

Hebrews 2:9-18

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[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 2. I want to spend the next two Sunday mornings! The writer to the Hebrews is quoting the Old Testament, Psalm 8, and he asks the question, doesn't he, what is man?

What is man? What is woman? And then in verse 9, he really gives us the answer to that in a very profound way, where he tells us we see Jesus.

That's really the answer to the question in verse 5. What is man? See Jesus. Jesus. If you hear this, isn't it?

I hid it in a supermarket not long ago. I love the human race. All of my family belong to it. And some of my husband's family too. And I don't know if you realize you're part of the human race.

There is only one race. I think we've got to keep saying that. There's one race. And that's the human race. The Apostle Paul, when he's speaking at the Areopagus in Athens, he's debating there with the intelligentsia of the day.

[1 : 36] And he told them and he tells us that from one man, God has created every nation to inhabit the whole earth. So that means there is only one race.

It's the human race. We're part of the same race. This morning, it doesn't matter where you come from. It doesn't matter what the color of your skin is. It doesn't matter what language you speak.

There's one race, one human race, and we are human beings. And so the question, I think that Psalm 8 is asking and verse 5 is asking, what does it mean to belong to the human race?

What does it mean to be a human being? There's a lovely story told about the 19th century philosopher Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer, as you can tell, I've not done much reading of him. But Schopenhauer was like many, many academics, and he wasn't very interested in his personal appearance. He wasn't too worried what he looked like.

[2 : 36] He was sitting on a park bench in a park, apparently looking more like a tramp than a professor. He was very disheveled. And he was approached by a policeman who said, Jim, who do you think you are?

And he said, I wish to God I knew. What does it mean for you? What does it mean to be a human being? To belong to the human race?

And the answer to that question is found in the incarnation of Jesus. The God who became man. And that is why it could be argued that Christianity is properly understood, actually really is true humanism.

As opposed to the mysticism and other worldliness of other religions. So someone has said, I would rather be found in Christ than lost in God. I'd rather be found in Christ than lost in God.

And so don't think that Christianity is losing yourself in God. That's mysticism. Christianity is being found in Jesus Christ.

[3 : 43] Christianity is, as you come and put yourself under the rule of King Jesus, you discover who you really are. Who you were created to be. You find your true identity as a human being in Christ.

And so there's two huge ideas in this passage and I want to draw it out. Let me put it like this. There is the man who would be God. That's you. That's me. That's Adam, the first man.

The man who would be God. And then there is the God who became man. So those two things. The man who would be God, verses 6 to 8. He's quoting from Psalm 8.

And the question that Psalm raises is, what is man? There's many answers to that question. What is a human being? Some of them are profound.

Some of them are ridiculous, aren't they? Plato once defined man as a featherless bipod. One day one of his students brought a plucked chicken into the lecture hall.

[4 : 47] Much to his embarrassment said, is this all we are? Is that all a human being is? A plucked chicken? A naked ape? Is that what we are?

Someone with far too much time on their hands has worked out that the average human being, that's you, has got enough fat for seven bars of soap. Iron enough for one medium-sized nail. Phosphorous enough to tip 2,200 matches.

Potash enough to explode a toy crane. Sulfur enough to rid one dog of fleas. That's what you are, chemically. Is that all you are as a human being?

It's interesting, isn't it? Even the most convinced atheist faced with the choice of having to run over a child or a dog would choose the child.

Even the most hardened atheist you know, if they were faced with that dilemma, what's the difference between a dog and a child? What is a human being?

[5 : 51] Isn't it surely just a highly developed animal? Is he an undeveloped child, as Darwin thought?

Freud taught. Is a human being a cog in a machine? An economic unit, like Marx believed? There's loads of different answers, aren't there, to this question.

Mark Twain apologized for man by saying that God made man at the end of a very busy week. Because he was tired. What is man? Well, the answer is, if you look at these verses in verses 6 to 8, and he's quoting from the Old Testament, and he's telling us the Bible's answer to this question. What is man? That you're mindful of him. You are mindful of him. Or the son of man that you care for him. You made him a little lower, a little while lower than the angels.

