



God's Intention for Humanity

Hebrews 2:5-9

Last week, when we were studying Hebrews, we came across the phrase “such a great salvation.” I said that the Greek words that make up that phrase were intended to emphasize how glorious and grand and majestic and wondrous salvation is – that is, words can’t describe the glorious nature of salvation.

Now, you could be sitting here today thinking, “Yes, salvation is glorious like that.” But in reality, do you believe it? I confess that there are many times in my daily life that I forget how glorious it is. Sometimes I think it’s so spectacular that it’s too good to be true. Other times, when I’m thinking about my salvation in Jesus, I know I dumb it down.

How do you think about salvation? The word “gospel” is more literally translated good news. Before I explain that phrase, I want to propose that many times people, instead of thinking it’s good news, turn the gospel into good advice. Imagine with me that you were a young adult in the 1940’s and you’re draft to fight in World War II. This is a war that war led to the deaths of between 70 to 85 million people. To grasp that number, the US was only a population of 139 million in 1939. That means, the global death toll was over half the population of the US. This war affected the whole world. Fear infiltrated most homes. People prepared to be bombed. Even if you didn’t fight in the war, you were affected.

How would you feel if you had been drafted? You’d probably have at least some level of fear. And, as you’re facing going off the war, you might express fear to your mom or dad, and they may say something like, “Chin up. Do your duty. Make us proud.” But if your mom’s saying this, she’s saying it through tears because she realizes this may be the last time she talks to you. Sure, her advice might be nice or helpful, but what does it do? It may make you feel good for a few moments, but it doesn’t change *anything*.

Is that what the glorious gospel does? Well, actually, the Greek phrase for “good news” was related to someone informing their land of their country’s victory in battle. Think of World War II again. Can you imagine being the individuals who were first made aware of German’s loss? Can you imagine the response of people when they found out Germany surrendered? People were flooding streets out of joy! Then came Japan’s surrender a little later! Those days brought good news, not merely good advice.

In my family, I have one story of joy at the news that WWII ended. It was with my grandpa. My grandpa still lived with his parents when he was drafted. He packed up his suitcase and, I believe it was the day that he had to leave, he heard the news that the war was over. His youngest brother, who was 12 years younger than he was, can remember that day. And his recollection is of him walking by his brother’s

room, seeing underwear flying all over the room and his brother yelling with excitement. My grandpa was joyously unpacking! Why? Because of the good news.

Now, think about this. He thought he would be saying good-bye to his father and mother. And he may have heard words of advice from his mom, but good news came. News that is superior to advice. He didn't have to see the ravages of war. He could sleep safely in his room that night. The despot lost and Americans can rest more securely. That's the idea behind the phrase "good news." The enemy is vanquished. Our kingdom won! While sometimes we might like good advice because it elevates us and what we do, good news elevates the Conqueror and frees us from fear.

This is why Hebrews calls the gospel such a great salvation. And throughout this book, the author is going to press why this salvation is so glorious. The victory that Jesus brings makes good advice pale in comparison to what he gives us in himself!

So, as we've been studying so far, the author heightens our view of salvation by emphasizing the One who is the center of our salvation: Jesus. He's the great prophet, priest and king. He's superior to angels. But as this struggling church is reading about Jesus, they could be saying, "What does this have to do with our situation? Here's a church that's struggling. Some had lost property in a previous persecution and now they're entering a new persecution, probably under Nero. This is the persecution that will lead to the deaths of both the apostle Peter and Paul. Their fellow church-members are defecting. Others are coming in and teaching false doctrine. Honestly, what does Jesus and the gospel have to do with this? If the gospel is *good news*, why do they just see bad news around them?

In the midst of this, the author raises their affections to Jesus and what he has accomplished. While it might seem like everything is lost, they need to see the expansive implications of the gospel message. It's not merely good advice that says, "Buck up. Try harder. Endure." The gospel is good news that says "Jesus won the victory. He's our King! Rejoice!"

With this in mind, let's read Hebrews 2:5-9 together this morning. I'll pray before we read:

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹

Thus far in reading Hebrews, we can wonder, "**Is God's intention that we suffer and be ministered to by angels and then die?**" In the midst of pain and persecution and struggles, we can be tempted that God simply wants to harm us. Why doesn't he listen to us? Will he rescue? Why do others seem to prosper, and I don't? Does God care?

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:5–9.

