

3 States

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[0 : 00] We'll turn back for a short time this evening to the verses that I mentioned from the letter to the Hebrews. From Hebrews chapter 2 and the second half of verse 8 and verse 9.

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, but we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Now the way that we're going to consider this passage is by thinking about it in three separate parts. We're going to think about the present state of creation, which the writer talks about in verse 8, the present state of Christ, which is in verse 9, and then going back to verse 8, the future state of creation. So we have the present state of creation, the present state of Christ, and the future state of creation. But before we think about this text in these three ways, it might be helpful to have a little bit of background about these verses and the letter that was written as a whole. Now of course we don't know much about who this was written to, or indeed who even wrote the letter, but we know something of the situation of the people who received this letter. We know, for example, that it was written before the temple was destroyed. Now the temple was destroyed in about AD 70, so the letter was written before then, and it was written to a group of Christians who basically were feeling very dejected, were feeling powerless, and importantly, were feeling unvindicated about their own religion. And the reasons for this, I think are as follows.

One, Jesus had said, and you'll remember in various accounts in the Gospels, Jesus, when they had been in the temple courts, had said, destroy this temple and I will rebuild it again in three days. Now we of course know that Jesus was referring to his own body, to his crucifixion and to his resurrection on the third day. The Jews, of course, thought that he was talking about the temple. And so they were waiting for this temple to be destroyed, and of course it wasn't, not up until now at least.

And so they were, of course, feeling that this particular claim about Jesus, although they didn't understand it, was unfulfilled. And therefore Jesus himself was being untruthful in claims he was making. But the second point is that Judaism was still extremely powerful. The Pharisees and the Sadducees that we read so much about in the Gospel accounts were still exerting their influence over the people. And very importantly, as even maybe we were hearing about this morning, the Thessalonians and the people that the writer to the Hebrews was writing to were expecting Jesus to return imminently.

[3 : 55] They were expecting that just as Jesus had gone and would eventually return back as judge, that he would soon be taking all of his people to be with himself in glory. And they thought, and we heard this this morning, that they thought he was coming so soon that they were prepared to sell everything they had and just wait around without working until Jesus came back and took all his people to be with him in glory.

And of course, this hadn't happened yet. And this is at least 30 years after Jesus had ascended back into heaven. And that was an extremely long time for people who are waiting for him to return. And so they were becoming dejected. They still had this power of their former religion, which was a real burden to them, a burden that was extremely tempting to the turn to. It exerted a real influence over the people. And though, of course, Christ had set his people free, there were a lot of people who were willing to return to that yoke of slavery that they'd had under their old religion. And so they had all these strains and they had all these pressures on them and they were feeling dejected. They were feeling unvindicated and they were feeling like there was no global change, no global acknowledgement of Christ as Lord and Saviour as they'd been hoping for. Of course, you'll remember in the book of the Acts that on the first day, just after Peter's first sermon, they'd seen

3,000 people converted. 3,000 that wouldn't even fit in this building and what an encouragement that must have been after the very first sermon that was preached on Christ. And while the church had been growing, they'd seen nothing like that kind of acknowledgement since then. And so the church at the time was dejected, particularly the people that this writer was addressing. So how does the writer speak to these people and comfort them and set their minds on the right track and cause them to really have the proper Christian focus?

And what can we especially learn from this focus that he was teaching them to have? Well, let's go back to those three points that I mentioned. And the first one, the present state of creation. What is the present state of creation that the writer was referring to?

Well, if we go back to that second part of verse 8, the writer says, at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. And to sum this up, the present state of creation is rebellion, rebellion particularly against God. And it doesn't take much for us to look around and recognize that it's not just the case in AD 60 or AD 65 when this was written. It's just as true today that there's a rebellion against God. We heard, of course, last Sunday night, if you were here on Romans chapter 1, how people, though they had a knowledge of the truth, were suppressing that and were trying to push God out of their lives and follow the path that they were wanting for themselves. Well, of course, people are still doing that. We only need to look around. We only need to look at, for example, the government on marriage. Even recently, the

Coalition for Marriage, you may know of, is trying to garner support to keep the usual, the traditional definition of marriage. But the government is considering changing it. The government is considering undermining not just marriage itself, but everything that God has instituted in his moral law and in the word of God. And so we can see that not just at a government level, but at an individual, at a national level, people are rebelling against God. You can see that just in the way perhaps you stick on your TV or you watch a film and you see how it's just a joke to make nothing of God.

