

The Greatest Man

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[0 : 0 0] Why don't I just pray for us, particularly as I'm starting to lose my voice, so that would be good. Father, we do thank you for your word, and Father, we pray now that you would indeed help us to understand this somewhat tricky passage, and upon understanding it, be encouraged by it, as we see the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We pray this in his name. Amen. Well, if you had to pick top three greatest human beings of all time, I wonder who you would pick.

Not Jesus, you can't pick Jesus right now. Who would you pick three greatest human beings of all time? Our daughter, who is in grade one at school, was given a school project where she had to do this.

She had to choose three, and then pick one of those three to write a speech on. And her top three greatest people of all time, one of them was her mother.

Yeah, we were quite chuffed as well. Until she told us, though, that her mother was number three on the list, behind her teacher and her teddy. And I said to Michelle, at least you made it on the list.

[1 : 2 0] Though in the end, the person our daughter decided to do the speech on was her mum, so it was all fine. But who would you say are the greatest human beings of all time? You know, Albert Einstein, Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates, with what he's accomplished.

No doubt many of you would actually rightly say Jesus Christ. But the very fact that Jesus was a human being meant that the recipients of this letter thought he was lower than the angels.

I mean, after all, surely angels are superior to humans, are they not? Now, at this point, we need to remember the background of this letter. I mentioned it to you last week. The letter of Hebrews is written to a group of Hebrews or Jews who had decided to become Christians.

They left their old ways of Judaism behind and started following Jesus. But now they are again suffering because of Jesus. They'd endured one round of suffering, but it's come back this time.

And so now they attempted to give up on Jesus and go back to their old way of Judaism. With its Old Testament law and its priests and its sacrifices and its messengers like the prophets and the angels who also spoke God's message.

[2 : 4 0] You might remember from last week. And so the writer encourages them to persevere in following Jesus by constantly pointing them to the surpassing glory of Jesus. As Joe mentioned at the start of the service.

The writer is constantly saying, look at who Jesus is. Why would you want to leave him who is superior to go back to what is inferior? And so last week we saw that Jesus is God's greatest messenger because he is God the Son himself.

He can speak directly from God. And when he speaks, it's the whole picture. But the angels and the prophets, well, they are inferior messengers.

And they spoke God's word in bits and pieces. You might remember the jigsaw puzzle. But it seems there is still an issue that the writer needs to deal with. And this issue has to do with Jesus's humanity.

For these Hebrews, Jesus's humanity made Jesus look inferior or lower than the angels, it seems. And so the rest of this chapter two deals with Jesus's humanity.

[3 : 45] That even as a human, he is greater than the angels. In fact, he had to become a human. In order to save the readers and us. And so the writer begins by defending the greatness of Christ's humanity.

Point one, verse five, he says, For it is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come about which we are speaking. You notice that?

He's saying the world to come. That is the new creation where everything is restored, where it will literally heaven on earth. That is not going to be subject to the angels rule.

They're not going to rule over it. In fact, and rather amazingly, humans are going to rule over it. How does the writer know this? Well, because Psalm 8 tells him.

So verse six, he says, But there is a place where someone has testified. He always kind of lets everyone be excused if you've forgotten a reference in the Bible there.

[4 : 47] 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. And 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. You see, Psalm 8 was our first reading. And it's a psalm about the extraordinary place God has given humanity.

Some Bible translations have what is man, singular, that you are mindful of him. A son of man that you care for him. But either way, it's mankind that is on view.

Even the reference to a son of man here refers to a human. That's how the phrase is normally used. Of course, Jesus picks it up and runs with it and fills it with his own meaning.

But here he's talking about the extraordinary place God has given humanity. Humanity is made just a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor, which is extraordinary. And what's more, God had placed all things under our feet.

[5 : 52] And the writer adds in verse eight, just in case we've missed the point, In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. In other words, humanity's place in God's plan was to rule over all of creation, including perhaps angels who are part of that creation.

Chapter one, verse seven. It's an extraordinary thing. But of course, Psalm 8 simply reflects God's creative purposes from Genesis, doesn't it? On the next slide is a verse from Genesis.

There we are. Yep. Genesis chapter one. Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion or rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth.

See, Psalm 8 is just echoing what God created humanity to do. In fact, Psalm 8 uses some of that same language from Genesis. And so the writer expects humans to rule over the world, which already means that Jesus' humanity doesn't make him inferior to angels.

Not if humans were meant to rule over all of creation. But there is a problem. We don't experience this rule over creation at the moment, do we? As the writer says at the end of verse eight, yet at present, we do not see everything subject to them.

