

# Hebrews 2:5-9

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[ 0 : 00 ] What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be human? What a piece of work is man. You may recognize these words, but I don't mind. How noble in reason. How infinite in faculties.

In form and moving, how express and admirable. In action, how like an angel. In apprehension, how like a god. The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals. Shakespeare, Hamlet, scene 2. The subscription of mankind. This amazing creature. The paragon of animals. The high point of God's creation. And yet, as human beings, we're capable of such terrible things, aren't we? There's a castle near where I grew up where if you look at it as the sun rises, you'd see this glorious castle. You'd think, what a fantastic building. And yet, in the daylight you went there, you'd see it actually as a ruin. It was crumbled. The tantulum castle no longer has the glorious instead. It is a ruin. And that is us, isn't it? We are glorious ruins. There's something beautiful about human beings. We are capable of such things. Infinite in faculties. How shapes to put it politically. And yet, minds that can devise medicines to cure terrible diseases. Can also devise chemical weapons to destroy. The internet brings us such good. It can also cause human trafficking and pornography and terrible things. What does it mean to be human? How do we account for these things? In some ways, we have a bit of an answer to that question. Here we look at Hebrews chapter 2. And as we look at this, we need to remember the context here. The writing of the Hebrews is writing to real people. Real people struggling with real life. Struggling with issues. They were a bunch of Christian believers who were ready to pack in their faith. They were ready to go back into Judaism that their neighbours and friends embraced. They thought that that was an equally valid way to go on. So why not give up on this Christianity thing and just go along with it? Perhaps they thought Judaism offered a more authentic experience. A more tangible experience. After all, there was still a temple they could see. There were still sacrifices happening that they could smell and know. And perhaps for them, Judaism was certainly an easier option. Why could our Lord have clapped the difficulty of following Jesus Christ? In the Roman world at the time, Judaism is a licensed religion. And Jews were allowed to practice what they believed. Christianity? That was just a weird new cult. And so if you read on through the book of Hebrews, you find these believers had faced imprisonment, faced the confiscation of their goods, all for following Jesus. So they were prepared to pack it all in. They'd go for an easier life.

I wonder if some of us can relate to that here. Perhaps some of us think, well, surely other religions are equally valid. Or, actually wouldn't it be easier to just go along with the flow, just to believe that all things are true and all things are nice and fine? Or shouldn't I go and look for some other experience that is more authentic? Well, the wife of the Hebrews wants his readers and us to know that that is not a good option. He wants them and us to stay holding on to Jesus Christ. And as he gets to chapter 2, he wants us to see this great rescue that only comes through Jesus Christ. Actually, back in verse 3, he didn't read it, but he talked about this great salvation, this great rescue passage that we should not ignore.

[ 3 : 48 ] And here in this chapter, he gives three different camera angles, as it were, to look at the work of Jesus Christ, to look at why God became human in the person of Jesus. And this week, we're going to look at how Jesus was the true human who came to rescue us. Next week, we'll see he's the true champion to liberate us. And in a few weeks' time, or two weeks' time, I should say, we'll look at how Jesus is the true priest we all need. But here, we're looking at how he's the true he. And in order to understand that, we need to see three things. We need to see the way the world is supposed to be, the way the world is, and the way the world will be restored forever. So first of all, the way the world is supposed to be. And the writer shows us the way the world is supposed to be in verses 6 to 8. And he's quoting here from Psalm 8 in the Old Testament. Now, Psalm 8 is a song

of praise in the Hebrew Bible, from the Jewish tradition, praising God for his creation. And particularly praising

God for two aspects of his creation. Firstly, for God's caring care and concern for creatures like us. So Psalm 8 verse 3, which isn't quoted here, which says this, when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of? Which the writer picks up here in verse 6. Praise in God for the fact that he cares for little insignificant creatures like us. Little dots in the landscape, on the third rock from the sun, in the midst of a vast galaxy, in the midst of a vast universe.

