

The Arrival of the King - who frees us from fear

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, thank you again for your word. I thank you that you continue to speak through it and by your spirit. And so help us again, we pray, that we might understand your word.
- But more than that, live in light of it. And particularly when it comes to seeing afresh the greatness of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.
- Well, if you had to pick the top three greatest people of all time, I wonder whom you would pick. Some time ago, one of my kids had to do this for a school project.
- She chose three people and had to do a speech on one of them. And one of her three greatest people of all time was her mum, Michelle, which we thought was kind of nice. Until we found out that Michelle was number three on the list.
- Number one was her teacher, who was her favourite teacher at the time. And number two, I think, was her best friend. And I said to Michelle, though, at least you made it on the list. I'm not even on there. She did, though, choose to do a speech on her mum.
- [1 : 0 3] But who would you say are the greatest humans in history? Perhaps Albert Einstein, Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates, perhaps? I do assume, though, that all of you would say that the greatest human in history is Jesus.
- After all, it's part of what we celebrate at Christmastime, is it not? That in history, God, the Son, came to earth as a man, as a human. And you can't get a greater human than someone who is also God, can you?
- But for the readers of this letter, Christ's humanity was actually more of a hindrance than a help. You see, this letter of Hebrews was written to a group of, well, Hebrews, Jews, who had become Christians.
- But now they were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. And so they attempted to turn from Jesus back to Judaism. Especially since, as Jews, they grew up being taught that any human hung on a cross was cursed by God.
- That's what the Old Testament says. And so Jesus' humanity and death didn't make it easy for them to follow. And so the writer writes this letter to show them that, actually, Jesus is the greatest.
- [2 : 1 8] He is worth following. He's greater than Judaism. He's greater than any prophet. He's greater than even the angels whom the Jews held in high esteem. And to give up on Jesus and to go back to Judaism would be like giving up your Ferrari and going back to a moped or a scooter.
- It's inconceivable. And in today's passage, the writer shows us that Jesus' humanity, far from being a hindrance, is actually vital. 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 do face fears in life, don't we? Just last week, some of my kids feared showing us their school reports for good reason.
- No, actually, they weren't too bad. At Christmas time, there's also the fear for some kids of meeting Santa. It's called Santa-phobia. And on the next slide, this kid has it. Poor kid.

Of course, for us adults, we face more serious fears, don't we? The fear of missing out or the fear of being a failure or being worthless. The fear of uncertainty.

[3 : 31] And of course, one of the big ones, the fear of death. Whether it's our death or 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 all of them.

But the writer begins by showing us Christ's humanity firstly means that he fulfills God's purpose for us. So at point one in your outlines, verse five in your Bibles. It is not to angels that God has subjected the world to come about which we are speaking.

So here, just very briefly, the writer says that angels will not rule over the world to come. That is 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.

See verse six and following? 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 him or 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 was not subject to them.

[4 : 49] I love in verse six how the author seems he can't remember where this passage is from. It always gives us hope if we can't remember the Bible well. But clearly it's Psalm 8, isn't it? Our first reading.

And the psalmist in Psalm 8 seems to be reflecting on Genesis 1, where God created us in his image. To rule his world as his representatives.

And I think that the primary meaning of image involves ruling. There's other ideas associated, but I think primarily it's that of rule. I mean, when kings and queens set up their empires, they would put statues or images around the place to remind the people of their rule.

That's why on the next slide, we still have the queen's head on all our silver coins. Because technically, we still live under her rule. But for God, we were to be his image in creation.

We were to rule over creation for him and reflect his loving rule to the world. And this kind of blows the mind of the psalmist.

[5 : 57] He says in verse six there, what is mankind that you are mindful of them like this? A son of man that you care for them like this. He's amazed that God would do this.

For verse seven, God made us a little lower than the angels in that we have a mortal body. But God still crowned us with glory and honor that has made us kings of creation.

To verse eight, rule over everything. That we might reflect the loving rule of the king, God. And if we were created to rule over everything, then it included the angels.

I remember reading a child's work at school where they wrote down what they wanted to do when they grew up in the future. And this one boy wrote this on the next slide.

One, get a girlfriend. Two, kiss her. And three, rule the world. But you see, that's exactly what God created us to do.

[6 : 56] The last one, that is. To reflect his loving rule over the world. And 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.

We wanted to be God. The Bible calls that sin. And it ruined our glory and honor. And what's more, instead of a loving rule over creation, humanity has often exercised an abusive rule over it, hasn't it?

And our rule is certainly not over everything. It's rather limited. I mean, can you stop the wind and the rain? Was there someone yesterday just turning the tap on and off?

So it poured on and off? Of course not. Can you tell a hungry lion in the wild to sit, stay, don't pounce and eat me? Can you jump into a pit of snakes and not be bitten?

What's more, as much as people try to rule over death, we cannot. It rules over us. Except for one human. See the last bit of verse 8 and 9?

[8 : 05] The writer says, 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.

See, while we don't rule over everything, we do see Jesus in scripture, who does. For he was made lower than the angels, that is, he was born with a mortal human body and suffered death for us.

But this was only for a little while, the author says. For then God raised him from the dead and exalted him to the highest place, now crowned with glory and honor. And 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 completely fulfill Psalm 8 and God's purpose for us.

To rule the world just as God created us to. And yet Christ didn't just stop there. He also forged a path to bring us to glory, to the new creation where we will rule with him.

[9 : 25] So at point 2, verse 10. 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 in verse 10, Jesus is called a pioneer. A pioneer is someone who goes ahead and forges a trail for others to follow. And sometimes I feel like that when it comes to one of my kids' room.

It's so messy, you've got to forge a trail to get through it. So there it is. We'll take it off Paul, get in trouble actually. But that's what Jesus has done for us.

He's forged a path for us so that we can follow him into glory. So that we can join him in ruling the new creation. So that he can bring us to the new creation.

How does Jesus forge this path? Well, by paying for our sin at the cross. The writer has already hinted at this in verse 9, where he said Jesus tasted death for everyone. Or verse 10, where Jesus is made perfect through what he suffered.

[10 : 35] Not perfect in terms of being sinless. He was always perfect in that sense. But perfect in the terms of qualifications to be our pioneer.

You see, by his suffering at the cross, he paid for our sins so that we could be forgiven and brought into glory with him. In other words, by his suffering, he is the ideal person, the perfect pioneer for us to forge a path for us into glory.

And he did that so that we might be fully crowned with glory and honor again. That we might rule the new creation with him. In other words, that we too might fully fulfill Psalm 8 as God created us to.

And this actually frees us from our fear of missing out. This fear is common today, particularly amongst young adults, I understand. It's even an acronym now.

You know, you've heard of FOMO, 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 miss out on anything, are we?

[11 : 43] Sure, we may not have the house we want or all the things we'd like in this life. But as Jesus himself said, we will inherit the earth.

And so we need not fear missing out on things in this life for following Christ. The next life will more than make up for it. A friend of ours took a lower paying job to work in the office at a Bible college, even though that now means she will never be able to afford to buy her own house in Sydney, which is kind of understandable, I guess.

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

See verse 11? 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. He says to God, I will declare your name, God, to my brothers and sisters. In the assembly, I will sing your praises.

[12 : 57] And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, he says, here I am and the children God has given me. So verse 11, Christ makes us holy, not just so that we can rule with him as a colleague, but that we can be brought together with him into God's family.

It says Jesus is not ashamed or put positively. He's proud to call us his brothers and sisters. And that's an extraordinary privilege. I was so used to hearing about this that we forget what a privilege it is.

To be in God's family. We who don't deserve to be anywhere near God are actually in the inner circle, part of the clan. And this means we need not fear being a failure.

You see, our world tells us our worth is in how successful we are, what job or position in society we occupy, how much we have, what contributions we can make.

And so if we lose our job, we can feel like a failure. Or as we get older, we can feel worthless because we cannot contribute the way we once did.

[14 : 05] But our worth is not tied to those things. Our worth is in Christ. And he thinks you're worth so much that he's proud to call you his sisters and brothers.

He thinks you're worth so much that he died for you to make you holy, to bring you into his family and secure your place in glory. With the privilege of ruling with him over creation.

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 and secured our privileged position of ruling with him.

We have great worth in Christ, no matter what our world says. But in order to do all this, to die for us as our perfect pioneer, to make us holy like him, Jesus had to become like us.

He had to be human. So point three, verse 14. He says, Since the children of God have flesh and blood, he, that is Jesus too, shared in their humanity.

[15 : 13] 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 that the devil holds the power of death. He can't kind of make us die. But what he can do is demand our eternal death because of our sin.

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

That's the devil's power of death here. to demand we pay for our sin with death eternal in hell. But if Jesus pays for our sins, if he suffers hell on the cross in our place, the devil can no longer demand anything from us.

It's already been paid in full. If Jesus pays for our sins, then that's it. The devil has lost all his power to demand our eternal death.

[16 : 30] See, that's how Christ breaks the devil's power, by paying for our sins at the cross. So he can't demand anything else from us. But for Christ to die in our place and pay for our sins, he needed to be human.

Otherwise, it wouldn't be a fair swap. It wouldn't be justice. I remember when my son came home from one of his first birthday parties, I think it was, he came home with a lolly bag and he had a chocolate Freddo on it, and I just thought, oh, that sounds nice.

And so I tried to make him a deal. I thought I could pull the wool over his eyes. I said, I'll trade you your Freddo for a biscuit from the cupboard. Nah. No way, Dad. That's not fair.

And he's right. You know, a fair trade would have been one flavoured Freddo for another flavoured Freddo. You know, Freddo for Freddo. And for Jesus to die in our place, to pay for our sins, it had to be human for human, you see.

It's why I'm sad to say, I think our pets won't be in heaven. I got in trouble for saying that this morning. Because Jesus did not come as a pet to die in their place.

[17 : 39] They don't have souls as well, but anyway, that's another story. I'll stop now. It's why angels cannot be saved if they sin. Because Jesus did not become an angel to die in their place.

Do you see verse 16? It says, For surely it's not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. That's God's people. For this reason, he had to be made like them, God's people.

Fully human. In every way. In order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service to God. And that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Notice he helps not angels, but people. Because he came as a person. And he helps them by making atonement for our sins.

Came for them, taking God's anger in our place so that we can now be right with God. And that means we no longer need to fear death. Because people do, don't they?

[18 : 38] People today usually fear death usually because either they fear missing out on life with their loved ones, or they fear the unknown. What will happen after I die?

They're usually the two causes for fearing death. Of course, they should really fear death because after we die, we will face judgment. And that's worthwhile fearing for that reason. But either way, people fear death so much so that verse 15, their fear makes them slaves.

Do you see that? Our fear of death enslaves us to 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 get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with trying to live longer. God created us for life. It's death that is unnatural actually.

So the desire to live is a good desire until it is driven by the fear of death, which is bad. Let me see if I can explain with an example.

[19 : 44] I remember seeing some non-Christian adult children insist that their dying Christian mother keep having chemo and radiotherapy even though the mother didn't want it.

It made her sicker or more sick. And even though everyone knew, including the doctors, it would not save her. Why do they insist? Well, because they feared her death and what it would mean for their lives.

You see, their positive desire to see her live changed to a negative fear of death, which enslaved them to do everything they could to avoid it. It enslaved them to denial, thinking that this was going to work when the doctors said it wasn't.

It enslaved them to worry and anxiety and even, ironically, acting selfishly, keeping their mum alive for them, not for her. But because Jesus became human, he could die in our place and free us from the fear of death and the judgment that comes afterwards.

He has secured for us life after death instead, 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.

[21 : 02] But we know where we are going. Instead, we can be content to let go when the time comes. I'm not promoting euthanasia, just to be clear, but I am promoting contentment.

To let go when the time comes, knowing where we are going. We can even let our Christian loved ones go when the time comes, knowing that we will see them again in the new creation.

For one person I remember from our church, from the 9 o'clock congregation actually, she died a year and a half ago now, I think. It even freed her to suggest another woman for her husband to marry after she died for his good.

And they are married today. That's incredibly selfless, isn't it? You didn't fear death, you see. Now, don't get me wrong, this is not easy, it's natural to miss our loved ones like crazy, but we need not fear that their death or ours is 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 that new creation, such that we need not fear uncertainty.

[22 : 12] See verse 18? Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. He's able to help us get to glory. So we need not fear uncertainty, we have the assurance of his help.

So do you see how crucial Christmas is? Christ's humanity is not a hindrance as the first readers of this letter thought, rather it's what enables him to fulfill God's purpose for humanity as rulers over creation.

It's what enables him to then die as one of us, so that he can bring us to glory and rule with him. It's what enables him to free us from fear, like the fear of missing out, knowing that we will inherit the earth.

Like the fear of being a failure, knowing that our worth is secure in Christ. Like the fear of uncertainty, knowing that he will help us to heaven. And like the fear of death, knowing that we have life, eternal, waiting for us.

There's a line in the Christmas carol, a little town of Bethlehem that we sang earlier in our service, and it's on the next slide. It says, in your dark street shining, that is in the town of Bethlehem, is everlasting light, Christ.

[23 : 23] It says, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you, Bethlehem, tonight. Why? Because Christ was born as a man that very first Christmas in that town.

And so he secures by his death and resurrection our heavenly hope and frees us from all our earthly fears. Christ if we believe in him.

And so do you? Do you believe in Christ? For us who do, then this Christmas we are to do what the very next verse after our reading says, the last one I'll read.

Do you see chapter 3, verse 1? It says, therefore, holy brothers and sisters, you know, remember, God's family, who share in the heavenly calling, you know, the new creation ruling with Christ, what are we to do?

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

[24 : 33] Let's pray. Gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the birth of your son who became human so that he could die in our place as one of us.

And we thank you that because of that he frees us from the fear of death and judgment and instead secures us a place in the new creation in glory to rule with him for eternity.

Father, we pray that you would help us this Christmas to continue to fix our eyes on Jesus. We pray it in his name. Amen.