

STUDIES IN HEBREWS No. 6
Hebrews 2:10-18
June 2, 2002

Review

We are now into the second section of biblical exposition in this sermon. He has so far made the point that Scripture says that the world to come is to be subject, not to angels, as these Jews were tempted to believe, but to the Son of Man, the Messiah. We still await that day when all will visibly be made subject to him, but the fact that Christ, following his death, was exalted to the right hand of God is the proof that all things will some day be put under his feet as the Scripture promises. Verse 9 reprises the thought of 1:3-4, which is a theme that the author will return to again and again throughout the argument. Christ came to redeem his people; he accomplished what he came to do; and his sitting down at the right hand of God is the demonstration that his work of redemption was finished and effective.

The Lord's death for our salvation having been introduced in v. 9, in the next paragraph the author explains why the Son of God had to become a man and suffer and die as a man. The comparison between the Messiah and the angels, introduced in chapter 1 and which continued to be the subject of 2:5-9 is not forgotten as v. 16 will show us. Again, assuming that these people were being tempted to think that Jesus fared poorly in comparison with the angels, figures of such might and glory and pure spirituality as they are, the argument in these verses is designed to demonstrate that the fact of Jesus' humanity does not diminish him at all, even in comparison to the angels.

Text Comment

v.10 Note once more the futuristic perspective we noted last Lord's Day evening. What is salvation in Hebrews? It is the bringing of the children of God to glory!

The reason why the Son became a man and incurred such ignominy in suffering and dying at the hands of men was precisely because in no other way could God redeem his people from their sins and deliver them from the wrath to come. The incarnation was not a pageant, it was not play-acting; for a salvation that would meet the requirement of a just God and the needs of guilty men required suffering that only a divine-human Savior could endure. The Father, here referred to, as frequently in the NT, simply as "God," is regarded as the source of salvation.

The word translated "author" is perhaps better translated "pioneer," or "trail-blazer," or "pathfinder." The idea is that of 6:20 where we read that Jesus, "who went before us, has entered [heaven] on our behalf." The other use of the term in Hebrews, in 12:2, also suggests this idea of forerunner or one who paves the way for others to follow. Sin deprived man of the glory that God had made him for. Then the Son of Man came and, by his death, opened a way for man back to the goal for which he was made. [Bruce, NICNT, 43]

Now, the question is, how can Jesus be said to have been “made perfect”? He was conceived and born without sin. He lived without sin. How can he then be said to have been made perfect? Well, as will become clear later in the exposition, he became perfect in the sense that by his suffering he became the *perfect sacrifice* for sin (his sufferings were, in that way, a prerequisite of his serving as the Lamb of God) and because through that suffering he gained the quality of a perfect priest, someone who learns through suffering both the compassion that is required for true sympathy and how to help those in the midst of trials and temptations.

- v.11 Literally the verse reads, “both the one who is sanctifying and those being sanctified...” In Hebrews, however, *sanctification* does not refer to the moral renewal of our lives that follows upon our justification, but rather to our reconciliation to God. In 10:29 there is a reference to the blood of the covenant that “sanctified” us.

Now, here, we begin to see the great difference the incarnation makes: the Son of God has come to share our humanity. No angel could or ever did do that! “Is not ashamed” reminds us that the Son of God forged an identity with a very unworthy people. Here is an honor paid to human beings beyond anything that could be imagined!

- v.12 Now follow three citations from the Scripture to prove the point of the Son’s solidarity with his people. The first is from the unmistakably messianic Psalm 22; the second and third are from Isa. 8:17-18, the prophet’s cry of the heart, which is interpreted messianically because of the reference in 8:14 to the Lord as the “stone that causes men to stumble...”
- v.13 In other words, Jesus is so much a man that he too must put his trust in the Lord, he too must live by faith.
- v.14 This is the remarkable thing about Jesus Christ. People are usually either sympathetic or strong; they are rarely both at the same time. Christ offers both true company to us (misery loves company), that is, real, practical sympathy, shared experience, understanding; and, at the same time, he offers relief (which misery craves even more)!
- v.15 The necessity of Christ’s sharing our humanity is recapitulated and elaborated. The reason he had to be a man was that he had to taste death for us (v.9). Only a man could die for and in the place of men and only the God/Man could die for the sins of the world. Only by such a death could the power of the Devil over our hearts and lives be broken. Why such a death alone could prevail to deliver us he will explain in v. 17.
- v.16 Christ was out to help men, not angels and that is why he had to become a man. And the incarnation is proof that a mere angel could never have done for us what we needed to have done. Interestingly, the verb the NIV translates “helps” in this verse is the same very it translates “takes by the hand” in 8:9.
- v.17 He is going extensively to elaborate Christ’s office as priest in the following chapters and so explain the points he makes here. “Make atonement for” is better translated “to