[8 : 19] And that can have a real effect on us. We can be drawn into, if not thinking the same way, as the people who will be belittling God. But we can almost just sit back and say, well, what hope is there for Christianity generally in this country? You see how many people in government, in the media, all across the spheres of influences in our lives, they don't think anything about God.

Is our religion really worth all that much if people think that it's so worthless? Well, we've not just got that kind of morality, but we've got that in our own lives as well.

We can't just look around and say, it's terrible the way that the whole of the rest of the nation's gone. It's just as well that we're not rebelling against God. But of course, if God treats submission to him as following his word and submitting to him and recognizing him as Lord, then if in any situation we don't do that, then we're rebelling as well. And you remember that Paul himself says that sin is lawlessness. Any sin that we commit is a breach of God's law. And any sin that we commit is implicitly saying, I would rather go my own way than go the way that God wants me to.

And so we can't just look at other people and say that, for example, the folks walking past the doors this evening and not coming to church, well, they're the ones that are rebelling against God. Even this evening, even sitting here in our pews, we may well already be rebelling against God.

And why is that? Because while we may not be going out of our way to rebel against God, we simply might not have trusted in him. And if there's anybody here this evening who hasn't put their faith in God, then what you're saying to him is, I don't think that the law, I don't think that the life that you're offering me is really worth accepting. I don't think that Christ is really worth accepting. I don't think that life and life with abundance that Jesus promised is really worth anything. And I would rather go on following my own pursuits and doing everything that I want to do and not submit to your law and not follow you and not trust in Christ. If there's any one of us here this evening that's thinking in that way, that's rebellion against God. God has commanded all men everywhere to repent. And if we're not doing that, then we're rebelling against him.

[11 : 07] So it's not just society, it's not just other people, it's each one of ourselves in our own hearts rebelling against God. So what is the present state of creation then? It's a lack of submission and it's rebellion against God. But then I wonder if we could maybe think about how as a church we've been rebelling against God. What is the kind of witness that God wants us to have in, even in this part of Stornoway or maybe in our own fellowships and our own local prayer meetings during the week? What's the kind of witness that he expects from us, whether it's over in Laxdale or in Coulne-Grain or wherever we happen to be meeting? Well, he expects us to be acting as salt. I

remember once hearing a really great analogy about Christians being the salt of the earth. Remember, Christ had commanded his people to be both salt and light. And someone once said that the reason that he really supported missionary work was because Christians are like salt and should be spread around the whole world to keep the whole place from rotting. And we can see the sense in that, that if Christianity is this preservation against the whole world turning away from God, then Christians in their own individual witness and in their own witness in fellowships, that that in itself is a testimony against following our own desires.

And so if in anything we're not acting as faithful witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we're partly to blame for people thinking that there isn't anything to be had in our religion, that there isn't any real value in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we have to make sure that we're not just going out of our way not to rebel, but to go out of our way to be faithful witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ, so that others, whether in this building or outside of this building, see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. That's the first point then, the present state of creation.

And if we were all honest with ourselves, it's really quite a depressing state. But there's a positive side to this verse and really to this whole letter of the Hebrews. The writer doesn't just want the people he's writing to to see how desperate the situation is, to see how negative the lack of church attendances in those days and even today, to see how few people care about God and how few people think anything about religion. He wants people to have a focus and to have a hope in spite of all these things.

And what's that hope? What ray of light does he offer to these people and to us here this evening? That's in verse 9. He says, but we see him. We see Jesus. What's the present state of Christ? That's what the writer to the Hebrews wants us all to be focusing on. We've thought about the present state of creation. What is the present state of Christ? And that present state is glorified.

