
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Conclusive Intention of God

Hebrews 2:5-9

5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. 6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, “WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? 7 YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; 8 YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

I suppose that very few of you, if any, know of the woman by the name of Mary King. Mary King was a rather unassuming woman who was hired as a cook in the home of a Mr. John Swindell. Mr. Swindell ran a school in Newmarket, an area of Cambridgeshire in England. Often the assistant teachers would come to the home of Mr. Swindell and be fed by Mary. Now while she was unassuming, Mary did have rather strong beliefs when it came to theology and she took opportunities to share her faith and strong Calvinistic beliefs with the teachers. Mind you, she was not a theologian or a preacher, just a seemingly average and otherwise insignificant cook in the home of a schoolmaster, yet the simple communication of her faith was anything but insignificant. For there was one assistant teacher in particular, just a teenager himself, that found her faith and deep conviction in God and His Word fascinating and he would sit there eating his meal and listen to her explain what she knew of the Word of God. So moving and inspiring were these words that they cause the young teacher to explore the Word of God more deeply for himself.

Later in life, this once assistant teacher said of Mary King, “From her I got all the theology I ever needed.” This assistant teacher would eventually become a great and prolific teacher – and while you may have never heard of Mary King, you most certainly have heard of the one she inspired toward a love and passion for God’s Word. Mary’s life reveals that even while you yourself may feel insignificant and of little importance to the plan and purpose of God; even though you may become like Mary, a seemingly forgotten hero of the Church, you may

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well influence such a mighty man of God – for you know this once assistant teacher as none other than - Charles Spurgeon.

There are times in our lives when we feel like anything but significant. Whether we view ourselves in comparison to others, feel defeated in light of our circumstances or see ourselves in light of the awesomeness of God, we are quickly reminded that we are but a speck of dust in a vast universe. Our victories and defeats, our triumphs and our trials are relatively unknown to the mass of humanity and quite frankly, the mass of humanity has relatively no concern about any one of us. Such feeling most certainly must have been part and parcel of the first audience of this letter to the Hebrews. Perhaps nothing more than a small house church in Rome, these church attenders were beginning to suffer the full brunt of persecution. This beleaguered little church had few people who seemed to care about them and the tendency of the human heart is to think that if no one else cares, then evidently not even God cares.

What is the intention of God for His people? Has He given us any clues or insight from His Word that might encourage and inspire us regardless of our circumstances? For the wife and mother ironing the clothes and cleaning the dishes, is there any hope of being significant? For the husband and father struggling to make ends meet, is there any hope of being significant? For the young person who has problems making friends at school, is there any hope for significance?

Now listen, I have been throwing around this word “significance”. By significance, I do not mean some self-worth, something we do that makes us important to others. For according to God’s Word, a man is not significant because of what he does (especially toward God), but rather a man is significant by virtue of what God has done for him in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not inappropriate to speak of the significance of a person who has come to know and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord as being significant. For such persons do not know the extent and influence they may be given by the Lord to encourage others in the faith, just as Mary King did so for Charles Spurgeon.

Our text this morning addresses this issue of the significance of man, again, not by virtue of what he does for God, but by what God has done for him. Our text, verses 5-9 is actually the first of two answers the author of Hebrews gives to two potential objections to the stated superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels.

The first objection that is anticipated by the author goes something along the lines of this – granted that the Old Testament presents the Son of God as superior to the angels, but when Jesus, the Son of God, became a man, did he

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really retain His superiority over the angels? Isn't it likely that He lost something or gave up something of His supremacy? Remember that Christians were suffering and dying for their faith. Man's frailty and mortality were being evidenced nearly daily. So the question is, how could the Son of God become a man not be subject to the supremacy of the angels and seemingly inferior position of man. It is like stating that Jesus like was a fish out of water. There is certainly nothing wrong with being a fish, or even the greatest of fish, but even the greatest of fish will suffer out of water.

Such questions and thoughts regarding the significance of humanity in God's plan revealed a lack of knowledge on the part of many to understand the real intention of God for man. God's plan and purpose for man was communicated from the beginning, back in the book of Genesis, but because of sin and time, the proper understanding of God's intention had been skewed and scarred. The author of Hebrews intends to set the record straight, revealing conclusively what God's intention for man is and how God intends to fulfill this intention in Jesus Christ – that man then is superior to the angels, even though now man appears to be a state lower than that of the angels. So then, to see this idea of God's conclusive intention for man, we will divide the passage up into four points.

- I. God's ultimate intention for angels (2:5)
- II. God's original intention for man (2:6-8a)
- III. God's suspended intention for man (2:8b-9a)
- IV. God's present intention for man (2:9b)

Let us examine these four points now one by one.

I. God's ultimate intention for angels (2:5)

"For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking."

The first point our author makes is simply pointing out that God's ultimate intention for angels does not include the scope and grandeur of that of man. While it may appear that angels are superior to man, the scope of their "seeming" superiority is but limited. For verse 5 tells us not so much about what is God's intention for the angels, but rather, what it is not.

