

MOVING ON TO MATURITY
Life in the “In-Between”
Hebrews 2:5-9

Every time I read and pray through our weekly prayer requests, I’m reminded that you and I are living life in the “in-between.” *There is a constant tension in our lives between the way we know things should be and one day will be and what we experience in the present.*

In this “in-between” time, something is wrong with everything. Toys break, accidents happen, relationships fail, healthy bodies get sick, friends and family members die, and hope so quickly turns to despair. We know deep down inside that we were made for something far better, far more satisfying. As believers, we know too that Jesus promises us a far better world than what we experience now.

I often pray (and I hope you do too!) through our weekly prayer sheet. And the requests are often very similar:

- Pray for my depression.
- I am feeling overwhelmed right now.
- Pray for emotional healing.
- Pray that I can overcome a bad habit.
- Pray for family issues to be resolved.

And when faced with the every day realities of temptation and suffering in the here and now, we cry out like the writer of Psalm 44:

Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
Why do you hide your face
and forget our misery and oppression? Psalm 44:23-24

Why do we pray this way? This is life in the “in-between.”

The book of Hebrews has a lot to say about life in the “in-between” time. And God’s Word in this letter gives us two words of advice. First, as to the future, we must remember that there is a better world to come. Second, as to the present, we must keep our eyes on Jesus.

That’s really what the writer is saying in the passage we’re looking at today. Let’s read it together:

It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.” In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:5-9

This “tension” I’m talking about between the future and the present is what these verses are all about. Notice verse 5: “It is not to angels that he has subjected *the world to come*, about which we are speaking.” Right off, the speaker reminds you and me that he is talking about the future “world to come.”

Remember, every one of the Old Testament quotations of chapter one is taken from a context which speaks of the future reign of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And all of these Old Testament quotes climax in the citation of Psalm 110 in verse 13: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”ⁱ

But when the hearers of this sermon (remember...this letter is really a “sermon” that was meant to be preached) heard that verse (Psalm 110), they probably scratched their heads and said, “Wait a minute, that sounds awful good, but we certainly don’t see everything under Jesus’ feet right now in the present!” There is so much out there that opposes the just, righteous rule of Christ: death, disease, suffering, persecution, addictions, broken marriages and divided families. There is so much that makes our present lives so painful and distasteful at times.

And that’s the caveat, the “tension,” that this passage is going to help us understand. Notice what he says at the end of verse 8: “Yet *at present* we do not see everything subject to him.” So if that’s the case, how do we live in the present? And that’s the question he’ll answer for us in verse 9 where he give us the answer to this dilemma.

That’s the overview. Let’s go back and look at the details. The writer is developing what he wants to say in three “movements.” The first is found in verses 6-8a as he quotes another Old Testament passage, Psalm 8.ⁱⁱ We could call this first movement *the dignity and destiny of man*.

THE DIGNITY AND DESTINY OF MAN

This first “movement” is introduced in verse 5: “It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come...” Actually, this verse picks up where the author left off in 1:14: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” In fact, if you took out the verses we looked at last week (2:1-4), there would be no break at all in subject matter between 1:14 and 2:5. In the present world, angels *serve* (1:14); in the future world, angels will not *rule* (2:5).ⁱⁱⁱ But there he leaves us hanging. “Well, then, who *will* rule?” we’re left asking.

The writer answers that question by quoting Psalm 8:4-6. The Psalm begins this way:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!...When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, The moon and the stars that you have set in place.
Psalm 8:1, 3

Maybe David wrote this Psalm while in the fields, keeping watch over his sheep as a young man. In the Palestine of David’s day, the splendor of the night sky – the moon and the stars – wasn’t covered over by the pollution and smut of our cities. As he looked up into the heavens, he is overwhelmed by the majesty of God and just how small and frail he is in comparison.