[7 : 15] Of course, we can rule over some things, over forests. We can cross rivers. We can tame some animals. We can even fly to the moon. But jump into a pit of sharks and see how you go.

Or get into the cage of a hungry lion and say, sit and see if he obeys. And not to mention that we cannot control natural disasters or disease or sickness, no matter how much we try to.

And most of all, we do not rule over death. Death rules over us. Now, as you know, all this is because of sin. Sin entered the world and it ruined our rule and spoiled our world.

And our sin leads to death. And so we don't see this world subject to us. But verse nine, we do see Jesus, who was 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.

You see, the readers of the letter may not see humanity ruling creation, but they do see or they do know that Jesus was made a lower than the angels, yes, but only for a little while, so that he might taste death for everyone.

[8 : 34] In other words, so that he might deal with sin and the rule of death in the world. And because Jesus died for us, God exalted him to the highest place, crowned him with glory and honor above the angels.

In other words, by his death and resurrection, Jesus has dealt with sin and the rule of death in the world. And so he has actually fulfilled Psalm 8, you see.

He has become the only human to perfectly rule over the world, including death. He's the only one who's been truly crowned with glory and honor.

And so he's the only true human, the only true son of man who fulfills that creative purpose of God back in Genesis chapter 1. You see, Jesus truly is the greatest human ever.

On the next slide is a picture. I think, yep. Do you know who that is? Yep. Does anyone remember what he said?

[9 : 39] Famous quote? I am the greatest. Now, here's the full quote. He said it in 1964. He says, I am the greatest. I'm the greatest thing that ever lived. I don't have a mark on my face and I upset Sonny Liston and I just turned 22 years of age.

I must be the greatest. Obviously, a very mature 22-year-old. Although, on the next slide, here he is at age 73.

And just four weeks ago, he released a statement on social media, Twitter, I think it was. And it said this, don't you forget, I am the greatest.

Four weeks ago. And yet, sadly, he suffers from the horrible disease of Parkinson's. And he sadly cannot control even his own body, let alone rule over all creation.

No, no. Ali, he is not the greatest. Jesus is the greatest. For by his death and resurrection, Jesus has fulfilled Psalm 8.

[10 : 47] He has defeated death and so he's crowned with glory and honor. He rules as God created humanity to rule over creation. You see, his humanity does not make him inferior to angels.

No, no. It makes him greater than the angels. For he fulfills God's creative purposes in Genesis to rule over all creation. To be crowned with glory and honor above angels.

But his suffering in death not only means he fulfills Psalm 8 and rules with glory and honor. But it also means he's opened up the way for us to fulfill Psalm 8.

To share in his rule over creation. To be whom God created us to be. Have a look at verse 10. It says, In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, the world to come.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.

[11 : 49] Here Jesus is called the pioneer of our salvation. A pioneer is someone who both leads and opens up the way for others to follow. A trailblazer, if you like.

I'm sure you all learnt about the early explorers in your history classes in school. For me, coming from New South Wales, we learnt about these characters on the next slide.

Blacksland, Lawson and Wentworth. Many attempts have been made to cross the Blue Mountains in the west of Sydney. But they pioneered the way. They blazed a trail for others to follow.

And even today, the road over the Blue Mountains follows their trail. They were pioneers, you see. They led the way and opened it up for others to follow.

And Jesus here, being pioneer, that's what that word means. Pioneer of our salvation means he is the one who both saves us and opens up the way for us to be brought to glory.

[12 : 49] And he did this by dying for us, by tasting death for us. That's why the writer says in verse 10, it literally begins, For in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God should make Jesus perfect through what he suffered.

And the word perfect here doesn't mean morally perfect. It means fully qualified, the perfect person, if you like, to save us and open up the way for us to be brought to glory, to share in his rule.

And so Jesus is the perfect person to be our pioneer, the perfect person to save us and bring us to the world to come. And how does he do that?

By his death? Well, as we'll see in a moment, his death pays for our sin so that we can be saved from judgment and brought into God's family. And being brought into God's family, as the writer is about to say, it means sharing in the family business, ruling as Jesus rules.

So verse 11, both the one who makes people holy, that's right with God, Jesus who makes people holy, and those who are made holy, that's us Christians, are of the same family, you see.

[14 : 03] And the idea is that we do what Jesus does, or we will do what Jesus does. And so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, I will declare your name, God, to my brothers and sisters.

In the assembly, I will sing your praises. And again, I will put my trust in God, says Jesus. And again, here I am, and the children of God, that God has given me as brothers and sisters.

