

HEBREWS CHAPTER 2

Last Sunday we began a study in the Book of Hebrews with the theme being "Jesus Christ: Above All Else." It doesn't take you long to recognize that Jesus is elevated prominently by the author of Hebrews. He's central throughout this book.

We're not certain who wrote Hebrews (we know the divine author was the Holy Spirit). And we aren't sure exactly who the original audience was. However, it's obvious from the content of this book, this letter, that both the human author and its recipients came from a Jewish background. As we made our way thru Chapter 1 last time the writer of Hebrews presented us with an amazing picture of who Jesus is. He is the Son of God. He is the heir and ruler of all things. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the entire world. He is the brightness of God's glory. When you see Jesus you see God. It was Jesus who dealt with our sin problem by His sacrificial death on the cross; and when Jesus had completed His work He was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father. And all that is just in the first 3 verses of Hebrews!

The writer spends most of Chapter 1 driving home one very important point – that Jesus is superior to the angels. Using the O.T. scriptures the writer of Hebrews contrasts who angels are with who Jesus is. And the bottom line as we saw is this: none of the countless angels, as incredible, holy, wise and powerful as they are, were never ever called by God, "My Son." But Jesus WAS! Not one angel was ever promised that they would have an eternal kingdom and reign forever and ever. But Jesus WAS! In fact, Hebrews 1:6 quoting from Psalm 97 the writer states that the angels will worship HIM (a reference to God's Son, the Messiah, Jesus). Angels are merely ministering spirits who do God's work. Jesus IS God. Angels are merely created beings. Jesus is the Creator. Angels are servants. Jesus is the King of kings. Jesus is higher than the angels! Jesus was a man but He was no ordinary man. He IS (present tense) much, much more!

Therefore – and this brings us to Hebrews Chapter 2 – Given everything we know about Jesus presented plainly for us in Chapter 1, given all of that, what are you (reader, listener) going to do with that information? God’s word always demands a response. The things in it were not given to us merely for our intellectual consideration. We must do something with it.

So, with that, let’s dive into Chapter 2. Are there any questions?

READ Hebrew 2:1-4

If you remember from last week, I pointed out that there are 3 groups of Jews who are the intended recipients of this letter: (1) Jewish Christians; (2) Jews who were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah but had not committed themselves to Him (fence straddlers); and (3) Jewish unbelievers, those who rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Here the writer has all three groups in mind. In v 1 he’s speaking to believers when he says, “lest we drift away from what we have heard.” But in v 3 he apparently has unbelievers in mind when he says, “if we neglect such a great salvation.” Whether you are a believer or an unbeliever there are consequences for you not responding appropriately to what you have been told about Jesus.

V 1 connects back to all that we were told about Jesus in Ch 1 (that He is the Son of God, heir of all things, Creator of the world, object of the angel’s worship, the One who died on the cross for our sins, the One seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven). As a Christian these truths about Jesus are foundational. They anchor the ship that is our lives [picture of a ship that drifts away from the safety of the harbor if not anchored]. James 1:6 talks about people who lack faith (not anchored) as being “like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”

V 2 warns of a “just retribution” for every sin. The “message declared by angels” is a reference to the old covenant Law. The Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai was mediated by angels. Let me show you a couple of

passages that reinforce this idea. READ Deuteronomy 33:1-2 (penned by Moses) and Acts 7:38 (part of Stephen's speech).

Even Jewish unbelievers had to acknowledge that there would be punishment for sin, that sin must be dealt with. In the O.T. how was sin dealt with? Thru the sacrifices and offerings that the people made thru a priest for their sins as required by the Law. So, having just been told in Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus is the One who made purification for sins, that He already dealt with the sin issue; knowing this, how then should we respond to this same Jesus? We should respond by placing our faith in Him! V 3 asks the all-important question, "how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" If Jesus is the means to salvation then how is someone going to escape the fires or hell if they reject Him? The implied answer is THEY WON'T! READ Hebrews 10:28-29.

At this point a fence-straddling Jew might ask, "how can I be sure that what you have said about Jesus is true" The writer answers this in V 3-4. First, the truth regarding this great salvation (the Gospel message) was first declared, taught by our Lord Jesus Himself. Second, this same truth was passed down to the disciples/ apostles and from them to us. That phrase by the author "attested to us by those who heard" indicates that the writer of Hebrews was probably NOT one of the apostles.

