

Hebrews 2: Jesus Our Empathetic Hero

Let us continue with Hebrews 2:5-18. Call this section, 'Jesus our Empathetic Hero.' What do you say to Christians who feel defenseless in a hostile world, to people who feel that God would be far off, indifferent to their needs, that they are unimportant, or unseen by God? One answer that Hebrews gives is, look at Jesus. That is the answer from chapter 1. The second answer is, Jesus looks at you. Jesus shares our humanity and our weakness. He shares our weaknesses to identify with us, but also to lead us out of them. There is a saying, "Misery loves company." That is only a half truth. There is a better saying, "Misery loves relief." Jesus gives us company, but not just to commiserate. Sometimes when you commiserate with somebody, you can become miserable too. The words 'commiserate' and 'miserable' come from the same place; to commiserate is to feel misery with somebody. We do not want somebody just to feel misery with us. We want them to feel our pain, but also to lead us out of it. That is what Jesus does.

This passage teaches that He does this as our hero. But he is an odd or a different kind of hero. He is our empathetic hero. If you think about this, most heroes are not empathetic. Most heroes, most people who are truly great at something, are so good and so far above that they can hardly communicate with the average person. For example, I am mediocre in the computer world. When I have a problem or do not understand something on my computer, I do not want to talk to a computer genius. I want to talk to somebody who is a little better than I am. A computer genius says, "You just have to press this, and touch this, and this function key, and it is in the manual on page 136. Understand?" They think it is so simple and easy. But I am saying, "I got lost back at Step 2, and would you please repeat it?" Then they repeat it, and just say it louder and faster. I want somebody who just solved that problem yesterday. They can say, "Oh, I know, I just fought with that." They wrestled with it, they commiserate. The hero of the computer world is so far ahead of me that they cannot help me. Now here is the great thing about Jesus. He is way ahead of us, but unlike most, He is still sympathetic. That is what this passage is pointing out.

Most people are either strong or empathetic. The most unpleasant people are people with really high IQ's because they cannot believe how dumb you are. Jesus had a really high IQ, but He never thought we were dumb. Let us look at the big picture shown in Hebrews. Jesus is still being shown in His supremacy in Hebrews 2:5 and 2:16. Both are telling the superiority of Jesus. The author is still working on the idea that Jesus is greater than angels. "It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come," verse 5, and verse 16, "Surely it is not angels he helps." That is called an 'inclusio.' It is a little way of telling you that what goes between the two parts all fits together. He is talking about the supremacy of Jesus, and his first theme is that Jesus as our empathetic hero is great, and He is greater than the world. Look at verses 5 through 9.

It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the Son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet. In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we do see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death so that by the grace of God, He might taste death for everyone.

Now this section starts again with the idea that everything is going to be subject to Jesus. Do you see how we had this interlude of applications? Chapter 1 ended in verse 13 with, "Sit at my right hand [Jesus hears this from God] until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Now he is picking that up

again in chapter 2. Chapter 2:9 points out the supremacy of Jesus, “That everything will be subject to Him.” Now what exactly is chapter 2:5 and following about? The author is quoting something again: Psalm 8. What is the topic of the reference to Psalm 8? It is all about mankind. Psalm 8 shows this very clearly. “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens...From the lips of children and infants, you have ordained praise...Praise God for the work of His hands, His fingers, the moon and the stars... What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you should care for him?” Now ‘what is man’ and ‘son of man’ are two words for the same thing. ‘Son of man’ in the Old Testament is not what it means in the New Testament, referring to Jesus. But ‘son of man’ refers to the sons of people, and the son of a person is a person. That is the ordinary meaning of ‘son of man’ in the Bible.

So as the author exalts God for His creation, looks at the moon and the stars, and looks at the greatest of all God’s creation, crowned with glory and honor, he says that it is mankind’s destiny to rule the world for God. Do you believe that it is your destiny, that you are created to rule the world for God? That is what He made you for. That is what He made Adam and Eve for. That was His original purpose. This is not always easy to see, is it? I have a hard time ruling my own desk sometimes. I have a hard time ruling my own car. I cannot keep dirt out of my car. You would think that since a car is small I could handle that. I can hardly rule my own phone. I have a hard time ruling my backyard, keeping the weeds out and the grass in. Our destiny is to rule the world for God. At present, however, we do not see that. But we do see Jesus. The fact that we do not see it does not mean that we should not pursue it.