You've crowned him with glory and honor. You see, God created human beings. And he made us a little lower than the angels. And when he created this world in which we live, he gave us this world to cultivate and care for.

[6 : 59] To nurture it. And that means it's our responsibility to seek peace, to work and act justly, to care for the environment that God has put us in. That's how God created us, to rule over his world.

But at present, look what it says. You've made man a little lower than the angels. You've crowned him with glory and with honor.

And then verse 8, you've put everything in subjection under his feet. That's problematic, isn't it? Because not everything is under human beings' feet.

The world is not under our feet. The world is not under our control. Everybody wants to rule the world, according to Tears for Fears.

Frank Sinatra's favorite song was, If I Rule the World. I'm really up to date, aren't I? You'll have a George Formby illustration in a minute. But we want to thank God. We don't rule the world, don't we? Thank God I don't rule the world.

[8 : 04] I can't even organize my diary. Imagine everything was under my control. It would be a disaster. And it's not just me, is it?

When you look around us at human beings, what do we see? We don't see everything in control, in its place. That's not how the world is, is it?

Martin Luther King famously said, we have guided missiles and unguided men. So we've got the technology, haven't we, in your pockets to do astonishing things.

Man can walk on the moon, but we can't live together. We've got the scientific know-how to feed the world millions, many times over, but still a quarter of the world's population are starving.

And the long history of the human race shows that human beings, men and women, often behave more like slaves than sovereigns. What is man?

[9 : 07] God made man a little lower than the angels to rule, to put everything under his feet, and we're meant to be sovereigns, ruling under the authority of God, the world that he's given us. A world that is perfectly suited to our needs, but we can't live like that.

So back in the Old Testament, one of the great observers of life, Solomon, in Ecclesiastes chapter 10, verse 7, he says this, I've seen slaves on horseback while princes go on foot like slaves.

If he was talking nowadays, he'd talk about chauffeur-driven limousines or something like that. But who is in the driving seat? He says, as I look around the world, I've seen slaves on horseback while princes go on foot.

Paul talks in Philippians 3 about those who are the enemies of the cross of Christ and their God is their belly. What does that mean? It's exactly the same point he's making, that the appetites and the desires that God has created us for, you know, things like the enjoyment of food and the ability to

form relationships, the gift of sex, the context of marriage, all those things which are good gifts from God's hand.

They are good servants in this life and yet they become masters which dominate us. Things that control us. And so the servants are on horseback and we are coming along behind sort of cap in hand to our own lusts.

[10:45] And instead of being in control, we find ourselves out of control in so many levels. Do you see, this is man, man who would be God, this is the man who would be the captain of his own fate and the master of his own destiny, but we're not.

So what is the answer to that? Here is man made by God to be ruler over everything, himself and this world for the good and blessing of others, but it's not the way things are.

And so here's where the great message of Christmas is, comes in. He says, what is man? See Jesus. Not the man who would be God, but God who actually became a man.

We see him who was made a little lower than the angels. That's what the incarnation is. It is God become flesh, the creator entering into his creation.

The king of the angels, the one who was seated below the cherubim, the one whom the angels worshipped, the king of the angels, now made a little bit lower than the angels. He takes on frail flesh.

[12:01] And there's three things here. We see him as our brother and as our captain and as our king. He's the king who is crowned. He's the king who is crowned, verse 7, with glory and honor.

Can you see that in verse 9? We see Jesus made a little lower than the angels, namely Jesus crowned with glory and honor. He's not the man who would be God, but he is the God who became man.

It's not robbery, Paul says, for him in Philippians chapter 2. It's not robbery for him to claim to be equal with God. He is equal with God and yet he humbled himself and made himself of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a servant, a slave, and he was obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

He did not reach out to grasp something that belonged to him. He didn't covet. That's what Adam did, isn't it? Which is why we're in the mess.

We're in. Adam coveted him. He reached out for what was not his. He humbled himself and Jesus is not a Greco-Roman God who lives on Mount Olympus, drinking wine surrounded by festal virgins, who occasionally looks down when he's bored.

