

Made Lower to Save Us

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Start with an animal story. It's to do with a segment in Zootopia, that animated movie where Judy Hopps, I think that's her name, that little bunny, is the star bunny cop trying to solve the mystery of why some animals in Zootopia were turning feral.

Now, midway through the show, they're captured by the crime mafia in Tundra Town, which is made up of these gangster polar bears. Now, these bears are led by a crime boss called Mr. Big. Now, Judy's sidekick, a petty crime hustler, he's a fox, called Nick Wild, tells Judy he's really scared of Mr. Big, who's the most fearsome crime boss in Tundra Town.

So, when they get to Mr. Big's headquarters, we're filled with suspense as to who this Mr. Big is. As they wait in the office for Mr. Big to reveal himself, Judy wonders aloud, as each polar bear enters the room.

One after the other, is that Mr. Big? Is that Mr. Big? And then finally, the biggest bear, polar bear, comes in. And so, everyone assumes that this must be Mr. Big.

[1 : 13] Except what happens is that he's carrying a little armchair, and in it sits Mr. Big. And I think we've got a picture of Mr. Big, who happens to be a tiny, arctic shrew.

We don't have a picture of Mr. Big? Oh, dear. All right. I'll keep you in suspense. It's an arctic shrew. It's a small little mouse.

Anyway, it's a comical scene. You've got to imagine. Because we all expect Mr. Big to be the fiercest and the most scary polar bear, but it turns out that this tiny shrew is the fearsome leader of the polar bear mafia.

I think now you're going to watch that movie now, aren't you? Just to see who Mr. Big is. Well, as we consider our passage tonight, this same sort of picture is what we get about humans.

We are like the little tiny shrew who ends up ruling the world. So just to recap, we saw last week that Jesus, as a human being, was elevated into the very throne room of God.

[2 : 19] He's seated at his right hand, and he's ruling on God's behalf. Well, this week, we come back to Earth, where we discover, first of all, God's plan and design for this world, which is that humble humans will rule the world.

That's point one. So he begins in verse five of our passage. It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come about which we are speaking. The writer here is resuming his train of thought from verse 13 of chapter one.

If you look back there, you read that it wasn't to angels that God said, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool of your feet.

Rather, it's to a human Jesus that God will put all his enemies under his feet. But now he goes further to say that it's not simply enemies who are under Jesus' feet, but it's everything.

But it's everything that's put under humanity's feet. Under Jesus, of course. And he shows this by quoting Psalm 8, even though he doesn't actually mention it by number, but because Brendan read it, you'll know that it is from Psalm 8, which says, One is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him.

[3 : 37] You made them a little lower than the angels. You crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet. Now, realize first of all that Psalm 8 isn't about Jesus in the first place.

Instead, this Psalm is about humanity. It harks back to Genesis 1, where God made humans in his image, male and female, to rule on his behalf over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living creature on earth.

And the writer of Hebrews' point is simply this. God made humans to rule his world, even though, looking at us, there's nothing really to commend us for that task.

For he says, What is mankind that you, God, are mindful of them? In fact, just compare us with some of the other creatures, and you may think that actually God made the wrong choice.

I mean, would you choose us if you had the choice? Or would you pick a better animal? Maybe a lion or an eagle, perhaps. Beautiful, majestic creatures, aren't they?

[4 : 47] They're powerful. They're feared. I know some of us may think, Oh, but hang on. Of course we're superior to these animals, aren't we? Because we're more intelligent. We're more creative.

We have the capacity to love. But remember, these things aren't actually inherent to our physical makeup. We're only like that because God has given them to us, because he chose us to rule on his behalf.

Had he chosen the lion or had he chosen the eagle, he could have easily given them those same qualities. You know, we like to think in this day and age that we are the most evolved of animals. But really, if you read Psalm 8, there's really nothing inherent in us that causes us to be exalted. Any dignity and honor that we have as humans only comes because of God.

But God made us a little lower than the angels. That is, at the pinnacle of his creation. It's saying any higher, and we would be where the angels are in heaven.

[5 : 54] No, he has given us the honor of ruling creation on his behalf. Everything has been put under our feet. That was God's design from the beginning.

But sadly, we've stuffed it up. We've stuffed up our responsibility. So, verse 8b, second part, continues like this. 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. Not everything is subject because we have rebelled against God. We have inverted his creation order.

We see how it was meant to be back in Genesis. God, humanity, man and woman. And then animals in that order. But then in Genesis 3, we invert that order. Eve listens to the serpent, the animal.

And Adam listens to Eve instead of God. And as a result, the ground becomes cursed for them. Instead of producing fruit for human, it produces thorns and thistles.

[6 : 58] There is now enmity between the serpent and the woman. And if we look today at the world, you know, the tame animals in Genesis 2, we now have wildlife.

That is, animals that are actually potentially dangerous to us. Those of you who went up that bushwalk yesterday and killed that snake, well, that's...

You can ask Esther about that later. She's got photos. Well, that's potentially dangerous. It could have killed someone. Not everything is under our control, is it? I mean, we can't even tame the humble bacteria or virus.

These sort of mindless organisms, which every winter kill our young and our weak. And then from time to time, we have plagues and pestilences that wipe out our crops.

But the saddest thing, of course, is that we can't even rule ourselves. Because there's enmity between humans. Nation against nation. Tribe against tribe.

[8 : 00] Neighbor against neighbor. Husband against wife. Parent against child. And so we've fallen short of this ideal that God has laid out for us in Psalm 8.

Not everything is subject to us. But the good news is that God has not allowed us to frustrate His plans.

He will still put all things under humanity. But what He has to do first is to send Jesus to solve the problem. And He does that by firstly rescuing God's people.

And so the writer says that although in verse 8 we do not see everything subject to humanity, yet in contrast, in the very next verse, verse 9, we see Jesus who was made lower than the angels for a little while.

That is, Jesus becomes a humble human, not crowned, and now crowned, and then now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

[9 : 07] Jesus then becomes the first to fulfill Psalm 8. He's crowned with glory and honor. But He gets there only after He suffered death, after tasting death for everyone.

And so in this verse 9, there's actually a double motion here. First, the downward motion where God in His kindness and grace to us sends His Son to become a human, a humble human, to become one of us in suffering and death.

So in verses 10 to 13, that's being unpacked. And then there's an upward motion where then He's raised in glory and honor. But as He does, the good news is that He brings us with Him, freeing us from death.

And we see that in verses 14 to 18. So let's look at both those sections, will we, in turn. So firstly, in verse 10, we read, 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.

Just like Moses leading Israel out of Egypt, Jesus too is bringing us out from slavery to glory. But in order for Jesus to achieve this, He must first qualify Himself as the pioneer of our salvation.

[10:25] He's the guy at the head of the expedition, as it were, blazing a trail for us. And Jesus achieves this, the writer says, by being made perfect through suffering.

His humanity has to be tested and tried to show that it's without sin or flaw. And that's why Jesus didn't just appear on the earth, you know, as a full-grown adult, put on the clothes of humanity for a day or so, and then climb up on the cross to die for us.

No, that would not have tested Him. Jesus' humanity had to be fully tested from the moment of His birth right up to His death. Now, it wasn't that He was imperfect in any way or had to improve.

No, Jesus was without sin from birth. Rather, the perfecting that's spoken of here is similar to what happens when something, you know, is being manufactured or designed.

So, take, for example, if you're an aeronautical engineer and you've just designed a new airplane wing. They're pretty confident that they've got the design right. They think that based on the calculations, you know, everything's going to work.

[11:29] And yet, this design still has to be proven, doesn't it? Perhaps you have to put it through a wind tunnel and then subject it to the full range of stress tests.

And then, only after that works or it passes, then you know it's safe to be manufactured. Similarly, Jesus' humanity is perfect, but He undergoes the full set of stress tests, as it were, on humanity.

So, from the very mundane inconveniences in life, you know, like feeling tired and subject to physical injury, to temptations, as we read later in verse 18, and persecution, all the way to the point of His death.

And it's only when He does all these things without sinning that we are shown, or He's shown, to be the perfect human. You see, if Jesus isn't fully human, like us in every way, except without sin, then He cannot be our representative, which means, He cannot save us.

So, verse 11 goes on to say, both the one who makes people holy, that is Jesus, and those who are made holy, are of the same family.

[12:41] Jesus has to become one of us, a human, so that then we can become part of Him, or part of His family. We can only become children of God, because Jesus is our brother.

And then only because He is holy, that is without sin, can we then also be made holy. And so that is what we see in verses 14 and onwards, which we'll come to in a while.

But before we get there, the writer in verses 12 and 13 notes the joy which Jesus does this. This humbling that He suffers, this death that He goes through, all of which is actually beneath Him as the Son of God, the one through whom God created the world.

Just think about it. Yet Jesus went through it willingly and joyfully. Why? Because He wanted to, in verse 11, not be ashamed to call us, because He is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. And to press on His point, the writer then quotes a few Old Testament verses. The first is from Psalm 22, which early Christians considered to be messianic.

[13:55] That is, they considered it to be words that were fitting to come from the mouth of Jesus as God's Messiah or chosen King. Psalm 22 is an example of this, because Jesus Himself cries out from the cross.

So He uses the words of Psalm 22 in verse 1. Remember when He was on the cross, He said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's Psalm 22 and verse 1. And so, the rest of Psalm 22 is then now seen in the light of what took place at the cross with Jesus as the suffering servant of God.

And if you read that Psalm, in the first 21 verses, the psalmist is crying out in the midst of suffering. And what is striking is that in the first 10 verses or so, the emphasis is really on trusting God.

Actually, why don't we just turn to that, because I think it's worth doing that. I haven't got a page number. Let me just check. It'll be 500 and something. Someone got there before me.

547. Make sure you put a finger in Hebrews, coming back to that. But if we turn to 547, I want to just show you why there's this emphasis on trusting God.

[15:19] So we see Psalm 22, verse 1, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? And then as we go down, verses 4 and 5, the psalmist reminds God that when his forefathers trusted in him, in you, our ancestors put their trust, they trusted, and you delivered them.

He reminds God that they delivered them when they trusted in him. Then in verse 7, the psalmist endures the insults of others who mock him for trusting the Lord.

So look at verse 8, He trusts in the Lord, they say, Let the Lord rescue him. Now again, these insults are very familiar, aren't they? Because they are the very ones that those passers by threw and hurled at Jesus when he was on the cross.

And then in verse 9, he says, Yet you brought me out of the womb, you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. From birth, I was cast on you. From my mother's womb, you have been my God.

Now the thing is that we often think that because Jesus is divine, that actually he had no need to depend on his Father. But actually, that is not the case. He trusted in his Father throughout his earthly life.

[16:36] He trusted just as any human should. And he trusted God all the way to the end, to the cross and to death. He submitted himself to both because he trusted that God would vindicate him.

And which we know God did by raising him from the dead. And so when we get to verse 22 of the psalm, if you look there, the entire tone of the psalm changes to one of praising God for his rescue. And it's this verse 22 that the writer of Hebrews actually quotes. So look at verse 22 and then come back to Hebrews chapter 2 on page 1205. Jesus is now vindicated, he's perfected in his suffering. And then he says, I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters in the assembly, I will sing your praises. Jesus calls those who are being made holy his brothers and sisters.

That's why this psalm is quoted. He's not ashamed to be family with us. And we now share the same Father because of him. Now, remember in John chapter 20 and verse 17, remember when Jesus first met Mary after the resurrection?

[17:50] What does Jesus say to her? I put this verse on the slides. Yep. Look at what Jesus says. He says, Go instead to my brothers, notice that word, and those are the disciples, and tell them, I'm ascending to my Father, listen to this, and your Father, my God, and your God.

Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers, call us his brothers and sisters. And because of that, his Father is our Father.

Now, this same idea of trust is picked up again in verse 13, back in Hebrews. Only this time, the quotes are taken from Isaiah chapter 8, verses 17 and 18. And here again, Isaiah is the model of the suffering but faithful servant of God.

And in Isaiah 8 and verse 16, it describes Isaiah as having disciples under his care. And then in verse 17 and 18, which should be on the slides, I hope, it's his trust in God that safeguards his own salvation.

And so the writer puts these verses into Jesus' mouth. Notice, I will put my trust in him. This quote is from Isaiah, but again, it echoes Psalm 22, doesn't it? And then immediately following that, he says, here am I and the children God has given to me.

[19:14] Jesus has therefore achieved what God has called him to do, saving and rescuing God's children, his own human brothers and sisters. And so as Jesus takes his seat at God's right hand, he brings these sons of God with him.

That is God's mission for him as pioneer of our salvation. And this mission is now what's described in verses 14 to 18. So having explained how his suffering and death qualifies Jesus to be our pioneer, we now see how his humanity plays the crucial role or gives him the ability to rescue us from death.

So first in verse 14, because Jesus shares in our humanity, his death is able to 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.

Now the devil has this power over us because of our sin. Our rebellion against God rightly brings God's judgment on us, and that judgment is death.