Just how big is God’s universe? Let’s pretend the earth were the size of a marble. In proportion, the sun would be the size of a beach ball and would be 163 yards away – a little less than the

length of two football fields (or four times the length of this auditorium). The largest planet in our solar system, Jupiter, would be about the size of a grapefruit, and it would be about five blocks up the road. What about the nearest star? In our scaled-down universe, the nearest star would still be 24,000 miles away. If the earth were the size of a marble, the Milky Way, reduced to a proportionate size, would still be 55 billion miles wide. And the universe is filled with other galaxies. Who can imagine the size of the universe? But the psalmist says that God's glory extends even beyond the heavens. And all this, the poet says, God created with his *fingers!*

Only *then* comes the question: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:4; Hebrews 2:6). In contrast to the heavens, man is miniscule. But God cares for you and me in our smallness and weakness. Amazing! God is more interested in people than in planets! And because he cares for you and me, he's given us a position of honor and dignity in his creation. He goes on citing verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 8:

You made him a little lower than the angels;^{iv}
you crowned him with glory and honor
and put everything under his feet." Hebrews 2:7,8a; Psalm 8:5,6

To understand Hebrews 2, we have to go to Psalm 8. But to understand Psalm 8, we have to go back to Genesis 1. Remember what God said on the sixth day of creation?

Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over this fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. Genesis 1:26

On the sixth day, man was created, crowned with glory and honor and everything was put under his feet. Psalm 8 is a commentary of Genesis 1. Man (i.e. mankind) was created as the "image" of God.^v And as the image of God, you and I were created a little "lower than the angels," and *not* (as some say today) a little higher than the animals.

Earlier we sang one of the most beautiful hymns ever written about God's creation: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty."

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!*

Its author would be horrified today to discover that his name has become better known in evolutionary circles than among Christians. The writer of this hymn, Joachim Neander, lived in the late 1600s in Germany. He would often take long walks in the countryside, as he composed hymns and sang them in praise to God. One of his favorite spots was a valley through which river flowed. He walked in this valley so often that it became identified with him and eventually named after him. The valley became known as the Neander Valley or Neanderthal (the *thal* in old German meaning "valley").

It was in this same valley two hundred years later, as limestone was being quarried for the manufacture of cement, that workmen came across some caves in the side wall of the gorge. One of the caves contained human bones, and the first Neanderthal was discovered. And even

today, the idea persists that Neanderthal Man is some sort of missing link in human evolution. When Joachim Neander walked in that beautiful valley he had no idea that hundreds of years later his name would be famous, not for his hymns celebrating God's handiwork in creation, but for a concept of human evolution that he would have totally rejected.^{vi}

The majority of people today think of themselves as a little higher than the animals, not a little lower than the angels. The vast majority have in their minds a mental image of something they've seen in any natural history museum: an ascendancy of primates, little jumping creatures, eventually humped over with knuckles dragging on the ground and then finally standing erect! And they say, "Wow! That's my heritage!"^{vii} And immediately, the God-given dignity of man is destroyed. And where there is no dignity, there is no morality.

No, you and I are not created a little higher than the animals, but a little lower than the angels. And with that high, dignified position as the "crown of creation," we are destined to rule. Hebrews 2:8 (quoting Psalm 8) says, "[You] put everything under his feet." And Psalm 8 clearly refers to Genesis 1:26 – "let them [mankind] *rule* over fish...birds... livestock...over all the earth." In fact, to emphasize this point, the writer of Hebrews adds (verse 8): "In putting everything under him, God left *nothing* that is not subject to him."

THE PRESENT REALITY OF LIFE IN THIS WORLD

But here's the caveat, which brings us to the present reality of life in this world. We don't at present see all things subject to us. We can't seem to control global warming (to the degree that it exists!). We can't seem to control our economy. From the news this past week, we can't seem to control our guns and the senseless taking of life. We can't control the elements: tornadoes and snow storms. We can't control our relationships. We can't seem to control our addictions. And we certainly can't control the inevitability of death. In fact, there is really little, if anything, that we (in and of ourselves) have control over. Our destiny of ruling in dignity has been distorted.

