

The Arrival of the King - who frees us from fear

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] Well, if you had to pick the top three greatest people of all time, I wonder whom you would choose. Some time ago, my daughter had a school assignment where she had to do that very thing.

And one of her three greatest people of all time was her mum, which I thought was kind of nice. Until we found out that her mum was number three on the list, behind her favourite teacher and her best friend.

I said to Michelle, at least you made it on the list. Poor old dad. But at least she chose to do the speech on one of them, which was her mum. But whom would you say is the greatest human of history?

Perhaps Albert Einstein, Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates. I'm hoping, though, you would all say the greatest human of history is Jesus. After all, that's part of what we celebrate at Christmas time, is it not?

That God the Son came to earth as a human, as a man. And you can't get a greater human than one who is also God, can you?

[1 : 1 2] But for the readers of this letter of Hebrews, Christ's humanity was actually more of a hindrance than a help. You see, the letter of Hebrews was written to a group of Christian Hebrews, Jews.

They were Jews, they'd become Christians, but now they were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. And so they were tempted to turn from Jesus back to Judaism.

Especially since Judaism, or in the Old Testament, it was taught that any human who was hung on a cross was actually cursed by God. And so Jesus' humanity and death on a cross really didn't make it easy for them to follow him.

And so the writer writes this letter to show that Jesus is actually the greatest. Greater than Judaism, greater than any prophet, greater than even the angels whom these Jews held in high esteem.

To give up on Jesus and go back to Judaism would be like giving up your Ferrari to go back to a scooter. It's silly. And so in today's passage, the writer shows us that Jesus' humanity is actually vital.

[2 : 2 2] In other words, Christmas is crucial. For it's only by being a human that Jesus could save us from sin and free us from fear. And we all face fears in this life, don't we?

Just last week, some of my children feared showing us their school reports. And for good reason. At Christmas time, other children are actually scared of Santa.

It's actually called Santa-phobia. Like this girl on the next slide. Poor kid. Of course, for adults, we face more serious fears, don't we?

Like the fear of missing out, the fear of being a failure or worthless in life. The fear of uncertainty. And the big one, of course, the fear of death.

Whether it's our death or the death of a loved one. These are the sorts of fears we face in life. And yet the fact that Christ became human in history means he can free us from them all.

- [3 : 26] But the writer begins by showing us Christ's humanity means he firstly fulfills God's purpose for us. So we're at point one in your outline, verse five in your Bible.
- He writes, Here the writer says angels, in other words, will not rule the world to come, the new creation.
- Now, how does he know that? Well, because God has said back in Psalm 8 that humanity was created to rule creation. Do you see verse six? But there is a place where someone has said.
- That always makes me feel better when I forget where places in the Bible. There is a place where someone has said. 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 crown 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, he says.
- [4 : 39] Clearly, he's referring to Psalm 8, isn't he? Which we heard in our first reading. And in Psalm 8, the psalmist seems to be reflecting on Genesis 1, where God created us in his image to rule over his world as his representatives.
- That's primarily what the word image means. There's other things, but primarily it means to rule lovingly like God. So, for example, when kings and queens set up their empires, they would put statues or images of themselves around the place to remind people that they ruled.
- It's why an image of the queen's head on the next slide is still on all our silver coins today. Why? Because technically, we are still under her rule.
- But for God, we were to be his image in the world. To rule over creation for him and to reflect his loving rule to the world.
- And this kind of blows the mind of the psalmist, that we should be given such a privileged position. He says in verse 6, Who are we? That God is mindful of us.
- [5 : 52] That God cares for us. For verse 7, God made us a little lower than the angels. That is, that we have a mortal body. But God still crowned us with glory and honor.
- Made us kings of creation. To verse 8, Rule over everything. That we might reflect the loving rule of the king, God. And if we were created to rule over everything, then that would have included the angels too.
- I remember reading a child's work at school, where they wrote down what they wanted to be in the future when they grew up. And this boy wrote on the next slide, Number one, to get a girlfriend.
- Number two, to kiss her. And number three, to rule the world. But actually, that's what God created us to do. The last one, that is.
- To reflect his loving rule over the world. Yet there is a problem, isn't there? Instead of being God's representatives who rule on his behalf, we wanted to rule on our own behalf without him.
- [6 : 56] And that's what the Bible calls sin. And it ruined our glory and honor. What's more, instead of a loving rule over creation, humanity often has an abusive rule over creation, doesn't it?
- And our rule is not over everything. It's limited over some things. I mean, can you stop the wind and the rain?
- Was there someone here yesterday turning the tap on and off? Of course not. Would you be able to tell a hungry lion in the wild to stay, sit, good boy, don't eat me?
- Would you be able to jump into a pit of snakes and not be bitten? What's more, as much as people try to rule over death, no one can. It rules over us.

Except for one human. Jesus. You see the last bit of verse 8 and 9? The writer says, Yet at present we do not see everything subject to humanity, but we do see Jesus, who is made a little 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.

[8 : 10] You see, while we don't rule over everything, we do see Jesus in Scripture, who does. He was made lower than the angels, that is, he was born with a mortal human body that suffered and died, but this was only for a little while.