First, please note that our text says angels will not be the ruler or reigners over "the world to come." What is striking about this is that at current, the world is subject to angels. Scripture clearly teaches us that Satan, the chief of the

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fallen angels, is in fact “the prince of the power of the air” according to Ephesians 2:1. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself referred to Satan in John 12:31 and 14:30 as the “ruler [or prince] of this world. Additionally, Ephesians 6:12 teaches us that this world is under the influence of powerful demonic [fallen angels] forces saying,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Even the holy angels of God have various decrees of and exercise influence over this world. In Daniel 10 we read of Michael, the archangel of God, coming to the aid of an angel sent to give word to Daniel, but was delayed by a battle with a demonic angel or prince who was over the territory of Persia (10:13). Yes, the world at current is subject in large part to angels.

But our text clearly states that this is but a temporary arrangement. For man, in Adam and Eve, was created to be kings and queens of the world, taking dominion of it and filling it. Obviously, as we will come to note more clearly in a moment, man forfeited this lofty position when he fell into sin, and now, the world is temporarily and partially subjected to angels.

The Word of God clearly teaches that in the “world to come”, when Jesus establishes His rule as the promised Davidic King, it is not angels that will reign and rule with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:6) but believers. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-3 it is said that believers will actually judge the angels with Christ. This conclusively indicates the superior position man has over the angels, even though for now, such superiority is not clearly revealed.

Now, there is a second consideration, and that is the meaning of the phrase “**world to come**” in our text. What does this refer to and mean? Beloved, sometimes we are asked why we believe in a literal, earthly, 1000-year reign of Christ? Why do we teach it in this church? Why do we believe it? We teach it and believe it because we see it taught in the Scripture. You see, beyond the reference to a 1000 year reign of Christ in Revelation 20; and beyond believing that the promises of God to Israel, both blessings and cursings, were to be and still are to be understood literally, meaning that just as Israel has receive the literal curses of God’s promises, she shall one day receive the stated unconditional blessings of God’s promises in His time; we have before us here in Hebrews 2:5 a verse that speaks clearly of a literal and earthly reign of man under the Son of Man.

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The word for “world” in our text is not the common word “kosmos” which commonly speaks of a “system” or “grouping.” In John 2:15 we read, “*Do not love the world [the world’s systems or ways of doing things] nor the things in the world.*” Nor is the word for “world” here another common word “aions” which means “ages” or “times.” We saw this word in Hebrews 1:2 where it is said that Jesus is the creator of the ages or the times of this earth. Rather, the word for world here is “oikoumene” in the Greek, which literally means, “the inhabited earth.” This verse gives us such a hope that one of God’s intentions is to restore man to his previous position of reigning and ruling over this earth. It will not be this current literal, inhabited earth, but a future, yet literal inhabited earth, as clearly stated by this verse. Such a time is often referred to as the Millennial [meaning 1000 year] Kingdom. Even A.W. Pink has said that the word “oikoumene” here in Hebrews 2:5 refers “to the second advent of Christ to this earth, and point to His millennial kingdom.”

What a word of hope and joy this statement, “***For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking...***” to these first readers. You see, they were by and large Jewish. In the mind of a Jew, the object of hope they set before themselves was not heaven, as is generally taught today, but was rather the thought of the ruling and reigning Messiah in His glorious kingdom on earth. This “world to come” then is the time when Israel will dwell once again in their land, peaceably and with the blessing of God, according to the words of the Old Testament prophets. There will be no wars, no oppression and no injustice for the Prince of peace shall rule them securely. And the Church, the body of Christ, shall dwell in this kingdom as well, as the Bride of Christ, having been presented before the Father by Christ as spotless and unblemished, according to the word of Ephesians 5:25-27 and Revelation 19:7-10.

The “world to come” cannot be rightly understood in a symbolic or spiritual sense. The context does not allow for it, nor does proper usage of the word. I am telling you friends that the glorious hope presented here is that man, not angels, was created to rule and reign with Christ. So then, we are reminded here of the temporary nature of this world being subject to angels – it will end and then man, again through the work and headship of the Son of man, will be restored as the kings and queens, the kingdom of priests upon the “world to come.” The point to be made then is that it makes no sense to believe that angels are in any way superior to Christ, even the incarnate God, the Man Christ Jesus, because the “world to come” is to be subject to Him and His followers.

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II. The original intention of God for man (2:6-8a)

6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? 7 YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; 8 YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET."

The next point, the original intention of God for man, is something I have already be alluding to but is now effectively proved by the author's quoting of Psalm 8:4-6. It is introduced in a strange way to us, "*but one has testified somewhere, saying...*" This is not stated this way because our author did not know who or where this Psalm was from. In fact, he quotes it perfectly from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The point is that God was the ultimate author of the passage and the human spokesman was incidental. More than likely, most of his audience would also have been familiar with this Psalm.

If we are to appreciate the point being made from this quotation, we need to be aware of the content of Psalm 8. Psalm 8 is a song declaring the awesome works of the Almighty God who is to be praised for such. Then, in recognition of the vastness, the greatness, the sheer immenseness and infiniteness of God and the smallness, the puniness and finiteness of man, the Psalmist declares beginning in verse 3;

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; 4 what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? 5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! 6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet...