propitiate,” or “to placate.” In other words, Christ, as our high priest, offers himself for us as a sacrifice to turn away God’s wrath which was against us on account of our sins. The divine wrath in the Bible is not a pique, a temper tantrum; it is the just and holy displeasure with sin and necessity to punish it as evil. All of that will be pieced out of this brief statement here as the argument proceeds. As so often elsewhere in the Bible, Christ’s atonement is both the gift of God’s love and the requirement of his justice.

- v.18 Again, the preacher is briefly noting matters to which he will return in greater detail subsequently. The Lord’s experience under temptation equipped him for helping us in our temptations, an important point to be made to people who were at that moment under temptation and needing to be reminded that they could find a sympathetic ear in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I don’t have to unpack this dense theological statement because the author is going to unpack it himself in due time. There is a great deal in these few verses! We have the incarnation with its rich and wonderful mysteries and the priestly office of Jesus Christ in a variety of respects: as the priest who offers the sacrifice; as the sacrifice that is offered; and as the faithful pastor of his people. We also have the atonement from a variety of viewpoints: the propitiation of the divine wrath (penal substitution as it known in Christian theology), the conquest of the Devil (Christus Victor as it is known in Christian theology), and the subjective effects in the hearts and lives of the elect, such as deliverance from the fear of death. But we have all of these deep and difficult things in adumbration or sketchy outline only. We have bare statement more than explanation.

But that in itself provides a lesson for us. For what we have here is a brief summary of our Christian faith: the incarnation of the Son of God, his atoning death on the cross, the effects of that redemption on our hearts and lives, and our continuing relationship with the Lord Jesus as our Savior, our brother, and our priest. And it behooves us from time to time to step back and look at our faith and the gospel as a whole.

It is worth pointing out from this extraordinarily rich statement in these few verses, a statement that well serves as a summary of the Christian message, how utterly contrary to human expectation all of this is. Remember, the Jews, who should have understood all of this most easily, found the cross, and by implication the incarnation that led to the cross, a stumbling block and the Gentiles found the message foolishness, more than faintly ridiculous. Today, in much the same way, Islam regards blasphemous the very idea that we would worship a human being. But here we are being reminded that the God from whom everything comes and through whom all consist, found it fitting to proceed as he did. We are always being told that God would never do this or that, or that God would certainly think this or that; or that this or that would be unworthy of God, but, the fact is, the only way we know what God really thinks is to consult his Word and to observe his acts. The incarnation and the cross were things God himself thought fitting to do!

But how different from our expectations? It should not be difficult for us to understand the mind of the Jews who thought that angels must be superior to Jesus Christ. We have a hard time grasping the true humanity of Jesus ourselves and precisely because we are so mesmerized by his

deity. The ordinary Christian is always misreading the Gospels in just this way. He or she is always seeing Jesus in the Gospels as a kind of Superman. He's looking into people's hearts and seeing their thoughts; he's exercising his divine power in stilling the storm or healing the sick. And, try as we might, when we think about Jesus that way, we never really can believe that he was like us, not really. He may have looked like a human being, he may have had, in principle, an authentic human nature – this is what we think – but he was not *really* like us.

But, the Bible says he was, except in the matter of sin. He did *not* know what was in a person's head unless it was revealed to him as such information, of course, had been revealed to many prophets before him. He *didn't know* how the next day was going to turn out. Later in his ministry he knew broadly how events were to unfold because he had been told, not because he was omniscient. No true human being is omniscient. He was a very wise man and understood human nature, he was very discerning in his estimation of human character and motivation, but he wasn't omniscient any more than you are or I am. He stilled the tempest, but with a power that was granted to him, not a power he had as a man. And he resisted his temptations by the same devices by which you and I must resist ours. He had no weapons that we do not have in doing battle with the Evil One. How did he have those texts from Deuteronomy at his fingertips to wield in his contest with the Devil in the wilderness? Well, he had memorized them; and he had by prayer and meditation and communion with his Father in heaven kept his soul alert and alive to spiritual things.

