

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part six
Sunday, February 12th, 2017 - 10 a.m. - Teaching #1947
Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

CHRIST AND THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD TO COME

Hebrews 2:5-9 - "For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. [6] It has been testified somewhere, 'What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? [7] You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, [8] putting everything in subjection under his feet.' 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. [9] But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

There is a flow to the opening two chapters of this letter, but they're not easily defined. Of course, it's a letter all about the redemptive priestly ministry of Jesus the Christ, God the Son incarnate. He, as the opening verses of chapter one state, is the ultimate revelation of God. He is God's living, redemptive revelation displayed in "**these last days**" (1:2). And that means His coming is the **conclusion** of all God was preparing the world for through the ministry of the **prophets** in the Old Testament.

From there the writer of Hebrews unfolds the many ways in which Jesus the Christ is superior to any prophet or angelic being. And we traced this point through the various quoted Old Testament texts, all of which, our writer says, were written about the Christ. He has always been the theme of all previous revelations. They are all incomplete without Him. God never intended there to be a separate, stand-alone Jewish religion. He was always tying up the threads of previous revelation in the coming of the Christ.

That brings us to the **first four verses of chapter two**. There is grace-filled warning here. There is a great deal at stake in the way we "**hear**" the revelation we have received in Christ. In other words, this revelation in Christ is not just an **event**. There is also a **necessary response** to this real, historic event. If it was dangerous to trifle with **previous** revelation through law and prophets (and it **was** - 2:2), it is dreadfully **more** dangerous to trifle with God's **final** redemptive revelation in the Christ.

So our writer makes a plea to these Jewish believers - "**We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it**" (2:1). We studied those words last week. This is a **mental inattention**, not a **denial of doctrinal truth**. We're being called to **mental focusing**. And our writer tells us this kind of spiritual concentration **matters** - "**...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?....**" (2:3). It's a rhetorical question. There is no escape from judgment for the mentally distracted.

This is where we have come in our study so far. And then something important happens in **verse 5** that forms a kind of transition to a brand new subject. At first you think the writer is going to return to more comparisons between Jesus Christ and angels - "**Now it was not to angels....**" (2:5a). But something else comes up first. He actually turns our attention to what he calls "**the world to come**" - 2:5 - "**For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.**"

But this seems like a mistake. The last part of that fifth verse says the writer has been "**speaking**" of the world to come. Where, we want to ask, has this letter been dealing with "**the world to come**?" As you look back over the first chapter and a half we don't see "**the world to come**" mentioned anywhere.

Or do we? **Hebrews 1:1-2** - "**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.**"

And then there are these words - **Hebrews 1:10-12** - "**And, 'You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; [11] they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, [12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.**"

Remember, our letter was written to Jewish believers. These believers have poured their hearts into one era of revelation with deep devotion - the **law** and the **prophets**. That means the final revelation of God the Son didn't arrive in a vacuum for these people. It was a massive mental transition. Their whole religious system was based on a previous, albeit incomplete, understanding that totally ignored what God was fulfilling in "**these last days**" (1:2). Remember, in contrast to most of us

with our non-Judaic upbringing, these **“last days”** were a massive transition from their previous devotion. These last days were a whole new **“world to come.”**

This is important. These **“last days”** of 1:2 are the **“world to come”** in 2:5 as these Jewish believers began to see with gospel eyes. Our writer is telling them God was initiating the **final era** - the **last chapter** - the **incarnation of the One who would bring redemptive history to its designed conclusion**. So **parts** of the world to come are still **to come**. And while this era will eventually **climax** in the rule and reign of the Christ over an entire new creation, these last days had their **starting point** with the incarnation of God the Son in Bethlehem. The **“world to come”** - like these **“last days”** - starts in **Bethlehem** and ends eventually in a completely **brand new creation**.

Remember, our writer has the nerve to say he has been speaking all along about a whole new world to come - **Hebrews 2:5** - **“For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.”** This is a hard message to digest because, on the surface of things, it doesn't ring true. These Jewish believers had been raised with certain specific expectations of what the Messiah would accomplish when He came. They had visions of a new Temple, their nation's enemies finally being vanquished, and all the earth seeing the glory of the restored, eternally blessed Jewish people of God.

It never happened. But it's not just our letter's Jewish readers needing this issue addressed. We all read our New Testaments. We read of the power of the Spirit, the greatness of the Kingdom, the glory of the New Covenant people of God. And here we are. Life frequently feels so ordinary - or downright discouraging and oppressive. There may come moments of glory, but they're by no means constant. We sing so many worship choruses about the ruling King of Kings while we get sick and lose jobs and pray for back-slidden family members. What is going on?

And now, after all that work, we're finally ready to see where today's text strides onto the stage with such striking relevance. And once again, because he's writing to a group of questioning Jewish believers, he takes everyone back again into their Old Testament Scriptures:

1) **OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES MAKE IT HARD FOR US TO IMAGINE GOD'S ORIGINAL CREATION INTENT FOR OUR LIVES**

Hebrews 2:6-8a - **“It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? [7] You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, [8] putting everything in subjection under his feet....”**

We should all pause and consider how striking it is that when our writer urges concentration on the **world to come** he pulls our attention back to the **world that was originally created**. He takes us **backward** to help us move properly **forward**.

Here's what we know. The Psalmist (**Psalm 8:4-6**) is stunned at the attention and glory the Creator has invested in mankind. The opening question of **Hebrews 2:6** hangs in the air one of the greatest questions ever asked in all the Bible - **“...What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?”(2:6)**.

There is no reasonable explanation for the dignity so graciously given each of us by God - **Hebrews 2:7-8a** - **“You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, [8] putting everything in subjection under his feet.”** Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control....”

These words are quoted from **Psalm 8:4-6** but are clearly meant to drive our minds back to **Genesis 1:26-28** - **“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ [27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”**

The writer of our Hebrews text knows what he's doing. This glorious description of the created glory and dignity of mankind is precisely where the problem lies. Every angry atheist on the planet screams out the disparity between what Christians claim to be true of the love and splendor of our great God and the moral mess of our present world. This is exactly where our writer has been leading our thoughts:

2) **ALMOST NOTHING IN OUR PRESENT WORLD REFLECTS THE GLORY OF OUR TEXT'S DESCRIPTION OF THE CREATED ORDER**

Hebrews 2:8b - ".... At present, *we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.*"

Twelve words. That's all it takes to gain universal agreement with his point. It's unarguable. The headlines prove it. The wars and disease prove it. And our own private thoughts and desires prove it daily. The created bliss of the garden of Eden is light years away. The Messiah didn't liberate the Jews. And the Risen Lord of all creation hasn't created the Kingdom of God on earth.

Look at that short sentence again - "**....At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.**" True, we're certainly all reminded of what we **don't** see and **want** to see. But these words aren't totally void of hope. Read them again and put the hit on the right words - "**....At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.**" "**Present**" and "**yet**" - those are **timing** words. And they lead directly into the next point in our text:

3) **IF YOUR HEART ACHES FOR THE GLORY OF THE WORLD TO COME LOOK TO JESUS THE CHRIST TODAY**

Hebrews 2:9 - "But we see him who *for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*"

This is the very first time the birth name of God the Son is used in the letter to the Hebrews - "**But we see him....namely Jesus....**" And the clear intent of the writer is to focus on the **Incarnation** of God the Son. And there's a reason for this emphasis.

The writer is wanting to deal with some tough questions. If Jesus really is God the Son - if His glory really is that which is set forth in the opening chapter of this letter - then why is His rule not complete and obvious to all? And what's more, the writer of Hebrews has just spent a chapter and a half proving the **superiority** of Christ to angels. Now he quotes **Psalm 8** and clearly states Jesus was "**made lower than the angels**" (Hebrews 2:9). What kind of superiority is this? And where is the evidence of it? That's the knot the writer of Hebrews is untying in this ninth verse.

And the key to understanding the plan of God is to notice the way the writer of Hebrews contrasts the way **mankind** was made lower than the angels with the way **Jesus** was made a little lower than the angels. **Man**, in Psalm 8, was made lower than the angels to show his **greatness**. **Jesus** was made a little lower than the angels to show His **condescension**. Though God the Son, He took the nature of man - along with that name - **Jesus** - with the purpose of "**tasting death for everyone**" (9).

Our writer obviously wants us to think this all the way through. He links the original grandeur of creation and all that mankind was created to be with the "**suffering of death**" (9) and the "**tasting of death**" (9) in Jesus, the Incarnate Christ, God the Son. And what the writer means for us to marvel at is the plain fact that what was lost in the **Fall of mankind** through sin can only be restored through the redemptive **death of Jesus on the cross**.

Strangely, this is also the very first time the **death** of Jesus is mentioned in Hebrews. The writer gives reference to it more vaguely in **1:3** but doesn't specifically use the words until **2:9**.

It is Christ's **death** that opens the gates for His being "**crowned with glory and honor**" (9). That's the writer's way of telling us **lost glory restored will only come through the death, resurrection, and ascension of God the Son**. He alone is the gateway into the new creation **begun** in His own flesh and **yet to come** in his future coming and reign.

With this in mind, read again those words we discussed earlier in the last part of **verse 8** - "**....At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.**" True enough. We, just like these Jewish believers to whom this letter was first directed, need to take God's whole plan just as He intended.

Surely this is our writer's point. The death of Jesus - His condescension and humiliation - the exaltation that is now a **past historic certainty** is the **guarantee of our future exaltation with Him**. This we cling to, whatever trials and persecution we face along the way. We are the "**church of the firstborn**" (12:23). We and all creation will follow in our risen Lord's steps.

And now I want to close with my personal favorite new creation/Easter text. It comes from **G. K. Chesterson's** **"Everlasting Man"** - ***"On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized the new wonder; but even they hardly realized that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in the semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool, not of the evening, but the brand new dawn."***