The psalm praises God for his care and concern for people like you and me. But secondly, the psalm praises God for the privilege he is for so long. And that's what the writer picks up here. What is man that you are mindful of him, a solid man that you care for him.

You made him for a little while lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honour, putting everything in subjection under his feet. But that is a story of creation. When God made the heavens and the earth, Genesis chapter 1, we read that God made human beings in his own image, to be his representatives. In those days, emperors and kings erect statues of themselves, images of themselves, throughout their territory. It's a way of saying that I'm the one who's in charge here, I'm the one who lives here. And in the same way, God didn't just make a statue of himself. He made human beings as his image bearers, as his representatives, to show that he rules over this world. And we were there as his vice-regents, if you like, to rule the world for him.

That's why the psalm says, verse 8, quoted here, that God put everything in subjection under his feet, under human rule. That's the way the world was meant to be. Everything was supposed to work under human rule, as we rule the world as God's representatives, ruling it, caring for it, in the way God rules and cares for us. That's the way the world was meant to be. That's what human beings are meant to be. But sadly, that's not the way the world is. You know, I should acknowledge that, isn't it? You look at the end of verse 8. At present, we do not see everything in subjection to him. This is the way the world is. We see that everything isn't in subjection to human beings. We see that so vividly on our television screens every night.

[ 7 : 22 ] We've got the floods, don't we? As I drove up to Scotland for Christmas, we passed through a town near our parents' lives, a sandbag is up against the door. Shortly after we left, another town up with ours was flooded. And on the news every night, we see flood defences failing.

Everything is not in subjection to human beings. The world seems to be in rebellion against us. We live in a world fit for rebels. The world is out of control. It's like an out of control train that we cannot derail or certainly cannot stop or control. Now, why is that?

What went wrong? Well, writer doesn't tell us here because history was new. And he goes back again at the beginning of the story of the Bible. In Genesis chapter 3, we were in that human beings rejected God. God had made everything for human beings to enjoy. And he made this beautiful garden, planted this beautiful garden so that you can eat any fruit from any tree in this garden. I want you to fill this earth and rule over it. I want you to develop culture, to develop art. I want you to develop science, to investigate this world I've made and to enjoy it and understand it. You can do everything you want. But here's a beautiful garden for you to enjoy. So any of the fruit in this garden except for this one tree. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don't eat from that. Because that is there to remind you that I, God, am God and you are creatures. You depend on me. If you eat from that tree, if you think you can live without me, if you think you can define good and evil without me, then that will result in death. That will result in death. And that makes sense, doesn't it? You cut the branch off a tree, the branch dies, doesn't it? As human beings, if we cut ourselves off from the God who made us, then God is the source of life. And death is the right consequence and the right punishment for us to live in that. But sadly, that is exactly what happened. Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree. Every human being since has tried to live without God. Has tried to live as if we could define right and wrong and meaning and purpose. And the result is not only we cut off from God, but the world is now the way it is rather the way it should be.

We now live in a world with floods and damage and disease destroying and famine and plaguing us. We live in a world where people fight one another instead of being united together. We live in a world where we do not naturally know God but are cut off from him. And yet, our dignity as human beings is not completely gone, is it? We still are capable of beautiful acts of love. Beautiful, creating beautiful works of love. Making astounding discoveries in science.

And yet, we can use those things to damage as well. J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote The Lord of the Rings, also wrote a poem in which he described human beings as, laws now bethroned, who wear the rags of lordship that once we earned.

[10:35] There's something about us that, like that castle where I grew up, shows something of the dignity we once had. And yet now, we are glorious ruins, cut off from one another, cut off from God, and in a world which is no longer subject to our rule, but subjects us to its fury.

Well, that's the way the world should be, is under our rule. The way the world is, is out of control. But thirdly, the writer talks about the way the world will be restored forever.