Have you heard the names Dwight Moody or D. L. Moody, and Abraham Kuyper? They were born the same year, in 1837. They became prominent Christian leaders, pretty much the same year, in 1877 and 1875. D. L. Moody said, “The world is like a sinking ship.” His goal was to rescue as many souls, as many bodies from that ship as possible and throw them into the lifeboat. If the world is going down the drain, all you can do is save souls off a sinking world. More or less the same time, Abraham Kuyper was the originator of this idea: “There is no part of the universe of which God does not say, “It is Mine.”” Abraham Kuyper also founded a political party and started a university. He ran a newspaper as well as being a theologian, a writer of theological books, and a pastor. He also had a breakdown at either 39 or 41 years old, and he realized maybe he should do all these things, but not simultaneously. “All the world is mine,” but it does not mean that Kuyper had to solve the whole thing all at once.

For some people these two perspectives are part of what it means to be Reformed. Some people understand that the Reformed perspective is that “God is sovereign of all,” which means ruling over all. We are harking back to this, because this is a biblical idea. I think D.L. Moody did a lot of good, but I think he was wrong on this point: the world was not like a sinking ship. The world was like God’s big beautiful backyard. It is a wrecked backyard right now, but it is God’s domain. So that is our destiny. That is what we seek, but we do not see it now.

There is a question as to exactly what is going on in verses 5 through 9. Is this describing people, is it describing Jesus, or is it somehow doing both? Now I am going to tell you that in the final analysis, it is both. When we read verses 6 and 7, they read like a description of mankind. It is the destiny of mankind to be crowned with glory and honor and for everything to be under our feet. But then in verse 8, it gets a little bit strange. It is quoting Psalm 8, which is about mankind. It says, “And putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him.” That is a strong statement. We can hardly see how that can apply to mankind. Maybe it was God’s original purpose for mankind, right? But now that the fall has taken place, in fact in a very real way we are doing anything but subjecting. We are actually rebelling against God, and so it does not really seem to fit. It seems originally like it is about mankind, but it does not quite fit the way things actually are. Then we realize that no, it is really about Jesus, who

is the true man. He is the one man that fulfills the destiny of mankind. Jesus is the one for whom it is true; God left nothing that is not subject to Him. “We see Jesus.” Even to the author it is not obvious that everything is subject to Him. The last phrase in verse 8, “at present we do not see everything subject to him,” that really applies to Jesus, right? We see Jesus, “made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone”(verse 9). It seems to be about mankind, but it is really about Jesus.

Now think about it one more time, and it is not simply about Jesus. It is about Jesus and those whom He brings with Him, because that is where the passage goes next. The author is also pointing out that Jesus does not just do this on His own, but rather He was crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death. He suffered death for our sake. It says it right here that “He might taste death for everyone.” Not only did He taste death for us, but we might say that He tasted victory for us. In the following verses it says that He did not just get this victory by Himself, but verse 10, “In bringing many sons to glory.” He had this glory. We should have had it, but we lost it; we lost the glory of ruling and being crowned. But Jesus got it, and now He brings us with Him to glory. And then in verse 11 it says that the author of our salvation is making men holy. We are of the same family, so He did not just win this on His own, but He was creating a family which we are part of. In the next verse Jesus says, “I will declare your name to my brothers in the presence of the congregation; I will sing your praises. Here am I, and the children God has given me.” So He is winning this victory, and He is also bringing us along. The passage is about Jesus, the true man, and His reconstitution of humanity. Only in Christ do we attain our destiny of ruling the world for God. It is almost laughable to say we rule the world for God. In fact, in ourselves, it is only funny because if you stop laughing, you start crying. But in Christ, it is true. In Christ, we are members of His family. We have attained the victory with Christ. He was lowered so that He might be exalted. In fact, this passage is a summary of the life of Christ and His incarnation. For a little while He was made lower than the angels, at His exaltation God crowned Him with glory and honor, and then His triumph.

Look at what happens next in Hebrews 2 in terms of the description of Jesus. There is another aspect to the description of Jesus’ work, and that comes up in verse 10. “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” The word ‘author’ is based on a Greek word *archegos*, which can be translated a number of ways. It can mean ‘author’ like a writer, it can mean a hero, a champion, a pioneer, or a trailblazer. Now maybe the best word, not a common word by any means to us, is a ‘trailblazer.’ For one thing, the parts of the Greek word mean ‘chief leader’ and it can be used as someone who leads someone along the path. The idea in verse 10 is that Jesus is our heroic trailblazer. That is, Jesus, this one who is far above us, is exalted and powerful, but He also cares for us. He wins the battle for us. He blazes the trail to eternity for us, but He does not just win the battle, He comes back and clears a path and helps us through that same path.