[14 : 35] Christ, even now, is seated at the right hand of the Father in glory. Now, he wasn't always there. We know perfectly fine. We've probably most of us been here enough Sunday mornings and evenings to hear that Christ hasn't always been in glory, but he left his home in glory and humbled himself and went, know, to be honest. He came to earth and was incarnated in the form of a man. And you know that we were thinking on a fellowship just this past week about when Christ's suffering really started. This verse here says he was crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death. But when did his suffering really begin? His suffering began as soon as he left his home in glory. Because he left the adoration of the whole of the host of heaven for an ignorance and a hatred of man towards him.

From the beginning of creation, he had been acknowledged as the son of God and as God himself and had been worshipped and loved by all those who had gone into glory before us. But he left all that for the sake of his people. And he began suffering from the moment of his incarnation. He suffered the whole way through the 30 plus years that he spent here on earth. Not just because he was rejected, but because he simply had to live with the kind of sinful people that we are. Because he never did any sin. There was no wrong in his mind, in his heart, in his words or in his actions. And he had to put up with the sinfulness that was around him day and night, right up until the point where he was risen, where he was erected on that cross between heaven and earth, paying for the sins of his people.

Christ didn't just start suffering on the cross. He was suffering for the sake of his people through the whole of his life. But because of that suffering, because of that obedience to death and even death on a cross, the father glorified him. He was glorified because he was obedient. He was glorified because he was an acceptable sacrifice. If you remember the passage that Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians, Philippians in chapter 2, that Christ became obedient to the point of death on a cross, therefore God has exalted him. He has given him the name that is above every other name. And why has he done that? So that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord, whether in heaven or on earth or under the earth. So what is it then that God really demands? Having put his son willingly through all these things for the sake of his people, he expects every knee in this place and in the whole of Stornoway and in the whole of the world to bow before Christ and for every tongue to confess that Christ is Lord. That doesn't just mean a mental ascension to that. That just doesn't mean accepting the fact that Jesus is God. That means accepting Jesus as our Lord and as our savior to God's glory. And so again, we see that that is just part of the rebellion, that people aren't accepting that. But God is not going to leave creation in that state. He is going to make sure that every knee bows before the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that takes us on to an extremely important point and a point that we all need to address to ourselves. And that is this, have we yet bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ? And are we just now bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ? Or are we simply going along and saying, I can accept the fact that it's good to come to church. I can accept the fact that it's good to sing the Psalms that we've been singing tonight. But have you been singing the Psalms tonight and not recognizing that, for example, in Psalm 53 that we sang, the fool has said in his heart, there is no God.

[19 : 11] That the fool goes on in his own life, not accepting God, living the way that he likes. We can be coming to church, we can be singing these Psalms, not realizing that they're testifying against us because we're not bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. The very Psalms that we've been singing and the word that we've been reading tonight testify to us that we have to bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. It brings us on then to the third point that we need to consider, and that's the future state of creation. We've thought about the present state that's in rebellion.

We've thought about the present state and how dejected the church can sometimes be. Perhaps even you yourselves are here this evening and you feel depressed because you see so few people, perhaps in your own family, perhaps in your own neighborhood, accepting Christ as Lord. But we've also seen that there is a promise that God will make sure that every knee bows before Jesus because the present state of Christ is that he is glorified. The third point then is the future state of creation, and we cannot ignore this fact. It says in verse 8, go back to the second half of verse 8. Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. This doesn't just mean that, and we can all accept this, that God is controlling the events of every hour of every day, that God is sovereign over everything that happens, and that nothing happens out with his own control. We can accept that. We can even say as non-Christians, I'm happy with the idea of a God who keeps everything running smoothly. But we forget that God is, yes, running everything smoothly, but it's towards an end, towards a predetermined end, towards a day and an hour that God himself knows and has set. And that hour is when Jesus will return. We've been thinking about Jesus as going to the cross for the sake of his people, as being glorified as a result of the sufferings as saviour. But he won't be returning as saviour, saviour for his people, but also as judge.