We get that in verse 9. We don't see, at the end of verse 8 actually, we do not, at present, we do not see everything in subjection to him, that is to human beings generally, but we see him, who for a little while was made lower than the angels. Who is that? Jesus. We see him crowned with glory and honour, because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. So there are three stages to this wrestling plan that the writer unfolds for us. First of all, there's humiliation, God stepping down.

Then there's coronation, Jesus getting the crown. And thirdly, the final victory. Let's just go through those three quickly. So first of all, the humiliation, the stepping down.

Some things can only stick from the inside, can't they? There was a film of years ago, came out about five years ago, called Unstoppable, starring Denzel Washington and Chris Clime. That train in Pennsylvania, I think, on the east coast, who got out of control.

[12:10] It was just charging off, there was no one on board. And so they had to try and stop this train and try and rescue it. And so they had various plans to try and derail it, or to do things to it. And none of those plans were there. And towards the end of the film, Denzel Washington tries to climb on the top of the train to get into the cabin, but he can't, his way is flopped.

And so Chris Clime, the hero of the story, is driven up in a vehicle alongside it and to jump off the train and get it back under control before it crashes and causes a catastrophe. The only way to stop the disaster was from the inside, to get inside and do it.

The writer said that is what Jesus Christ has done, that's what God, the eternal Son of God has done. He has stepped inside. In chapter 1 he described the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, as the heir of all things, the one through whom all things were created. Yet here in verse 9 he reminds us that for a little while he was made a little lower than the angels.

He stepped down, he was humiliated. He came to the inside. There's a bigger humiliation than the chief executive going to clean the toilets. What chief financial officer wrote he is in night security behind. And it wasn't just like Prince William a few years ago. You know, Prince William, I can fair play say he did this. He went and spent the night on the streets before Christmas one year. As a way of identifying and understanding what the homeless people were suffering. Well it's a great thing he did that, but Jesus went further than that.

It wasn't just for a night. The eternal Son of God took on human flesh. Not just for a day, not even just for 30 years. Not just for his birth and death and death and death and the cross.

[13:51] But in fact forever. And verse 9 shows what he endured in that stepping down. At the end of the verse. He was crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Death. Remember that was a punishment for us rejecting God's rule. For human beings trying to live as if we were God, instead of dependent on God. Yet Jesus sat down. He tasted death for us. Not just a sip of course, he drank the whole cup of death down to the dregs. Remember death is not natural in this world. Death happens because we reject God. Yet here is God come to earth, come inside to taste death for us.

to be. And he can do that as the true human. As the one who always lived in fellowship with God. As the one who always submitted to God's authority. The authority of God the Father.

And you notice Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who becomes the Lord Jesus Christ, doesn't do this to try and argue with God the Father. But it's the Father's will. See that at the end of the verse? That by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. As long as if the Son dies to persuade the Father to be merciful. Rather it's all part of a rusty package designed by the tri-ego of the Father, Son and Spirit to remake what we work. To restore us to true humanity from the glorious ruins we are currently. So that's the first stage, the second stage, the second stage, the humiliation. The second stage then is the coronation. Look at verse 9 again. You see him who for little while has made love in the angels, namely Jesus, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death. Death was what we all do for our rebellion against God. Even though we are

created with glory and honour to be rulers of God's world, made in his image. That is broken and lost and now we deserve death. Yet while

Adam and Eve lost, Jesus has restored. Jesus has gotten back. He is now crowned with glory and honour. He is now the true human who has come to the inside, lived the life we could never live, died the death we deserve to die and is now crowned with glory and honour. But you may say, how do we know he is crowned with glory and honour? We can't see him. Well, the New Testament writers are clear that we know he is crowned with glory and honour now because his tomb is empty. The resurrection is proof that he is crowned with glory and honour. Because he is risen from the dead, he is now the man, the God-man at God's right hand, ruling over all things. All things are subjected to him, as the writer said back in chapter 1 verse 13.