Do you sense what the Psalmist is getting at? He is absolutely astounded at the purpose or intention of God for man. "God," says the Psalmist, "why is it that you have given so much meaning and purpose to small and pathetic man?" Yet the answer is given to us if we would go back for just a moment to the book of Genesis. If you look at Genesis 1:26-28, you see God's initial intention for mankind. Here we read;

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26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God’s original intention for man is that he would rule, subdue and have dominion over all the earth. Again, Adam and Eve, along with their children, were to be the kings and queens of the earth, God’s viceroys, filling the earth and righteously living before and to the glory of God, their Creator. This is why, as the Psalmist considers the works of God, the complexity and greatness of the creation, that he cries out, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” What an awesome thought! From Psalm 8:4-6 and Hebrews 2:6-8 then we can discern at least three things about God’s original intention for man; intentions that He promises to fulfill in us who are by faith, trusting in and living for Jesus Christ.

1. We have an awesome position –

“You have made him for a little while lower than the angels...”

This again reminds us of what we have already looked at regarding the temporary nature of the seeming superiority of angels over man. Man is only temporarily “lower than the angels” in that man is yet in a mortal body as opposed to an immortal one like the angels. But the time is coming when man’s body will be made immortal and will be elevated once again to a position above that of the angels.

Another important thought here is that while man may be temporarily lower than the angels in that he is mortal and comparatively powerless to the angels, man is nonetheless – now listen – not spiritually lower than the angels. The spiritual well being of mankind was of such importance to God that He sent His Son to bring salvation. No such offer of salvation and reconciliation was given to the angels who rebelled against the Almighty God. Why is it that God is concerned with such seemingly insignificant specks of dust as us? I have no answer except that in the grand plan and wisdom of God, He will glorify Himself fully by giving salvation, that is deliverance from sins, reconciliation, that is being

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made right with God, sanctification, that is becoming like the Son of God, and glorification, that is being brought into the presence of God to sinners like you and me, who trust the message of God's word that says if I will call upon the name of the Lord for deliverance from my selfish, sinful state, I will be saved; I will be made into a new creation, a creature who now wants to know God, who now wants to love God, who now wants to serve God. The awesome position of the believer in Christ is found when one comes to see what God has done for him in Christ. Again, a man is not significant because of what he does for God, but rather is significant because of what God has done for him. And what had God done? God has turned the sinner into a saint, the profane into a giver of praise, the rebel into the redeemed. This then calls us to see the second aspect of God's original intention for man -

2. We have an awesome honor -

"You have crown him with glory and honor..."

Now I know there are many conceited and arrogant persons in this world, but I sincerely doubt that most, when rightly confronted with the holiness, purity and righteousness of God, would even seek to put up an argument to suggest that they deserve to be crowned by God with glory and honor. And the truth be told, man, in sin, does not even come close to revealing or displaying the glory and honor of being created in the image of God. However, God, in the "world to come" will restore to His redeemed the honor of being His crowned viceroys upon the earth. As we await the "world to come" we are not to act in a manner unbecoming our status, but are to walk in a manner consistent with being the princes and princesses of the living God. What an awesome honor! And so we come to the third aspect of God's original intention for man -

3. We have an awesome authority -

"And appointed him over the works of your hands; you have put all things in subjection under his feet."

While we await the ultimate fulfillment of this in the "world to come" as described in verse 5, we nonetheless are to exercise authority while upon this earth. As we will learn next week from verse 9, "we do not yet see all things subjected" to man, but it will come and so in the meantime, believers are called to look upon their lives, to consider the situations and understand that no matter how insignificant this world makes you feel; no matter how steep the hill or

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mountain of your difficulties, no matter how intense and fierce the waves of guilt for previous sins confessed and repented of, we are, in the words of Philippians 3:12-14 to say,

12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The prize is the restoration of man's position as that creature most perfectly designed to praise God, to serve God and to be God's perfect representatives whether on this earth or in heaven. We have the authority to pursue this by prayer, by study of God's Word and by sheer perseverance in the things of God. But we also have authority to take such a message to the world, to make disciples, that is learners and followers of Jesus Christ, according to Matthew 28:19. What awesome authority – are you going out in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the Christ has commanded? What awesome honor – God has crowned His redeemed with glory and honor, are you now glorifying and honoring Him with the great honor He has bestowed upon you? What an awesome position – that this once calloused sinner is a child of the King; this former profaner of God is now a proclaimer of God.

Do not think of yourself as insignificant. In Christ, there is more than enough significance within you for you to be used of God to provide insight for others who serve God, to influence others for the glory of God and inspiration for others to desire to come to the knowledge of God as Lord and Savior in Jesus Christ. Whether you influence the next Spurgeon or become the next Spurgeon, our desire ought to be simply, Lord, use me for Your glory, for You have already saved me for Your glory!"

Soli Deo Gloria

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