You see, we Christians have been made right with God, holy in his sight, and are now part of the family. We're now brothers and sisters of Christ. We're now fellow sons and daughters of God.

And so we will share in the family business of ruling over creation. In fact, I think I've got a verse from Romans 8 on the next slide. Paul puts it like this, we are co-heirs with Christ, and we will share in his glory, do you see.

By his death and resurrection, Jesus not only fulfills Psalm 8 as the greatest human, the greatest son of man ever, but he also pioneers the way for us so that we can fulfill Psalm 8, so that we can fulfill Genesis 1 and rule as God created us to rule in the world to come.

[15 : 18] But only if we belong to his family by trusting in him. Well, the writer has spent some time establishing the greatness of Jesus, his humanity, which does not make him inferior to the angels, but actually superior.

He's the true human who rules over all, including humans. And more than that, he opens up the way for us to fulfill our role of ruling over creation, as God created us to in the world to come.

But the question then is, why was it necessary for Jesus to become human in the first place? Couldn't he have done all that anyway? In chapter 1, you see, Jesus is declared to be fully God, the exact representation of God, chapter 1, verse 3.

And here in chapter 2, he's declared to be fully human, the exact representation of us. But why is that part necessary? Well, it brings us to a second point and two reasons.

We only have time to look at the first one, though. The first reason is in verse 14 to 16. He says, 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.

[16:37] For this reason, sorry, for surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. Here it says that Jesus was made fully human in order to free us from the devil's power of death and our fear of death.

You see, humanity has a fear of death. It's not hard to work out. People are afraid of dying. And what's more, this fear of death actually enslaves us.

It makes us slaves. And so people, for example, will work as hard as they can to earn as much as they can in this life because they know death is coming and will take it all away. And so the fear of death taking away means they work even harder to get as much as they can and experience as much as they can.

Or people work hard at living as long as they can to avoid death. It enslaves them, you see. Or take another example. I've seen adult children insist that their elderly and dying mother keeps having chemo and radiotherapy even though the mother didn't want it and the doctor said it wasn't going to make a difference.

It was too far gone, the cancer. But the children insisted against the mother's wishes, against the doctor's directions, that she still have chemo and radio.

[18:00] Now, they thought they were being loving, but they're actually causing their mother more pain. In the end, they weren't being loving. They were being fearful of death, her death.

And so it ironically enslaved them to be unloving by forcing their mother to go through this, you see. Now, don't mishear me. There is a place for all those treatments.

But at this point, even the doctor said there was no point. But their fear of death, you see, enslaved them and pushed them and drove them and their mother. Fear of death enslaves people.

And what's more, our physical death is simply an introduction to eternal death or to judgment. As the writer of Hebrews will later say, we are all destined to die once and after that to face judgment.

And so in a sense, we are right to fear death because of what will follow. It's all very bright and cheery, isn't it? It gets worse, though. To make things worse, we are told that the devil also has the power of death.

[19:05] Did you notice? That is, he has the power to demand our death. How? Well, he accuses us of being guilty of sin. In fact, his name, Satan, means accuser.

And the problem is, he's right. We are guilty of sin. Of ignoring God. Of not honoring God in our lives as he deserves to be honored.

And so he can demand our death. It's all very depressing, isn't it? Until, of course, we remember why Jesus became human. You see verse 14? It says that Jesus becomes one enough, one of us, so that by his death in our place, he might break the devil's power to demand our death in the next life.

Let me see if I can illustrate with a story I once heard of an ancient Eastern ruler.

I think it was Japan, but I'm not sure. But he had a great problem in his kingdom with drug smugglers, smuggling opium. And so he passed a law, not unlike Bali, where anyone caught smuggling drugs would be put to death.

[20 : 18] Some weeks later, a drug dealer was caught. And when the guards told the king, he said, well, you know the royal law, death. And so the guards brought in the drug dealer to hear his sentence from the king.

And as the drug dealer was brought in, to the king's horror, it was his son. And next to his son was the jailer, jangling his keys as if to remind the king that he's got a law.

And if he is to be just, then even his son must die. And so the king, justice must be served, gave the order for the jailer to execute the son, except that they should put a hood over his head to cover his shame.

And so the next day, the jailer arrived at the son's cell, who had already had his hood put on him, and led the son away to be executed. But when the jailer removed the hood from the executed body, he saw that it was the head of the king.

You see, the king had come down from his throne, taken off his royal robes, dressed himself in his son's prison clothes, becoming like him so that he could take his place and die for him.

[21 : 29] And the jailer, well, he could jangle those keys as much as he wanted, but the punishment had been paid. The jailer could demand nothing more. Now, I don't know if that is actually a true story or not.