For then God raised him from the dead and exalted him to the highest place, crowned him with glory and honor, so now Jesus rules over everything as a human, including over the angels and even over death.

In other words, Jesus' humanity actually enables him to fulfill Psalm 8 completely, to rule the world just as God created us humans to do.

But Christ didn't stop there, he then also forged a path for us, to bring us to glory so that we too could fulfill Psalm 8. So at point 2, verse 10, he says, 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.

Now here, Jesus is called a pioneer. A pioneer is someone who goes ahead and forges a trail, a path for others to follow. Sometimes it feels like that when I come to one of my children's rooms, actually, it's so messy that there needs to be a trail forged so I can get through it.

[9 : 39] So I've got a picture on the next slide. See the trail? Terrible. But you see, this is what Christ has done for us, forged a path for us to glory, so that we can join him in ruling the new creation, just as God created us to.

How does Jesus forge this path? Well, by paying for our sins at the cross. The writer hinted at this in verse 9, where he said Jesus tasted death for us, for everyone.

Or in verse 10, where it says Jesus was made perfect through what he suffered at the cross. And not perfect in terms of, you know, being morally perfect and sinless. He always was that.

But made perfect in terms of qualifications. You see, by suffering at the cross, he paid for our sins so that we could enter glory. In other words, by his suffering, he was the ideal person, the perfect pioneer to lead us, to bring us into glory.

And he did that so that we might fully be crowned with glory and honor again. The glory and honor that sin ruined. That we might rule the new creation with him, that we might fulfill Psalm 8 completely in him.

[10 : 57] And this frees us from all sorts of fears, like the fear of missing out. This fear is so common today, particularly amongst young adults, that it's turned into an acronym. It's called FOMO.

Have you ever heard of that? Fear of missing out. But if we're going to rule with Christ in the new creation for eternity, then we're not going to be missing out on anything, are we?

Oh, sure, we may not have the house we want or all the things we'd like in this life. But as Jesus said, we will inherit the earth in the next life. So we need not fear missing out on things in this life of following Christ.

The next life will more than make up for it. A friend of ours chose to take a lower paying job to work for a Bible college in the office, even though it means she will now no longer be able to afford her own home in Sydney.

But she doesn't fear missing out on owning her own home in this life because she will inherit the earth in the next life. She will rule with Christ. And not just as Christ's colleague, but as Christ's sister.

[12 : 03] You see verse 11 to 13? Both the one who makes people holy, that's Jesus, and those who are made holy, that's us Christians, are of the same family.

So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. Jesus says to God, 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 I am, God, and the children God has given me. See here in verse 11, Christ makes us holy so that we can rule with him, not as a colleague, but as part of the family.

Jesus says he's not ashamed or put it positively, he's proud to call us his brothers and sisters. That's an extraordinary privilege, isn't it? We're so familiar with hearing that we are part of God's family that we can take it for granted.

But it's an extraordinary privilege that we should be brought in to the inner circle, so to speak. And this means we need not fear being a failure or being worthless in life because our fear, our worth, is not tied up in what the world says it is.

[13 : 17] The world tells us our worth is in how successful we are or what job or position in society we occupy, how much we have, or what contributions we make.

And so if we lose our job, like a couple of men have at the 1030 service, we can feel like a failure. Or as we get older, we can feel worthless because we can't contribute the way we once did.

But our worth is not tied up in those things. It's tied up in Christ. And he thinks you're worth so much that he's proud to call you his brother and sister.

He thinks you're worth so much he died to make you holy and secure a place for you in glory with the privileged position of ruling the new creation with him.

I mean, that's a pretty important job, isn't it? You see, we need not fear being a failure or worthless for Christ has brought us into his family, secured our privileged position of ruling the new creation with him.

[14 : 20] You are of great worth to Christ, no matter what the world says, and our worth is secure in him. But in order to do all this, to die for us as our perfect pioneer and to make us holy like him, Jesus had to become like us.

He had to become human. So we're at point three in verse 14. 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.

Here in verse 14, we're told firstly that the devil holds the power of death. That is, he can demand our eternal death, our judgment.

You see, the judgment for sin is eternal death, hell. And the devil is like a prosecutor in a courtroom. He doesn't have the power to sentence us to hell, but he has the power to accuse us of being sinners, which we all are, and then demand that God the judge sentence us to hell.

That's the devil's power of death here, the power to demand we pay for our sin with eternal death. But if Jesus pays for our sin, if he suffers hell on the cross in our place, then the devil has nothing left to complain about.

[15 : 51] He can no longer demand that we pay it because Christ has already paid it. If Jesus pays for our sins, then that's it. The devil has lost his power to demand anything because Christ has paid it all at the cross.

You see, that's how Christ breaks the power of the devil here. But for Christ to die in our place, to pay for our sins, he had to be human. Otherwise, it wouldn't be a fair swap.

It wouldn't be just. I remember when my son was little, he came home from a party with one of those party bags and he had a chocolate Freddo frog in it. I felt like some chocolate so I tried to hoodwink him.