You know, sometimes we can talk so much about Jesus, that we can feel like Jesus doesn't connect to us. In other words, Jesus is superior, but God doesn't care about me. Jesus suffered and died, but he rose again. What about me? Does God love me? Now, clearly when we think those things, there can be times where we're diminishing Jesus. But there are other times where we're simply wondering, "How does Jesus and the gospel relate to me?"

For us and for a struggling first century church, we need to hear words that emphasize God's love and intentions for us. We also need to see how Jesus and the gospel relate to God's care and intentions for us. So, in these verses, the author starts by emphasizing God's good intentions for humanity and then shows how Jesus fulfills those intentions. These words bring *the* good news to the forefront and they show us that our good and Jesus' glory go hand-in-hand.

I admit that as I was studying this text this past week, I had thoughts of unbelief. What is told here is so grand that I thought to myself, "Really?" It sounds too good to be true. The author first highlights God's intention for us and then reveals how Jesus fulfills and guarantees that intention. So, what is God's intention for us? The author says that **God's intention for humans is that we would rule in his kingdom.**

I know that you might have a lot of questions about how the author gets to this point, but please be patient with me as we walk through this section verses by verse. I hope, and pray, that this sermon culminates to the proclamation of the glorious good news! So, let's start with the author's first point.

1. Humans are intended to rule, but we defied God.

Verse 5 comes almost shockingly. The author is magnifying the magnificence of Jesus, and then he says: ⁵For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? ⁷You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸putting everything in subjection under his feet."²

Hold on a second. Weren't we talking about Jesus? Why does he turn to us human beings? Because if Jesus and the gospel message doesn't apply to our lives, then Jesus has no bearing on us and there is no point in following him. But Jesus does affect us. So, the author reveals God's plan for us. What is that plan? Verse five says that humans are to reign in the world to come. There are different views on this phrase "world to come," but I think the most obvious understanding is that the "world to come" refers to the kingdom to come. The day when we see the New Heaven and the New Earth. The day when there will be no more sin, no more death, no more pain – only eternal joy and glory! The day when we will be with God forever and our souls are eternally fulfilled. That's the world to come. It's the "city which is to come" that the author talks about later on in this letter (see Heb. 13:14).

So, he says that it's not to angels that God subjected the world to come. In all this talk about angels, the author has done a superb job in showing how Jesus is superior to angels, but then he says that there's going to be a day when human beings will have a superior position, privilege and power to the angels in the world to come.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:5–8.

For this struggling church that thinks they should go back to the old ways because angels mediated the Law, the author says, “But what about the future? Where will angels be then?” Oh yes, angels will be there in the future, but even the angels will be subjected to humans.

This point is emphasized in the author’s quotation of Psalm 8: What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him. In this Hebrew poetry, we have synonymous ideas. To be mindful of and to care for are the same. The word “man” and the phrase “son of man” refer to the same things. In this psalm, David ponders the vast cosmos and then in comparison looks at the tiny specks we are and says, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” Now, listen, David didn’t have all the technology we have today. He didn’t understand just how vast the heavens are and yet he still felt as though humans were tiny specks in the cosmos!

Now, if God states that one’s worth and significance is on the basis of one’s size, then clearly human beings lose. However, David goes on to say that that’s not how God considers significance. Our significance doesn’t come in our size. Our significance comes from God and his intentions for us. If he intends us to be significant, then we are. So, David says of humans, “⁷You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”³

These verses call us back to Adam and Eve. God created them in his image, and in Genesis 1:26-28, we read, “²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”⁴

Humans were created to be vice-rulers over all creation. Under God’s rule, humans rule. And there is no other creature who is said to be created in God’s own image. As a result, David first emphasizes the **unique position** of humans: a little while lower than the angels. If your translation says “a little lower,” I’d recommend you circle the word “little” and draw a line to the side and write, “for a little while lower.” The Greek word can indicate a lesser status, but it can also refer to a shorter duration. I think he’s speaking of duration. God’s intention from the beginning was that humans be, for a little while, lower than the angels. That means that humans have a unique position or ruling that will then increase to an even greater position. We are mere specks in this gargantuan creation and yet we have a profound position.

Another emphasis of David in Psalm 8 is the **unique privilege** God has given humans. We are crowned with glory and honor. Created in God’s image, and created to fellowship and commune with God. Even certain angels have to veil their faces in his presence. But humans can walk and talk with God, experiencing a depth of relationship like no other creature. Little pieces of dust given breath by God and given the greatest privilege!