The person who told me suggested it was, but I do know the one here in Hebrews 2 is true. Jesus, who is God, took off his royal robes as it was, was made lower than the angels, put on humanity's prison clothes, if you like.

He became fully like us so that he could take our place and die for us. And by his death, the punishment for our sin has been paid.

And so the devil cannot demand anything more from us. He's paid the punishment. That's it. He can jangle his keys all he likes. And instead of eternal judgment, what awaits us is eternal glory to rule with Christ in the world to come.

Verse 16 literally says, for it is, of course, not angels he takes hold of, but he takes hold of Abraham's descendants.

[22 : 38] That is, Jesus takes hold of us, his brothers and sisters, those who are part of Abraham's family, God's family. It's like he grabs us and takes us into glory. And if we know that's where we are headed, then we no longer have to fear death in this life, do we?

I mean, it's why conducting Christian funerals like the one last Wednesday of Nancy Lyons is such a comfort. She did not fear death because she knew where she was going.

And it was a great time to give thanks to God for her life, rather to mourn and wallow because we fear death. We don't fear death because Jesus has taken away judgment, you see.

And so we know we're going to glory instead. We're going to share in our brother's glory. Now, Jesus could not do all that if he wasn't fully human. If he wasn't fully human, he could not have taken our place as one of us.

So, for example, I tried to do a swap with one of my children one day. I tried to swap one of those lolly snakes, you know, those snakes alive, Alan's snakes, tried to swap him a snake for a Freddo frog.

[23 : 46] It was a bit cheeky of me. And of course, he said, no way. You know, that's not fair. It had to be a snake for a snake, you know, a red snake for a yellow snake. Or it had to be a Freddo for a Freddo, a white Freddo for a chocolate Freddo.

That was fair. That was just. And it's the same with Jesus. For him to pay humanity's sin, he had to be human, do you see? Human for human.

It's why angels cannot be saved if they turn against God. Because Jesus did not become an angel and die in their place as one of them. But he became a man so that he could die in our place as one of us.

And free us from the devil's power. And so the fear of death. The second reason he became human, and we're not going to spend much time on this at all. Verse 17 to 18. And this is because the themes of high priest will be picked up later on in Hebrews.

It says, for this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service to God. And that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

[24 : 48] Because he himself suffered when he was tempted. He's able to help those who are being tempted. And there's great encouragement there. But he'll return to that theme in chapter 4.

The point is, Jesus is the greatest human. Greater than the angels. He fulfills Psalm 8. He's crowned with glory and honour. And he had to become human so that he could die for us.

And free us from judgment. From the power of death. And its fear. So where does that leave us? Well, let me start with President Obama.

Some might say that he's one of the greatest humans of all time. Certainly, that was the vibe when he was elected. In fact, when he was elected, there was great celebration. And a man called Tim Alexander wrote a book on the next slide.

There it is. Obama, hope for the world. And of course, six years later, the world is still in need. Still a mess. And you can actually buy the book for one cent.

[25 : 52] But the writer of Hebrews wants us to see the glory of Jesus. That his humanity is so much more than any other human in history. He wants us to see the hope that Christ, because of his humanity, gives us.

Hope of freedom from fear of death now. Because we have freedom from judgment later. And what's more, Jesus is the only one who enables us to be truly human.

If God created us to rule his creation in right relationship with him. If this is what it means to fulfill our role as humans. Then only Jesus can help us be human.

Because only Jesus helps us to fulfill that role. To have a right relationship with God. And to rule over creation in the world to come. You see, without Jesus, we cannot be truly human.

I don't know if you realize that. Jesus offers us hope for all of this. For us who join his family by trusting in him. So have you done that?

[26 : 56] Are you part of his family? Have you put your faith in Jesus? And if you have, then continue to behold the glory of Jesus. In fact, do what he says in the very next verse.

Chapter 3, verse 1. Therefore, holy brothers and sisters who share in the... Notice the heavenly calling, the world to come. Fix your thoughts on Jesus.

Whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. May God help us to do this. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus.

That he was not only fully God, but he became fully human. So that he could fulfill our role and open up the way as our pioneer.

That we may fulfill the role you have given us at creation. And Father, we thank you that also by becoming human, he has died in our place as one of us.

[27 : 56] So that we can have freedom from the devil's power of over death to accuse us. And we can have freedom from fear of death in this life. For we know that we are headed for glory. There to rule with our Lord and Saviour Jesus. In perfect relationship with you. And so Father, in the meantime, help us to keep fixing our eyes on him we pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.