[13:28] He's the God who actually came down. Tim Caller, in one of his books, retells the gruesome story of a murder that took place in 1964 in New York.

I was a 28-year-old by the name of Catherine Genovese. She was brutally murdered in a place called Kew Gardens, but in New York. It was a grisly killing and what particularly hit the headlines was not so much the killing, because that happens in all big cities, doesn't it, all the time.

It was the response of the neighbors as she screamed for help. 38 witnesses did nothing to help. People opened their windows.

They looked out, but nobody bothered to call the police. One witness later explained himself with a phrase that passed in infamy, I didn't want to get involved.

According to the reports, the people opened their windows and looked down. Some called down and the murderer went away, but came back to finish her off. Jesus, Jesus didn't open the window and look down.

[14:41] Jesus heard our screams and came down. He's not some Greek or Roman God who lives in his own world and is not really interested in us.

Jesus, here's the one who appeared to Moses in the burning bush. The angel of the Lord who appeared in the burning bush and he says, I've seen the misery of my people, I've heard their cries and I'm concerned about their suffering.

and I've come down to deliver and this is the one who appeared in that manger in Bethlehem.

There's a great little picture of a manger and the caption in the cartoon above the manger says, king-sized bed.

It's great, isn't it? That's what happened to the king, the king of the angels, the Lord of lords didn't just look down, he didn't just hear our screams, he's come down to do something about it, to deliver us and we look around the world and we don't see the world as it was meant to be and our lives are not as they were meant to be but we see Jesus this Christmas and we want our friends and our

neighbours to see Jesus because Jesus is the hope of the world.

We see Jesus in that manger and it is a king-sized bed because the king has come down to do something about the mess we've got ourselves into. He's our king, he's the captain of our salvation.

[16:14] Look at verse 10 with me. It says, for it was fitting that he for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder of their salvation, the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.

And so verse 10 is saying he's not the one who's appeared in the burning bush as an angel of the Lord. He is that one who appeared in the burning bush.

He is the one who appeared to Joshua at Jericho as the captain of the Lord's army. He is the captain of our salvation and now he comes to champion our cause.

The burning bush in Joshua it's just an appearance, it's fleeting, it's temporary. It's foreshadowing something, it's pointing you to something, it's a tantalizing glimpse.

But now here is the reality the writer of the Hebrews says. Here is the founder, here is the captain, here is the champion of our salvation who's actually come. And you notice in verse 10 do you see what he brings?

[17:35] He's bringing many sons to glory. Many sons to glory.

Literally he's the arch leader. Literally he's the founder, he's the trailblazer, he's the pioneer. And it was fitting that God should make him perfect.

In other words, Jesus is perfectly suited to this job of saving. Perfectly suited to this job of saving through suffering. suffering. So it's not enough for him to come and for him to appear.

He has to become one of us. He has to take frail human flesh in order to bleed and die. It was fitting that God should make the captain of our salvation perfectly suited through suffering.

So imagine someone is trapped in a burning building. you don't send someone just in a pair of Speedos into that burning building, do you?

[18:46] You don't do that because that would not be fitting. But if somebody was drowning in the sea, you wouldn't send someone in full fireman's gear, would you?

That wouldn't be fitting either because the type of rescue defines the kind of rescuer you need.

Can you see that? And Jesus is exactly the kind of rescuer that you need. There's an old acronym.

Jesus, you take the letters, Jesus exactly suits us sinners.

Jesus, Jesus exactly suits us sinners. sinners. He's the God who became man in order to suffer and bleed and die for our sins.

He's put on the uniform of our humanity, if I can put it like that. He's become an authentic human being in every sense of the word, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually. He's become one of us in order to rescue us.

[19:54] Jesus exactly suits us as sinners. He's not only the king and the captain, but notice also he's our brother. Verse 11 and 12. For he who sanctifies these, he who sets us apart, and those who are sanctified, all of one source, that is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Saying, I will tell of your name, God, to my brothers, and in the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise. And again, I will put my trust in him, and again, behold, I, look, I and the children God has given me.

That's what Christmas means. It means that the God who created us has now actually come amongst us and has brought us into his family.