My sister told me once that she had been dealing with one of her girls about the need to resist the temptations that she faced and she made the point that the Lord Jesus was tempted in the same way that we are and he didn't sin. "Yea," she said, "but he is *God!*" Well, that is what we all tend to think. Christ may have been a man in principle, but he was not a man like us. He was a superman! That is too often how we think about Jesus Christ. But it was not so!

Christ was omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent as God the Son. But he was none of those things as a man. How the divine nature was kept from overwhelming the human nature, we cannot say. The interior psychology of the incarnate Son is the greatest mystery of them all, unless it is the triple personality of the one, living God. But the Bible presents us in the Gospels and elsewhere with a true man. So truly was he a man, we are told here, that he had to live his life by faith.

I remember the terrific impression that this realization made upon me when I first read Alexander Whyte's great sermon on "Jesus Christ our Lord as a Believing Man." The reason it impressed me so deeply was because I hadn't thought that way about Jesus. I had never thought that he had to live by faith in precisely the same way I do. I had never seen his life as a matter of believing in promises that had not yet been fulfilled, trusting in a present God that he could not see, depending upon help that was provided him only because he was actively counting on the Lord his God to provide it. I had not really realized that Jesus had had to live his life, resist his temptations, and serve God, in the same way and by the same means in which I must do the same things. That he had no resources that are not available to me!

This author is going to tell us in 5:7-8 that Jesus prayed with passion and his prayers were heard because of his reverent submission to God. If he hadn't prayed as he did and hadn't lived as he did, he would not have made it to the end, the lamb without spot or blemish. What is more he *learned obedience* through what he suffered. He was not the same man at 30 that he had been at 20. He knew more of God's love and faithfulness, he understood his own weakness and his need for the Spirit of God far better later in his life than he understood such things when he was younger.

For a long time I didn't see these things and I had, as a result, a very diminished view of Jesus Christ, of his incarnation, of the wonder and mystery of it, and of Christ being perfectly suited by it to deliver us from sin and death. He really was a man. Think of Jesus not knowing what the next day would bring. Think of Jesus wondering how he was going to stand up under his trials. Think of him being crushed by the weight of his responsibility – not just the day or two before the cross, but all the years of his adult life. Think of him having to come up with the right answer out of his own mind as it has been shaped by the Word of God which he had so carefully learned and so faithfully meditated upon. Think of him growing through all the disappointments, the setbacks, the frustrations, the mean-spirited opposition, the physical frailty, the sickness and all the rest. Think of him fighting to stay awake as he prayed early in the morning or late at night. Think of him as a real man, like you or me, and you begin, only begin, to see how much deeper and more wonderful the history of his life really is *and how much more wonderful a thing it is that he was willing to share our humanity and be our brother.*

The great commentator Albrecht Bengel once wrote that “the most fragrant part of Christ's sin-atoning sacrifice was His unshaken trust in His Father's faithfulness and love.” [Cited in Whyte, *Walk, Character and Conversation...*, 187]

Listen to Samuel Rutherford.

“He would be of blood to us: not only come to the sick, and to our bed-side, but would lie down and be sick, taking on him sick clay, and be, in that condition of clay, a worm and not a man, that he might pay our debts; and would borrow a man's heart...to sigh for us, man's eyes to weep for us, his spouse's body, legs, and arms, to be pierced for us; our earth, our breath, our life, and soul, that he might breathe out his life for us; a man's tongue and soul to pray for us....

Oh, what love! Christ would not intrust our redemption to angels, to millions of angels; but he would come himself, and in person suffer; he would not give a low and base price for us clay. He would buy us with a great ransom, so as he might over-buy us, and no one could over-bid him in his market for souls. If there had been millions of more believers, and many heavens, without any new bargain his blood should have bought them all, and all these many heavens should have smelled one rose of life; Christ should have been one and the same tree of life in them all. Oh, we under-bid, and undervalue that Prince of love, who did overvalue us; we will not sell all we have to buy him; he sold all he had, and himself too, to buy us.” [*Trial and Triumph*, 98-99]

No one ever would have dreamt this up! This utter mystery that baffles us the longer and harder we think about it. A true man, a real man, a man living a real human life – a life such as you and

I live, absent sin – having to live his life that way and not in some superhuman way, the way of faith, of prayer, of trust, of the believing the Word of God and putting it into practice. How can this be? How can this be the life of God the Son? No one can begin to say. No one can explain it. This is the highest and the most wonderful mystery of all. You will ponder this for eternity to come and you will still not understand it.

