

Hebrews 2:5-3:15

1. In Hebrews 2, the author continues with his argument that Jesus, the Messiah, is superior to the angels. In 2:5-8, he refers to Psalm 8 which specifically compares humans and angels. He then ties Jesus to his people using a reference to Psalm 22 and another to Isaiah:

Psalm 22:22: “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you”

+ *Isaiah 8:17-18*: “I will put my trust in him...Here am I and the children whom God has given me”

Hebrews 2:14: “Since, **therefore**, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death...”

These two short OT references are pregnant with meaning not evident at first glance. Read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8. What further message, beyond the kinship shared by Jesus and his followers, is the author of Hebrews intending to deliver to these Jewish Christians who are nervous about persecution and considering returning to Judaism?

2. Hebrews 2:6-8 references Psalm 8, describing the relationship between humans and God’s creation: Just as humans are “for a little while lower than the angels,” they are intended for dominion over “the works of your hands.” Jesus demonstrated his dominion over the creation in his calming of the storm, walking on water, feeding the multitude and perhaps most obviously in his many healings.

We are very familiar with some aspects of our already/not-yet salvation: For instance, just as Jesus was “perfected” through suffering, we anticipate an end to our struggle with sin in the next life. Also, just as Jesus is now crowned with glory and honor, so we shall enjoy dominion in the life to come, following in the footsteps of our pioneer, the first Adam. The “already” of our sanctification (the first example) is seen in the fruit of the Spirit. Where do you see the “already” of our anticipated stewardship and dominion of creation (the second example)?

3. What reasons does the author give in 2:11-18 for Jesus’ suffering?
4. “It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect¹ through sufferings,” reads 2:10. Shortly after this verse, in 2:12-13, the author lists three OT passages which identify Jesus with his “brothers and sisters.” So central is this identification between Jesus and his followers that 2:11 begins “**For** the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father”—i.e., it is because of our identification as brothers and sisters with Christ that all the things in 2:10 are true (“fitting”), and in particular, that Jesus was made perfect through suffering.

1 “Perfect,” Gk *teleios*, has the sense of being “fully qualified” (Brown, 61) or “fully adequate for the task for which designed” (Barclay, 26).

As Barclay puts it, “It is, in fact, this identification with men which is the essence of the Christian idea of God. [Whereas] the basis of the Greek idea of God was *detachment*; the basis of the Christian idea is *identity*. Through his suffering Jesus Christ identified himself with man” (27).

What would it be like if Christians were known for their Spirit-empowered ability to identify with others? How might we tap into that gift of the Spirit in our relationships with others?

5. Chrysostom writes that “the one who suffers for someone not only helps him but becomes himself more glorious and more perfect” (ACCS Hebrews, 42). A good example of this² is the increase in Christlike perspective and learning found in C. S. Lewis’ *A Grief Observed*, which he wrote *after* suffering a great personal loss, compared to *The Problem of Pain*, which was written earlier in his life; his personal loss brought about real growth in spiritual maturity in him.

Yet there are many relationships where the suffering of one person for another is not so redemptive. For instance, the co-dependent spouse who suffers for an alcoholic, and whose suffering leads to a stunted, unhealthy relationship. Or those cases where the suffering is voluntary and out of love, but may be tainted or too heavy a burden; how many parents suffer for the sake of a terminally ill child who eventually dies, only to find their marriage, and sometimes their faith, don’t survive the grief?

What are the necessary ingredients of Christ-like suffering for another? Can you think of an instance of suffering which exemplifies redemptive suffering?

6. Through Jesus’ death he was able to “destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (2:14-15). The prospect of being freed from fear of death is powerful, yet many Christians don’t experience it, living in dread of their end.

The Bible has surprisingly little to say directly about fear of death. Jesus tells his disciples, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28). In 1 John 4:18, we read, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.”³ Finally, in 1 Cor 15:55-56, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”

- a. Do you fear ever death? If so, what do you fear? The judgment to follow? The suffering which sometimes precedes it? The nothingness which would follow if your faith were a mirage? Going someplace you can’t return from, and leaving loving ones in the process? Or simply doing something you’ve never done before?

2 D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, p. 18.

3 One might also include Romans 8:14, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.” This seems, though, to be more about fear of condemnation.

- b. How can we better apprehend the truths of Hebrews 2 in order to not fear death? Is there a trait, attribute, strategy, experience or practice which is common to those Christians you know who least fear death?
7. In 3:1-6, the author of Hebrews argues that Jesus is superior to Moses. Having just spent two chapters demonstrating Jesus' superiority to the prophets and the angels, is this really necessary? (Cf. Num 12:6-8.)
 8. Hebrews 3:7-15 presents a warning which is based on Psalm 95, which is itself a warning based on Ex 17:1-7 and Num 20:1-13.
 - a. Read Num 20:1-13. What was Moses guilty of? (Or the Hebrews, in Num 13-14, for that matter?) What, for him and the other Hebrews, was God's "rest"?
 - b. Read Ps 95. Given that this is a Psalm of worship, what are the people being warned of?
 - c. Given its context, what are the "Hebrews" being warned of? What are its consequences—i.e., what, is God's "rest" for the believers addressed by this letter?
 9. The Psalmist, in Ps 95, says, "*Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." As Hebrews tells us, this warning is true always, but of course especially on those days when God is speaking, as he was to the early church and as he does to us today. His readers, though, were falling into the Jewish mindset of the day, that God hadn't spoken, and wasn't speaking. "They had been living in what you might call 'tomorrow mode' for long enough; now it was 'today mode,' the moment when suddenly it was all happening. If only they would remember that, they would stay on track" (Wright, 29).

We also sometimes live as if we are living in "today mode" or "tomorrow mode." We may ask ourselves, Are we behaving as those in the end times for which Joel's prophecy has been fulfilled, the Spirit has been poured out, and God has pitched his tent among his people? The connection in Psalm 95 may be telling in this regard: If in our worship (and ultimately in our hearts) we are celebrating what God is doing in our lives, our churches, and our communities, then we have some assurance our hearts aren't being hardened.

What *is* God doing in these spheres that we can celebrate?

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Fun fact: "In the second century a Jewish teacher called Rabbi Jose ben Chalafta, commented on [Numbers 12:6-8], declaring that Moses was faithful in all his house, saying: 'God calls Moses faithful in all his house, and thereby he ranked him higher than the ministering angels themselves.'" (Barclay, 29)