So here is the rescue package. First of all, humiliation. God steps down, fixing the problem for the inside, chasing death for us. And then coronation. The crown is regained. The true man is back in charge, ruling the universe. But we don't see that yet, do we? We don't see that yet. Look at that verse 8 again.

[17:28] At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. In other words, the final trial has not yet come. The final trial, though the writer talks about it back in verse 13.

When God has said, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies at foot, stood to your feet. That final victory is still in the future. The humiliation is past, the coronation is present, Jesus is crowned with glory. But the final victory still awaits. When will that happen?

When Jesus comes back. When Jesus comes back. It's then that we get this world to come. That the writer talks about in verse 5. It's then that Jesus will restore everything perfectly. Under his will. And the world will function, not just as it should have done, but even better than it should have done. In his glorious restoration. But so what? How is that of any help? To people struggling with chronic pain? Struggling with grieving? Struggling with ill health? Struggling with depression? Struggling with loss?

Well let me give briefly. Four implications of this. Why there is any good means. First of all there is one thing we can never say. Let me tell you. The one thing we can never say. One thing we can never expect. One thing we can always have. And one choice we need to make.

[18:50] Suppose there is one thing we can never say. As we look at a world that is out of control. As we look at the floods. As we look at famines. As we look at disease. As we look at death and bleeding. we look at death and we're even. We can never say God doesn't care. We can never say God doesn't care. We can never say that precisely because he has stepped in in the person of Jesus to fix this problem. Isn't that Dorothy L. Sayers, the choir writer from the first half of the 20th century? Here are her notes. The incarnation, God becoming human, means that for whatever reason God chose to let us fall into suffering and to be subject to sorrows and death, he nonetheless had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine.

He himself has gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money, to the worst horrors of pain, humiliation, defeat, despair and death. He was born in poverty and suffered infinite pain all for us and thought it well worth his while. We can never say God doesn't care.

But also, there's one thing we can never expect. We can never expect life to work perfectly now. We are not yet at that stage in time. Verse 8 puts it. At present, we do not see everything in subjection to. We still live in a world starved by disease and death and mourning and crying and pain. Yet so often we expect things to be better, don't we? We expect that a nice holiday will make us feel a whole lot better. We expect that if we get a promotion, then work will suddenly feel easier. We expect that if the government gets the right policies, then the market will be fairer, the flood defences will be better. We can never expect perfection in this world. And actually so much of our own purpose, so much of our discontentment, comes from expecting too much, doesn't it? So we can never say God doesn't care.

And we can never expect perfection now. However, there is one thing we can always have. And that is hope. We can always have hope because Jesus is crowned with glory and honour.

One day everything will be subjected to. He's sitting on the throne of the universe. Because he's tasted death for us, we can have life. We can have hope.

[21:15] And that hope is not merely wishful thinking. That hope is based on historic acts and what God has done in history. Neither is this hope just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It's not Buddhist nirvana of just blending into the one and having nothingness. It's a solid, physical hope.

It is a new world. A recreated world. Restored in all its glory. A world that will be no more death because Jesus has tasted death for us.

There's one thing we cannot say that God doesn't care. There's one thing we can never expect. Perfection now. There's one thing we can have. And that is real and solid hope. But finally, fourth education. There's one choice we need to make. We need to choose whether to embrace this rescue or to turn away from it. The original readers of this letter were in danger of turning away from it. It seemed so hard to follow it. It seemed so unnecessary when your other religious beliefs surround it. It seemed so real because there was lots of stuff to see and feel and touch with it. But the writer said, no. This is the one hope. This is the one hope. This is the one chance of restoration for our world. And the restoration for us, for our true humanity. No other religion or philosophy deals with a fundamental problem of our value against God. No other worldview shows us that God cares. The writer said, hold on to this great salvation. Hold on to this Jesus. Because no one else can do for you what he has done. So here's the choice. Embrace this rescue or walk away from it. And what I want you to do in 2016. Thank you.