And it's this present reality of something being wrong with everything that the author is talking about in the latter part of verse 8:

Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. Hebrews 2:8c

Now the writer in this passage doesn't come right out and tell us *why* that is the case. He assumes that his readers, as well as you and I, already know. The inherent dignity and destiny of man as described in Genesis 1 is terribly marred (marred but not destroyed) in Genesis 3. The rebellious decision to disobey God brought sin into the world. And as Paul tells us, "just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12, 13).

LIVING LIFE IN THE "IN-BETWEEN"

What then is the solution? You and are living in the "in-between." We are "in-between" all that God created us to be and all that we will some day be. And life doesn't go as expected. We know that we were made for something much better than this.

The answer is found in verse 9:

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

You see, the perfect “man” and the “son of man” in Psalm 8:4 and Hebrews 2:6 *is* Jesus.^{viii} The psalmist David is writing one thing in Psalm 8, but the Holy Spirit is also giving a fuller, more complete meaning to these words. This is even seen in the way that he introduces this quote: “But there is a place where someone has testified.” Do you think the writer is having a “senior moment?” Can he not really recall just where this passage is found in the Old Testament? No, I think he knows very well where this familiar passage is and who wrote this psalm. But just as in chapter one, his focus is not on the human author, but on the voice of the Holy Spirit.^{ix}

And what is the Holy Spirit saying in Psalm 8? He is saying that, though the first man, Adam, failed in his role of rulership, there is One coming, called the “second man,” or the “last Adam,” (Romans 5) who will perfectly fulfill this role. *Jesus replaced what Adam erased!* In fact, he did even more than “replace” what Adam “erased.” And it is in him – Jesus – that you and I can discover all that we were meant to be!

How did Jesus do this? Well, the writer tells in a way that unfortunately doesn’t stand out in our English versions. More literally, verse 9 reads this way: “Made a little lower than the angels, *we see Jesus*, now crowned with glory and honor...” And there he tells us the two ways in which you and I are to “see Jesus.”

First, we are to see him *in his sufferings*. He was “made a little lower than the angels.” Chapter one tells us that he is far superior to the angels. But here we’re reminded that he was made a little lower than the angels. That speaks of his incarnation – when he took on human flesh, became like you and me, and *suffered*.

This book has a lot to say about suffering in the “in-between” time. In the very next verse (v. 10) we read that the “captain” of our faith, Jesus, was made perfect through suffering. And the very last verse of this chapter says, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). And other writers of the New Testament remind us just how important a role that suffering plays in the Christian life:

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to *suffer* for him. Philippians 1:29

To this you were called, because Christ *suffered* for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21

Paul Tillich once described “the average American who uses God as hot water bottle.” When we feel pain, be it emotional, psychological, physical or relational, we pull God off the shelf and apply him to the pain. But when the pain goes, God goes too. I like how one of my favorite authors puts it:

“We have become committed to relieving the pain behind our problems rather than using our pain to wrestle more passionately with the character and purposes of God. *Feeling*

better has become more important than finding God. And worse, we assume that people who find God always feel better.”^x

Is that your basic commitment in life...to relieve the pain? If so, you are not following in the footsteps of Jesus, our captain. We are not called to relieve the pain of life in the “in-between” at all costs. Rather we are called to see Jesus in the pain.

This can even affect the way we pray. Do we pray “Lord, deliver me from this depression, this problem, or this pain?” Or do we pray, “Lord, help me see you *in* this depression, this problem, this pain?” Sometimes in this “in-between” time God wants to deliver us *from* the difficulty. But sometimes he wants to take us *through* the difficulty, with our eyes on him. Bottom line, the prayers that honor God are in the *name* of Jesus, for the *fame* of Jesus, and towards the *reign* of Jesus, and not first of all for our comfort.

But to see Jesus is not only to see him in his sufferings. It is also to see him in his *exaltation*: “now crowned with glory and honor.” As we look back, we see him in his sufferings. As we look up and forward, we see him in his exaltation. Remember, this suffering Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God. And there, he intercedes for you and me. He is faithful and merciful High Priest, who is *for* us and invites us to come to him for help in the time of need.