Finally, David emphasizes the **unique power** God has given to humans. This is the point of the writer of Hebrews. Humans were intended to reign: putting everything in subjection under his feet. Everything

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:7–8.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ge 1:26–28.

under his feet. This is a vast power and rule. One man writes, **“Adam and Eve were God’s viceroys – creature king and creature queen with the responsibility of ordering creation under the Lordship of God”** (R.K. Hughes, p. 56).

At this point in Psalm 8, the author of Hebrews stops the quote, and then he writes, “Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.”⁵ Here’s the highlight. God’s intention is that humans would rule over all creation under God – everything! That’s a powerful control. But hold on here. How does this align with reality? The Hebrew Christians are undergoing Roman persecution under an insane Emperor Nero. Here’s a man who not only blamed the fire of Rome on Christians, but he also killed his mother and his first wife. He’s got problems. Is this the type of rule that God wants from humans? And that’s just one ruler. What about the rulers throughout the ages who have waged blood-thirsty wars? We can look around in our recent history and see the same things around us: countries that are ravaged by evil and/or negligent rulers.

If I was a Hebrew Christian in Rome, I could potentially find myself saying, “Ok, that’s God’s intention, but obviously God’s intention hasn’t played into real life!” So, what does it matter for the author to talk about God’s intention for humans? Well, the author admits the tension. He says, “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.” Yep. We do not see everything in subjection to humans. And when there is subjection to humans, we have to have a lot of balance of power or else humans grasp for dictatorship. This isn’t only the case for kings and presidents. This is the case for all of us. We were supposed to have *everything* under our rule: taking care of animals, planting gardens, loving people. Yet, in this world animals run from us and gardens produce thorns. In this world, we see murder, human trafficking, marriages torn, families broken, manipulation in business, fraud. The list goes on. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to humans.

Why is this the case? Two reasons. First, Adam and Eve rebelled. Instead of rejoicing in their position, privilege and power; they turned from God and sought to take his throne. As a result, all of creation (which was under their rule) fell with them. Distortion, brokenness, pain, sin, death, punishment all entered in. And now all creation aches along with humanity’s broken, dead hearts.

People can be tempted to think then that God’s original intention has been thwarted. Adam and Eve sinned and therefore, it’s over for humans. We just need to do our best and try our hardest and hope that maybe it’s enough for God. But did anything in verse 5 catch your attention? We read that God’s intention was that humanity rules the world to come. Ponder this with me for just a moment. God did not create the original creation to be our final ruling place. Just in case you aren’t getting all of this yet, let me say it another way. Not only did Adam and Eve’s sin *not* surprise God or thwart him; the sin of Adam and Eve were already known and under God’s sovereign control before it even happened. God did not intend for humans to eternally rule over the original creation. And we see that clearly every single day. Just open the newspaper. You know, it was G.K. Chesterton that once said, **“Whatever else is true about man, this one thing is certain—man is not what he was meant to be”** (as quot. in R.K. Hughes, p. 58).

Even this information should be immensely hope-filled. You see, we often think that sin thwarts God and keeps him back from what he wants to do. But even sin must submit to God. That means that for the struggling church in Rome, Nero won’t keep God from his intentions and plans. Nero himself is on God’s

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:8.

leash, and even though the church is facing pain; this will not always be the case. In a little while, humanity will reign.

This phrase “little while” reminds me of driving in the car with my kids. If you have ever driven with a child, you know the questions coming: “How long until we get there?” I will often give them a timeframe. They might not understand, and they’ll ask again and again. Time to them seems to go on forever! Especially when they’re younger, they don’t understand timeframes. So, Tracy and I will sometimes show them with our fingers the length of time. We’ll hold our pointer finger and thumb out at a distance from each other and say “This is the trip,” and then we’ll bring our fingers closer and we’ll say, “This is how much is left.” For some reason that clicks with them. They understand that there’s an end point and there’s progress to that end.

This phrase “a little while” is God saying that there’s an end-point. And, like children, we don’t gauge time well and we say “It’s taking so long!” But we need to get into our minds that there is an end to this fallenness.