There is an uncommon motif of the hero or champion found scattered throughout the Bible. The fact that something is not common does not mean it is not important. This is one of the unique contributions of the book of Hebrews for understanding our Christian faith. A champion is one who fights for God’s cause, for God’s people. A champion would be ideally someone who represented God’s people. There is a case in the Old Testament where one fights for many. It is the story of David and Goliath. Goliath goes out as the champion, the hero, the representative of his people and David goes out as the champion, the hero of his people. It is an extremely strong foreshadowing of the work of Christ. There is an enemy who consciously arrays himself for the sake of the destruction of God’s people. The Philistines were invading Israel at the time, and not more than 10 or 15 miles from Jerusalem, seeking to dominate, to destroy God’s people, God’s anointed. David had just been anointed by God, and Goliath was taunting the Israelites by saying, “Who will dare to fight me?” David realized that this was not an issue of flesh

and blood, but this was an issue in which a pagan has taunted the army's living God. He has taunted God, and so David went out in God's strength, as the one representative, and defeated God's enemies and blazed the trail for a great victory that day.

There are other references to that in the Old Testament. In II Samuel 3 there is another representative warfare there. It is not with just two men, but a handful of men fighting. God calls Himself a "divine warrior." In Isaiah 49:25-26 there is a combat scenario, "This is what the Lord says, 'Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce. I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save.' Here God is predicting, among other things, the fall of Israel, and saying, "You will be taken captive, but I will fight those who fight you. I will be your warrior. I will release you from the clutches of the warriors who have grasped you as their plunder." That is God's promise. Then He goes on to say in warrior language, "I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh. They will be drunk in their own blood as with wine. And all the world, all of mankind, will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." Jesus Himself, in the pages of the Gospels calls Himself a warrior. Luke 11:20 describes that. So Hebrews is harking back to Luke. Sometimes I have a hunch that it was Luke who wrote Hebrews, because of parallels like this, and others.

Jesus says in Luke chapter 11, starting with verse 20, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his house, his possessions are safe. [The strong man is Satan. A strong man is guarding his house, the domain of Satan; the domain of evil.] But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his spoils." The stronger man is Jesus. So Jesus uses this divine warrior motif, found in I Samuel 17, Isaiah 49, also some other places in Isaiah. It is found in Luke. It is also found once in a parallel passage in Matthew, and here it is again. The idea is that Jesus is indeed a champion, a hero, a trailblazer and he has come to bind the strong man. He has come to cast out demons, to spoil Satan, to deprive him of his power. Yet paradoxically in Hebrews 2:14 it says that He wins his greatest battle by losing: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil."

Satan's hold on us is almost legitimate. Revelation 12:10 says the hold is that we are guilty and we deserve to be punished. That is his accusation. "A loud voice has come from heaven. The accuser of our brothers who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down." He accuses us day and night. In Zechariah 3, he accuses us of being guilty and he has a point. We are guilty and liable to judgment. How do we overcome? Revelation 12:11 goes on to say, "They overcame him by the blood of the lamb." Revelation is in coherence with Hebrews, which says that Jesus broke the power of Satan, broke the power of death by dying. He came as a substitution for us. He is not ashamed to call us His brothers, even if He has to die to do it. He is our hero, but He also identifies with us. He says we are His brothers, His family, His children. We are His brothers and His children, simultaneously. He is not ashamed to identify. Can you relate to this? How many of you had a younger brother or sister you were ashamed to identify with? "Please go away; you are embarrassing me around my friends." If you were the younger brother or sister, how many of you deliberately tried to embarrass your older brother or sister at various times? It is very easy to become ashamed, and if we could be ashamed of our younger brother or sister, I guarantee you Jesus could be ashamed of us. I have refrained from putting Christian bumper stickers on my cars for two years, partly because when you take them off, they make a mess, also because my driving is not good enough. I am not sure that I want the cause or the name of Christ to be identified with me and my driving. We might say that God would be ashamed to have His cause identified with my driving, but if you carry the name 'Christian,' God is identifying with you. You may say, "My driving is not up to it," but your whole life needs to be up to it. Anytime anybody knows you

are a Christian, then your whole life is one in which Jesus is not embarrassed. Although we could imagine Him being embarrassed, He is not embarrassed to identify with you. That is the thing about Jesus, our great hero. He is so far above us but He also understands us.