste death.

The with us God tastes death. It is what makes Jesus the perfect mediator. He really knows what it's like to be us because he tastes what we taste all of our life.

He tastes death. Dorothy Sayers brings this out so meaningfully in her Christmas play, *He That Should Come*. She has the three magi, the three kings who have come across the desert to find the newborn king, express their aspirations.

One of the magi, Belfastar, expresses the feelings of countless human beings. He says, All I ask is the assurance that I am not alone. Some courage, some comfort against the burden of fear and pain.

About my palaces, the jungle creeps in whines. Famine and plague are my fireside companions. And beyond the circle of the fire, the glare of human eyes. Fear in the east, fear in the west, armies and banners marching and garments rolled in blood.

[23 : 26] Yet, this is nothing. If only God will not be indifferent, if he is beside me bearing the weight of his own creation, if I may hear his voice among the voices of the vanquished, if I may feel his hand touch mine in the darkness, if I may look upon the hidden face of God and read in the eyes of God that he is acquainted with grief.

Hebrews 2, the God of Hebrews 1, is acquainted with grief. As one of us, he tastes death. In the eyes of Jesus, I see that God knows grief.

And because he has tasted death, he is perfected. This is mystery. Hebrews 2, 10, the author of our salvation made perfect through suffering, through tasting death.

So fully human, so truly us, that he matures into his fully mature maturity through what he suffers in a broken world.

A great mystery. Jesus, the son, so fully human, so truly us, that like all other humans, he grows into his full maturity like a seed.

[24 : 47] A seed may be perfect in and of itself, perfect as a seed, but it's not yet what it was intended to be. It's not what it's intended to be until it grows out of its seedness and it grows by dying.

It grows by dying into the ground. God the son, so completely human, he becomes, he becomes what he's intended to be through suffering.

Now, why? Before we hear Jesus speak, let's ask that question. Why does he do it? Why does he who is God become real, fully human humanity?

To render powerless the one who has the power of death, says the author of Hebrews. The son enters into death, tastes death, so that he can defang death.

Another mystery. Jesus conquers death not by avoiding it or by commanding that it go away. He conquers death by experiencing it.

[25 : 56] The one who is God enters the devil's realm, tastes death, swallows death, and thereby conquers death. By giving himself over to the power of death, he renders it powerless.

I quoted last Easter, and will probably next Easter, the words of one of my favorite Welsh preachers, Peter Joshua, who regularly said, when death stung Jesus Christ, it stung itself to death. By death, he conquers death, and thus Jesus steals the enemy's chief weapon, the fear of death. God the Son becomes fully us to deliver those, says the preacher, who through fear of death were subject to fear all their lives, or to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

He recognizes that what holds us back in life is the fear of death. By conquering death through dying our death, Jesus sets us free from the emotion that distorts our existence.

I like that phrase. The emotion that distorts our existence. Timothy Luke Johnson said it that way. By conquering death through dying our death, Jesus sets us free from this emotion that distorts our existence.

[27 : 24] Jesus sets us free from the fear of non-being, and therefore sets us free from all the ways we are trying to stave off non-being. Death no longer has the finality it once had.

And all of this made possible, says the author of Hebrews, because God the Son as one of us deals with the problem of sin which caused the problem of death in the first place. He becomes fully human to atone for sin, to give himself as a sacrifice that takes away the barrier that sin erects between God and humanity.

He becomes the merciful high priest, the faithful high priest, who at once is the one who offers the sacrifice and the sacrifice itself, which is the theme of the rest of Hebrews.

Jesus. And, says the author, he does it all to bring us to glory. To, out ten, in bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

He pictures Jesus as the pioneer of our salvation, out front, clearing the way, leading us into the fullness of our salvation, which is glory. We were originally created to reflect the glory, the nature and character of God.

[28 : 39] And, God the Son, as one of us, is bringing us back into that original design. Which is why, he is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.

Hebrews 2.11, Jesus is not ashamed to call them broken human beings, brothers and sisters. The most perfect human being who ever lived.

God in our flesh and blood is not ashamed. He's not ashamed to stand before the watching world, point to us and say, my brothers and sisters.

Talk about granting dignity. We might be ashamed to do that, right? Are there not times when we're just a tad ashamed, looking at each other in our brokenness to say, my brother and my sister?

Not the God man. man, he's not ashamed. He's not ashamed of you or me. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them, says the Pharisees.

[29 : 45] They say it in disgust. This man, this Jesus, this supposed holy one welcomes sinners. Welcomes means as welcome them as a member of the family.

That's what the term means. This man eats with sinners. This is disgusting. This man welcomes sinners into his family. Disgusting. Tarnishing the reputation of a holy God. Not so, says Jesus.

Not tarnishing the reputation of a holy God. I'm honoring the reputation of a holy God. This is the reputation the holy God wants to have in the city. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

He's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. And now we can hear him speak. Listen now to how the Son of God, God the Son, as one of us, speaks about and to the Father.