But, we are just beginning. We can go on and on from this single text. What of the Savior's *propitiatory sacrifice*? This turning away of the divine wrath. But he was God the Son. So we are talking about God taking steps to satisfy his own holy wrath and justice so that it would not fall upon and consume his chosen people. It would discourage you if I were to tell you and demonstrate to you how many people even *in the Christian church itself* are offended by this notion of the wrath of God and of Christ's sacrifice as a *propitiation* of that wrath. It is an entirely unwelcome thought that God's own character should require the execution of a holy vengeance upon us on account of our sin. The ingenuity that even Christian scholarship has used to remove this teaching from the Bible would astonish you. That God should offer himself a sacrifice; that it should be his own son now become also a man; that the sacrifice should propitiate the divine wrath and vengeance; that we should thereby be delivered from the power of death – it is all so unexpected, so improbable, so unlike any of the religions that man has invented for himself.

Men are so sure that there is a simpler way, less elaborate, less complicated by which to secure peace with God. In the history of Christian theology it has been taught by many that God, in fact, could have secured our salvation in some other way than the way he chose to secure it. But it is not so. It might seem that the "it was fitting" in v. 10 means that this was the most appropriate way, not necessarily the only possible way. But, as v. 17 makes more clear – and as the rest of the Bible confirms in many ways – the Son of God *had to become a man* or he could not have turned away God's wrath from his sinful people. Our doctrine is what theologians call the "consequent absolute necessity" of the atonement. That is God did not have to save us, he could have left us all to our sins, but, once deciding to save us, there was no other way to secure our salvation but the way that was used: the incarnation of God the Son, his obedience and suffering in our place, his death and resurrection, and the application of Christ's redemption to our lives by the Holy Spirit.

Here is the great 17th century theologian:

"For since to redeem us, two things were most especially required – the acquisition of salvation and the application of the same; the endurance of death for satisfaction [of divine justice] and victory over [death] for the enjoyment of life – our mediator ought to be God-man...to accomplish these things: man to suffer, God to overcome; man to receive the punishment we deserved, God to endure and drink it to the dregs; man to acquire salvation for us by dying, God to apply it to us by overcoming; man to become ours by the assumption of flesh, God to make us like himself by the bestowal of the Spirit. This neither a mere man nor God alone could do. For neither could God alone be subject to death, nor could man alone conquer it. Man alone could die for men; God alone could vanquish death. Both natures, therefore, should be associated that in both conjoined, both the highest weakness of humanity might exert itself for suffering and the

highest power and majesty of the divinity might exert itself for the victory.” [*Institutes*, XIII, iii, xix, 302-303]

I could go on and on. We have not spoken of the remarkable identification of Jesus as our High Priest and all that this means, or of the breaking of human bondage to the fear of death, or of the fact that we can receive sympathetic understanding and practical help from Christ, our brother and our priest, now, in the middle of our lives.

These are all such remarkable things and so utterly unlike what men expect. Our salvation is so much more profound a thing, so much more miraculous, so much more divine in its genius, so much more transcending of human thought or calculation. We far too often take it to be far simpler than it is. We think we understand it, when, in fact, we have never explored anything but the periphery of this great deep.

And the tragedy of that, the loss of that, the error of that is that we fail to carry about with us a real appreciation of how high and deep and great God’s love for us really is and what extraordinary lengths were gone to secure our salvation. Our situation was far more desperate than what any angel or all the angels together could have done anything about. Only a complete identification with us on the part of God the Son would suffice. And he, taking that long trip down from heavenly glory to earthly humiliation, had to live and die a complete and authentic human life, become our brother in every way. And by doing so, he provided a salvation that was the entire and perfect answer to our need, sufficient to take us from our sinful, guilty, and mortal life in this world all the way up to eternal glory in the very presence of God.

So, this preacher says to these Jewish Christians, forget the angels. They couldn’t do this. They couldn’t do what had to be done. Only Christ could do that. Only the God/Man could meet our great need. And he did! That is why you must continue to trust in him, continue to follow him, continue to remain steadfast in your loyalty to him.