Christ is going to be coming back at an hour that has been set to judge the sins of every single person here in this building. Now, we can take comfort in that if we're Christians. We can take comfort, and the people that the writer to the Hebrews was addressing could take comfort as well. They knew that while things looked so bleak at the time, Jesus was coming back for them, that they would be vindicated, either by themselves being taken home to glory, or by Jesus returning and visibly before the whole of creation, drawing his people to himself. And so we can look forward to that if we're Christians. But if we're not Christians, we can certainly not look forward to that day, because that's not going to be a day when Christ comes back and says, now do you believe? And if you do, then put your faith in me and everything will be fine. When that day comes, the hour of salvation will be passed. There'll be no opportunity to repent and to trust in Christ, because he'll be returning to ask you why you didn't put your faith in him, why you didn't bow the knee, and why you were continuing in that state of rebellion that we were thinking about before. It's fine to go on in a certain direction of life when folks around you are doing the same thing. But it's an entirely different thing to be going on in a state and in your own lifestyle when you know that someone is actually coming back to ask how you've been doing. I can imagine if we wanted to picture it this way, of, for example, someone saying that they were going to go away after a couple of hours, that they were going to keep a camera on everything that you were doing during those few hours, and they were then going to come back, and they were going to review everything that you'd been doing.

[23 : 46] And if we can imagine that, we would say, well, the camera's on me. Of course, I'm going to behave, and I'm going to help my family. I'm going to be kind to everybody, and I'm just going to generally behave myself well. There's a camera on me. I know that I'm being watched all the time.

And so when the person comes back, they can review what's been filmed, and they can say, yes, just as the camera proves, you've been living well. Well, that's exactly the same way that it is with God. Of course, there's no camera on us, but God knows not just our acts, but every word that comes out of our mouth and every thought that happens in our head. And God has been recording each and every one of these things, not just for a few hours, but through our entire lives.

And if God has been calling us to account like that, do you not think that the safest thing for each and every one of us to do would be to make sure that we were actually in his camp rather than as an enemy of him? And you know that that reminds me of a verse that I've been thinking about, as last week, many of you know, we had communion. And as I was sitting there, and I was looking at everybody's seated, of course, on this side of the cloth at the Lord's table, the verse that sprung to my mind was actually a verse that came up here in the passage that we read in verse 13. Behold, I and the children God has given me. And that verse really struck me last Sunday, because you could see the people who had gone forward. You'd seen the people who had gone to the session, who had declared their love for Jesus, who had said that they had really started to follow him, and that coming to the Lord's table was a way of expressing their devotion and submission to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

But I didn't just see people on this side of the cloth. It would have been a fantastic thing if every single person in this building had been sitting on this side, at the Lord's table. But I know for a fact that there were a lot of people who weren't at the Lord's table, that there were a lot of people who were sitting on the other side of the cloth at the back of the church. Now, while that, of course, does not necessarily mean that everybody was not a Christian who was on the other side, it does point out that there is a division between the people who say that they are friends of God, and a division between the people who act as enemies of God. And you know that that division that we saw so clearly last Sunday is going to be made far more greater, far greater, and far more permanent when Christ returns. There won't be any opportunity to say, I made a mistake, I need to come down, and I'm going to sit at the table in future, and I'm going to become a Christian, I'm going to start following.

Because by that point, it'll be too late. And that division that you saw last Sunday, I really want you to keep it in your mind, every one of you, and me with you. Because the Christians, or certainly those who are professed to be Christians, they're the ones who know that they are friends of God, who know that they are going to share with Christ in glory. But remember, if you're a non-Christian, don't forget that division that you saw last Sunday. Don't forget that division that you saw at the Lord's table, because it is going to be permanent. And keep that division in your minds until the day that you do submit, and you do put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because it would be a fantastic thing for each of the Christians here to see you coming to faith. And it would be a fantastic encouragement, and it would be a joy even to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, for his death to have meant something to you, and for his death to be applied to you. So for all the Christians in here, I would encourage you with this verse, to take this verse, these two verses away with you tonight, and to meditate on them, and to think Jesus is returning for each and every one of you. Whether that means that you'll be going away to glory before he comes, or whether he will appear and take you home to be with himself, you will be with the Lord. But for each one of us here who have not put their faith in Christ,

[28 : 22] I would urge you even to do that this evening. That is the only barrier to overcome to life and life with abundance with Christ in glory. And it's my prayer that over the next few weeks, I would see more and more of you having put their trust in Christ and begin to follow him.

Well, may God bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray.