

Hebrews 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 2 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders, and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?

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

[1 : 14] 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 perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.

That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise. And again, I will put my trust in him.

And again, behold, I and the children God has given me. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews began with a grand presentation of the glory of Christ as the exalted and eternally supreme Son, far greater than any of the angels.

[2 : 32] In chapter 2, however, the author turns to the questions of the appropriate response to this. If Christ indeed is far more than merely one of the heavenly beings, being God himself, then the manner of people's response to his work is a matter of so much greater significance.

Seeing the faithful suffering of Jesus the Messiah is important. However, without a robust account of the fact that Christ came from the heights of heaven, that he is the one through whom the creation was made, and the one who is the unique Son of the Father, and the fact of his ascension over all other powers, the true significance of Christ's suffering, simply will not be recognized.

The author of Hebrews wants his hearers to be in no doubt as to the power and exaltation of Christ, and what this means. Christ isn't just another in the line of the martyrs, for instance.

He is the Lord of all. Knowledge of Christ's exalted power is not something that we can gain by sight. Although Christ's sufferings occurred in the realm of sight, knowing of his exaltation requires heeding the spoken message that has been delivered to us in the Gospel.

The greater revelation that we have received through the Eternal Son, a revelation that exceeds the revelation given through the prophets in past times, should lead us to pay much closer attention.

[3 : 47] It can be very easy to forget the exaltation of Christ in the situations of our lives, especially when we face resistance and persecution. However, once we have this reality clearly in our awareness, everything else takes on an added gravity.

The angels had been involved in delivering the message of the law at Sinai, a word that had been reliable and enforced with divine judgment. The message brought by the Eternal Son is of a far greater significance.

It isn't a message merely delivered by emissaries, lesser messengers, and various other intermediaries such as angels and prophets. It is delivered by the Son in person. The message of the Son was then corroborated by the message of the apostles and other witnesses of his earthly ministry, who testified to its truth.

Their message was confirmed by the accompanying witness of divinely given signs with their teaching. Signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Spirit were part of the means by which the apostolic teaching was divinely confirmed.

This seems to have been especially important in the foundational period of the church's life. After churches were established and the New Testament scriptures completed and widely accessible, such signs, wonders, and miracles seem to become less prominent.

[5 : 01] In verses 3-4 we see each of the persons of the Trinity as well, all involved in the work of witnessing to the message of the Gospel. First of all the Son declares the message in person, then the Father bears witness with signs, and the gifts of the Spirit also testify.

The author of Hebrew turns back to his treatment of the Son in relationship to the angels at this point. The book began with the Son exalted above all of the angels. However, now we will see the Son taking a position lower than the angels.

Exploring the nature and the importance of the relationship between the Son's states of exaltation and his state of humiliation, the author will be able to strengthen his point. The angels are exalted, but they are not going to rule the world to come.

As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6-3, Do you not know that we are to judge angels? That privilege of rule belongs to humanity in the Messiah.

He quotes Psalm 8 verses 3-6, This great statement probably relates primarily to the Davidic king.

[6 : 26] The psalm is not about the exaltation of the generic human being, but of the representative man, the Davidic king of the people. It is about God establishing the king as his son in the Davidic covenant, and establishing his rule over all of his works through him.

The reference of the quotation is to Christ. Christ fulfills the meaning of Psalm 8. He was made lower than the angels for a period of time, but has now been exalted to the throne, everything placed in subjection under his feet.

However, although Christ has been exalted in this way, it isn't visible to us yet. Not everything seems to be under his feet. Indeed, the claim that Christ is the exalted Lord of all seems to go against all appearances.

However, what we do see is Jesus. He is the one who was made lower than the angels. He was seen and heard by many witnesses. We now also perceive by faith that he has won the victory through his death, and is crowned with glory and honour.

Visible appearances alone will be deceptive. A fuller understanding of who Christ is, and the nature of his work, will make apparent the fact that he, as the one given by God for the purpose, enters into the reality of death, and deals with it for everyone.

[7 : 38] Christ is the founder of our salvation. He is a great conquering hero who leads the way. He goes before his people. He was the one who founded the world, and now he has also founded our deliverance through his suffering.

He brings many sons to glory, and in so doing, he pioneers the path that they will have to walk. This is the appropriate way that things should be. The way of the son is the way of the deliverance of the many sons.

The son is made perfect through suffering. It is the means by which he attains to true maturity, and the people of God will also be brought to their maturity in a similar manner. The son fully enters into our condition, so that in entering into his life, we might be rescued from the power of death within it.

Christ is one with humanity. He does not just stand between God and humanity as a sort of intermediary being. He is fully divine and fully human. He is our brother and speaks of us as his brothers.

The quotation from Psalm 22 verse 22, I will tell of your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you, is from the most famous psalm speaking of the Messiah's suffering and victory.

[8 : 44] It is the principal psalm that is found on Jesus' lips on the cross. The gospel writers also allude to it on several occasions in their crucifixion accounts. Like the verses that follow, from Isaiah chapter 8 verse 17 and verse 18, they present the victorious Christ surrounded by the human beings he has delivered, with himself as their champion, their chief, their forerunner, and their redeemer.

He sings in victory as one of them, leading them in song. He trusts in the Lord as one of them. We'll see later on that he is the author and the perfecter of faith. He presents them as people given to him by God as his children.

From speaking of the son chiefly as the hero and forerunner, the author moves to the son as the deliverer. The children given to him were under the dominion of the one with the power of death. So, in order to deliver them from it, the son entered into their condition.

While the devil does not ultimately have the power to give or to take life of his own accord, death is destruction and the devil is the destroyer. Death, even though introduced by God, is a means by which the devil can achieve his purposes.

The thrall of any power also is generally wielded much more through fear than it is through direct coercion or force. The power of death that keeps us in slavery is mostly the fear of death.

[10 : 02] If people start fearing the punishments of a king, that king will lose his power. Even if the punishments might still occur, people will far more readily rebel against him. Christ disarms the devil chiefly in his power of wielding fear.

By openly overcoming the finality of the power of death and destruction that the devil boasts in, that power ceases to terrify as it once did. Former prisoners can now rise up and people can be set free.

Christ's identification with and deliverance of the prisoners and the hostages of death and the devil is exclusive to human beings. Angels have not received such a salvation. The son is also a high priest, in addition to being this hero and liberator.

In order to be effective as such, he needs to be one of us, able truly to act as our representative. Through his suffering he has experienced the extent of the human condition, so he is one to whom we can turn in our struggles.

A question to consider. What are some examples of the ways in which the devil wields his power over us through the fear of death?