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OUR GLORIOUS DESTINY IN CHRIST

Hebrews 2:5-9

By

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Hebrews Lesson 5

Our Glorious Destiny in Christ Hebrews 2:5-9

What would you do with a 19-year-old Christian young man, who wrote in his diary, "9. *Resolved*, To think much, on all occasions, of my dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death"? As you read through his 70 resolutions, you encounter things like, "7. *Resolved*, Never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life." "17. *Resolved*, That I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die."

If that young man lived in a modern evangelical home, his parents would probably be looking for a good Christian psychologist to get this kid's focus off of such morbid subjects. Maybe a prescription for Prozac would help!

That young man was Jonathan Edwards, who went on to become the great revivalist preacher of the First Great Awakening (his resolutions are in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Banner of Truth], 1:xx-xxi). His writings are still immensely helpful to believers, 300 years later. Lest you think that he was a gloomy, depressive type, I should point out that his first resolution was, in part, "1. *Resolved*, That *I will do whatsoever* I think to be most to the glory of God, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration; without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence." Edwards realized, even as a teenager, that to live for God's glory in light of death and eternity was to live for the greatest personal good, profit, and pleasure.

It seems to me that modern evangelical Christians are far too focused on the here and now. We've lost the central focus that Edwards had, even as a teenager, of living each day in view of death and eternity. The modern view is, "Heaven is a nice thought, but I want the good life *now*. If Jesus can help me succeed in my family, in business, and in my personal emotional life, *that's* what I want! I'll think about heaven when I'm in my eighties."

As a result of our shortsightedness, we don't handle trials well. It is unknown how we might handle persecution, should such arise

against the church, but it probably would free up a few seats on Sunday mornings. I agree with John Piper, who observed (in a tape on Charles Simeon; order from www.desiringgod.org) over a decade ago that evangelical pastors are too emotionally fragile. If we catch strong criticism or personal attacks, we're quick to bail out of the ministry. One main reason for this weakness is that we are not focused on our glorious eternal destiny in Jesus Christ.

A main practical theme of the Letter to the Hebrews is endurance under trials. The author frequently exhorts his readers, "Hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end" (3:6; see also 3:14; 4:14; 6:11-12). "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (10:36).

In order to give his readers the perspective to endure, the author focuses on their eternal destiny in Christ. In 1:14, in his argument that Jesus is greater than the angels, he pointed out that the angels serve "those who will inherit salvation." While we now possess salvation (if we have trusted in Christ), much of it is reserved for eternity as our inheritance. As Paul puts it in Romans 8:17-18, we are now children of God, "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." To endure our present sufferings, we must focus on the glory ahead in Christ.

That is the train of thought in Hebrews 2:5-9. After his brief exhortation to pay attention so that we do not drift (2:1-4), he comes back to deal with Jesus' superiority over the angels. It is difficult to say whether the opening word, "for," links back to 1:14 or to the entire preceding argument. It is likely that he was thinking of an objection that some of his Jewish readers who were wavering might have had. They may have been thinking, "If the Son of God is greater than the angels, having obtained a more excellent name than they (1:4), then how does this fit with His becoming a man, since men are lower than the angels? Furthermore, how does this fit with His dying on the cross, since angels never die? How then is Jesus superior to the angels?"

The author responds by showing that God did not subject the world to come to angels, but to man. To support this point, he cites from Psalm 8 (LXX). His introduction of the quote, "one has testified somewhere," does not mean that he couldn't remember where the quote was from. He cites it accurately (the original probably omits the last part of 2:7, "and have appointed him over the works of Your hands"). Rather, the author wants to emphasize that the quote comes from God, rather than to draw attention to David, the human author. Psalm 8 reflects on the high position to which God appointed man, putting him over all creation.

But, the author adds, "we do not yet see all things subjected to him" (2:8). The unstated but obvious event that overturned man's high position was the fall. Then, in verse 9, he shows that Jesus (the first use of His name in the book, obviously emphasizing His humanity), because of His death on our behalf, was crowned with glory and honor. Thus He recovered what man lost in the fall. In the world to come, redeemed man will reign with Jesus as God intended. So the main idea is that...

Although God's original high purpose for man was lost in the fall, it will be recovered through Jesus Christ.

Because the train of thought is not easy here, I need to explain the text first. Then I will apply it.

1. God's original intent for man was that we rule over the earth (2:5-8a).

He makes two points here:

- A. Man's destiny is higher than that of the angels (2:5).

"For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking." There is debate about the meaning of the phrase, "the world to come." The Greek word for "world" means "the inhabited earth." Some take the whole phrase to refer to the messianic age inaugurated by Christ at His first coming. Others understand it to refer to the future Millennial Kingdom.