And more than that, he promises us that a better day is coming – a day when he will rule. We don’t see it now and we don’t feel it now, but someday every thing that opposes the righteous, just rule of Christ will be brought into submission to Him. That includes death, disease, pain, suffering, and relational disharmony. It includes everything that makes our present life so painful and distasteful at times.

A pilot in a deep fog or heavy clouds stays on course by looking at his instruments. So for us, Jesus is our reference point who will enable us to stay the course through the stormiest times of our lives in the “in-between.” Are your eyes on Jesus?

ⁱ By the way, did you know that between 10% and 20% of the New Testament is either a direct quotation or an allusion to the Old Testament? That tells you and me that we really can’t understand the New Testament without understanding the Old.

ⁱⁱ Psalm 8 is quoted in four New Testament passages: Matthew 21:16; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22 and here in Hebrews 2. There are four other passages where Psalm 8 is alluded to: Romans 3:23; Philippians 2:9-11; 3:21; 1 Peter 3:22.

ⁱⁱⁱ In God’s government of the universe today, however, angels *do* “rule.” The Bible teaches very clearly in passages such as Deuteronomy 32:8, Daniel 10 and Ephesians 6 that good angels carry out God’s purposes and evil angels oppose God’s purposes. Angels, the Bible teaches, even stand behind the governmental authorities of this world. And yet, while the angels exercise this role of “ruling” today, in the future world it will not be the angels who rule.

^{iv} In Psalm 8 the NLT and NASB read, “You made him a little lower than *God*.” The Hebrew word *elohim* in this verse of Psalm 8 can be translated either “God” or “angels,” depending on the context. Given the New Testament use of the passage, the translation “angels” is preferred.

^v And that involves three things. I like to call them the three “R’s.” First, it means *resemblance*. Man was created to be *resemble* God, not in his physical appearance, but in his moral capacities. Second, it means *relationship*. “Man” was created as man and woman, intended for relationship (cf. “let *them* rule...”). But thirdly, it means *representation*. Man was created for the purpose of being God’s official representative on this earth. As such, he is to “rule.”

^{vi} *Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations and Quotes Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations and Quotes* by Robert Morgan, p. 159.

^{vii} Idea adapted from Jay Kesler, “Lost in Space,” *Preaching Today*, Tape #85.

^{viii} Jesus applied Psalm 8 to himself during the Passion Week. In Matthew 21 we read that Jesus had just made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people were crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Of course, the religious leaders didn’t like what was happening and they begin to protest: “Don’t you hear what these children are saying?” “Yes, I sure do!” Jesus replies. But then he goes on to say, “Haven’t you ever read (and here he quotes Psalm 8): ‘From the lips of children and infants I have raised up praise?’” Furthermore, the title “son of man” is clearly messianic and goes back to Daniel chapter 7: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14. And in John 5 Jesus applies the title “son of man” to himself: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the *Son of Man*” (John 5:26-27). Not only is Jesus the Son of Man in Psalm 8, but so also is the church. The “Son of Man” is not only referring to Jesus Christ, but also to you and me as his Body. In this sense, the “Son of Man” is a corporate idea. Notice, too, that Hebrews 1 emphasizes Jesus as the Son of God. Hebrews 2 emphasizes Jesus as the Son of Man.

^{ix} He also knows that the readers, being Hebrews and very familiar with the Old Testament, will immediately know what passage he is citing. What he wants us to focus on, however, is *not* the human author, but the voice of God speaking in this text. When David wrote the words of Psalm 8, he probably thought first in a general way of man and the great dignity with which God had invested us. But then he thought, too, of the Perfect Man, the One God had promised would sit on David’s throne throughout eternity. This is confirmed by Peter’s words: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” 1 Peter 1:10-12

^x Larry Crabb, *Finding God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 18 as cited by George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 104.