He was really little. I said, I'll swap you the Freddo frog for a biscuit in the cupboard. But he was old enough to cotton on to it and he said, no way, Dad. That's not fair.

And he was right. It wasn't a fair swap. A fair swap would have been one flavour Freddo for another flavour Freddo. Freddo for Freddo. And for Jesus to die in our place and pay for our sins, it had to be human for human, you see.

[17 : 00] It's why I'm sad to say that our pets will not be in heaven because Jesus did not come as a pet to die in their place. It's why angels cannot be saved if they sin because Jesus did not come as an angel to die in their place.

See verse 16 and 17? It says, For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants, God's people. 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 the service to God and make atonement for the sins of the people.

Notice who he helps, not angels, but people because he came as a person. And he helps them by making atonement for our sins, paying for our sins at the cross so that we can be right with God.

And all this means we now no longer need to fear death or the judgment that comes after it. People fear death these days for all sorts of reasons. The two most common ones are because they fear missing out on life with loved ones or they fear the unknown, not knowing what will happen.

After they die. Of course, people should all really fear death because after we die we will face judgment. But either way, people fear death so much so that verse 15, their fear makes them slaves.

[18 : 30] Do you see that? Our fear of death enslaves us into doing everything we can to avoid it. It's why pharmaceuticals is a billion dollar business because people spend copious amounts of money trying to live longer or have their loved ones live longer.

Now, don't mishear me. It's not wrong to try and live longer. God created us for life. It's death that is unnatural.

So the desire to live is a good thing until it is driven by the fear of death which is a bad thing. Let me give you an example.

I remember seeing some adults, children who were non-Christians. they had a very sick mother who was Christian, elderly mother and they insisted that their dying mother kept having chemo and radiotherapy even though their mother did not want it, even though it continued to make her sick and even though everyone knew including the doctors it would not heal her.

But the children insisted that their mother take it. Why? Because they feared her death and what it meant for them. You see, their positive desire to see her live actually changed to a negative fear of death and it enslaved them to do everything they could to avoid their mother's death.

[19 : 54] It enslaved them to denial that these drugs were actually going to work. It enslaved them to worry and anxiety and even to acting selfishly. This wasn't good for their mother.

But because Jesus became human, he could die in our place and free us from the fear of death and the judgment that comes after. For he has secured for us life after death.

We know what's going to happen now. And not just life after death but life where we will rule with him in the new creation. So we need not let the fear of death enslave us to worry or anxiety or even acting selfishly.

We know where we are going. Instead we can be content to let go when the time comes. We can even let our Christian loved ones go when the time comes.

Knowing we will see them again in the new creation. Just to be clear I'm not promoting euthanasia. Okay? When the time comes though we should be content to let them go.

[21 : 01] Knowing we'll see them again in the new creation. For one person I remember it even freed her to suggest another woman for her husband to marry after she died for his good.

Now that's selfless isn't it? Now don't get me wrong this is not easy and it's natural to miss our loved ones like crazy but we need not fear that their death or ours will be the end.

For if we believe in Christ like them we will see them again. And in case that's not enough Christ's humanity also enables him to help us to glory to see them again such that we need not fear uncertainty.

See verse 18 the last verse there because Christ himself suffered when he was tempted as a human he's able to help those who are being tempted.

In other words we need not fear uncertainty but can have the assurance of help. that he will help us to glory. And so do you see how crucial Christmas is? Christ's humanity is not a hindrance as the first readers these Hebrews thought.

[22 : 07] Rather it's what enables him to fulfill God's purpose for humanity as rulers over creation. It's what enables him to die for us as one of us and bring us to glory where we will rule with him.

And it's what enables him to free us from fear like the fear of missing out. knowing that we'll inherit the earth. Like the fear of being a failure knowing that our worth is secure in Christ.

Or the fear of uncertainty knowing that he will help us to heaven. Or like the fear of death knowing that we have life eternal waiting for us. You see Christ became human to die in our place and to secure our hope of ruling in the world to come.

And that frees us from all these fears in this world doesn't it? so that we can live lives of contentment, comfort and joy. There's a line in a carol called A Little Town of Bethlehem which we'll sing next week.

It's on the next slide. And the line says, In your dark streets shining, that is in Jerusalem's dark streets shining that night, is everlasting light, Christ. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you Jerusalem tonight.

[23 : 19] Why? Well, it's Bethlehem actually, because Christ was born in Bethlehem, that very first Christmas, to secure our heavenly hope and free us from earthly fears, if we believe in him.

So do you. And for us who do, then this Christmas we had to do what the very next verse after our reading says, chapter 3 verse 1. It says, Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, notice the family connection there, who share in the heavenly calling, you know, glory to rule with Christ, what are we to do?

Fix your thoughts on Jesus. That's what we are to do this Christmas. We are to continue to fix our thoughts on Jesus, for it's his birth as a human, his death and resurrection that not only saves us from sin, but frees us from fear, that we may continue to live this life with contentment, comfort and joy.

Let's pray. Let's pray.