But how can we be absolutely confident that there will be a day when God’s intentions for humanity will be fulfilled? The gospel of Jesus gives us the confidence. In verse 9, we discover that

2. Jesus fulfills God’s intention (v. 9)

⁹But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ⁶

While David, in Psalm 8, may not have been thinking about the Messiah specifically when he said “son of man,” that phrase did become a messianic title, and it was Jesus’ favorite one that he used to refer to himself. Therefore, the author of Hebrews says “But we see him. . .” Ok, so we don’t see how humanity is ruling, but we see him! What do we see of him? He who was made a little while lower than the angels, namely Jesus. . .” This is the first time that the name Jesus is used in this letter. The author specifically refers to the Son as Jesus. And Jesus did come from from Heaven’s glories to enter into this physical realm. As a result, because he took on human flesh and became Immanuel (meaning, God with us), he also was a little while made lower than the angels.

This phrase “little while” comes up twice in this section. But here, we can understand the timeframe. Jesus came to this earth in the flesh and he is no longer on this earth in the flesh. He was here for a little while. And, for a little while, he was lower than the angels in that he had a human flesh, but as we studied in chapter 1, he is superior to angels.

David said to God, “What is man that you are mindful of him,” and God’s response is “Not only am I mindful of him, but I will stoop to man’s glory and become man.” Putting all of this together, Jesus, the Son of Man, took on the position, privilege and power of humanity. Then, in perfection he fulfilled what Adam never could have. Therefore, **Jesus, the God-Man, the Superior Savior, the Son of Man, became the Second Adam – thus fulfilling God’s intentions for humans not merely to rule this world, but the world to come!**

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:9.

How do we know Jesus fulfilled God's intentions for humanity? Verse 9 tells us that Jesus' death and exaltation prove God's intentions don't remain intentions, but reality. First, we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. I don't believe he's saying that the church literally saw Jesus everyday with their eyes, but that through faith, they believed the message that was taught by the eyewitnesses the author speaks of just a few verses before this.

Did you know that real people saw the real Jesus risen from the dead, and real people saw him ascend up into Heaven? If that message sounds odd to you and unbelievable, in some ways that's good. If you came to me this week and said, "I saw a guy come back from the dead and then he floated up into Heaven," I might a doctor for you. Why? Because we don't see people floating in the sky on a daily basis. So, why do we believe Jesus' story of ascension? Because it wasn't just one person. It was *many* people who saw the Risen Lord. Five hundred people saw Jesus. That type of evidence indicates that miracles can happen. God is engaged with this world. God has a plan for humanity, and God's plan for humanity is fulfilled in Jesus. He ascended up into Heaven as the first human to reign over creation. So, the God-Man now reigns.

But how did he get the right to reign? The author of Hebrews says, because of the suffering of death.⁷ Jesus' ascension is necessary for us because his ascension guarantees our ascension. Or, as one person put it, "Christ's glorification is our foothold in glory" (R.K. Hughes, p. 59). But, listen carefully, Jesus' ascension would mean nothing without Jesus' suffering of death. You know, in Martin Luther's day, there was people referred to as theologians of glory. They were people who emphasized the ascended status of Jesus, but Luther was concerned that they weren't focused on the Scripture's emphasis of glory. Instead, as humans, we always associate glory with painless, carefree situations where we're in charge and in control. In contrast, Luther saw that the Scriptures taught that Jesus' exaltation on the cross is where glory is found. God's glory of justice and mercy was clearly revealed at the cross of Jesus. And because of the cross, Jesus was crowned with glory and honor. Without the cross, there'd be no ascension. There'd be no crowning.

Oh, we need Jesus to ascend, but we needed Jesus to die. This is emphasized twice in this verse. At the end of verse 9, the author writes, "so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."⁸ The "so that" is connected to why he was made a little while lower than the angels. In other words, he came to this earth in the flesh in order to taste death for everyone. He came to die. And, this word for "taste" does not simply mean to get a sampling of death. To taste death was a phrase that meant to experience it fully. And Jesus experienced it fully on the cross!

When we think about death, we tend to think "cease to exist," but the Bible teaches that death is more than ceasing to exist. We may cease to exist in our flesh for a time. That's one part of death. But there's another part of death. Death relates to whether or not we are in a reconciled relationship with God. In other words, are you experiencing his punishment or enjoying his mercy. Death is an eternal decay of the person, experiencing God's full and just punishment.

Now, did Jesus taste death? Absolutely. On the cross, we are told that Jesus became sin. The One who is one with the Father. The One who was worshipped by angels (and created the angels). This One then took on physical and spiritual death. He experienced the fullness of the force of God's wrath on himself.

⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:9.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:9.

But maybe you are thinking, “Why is that such spectacular news? That sounds awful.” Oh, please hear me. The cross is an essential component to the good news, the gospel, of Jesus. The cross is a declaration of victory! Humanity rebelled against God and became traitors of the Creator and Ruler over all. In following after Adam and Eve, we’ve decided to sow our own fig leaves to cover up our guilt and shame. We experience confusion and hurt. We feel like we’re wandering. Many times in our lives, we wonder, “What’s the point?” We struggle. At times, we succeed, but we aren’t satisfied. When God reminds us of himself, we many times suppress him in order to do what we want to do. In our lives, we get this nagging that we know we deserve death, but we don’t want to face it.

We have sought to use our position, power and privilege to wage war against the King. And yet, for many of us, we know we’re dead on the battlefield. No amount of advice is going to rescue us from our plight. In this horrendous position, something great happened. On that battlefield of creation, the King, directed God’s wrath towards himself, drinking in the fullness of the punishment that we soldiers of darkness deserve. There, in his death, he spoke to God’s justice in punishing sin and God’s love in taking what we should experience.

And then. Oh, don’t forget this. And then, the King came to us and declared his message of good news. He didn’t say, “Good advice. Try harder against God’s wrath. Try harder to fight. Try harder to do better!” No. Instead, he came and said, “Good news, I took the punishment you deserved. Good news, God accepted the sacrifice. Good news, shame and guilt have been taken at the cross. Good news! God’s intentions for humanity are guaranteed because Jesus died, rose and reigns.” **Because Jesus conquered death, those who trust him will conquer death. Because Jesus reigns, those who trust him will reign as well.** Good news! Our enemy of death, Satan and sin was conquered at the cross.

Have you heard and embraced the good news? The King has won! This is *so great a salvation*, Ventura. Jesus’ salvation is cosmically significant! Glory and praise to his name. Do you believe? Will you trust Jesus? This verse says that God wanted to show his grace to the world. He didn’t merely want to give humans something. He wanted to be a gracious and merciful God. And we can see his mercy and grace, can’t we? But also, please hear this, the author says that Jesus tasted death for everyone. This phrase “for everyone” in the Greek can mean literally for every single person or it can refer to every single person of a given group. If it’s literally everyone, then this means that Jesus’ death is sufficient to save anyone who comes to him. That means that if you haven’t gone to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation with God, then don’t let your past, your sins, your shame keep you from him. Jesus experienced what sinners deserved so that sinners could experience eternal glory with God. This is true! Will you trust him?

But this could also be speaking to everyone in a specific group. If that’s the scenario, then the author is giving specific encouragement to the Hebrew Christians. Jesus saves *every single one of his followers*. No matter the pain, the difficulty, the trials, the suffering that you endure; Jesus’ death guarantees your life and your future reign. As R.K. Hughes wrote, **“The illusion of insignificance has wrapped its cold fingers around many of [the Hebrew’s] hearts. They feel like an unwanted speck among the millions of the Roman Empire. But that is an illusion. The reality is, they are indeed submicroscopic spots in a huge, fallen universe, but as God’s children they are objects of astounding attention, for God is minutely mindful of them and cares for them in the greatest detail”** (R.K. Hughes, p. 60).

So, how does the gospel apply to suffering? Christ on the cross reveals God’s glorious love. Christ ascended prophecies to their position, privilege and power. Without Christ, we’d have nothing. No God, no grace, no glory.

The implications should touch us as well. We often can live our lives in awe of the world around us. Personally, I can become so distracted by what earthly kingdoms can create. I love architecture and so I can become distracted by the buildings and the artistry of those buildings. I can think that because nations have built many beautiful edifices, then that's a glorious nation. Quickly, I can forget the Kingdom to come. I can focus my attention on living simply for the here-and-now, forgetting the mission that God has given me to live for his glory here to endure for his glory and to make him known. I can become envious of people in powerful positions, forgetting the position I'm in and will also be put in someday. Some of you may focus your priorities in life forgetting your future reign – thinking all that matters is how you reign today and how much of a name you make for yourself today. Others of you may think God doesn't care for you because of the difficulties you're facing.

Look to Jesus. Gaze excessively at him and his death and resurrection. Then see the good news that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's intention for us.

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