In the original creation, God created man in His image to subdue the earth and rule over it (Gen. 1:26-28). Man lost that dominion to Satan in the fall, so that he is now "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; also, 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1

John 5:19). At the cross, Jesus overcame Satan's power (John 12:31; 16:11). Christ's victory will be finalized in His second coming and kingdom rule. At the end of that 1,000-year kingdom, Satan will be loosed briefly for one final assault on Christ's kingdom, only to be defeated and judged forever (Rev. 20:7-10).

Thus I understand "the world to come" to refer primarily to the future Millennial Kingdom. But there is currently a heavenly conflict for dominion on earth. We participate in this conflict and reign with Christ as we conquer the strongholds of Satan through spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20; Dan. 10). To the extent that we live under Christ's lordship, we experience a taste of His kingdom rule now. But the full expression of Christ's kingdom awaits His return, when He will reign over all the earth. Then we will reign with Him and we will judge the angels (1 Cor. 6:3). So our ultimate destiny is higher than that of the angels, since we will rule the world to come with Christ.

B. God's original intent for us is described in Psalm 8 (2:6-8).

David was probably standing out under the night sky, gazing at the impressive array of stars, when he marveled, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!" As he considers his own smallness in light of the immensity of the universe, he marvels, "What is man, that You remember him, or the son of man that You are concerned about him?" David stands amazed as he realizes that, in spite of man's insignificance compared to the vast universe, God has appointed man below the angels to rule over creation.

The phrase, "a little lower than the angels," is ambiguous. It can mean either "by a small degree" or "for a short time." The former sense fits the psalm as applied to man, who lacks the supernatural powers of the angels. The latter sense fits the psalm as applied to the Son of Man, who laid aside His glory for a short time to take on human flesh while on this earth (Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 85). He retains His humanity forever, but when He ascended, He took back His glory (John 17:5; Rev. 1:12-18).

As the Psalm unfolds, God created man as the apex of His creation, giving him great glory and honor. He gave man a position of authority, to rule over all other creatures. Adam and Eve were in a perfect environment, enjoying perfect fellowship with their Creator. Man's original high position of honor shows how utterly inexcusable the fall was! What more could Adam and Eve have wanted? What did they lack? They had position, prestige, and power over everything on earth! Yet, they wanted more, to be like God Himself.

After citing the line of the Psalm, "You have put all things in subjection to his feet," the author of Hebrews explains, "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" (2:8). The question is, does "him" refer to man or to Christ? It probably refers to man in the first place, but also beyond man to Christ as the representative Man (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 37). As Bruce explains (*ibid.*), "The writer confesses that it is not easy to recognize in man the being whom the psalmist describes as 'crowned with glory and honor' and enjoying dominion over all the works of the Creator's hands." But, as he will explain in verse 9, man's failed purpose is fulfilled in Christ. The author refers to that failed purpose in 2:8b:

2. God's original intent for man was hindered by our fall into sin (2:8b).

The fall looms behind the words, "But we do not yet see all things subjected to him." The author, then, is saying that Psalm 8 had reference to the first Adam, created in God's image to have dominion over His creation. Everything without exception was to be subject to man. That was God's original intent, but that is not what we now see. Man fell through sin, thus thwarting the fulfillment of everything in creation being subject to him.

As a result of the fall, God ordained that the earth would be cursed, so that man would have to till it by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:17-19). Adam and Eve were put out of the garden, losing their place of dominion. The human race became subject to sickness, injury, and death. The effects of sin infected the entire race, so that Adam and Eve's first son murdered his brother. Man became subject to what we call "natural disasters," such as earth-

quakes, volcanoes, floods, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, drought, and extremes of heat and cold.

John MacArthur describes it this way (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Hebrews* [Moody], p. 57):

Man lives in jeopardy every hour. Just at the height of professional achievement, his brain may develop a tumor, and he becomes an imbecile. Just at the brink of athletic fame, he may be injured and become a helpless paralytic. He fights himself, he fights his fellowman, and he fights his earth. Every day we read and hear of the distress of nations, of the impossibility of agreement between statesmen in a world that languishes in political and social conflict—not to mention economic hardship, health hazards, and military threats. We hear the whine of pain from dumb animals and even see the struggle of trees and crops against disease and insects. Our many hospitals, doctors, medicines, pesticides, insurance companies, fire and police departments, funeral homes—all bear testimony to the cursed earth.

Even if we look beyond man as the reference in 2:8b, to Christ as the representative Man, we do not yet see all things subjected to Him. That idea ties back to 1:13, where the Father says to the Son, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” That has not yet happened. In God’s sovereign plan, He allows wicked men and nations to rage against His Messiah in this present age. But the day is coming when He “shall break them with a rod of iron” and “shatter them like earthenware” (Ps. 2:9). This leads to the third link in the author’s thought:

3. God’s original intent for man will be realized through Jesus Christ (2:9).

The order of thought here follows Paul’s treatment of Jesus’ humiliation and glory in Philippians 2:5-11. There, Jesus who existed in the form of God emptied Himself of His glory, took on the form of a servant, and became obedient to death on a cross. Therefore, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name.