Listen. Hebrews 2.12. I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters. In the congregation, I will declare your name. That's the driving force of the whole of Jesus' earthly ministry.

[30 : 53] He lives and dies to announce and reveal the Father's name. Name is a way of saying nature and character. If you knew a person's name in the first century, you knew something about that person's nature and character.

Jesus lives and dies to make his Father's nature and character known to the world. Jesus lives and dies to show us who the Father is and what the Father is like.

This is what he prays in his high priestly prayer recorded in John 17. I have made your name known and will continue to make it known. It's the driving force of the Son of God. I will declare.

I will announce. The term the author of Hebrews uses is another of the terms that the early church used for its preaching. I will preach, says God the Son as one of us.

I will preach, leading us to a great mystery about this moment and any preaching moment. When a preacher steps forward to preach the name, he or she does not stand alone.

[31 : 59] When a preacher steps forward to preach the name, he or she stands with the great preacher. In every preaching moment, Jesus is preaching.

All preaching participates in his preaching. It's because Jesus is preaching in this very moment that our souls are stirred, our spirits lifted, our wills changed.

Hear the Son say to his Father, I will preach your name among my brothers and sisters. Hebrews 2, 12 again. In the presence of the congregation, I will sing your praises.

Of course. Given what the Son knows about his Father, given how the Son loves his Father, of course he sings his Father's praise.

Jesus sings. Jesus sings to the Father among the brothers in the congregation. Wouldn't you like to hear Jesus sing? Wouldn't that be a thrill to hear the only begotten Son sing his heart out to his Father?

[33 : 10] Would that someone, Brian Moss or others, would that someone could write the songs Jesus would sing. Would sing? Would?

I should say, is singing. The songs the Son is singing. And here we have another mystery about this moment and about every moment of worship.

When we sing our praises, we are not singing alone. We are singing with each other, but we are also singing with Jesus. This is the great mystery that we're singing with Jesus.

He is the great worshiper in the congregation. congregation. And just as the Father exhorts angels and us to worship his Son, the Son invites us to join him as he worships his Father.

Hear the Son say to the Father, Father, I will sing your praises in the congregation. Next time you come to church weary and you can't sing, don't worry about it.

[34 : 08] Jesus will take over for you. I'm serious. And then you'll be lifted. to know that God the Son in our midst is praising his Father all that we could hear what he's saying.

Hebrews 2.13. I will put my trust in him. To trust God is the highest act of worship. To trust the Father is the greatest response that we can give to the revelation of the Father.

The Father deserves trust. Given who he is, he deserves trust from humanity in every circumstance at every moment. Not to trust the Father is an affront to his glory.

Not to trust is to say, you really are not as good as you claim to be. You really are not as merciful and powerful as you claim to be. Trust is the highest form of worship.

Do we trust? Do you trust? Do I trust the Father the way he deserves to be trusted? trusted? No.

[35 : 16] I do not. I try to give the trust that God deserves but I can't. But Jesus does. The man does.

The God man does. He who is us trusts on our behalf. He believes on our behalf. He believes for us. When you can't believe, look at Jesus.

He's believing for you. Jesus is the great preacher. He's the great worshiper. And he's the great believer. The Son of God as one of us gives the Father all the trust that he deserves.

Thank you. And one more word of the Son to the Father. Hebrews 2.13. Listen. Here I am and the children God has given me.

And the children God has given me. Jesus sees us as gifts. Jesus sees us as the presents the Father puts under the Christmas tree for him. The Father is, Jesus is the Father's gift to us and it turns out that we are the Father's gifts to Jesus.

[36 : 26] We are gifts. Here I am with all and all the children you gave me. Here I am. Here I am. Here I am.

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? Those steeped in the Bible in the Old Testament like the author of Hebrews would have heard loud and clear. Here I am. Here I am.

The Father is finally getting an answer to the very first question he asked humanity. In the garden, in the garden that had become a cemetery because of the sin of Adam and Eve, in the castle where the prince and princesses are rebellion, God calls out, where are you?

And the humans hide. They don't want to come out from behind the tree. Where are you? And finally, here I am. Here I am, says the representative human.

Here I am, says God the Son is one of us. Here I am, says the one who is us. Here I am, and all the children you've given me. that is the gospel of Hebrews 1 and 2.

[37 : 33] God so loves humanity that he becomes humanity. God so loves us that he becomes us. God has not given up on the original design.

The living God so wants us to be all he wants us to be that he becomes what he wants us to be. here I am.

Finally, here I am, the one true human. God, the one true human. And that, brothers and sisters, is why we are drawn like a magnet to Jesus of Nazareth.

That's why we find him irresistible. He is everything we were meant to be. He is everything we long to be.

To him be all the praise and glory now and forevermore. Amen.