And this is actually a reality that no one can argue with, because we all live under the shadow of death, don't we? We may not think much of it, particularly if we are young, or you are young, but death could come to us at any time and for any reason.

[20 : 43] A car crash, an anaphylactic reaction, cancer, heart attack, that's all it takes, doesn't it? One person I knew some years ago at work, he choked on a peanut.

Anap, suffered a heart attack, and within the hour he was dead. Death is, you know, we don't think about it, but death does hang over us all the time, doesn't it?

And so, imagine, I've taken this imagery from a hymn from Charles Wesley actually, so it's not original, but so imagine us in this prison cell called Life on Earth with the shadow of death hanging over us constantly.

There in the cell, the devil stands guard and there is this single doorway out of this prison cell.

Beyond it, you can see it, lies a glorious land where God and eternal life dwells.

But every time we try to head for this door, the devil stops us and gleefully says, sinful humanity isn't allowed there. And he's right because of God's holiness and our sin.

[21 : 55] But then, along comes Jesus one day and he takes all those who wish to come with him and heads for that door. And then when the devil tries to stop him, he says, step aside, Satan, because I'm a sinless human.

And then as we follow behind him through that door, it's his sinless humanity that shields us. He is the high priest who brings himself as the sacrifice to atone for our sins before God.

And if you read verses 16 and 17, that's essentially what it says. 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 his people or the people. Now, we're not going to go into much of that tonight because it's actually being elaborated in the later chapters of Hebrews. Suffice to say, that it's only because Jesus is like us, fully human in every way, except without sin, that he's fit to be our high priest. He's fit to make atonement for our sins.

[23 : 08] You see, when Jesus approaches God's throne, what he doesn't say is, Father, look who I've brought with me, these lowly earthlings, you ask me.

Nothing impressive about them, but since you asked for them, well, here they are. That's not what Jesus says, no. Instead, he will say, Father, look who I've brought with me. My sisters, Katie, Hannah, Helen, Joe, Renee, keep going on, and my brothers, Josh, Daniel, Dietrich, Peter. These are the children you've been waiting to glorify. Friends, this is the kind of glory that awaits each of us if we persevere in our faith in Jesus.

We will be welcomed home by our Father and our brother. And so the question tonight is, have we got this vision of glory aged deeply into our hearts so that it actually fuels everything that we do?

Is it always there in our mind's eyes so that we will never jeopardize its fulfillment with our choices in life? You see, it's actually no accident that this passage is sandwiched between two instructions.

[24 : 25] So last week in verse 1 of chapter 2, it says, pay careful attention to what we've heard so that we do not drift away. And then next week, we will begin in chapter 3 in verse 1.

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, fix your thoughts on Jesus, our apostle and high priest. Pay attention, fix our thought, and in the middle is this glorious picture of Jesus, our perfect human brother, leading us as sons into glory.

Now, sisters in Christ, I've deliberately used the word sons because sonship in the Bible isn't about gender, but about inheritance and rule. God did not have an eternal daughter, he only had an eternal son.

And this son shares his glory with all of us, brothers and sisters, so that we are all sons, small s, because Jesus is the son, capital S.

And yet, our greatest temptation on this journey is to stop trusting God, isn't it? Which is why the writer ends our section in verse 18 as such.

[25 : 37] he says, because he himself, Jesus, suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Jesus too was tempted when he suffered.

And I think the temptation in mind here was that he would stop trusting God. He would lose sight of his calling as our pioneer. I think that's why he's majored on Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8, to show that Jesus did not give in to that temptation, but kept trusting God to vindicate him, kept resisting the temptation to shun suffering and death.

And so that is likewise with us. When we face suffering or persecution or disappointment, our temptation is to stop trusting God, but we mustn't blame God or stop trusting him. That's what the writer is saying. We mustn't resist the temptation to take things into our own hands and find reward and satisfaction without Jesus. Rather, we must fix our thoughts on Jesus, who came from glory, became a humble human just like us, so that he can save us from death and lead us into glory.

Fix our eyes on Jesus. Let's pray. Father, help us not to lose sight of Jesus. Fix our thoughts on him. Keep hearing and obeying his word.

[27 : 00] He trusted in you. Help us to trust in you as well. help us to see this glory that awaits us. Help us to see it so clearly that there are no other distractions or no other temptations that can take us away from this great and glorious vision.

We pray this in his glorious name, in the name of Jesus. Amen.