Here, Jesus, the eternal Son of God (Hebrews 1) humbled Himself by taking on human flesh, becoming “a little lower than

the angels." But He didn't stop there. He submitted to "the suffering of death," "so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." As a result, He is now "crowned with glory and honor." To "taste death" means not to nibble at it but, rather, to experience death to the fullest degree. "Everyone" refers to all that will experience the benefits of Christ's death through faith, the "many sons" whom He will bring to glory (2:10).

The risen Jesus chided the two men on the Emmaus Road for not believing in all that the prophets had spoken. Then He said, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). Peter said that the prophets sought "to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). In other words, Jesus' death was not unforeseen. The Old Testament prophets had predicted His death and after it, His glory.

This was God's ordained means of rescuing the fallen human race from the ravages of sin and restoring us to the place of His original intention. If we are in Christ through faith, then we are seated in the heavenly places in Him. If He is now crowned with glory and honor, then we share that glory and honor, although we do not yet see it (Heb. 2:7; Ps. 8:5). When He comes again to reign in His kingdom, we will reign with Him! That is our glorious destiny in Christ!

To recap, Christ's incarnation and death did not in any way imply His inferiority to angels. This is supported by the fact that God ordained that man will rule angels in the world to come. Psalm 8 shows that this was God's original intent. That intent was hindered by the fall, but now has been recovered in the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through His death, resurrection, exaltation on high, and coming again to reign, we will reign with Him.

Conclusion

Hopefully, you now understand the flow of thought in this text. How should we apply these verses practically?

First, we should not let present trials cause us to neglect our great salvation, because one day we shall reign with Christ. A. W. Pink (*An Exposition of Hebrews* [electronic ed.], Ephesians Four Group: Escondido, CA,

p. 97) said, "The *practical* bearings of this verse on the Hebrews was: Continue to hold fast your allegiance to Christ, for the time is coming when those who do so shall enter into a glory surpassing that of the angels." In other words, we need to develop and maintain the eternal perspective of our glorious destiny in Christ so that we can endure joyfully our present trials. If Jesus had to suffer first and then enter His glory, so do we. God used suffering to perfect His Son (2:10), and He does so with us. Jonathan Edwards was right: we should focus often on the shortness of life in light of eternity.

Victoria was Queen of England from 1837 to 1901. When she was young, she was shielded from the fact that she would be the next ruling monarch of England, lest this knowledge should spoil her. When her teacher finally let her discover that she would one day be Queen of England, Victoria's response was, "Then I will be good." Her life would be controlled by her future destiny.

Our situation should parallel hers. Our future destiny is that we will reign with Jesus Christ, not for a few years, but throughout eternity. Our knowledge of that should enable us to endure present hardships and trials. We should live as set apart unto Christ because we look ahead to our glorious destiny.

Second, by faith we should see Jesus and marvel at what He did for us and that we are now in Him (2:9). He left the splendor of heaven and not only took on human flesh, but also went to the cross on our behalf! "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" (Charles Wesley). That is why our Lord ordained Communion, so that we would remember Him and what He did on the cross for us. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). Paul daily saw Jesus, who endured the cross on his behalf. And, he saw himself in Christ, so that all the benefits of Christ's death applied to him. That is how we should live each day.

Third, if you feel weak, despised, or insignificant in this evil world, take courage! In Christ, we are more than conquerors. Although it is difficult to fathom, in the ages to come we will reign with Christ in His kingdom. It doesn't really matter what the world thinks of you. What

matters is what God thinks of you. If you have trusted Christ as the One who bore your sins on the cross, then God has imputed His righteousness to you. You are purified from your sins. You can know that although you are just a speck on planet earth, which is just a speck in this gigantic universe, God cares for you and has a purpose for your life. That purpose transcends the short life we have in this body, and extends through eternity in our glorified bodies that we will receive when Christ returns.

But there is a final truth that may apply to some: *If you are not in Christ, you should greatly fear.* Though He is now despised and ignored by millions around the world, the day is coming when they will cry out for the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16). He is that chief cornerstone, which the builders rejected. If you build your life on Him, you will find a sure foundation for every storm in life (Matt. 7:24-25). But if that Stone falls on you, it will scatter you like dust (Matt. 21:44). “Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him” (Ps. 2:12).

Discussion Questions

1. How, practically, can we keep our focus on our eternal destiny in the midst of life's problems?
2. Sometimes Psalm 8 is used to teach the unbiblical concept of “self-esteem.” Was David's response to these truths to glorify himself or God? Is it proper to have a sense of significance as those created in God's image?
3. To what extent do the effects of the fall remain in believers? To what extent are these effects removed?
4. Is the Christian life just “pie in the sky when you die”? To what extent should we experience the abundant life now? What exactly does that mean?

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