And it says, doesn't it, Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. brothers. Our Western individualistic society is quite different to Jesus.

In the world of the New Testament, family matters much more than it does even in our culture. And so if you go for a job today, you come up with a CV and you come up with references, you list your achievements and your accomplishments and that is what will get you the job.

[21:19] But in the ancient world, in the New Testament world, it wasn't like that at all. And in lots of cultures today, maybe some of the cultures you come from, it's not like that. That you're not so much a product of your own choices and your own decisions, you are actually a product of your family.

And so what they want is, if you are going to commend yourself to an employer or someone in the ancient world, what they want is not so much a CV, a list of all your accomplishments and all your achievements, but what they want is your family tree.

What family are you from? Can I trust you? And so it's interesting, isn't it, that the Gospels, what do they begin with, Matthew and Luke? They begin, don't they, with a genealogy. they begin with a family tree. And Matthew and Luke are writing the Gospels to commend Jesus to the world and he starts not with a CV and not with a record of achievement, but with a family tree. And who do you find in that family tree, Matthew chapter one? There's all sorts of different names, aren't there? it's not an exhaustive list of kind of every generation, but there's four or five women in there for a start, which is unheard of in Jesus' day.

[22 : 39] Because the status of women is something that the Gospel of Jesus Christ actually brought in. In the ancient world, women had no status, and you wouldn't put them in your CV, but in Jesus' CV, there are four or five women in the family tree.

There's Tamar, sordid story of incest. Bathsheba, and the story of her adultery with David, there's Rahab, the prostitute, in the genealogy of Jesus, and there's Mary, a single mom, an unmarried mom.

And by the moral standards of the day, they would be seen as the black sheep. And if you wanted to commend yourself and put yourself forward, you wouldn't put those people in your family tree. You'd put the high achievers in the family tree and all the famous people.

You wouldn't put the black sheep in at all. The people you're ashamed of. But Jesus is not ashamed of you. He's not ashamed of me.

to call us his family. He's not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. So it doesn't matter what you've done.

[23 : 59] It doesn't matter how many skeletons are in your cupboard. In his incarnation, in his becoming a man, and by his sacrifice for our sins on the cross, Jesus is not ashamed to call his people his brothers and sisters.

So does it matter what they think of you in school? Does it? Does it matter what they think of you in work? Does it matter what people say about you when Jesus is not ashamed to call you his brother?

He is our king. king. And he is our captain. And he is our brother. Let me try and apply this to you. What are you afraid of this morning? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of the future? Lots of people are very afraid, aren't they? I was at a party last night where people didn't know what to talk about, so everybody talked about the cost of living crisis?

Are you afraid of the future? Look what it says in verse 5, can you see that? For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come.

[25 : 24] That's the future way to talk about. That is the world as it will be, the world as it should be, and Jesus has been there. And if you belong to the Lord Jesus, that is your future.

You belong to Jesus in the world to come, where everything is going to be in its place, a world where everything sad has become untrue, a world where everything will be as it was meant to be. No sickness, no sadness, no sorrow, no death, no difficult Christmas. And so what hope is there of that in the world? Is Rishi Sunak going to bring that in?

We know he won't, don't we? But we do see Jesus. And that's why Christmas matters so, so much, doesn't it? The message of the incarnation is so relevant to our world.

We do see Jesus, the one who will rule the world to come, and he is the man who Psalm 8 is all about, and through him it will be true for us. So are you afraid of the future? your captain has secured your future.

[26 : 36] Everything will be under his feet. Are you afraid of the past? Are there things in your life that you wouldn't be able to live down if it all came out?

skeletons. We've all got skeletons in the cupboard, haven't we? But some are bigger than others. Some are more scary than others.

All of us have got a history. We have all got things that we are terribly ashamed of, and we wouldn't want anyone else to know. We've all got that, haven't we?

But Jesus does know about that. Jesus knows about those things, and he is not ashamed to call you his brothers. There's an old hymn, how willing was Jesus to die that we fellow sinners might live.