Third, the truth of the Gospel message was confirmed by signs and wonders. First by Jesus thru His supernatural powers to heal the sick, make the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, cleanse the lepers, turn water into wine, calm the storm, raise the dead – on and on we could go). All those miracles Jesus performed proved that He was sent from God and that His claims and message were true. READ John 10:36-38.

Not only did Jesus perform signs and wonders, but then later the apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform many of the same miracles that Jesus did. So, their signs and wonders validated the Gospel message they preached. These proved that they were also messengers of God. READ Acts 2:22, 32-33 and Romans 15:19. In other words, you

unbelievers, you doubters, you skeptics, how can you be sure that what we say about Jesus is true – just look at the evidence!! Questions?

OK, let me give you a heads up. Things are about to get a little deeper. Originally my plan was to cover all of Chapter 2 today. But when I came across these next verses, I realized I need to spend a little time explaining them.

At this point the writer goes back to his argument from Ch 1 that Jesus is greater than the angels. The question that the unbelieving Jews might be raising – the sticking point for them – is this: “If Jesus was a man (He was human) and if He died, how could He be superior to angels (who are a higher form than humans and do not die)?”

Let me warn you – this is where it gets rather deep, so stay with me.

READ Hebrews 2:5-9

Let’s break this down piece by piece. In this world (today) angels are ministering spirits. In the world to come (both the millennial kingdom as well as the new heavens and new earth that follow it) angels will continue to be ministering spirits. “World” in v 5 refers to the inhabited earth.

In v 6-8 the writer of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 8:4-6. What is this portion of Psalm 8 talking about? David, the psalmist, is describing God’s plans for mankind. In Genesis 1:26 man was made in the image of God. He was given dominion to rule over the earth. Then came the Fall, man sinned and as a result was cursed. He usurped his dominion over the earth (Satan is the prince of this world). Man became subject to the earth – disease, pestilence, wild animals, weeds, weather patterns, floods, earthquakes. Temporarily (v 7, “for a little while”) man was made lower than the angels. How are we humans lower than angels? We’re confined to physical bodies while angels, being spirits, have the freedom to go between heaven and earth. They are spirits but can take on physical forms as necessary. We humans are sinners, while the angels are holy (except for the fallen angels who are unholy but are doomed and cannot be saved). Angels have direct

access to God's throne, supernatural powers and strength and they don't die. We humans have limited access to God (thru prayer). We are physically limited. We are relatively weak. We live in a mortal shell and will one day die unless Jesus comes back before. Angels don't die.

But the Good News is that God loves us and has a desire for humanity's good. When Adam and Eve sinned, when man fell, God had a plan of redemption already in place. Redeemed humanity has a destiny. Do you know what that is? READ Daniel 7:18, 27. We are going to rule one day, in the world to come. That promise was not made to the angels, only to redeemed humanity. Jesus says that in the world to come man will be "equal to angels" (Luke 20:36). Revelation 3:21 says that we, the redeemed, the conquerors, the overcomers, are going to sit with Jesus on His throne and rule. This is what v 7-8 are talking about. Pretty amazing!

V 9 shifts gears. Now the writer begins talking about Jesus. The previous verses were talking about mankind in general ("son of man" with lower case "s"). Jesus, like us, was made lower than the angels. This happened not when he sinned (as with us) but when He left heaven and became a man. This is often referred to as His "humiliation." For 33 years Jesus did what no angel ever did. He left heaven, became human, suffered and died. God took on human flesh and dwelt among us! Amazing.

We will be crowned with glory and honor in the future, in the world to come (v 7). Jesus is already, as we speak, crowned with glory and honor because of what He did on the cross. He suffered and died. He tasted death for us. READ Philippians 2:6-8.

Jesus did a remarkable thing. He took our place on the cross. We should have paid for our own sins. We should have died. But Jesus bore our sins. He paid our penalty. By God's grace we don't have to suffer that kind of horrible death! He tasted death for everyone. The rest of the chapter, v 10-18 continue the thought of Jesus as the Savior. And it answers the question of why Jesus had to become human in order to be our Savior. We'll pick it up there next week.