The life they could not take away, how willing was Jesus to give. That we fellow sinners that Jesus should be made sin for us, that he should be made the representative sinner, that he should not be ashamed to identify with the likes of you and me.

[27 : 58] With all the skeletons in my cupboard, how willing was Jesus to die that we fellow sinners might live?

not just fellow sinners with one another, but fellow sinners with him. He was no sinner, but he who knew no sin, the Bible tells us, he who knew no sin was made sin, that we might be put right with God.

God. So maybe this morning it's all the past and it's not the future, you are really struggling with temptation. You're really struggling with sin, and it kind of seems like it's trapped you.

This morning the Bible tells you you have a captain and you have a champion and you have a brother. you have one who will put his arms around you and you have a king who will deal with that problem in your life.

Maybe you're just struggling with life generally this Christmas. It's often a time when life unravels, it's often a time when real problems and real difficulties that people have come to the surface.

[29 : 26] Perhaps it's because you've got more time to think about it or perhaps you're thrust into the company of others and we're not distracted by work and other things and things that we're struggling with and we're afraid of our troubles.

Advice is often given to young ministers and that is to be with your people in their troubles because they'll remember that long after they've forgotten your sermons.

It's good advice, isn't it? To be with your people in their troubles. Jesus is here with us in our troubles. What's his name?

His name is Emmanuel. What does that mean? It means God with us. It's not God up there looking down, not God on the sidelines giving you some advice like some coach, but he is the one with us. He is God with us. In our trials and difficulties and troubles, in our temptations, and our struggles with sin. Temptation is powerful, isn't it?

[30 : 31] And sin can ruin lives. Christianity is not simply a matter of believing in Jesus or believing Jesus.

We need more than that. We need to have Jesus with us in our struggles. as we face those temptations, those monsters, and that is exactly what Jesus promises to do.

He is with us. He says, I've seen the misery of my people. I've heard their screams. I know about their suffering, and I've come down to deliver them. Jesus, your brother, your captain, your king.

Apparently, it was said of the Roman emperor, Trajan, that he was not just a king, but a captain and a brother. That not only did he lead his soldiers into battle and fight alongside them and for them, but apparently he tore his royal robes to bind their wounds.

Jesus has done that for us, hasn't he, and more. Tonight, we will come to the Lord's table where Jesus will say, this is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you.

[31 : 48] Lord of the Rings. I hope you watched the Lord of the Rings at Christmas. I heard of a church last year in America, but on one day after Christmas, they showed the three Hobbit films in church, morning, noon, and night, and then the following day, they showed the three Lord of the Rings films.

Great, wouldn't it? We'll watch Lord of the Rings at Christmas. I love it. Anyway, you know the story of the Lord of the Rings. Boromir.

Boromir, he was destined, he thought that he was going to lead the great city of Gondor, but then he runs into Aragon. Aragon is the true heir to the city.

He's the real king, and Boromir really struggles with that. He struggles because if Aragon wasn't around, Boromir would be the true ruler of Gondor.

But Aragon is there. Boromir really struggles with that, and towards the end of the movie, he repents, and he looks up at Aragon, and he says, I would have followed you, my brother, my captain, my king.

[33 : 02] And then he dies. Is that the challenge of Christmas? The challenge of the incarnation is Jesus, he is the man of Psalm 8.

Jesus is the proper man, he is the true, authentic human being, he's the man who's crowned with glory and honor, he is the man to whom all belongs, he is the true heir to the throne of your life and the throne of this world.

And if that is true, that is who he is, well that means you cannot be king. And maybe you don't like that, maybe you struggle with that.

You can't rule, you can't run your own life. Because Jesus is Lord and Jesus is king. And you have to renounce all claims to be the captain of your fate and the master of your own destiny.

And will you say to Jesus this morning, I will follow you, my brother, my captain, my king. me. Why wouldn't you follow it?

[34 : 12] How is it going with you as the master of your life? Are you making yourself happy?

You're not. Certainly not making others happy around you. Why wouldn't you come under his lordship so that you can be the man or the woman, the boy or the girl that God created you to be?

I will follow you anywhere, my brother, my captain, my king. Let's pray. Let's pray.