

6. Psalm 8 provides the framework for the writer's present argument about Jesus' supremacy over God's angels. In a word, He is superior to them because He is True Man – man as celebrated in the psalm. But the psalm's celebration of the *creature* man points to another dimension of this superiority: *Jesus is superior as True Man, but also as Man unto mankind*. Until His birth, there had never been a human being who matches the depiction in Psalm 8; if it were not true in Him, it would not be true at all. But the psalm speaks of the human creature, and not merely one human being. Therefore, the truthfulness of Psalm 8 depends on it presenting an accurate depiction of the human race, *but it doesn't do so because of the fallen human condition*. And so, either the psalm is false, or it's prophetic; either its vision of man is flawed, or it predicts man's final conformity to his created design and purpose. The Hebrews writer believed the latter, and he had come to recognize that this human destiny has been attained in Jesus. He is the man depicted in Psalm 8, but in order that the psalm's vision should be fully realized.

This is the subject of the balance of chapter two (vv. 10-18), and in these verses the writer shows how the man Jesus accomplished God's will for His human creature – how it is that He is True Man for the sake of mankind; how, in Him, the truths highlighted in Psalm 8 have become “yes and amen” for Adam's race.

- a. The Hebrews writer centered this fulfillment of human destiny in Jesus' vicarious suffering and death – the fact that He “*tasted death for everyone*” (2:9). Drawing on the language of Psalm 8, he asserted that the Son who is superior to the angels was “*made for a little while*” lower than the angels, but unto the goal that He should be “*crowned with glory and honor*.” And Calvary – the “*suffering of death*” – was the means of this movement from lowliness to exaltation.

David penned the eighth psalm with the understanding that God has ordained a glorious, regal destiny for His human creature, in spite of his present lowly status and condition. (The verb rendered “made a little lower” concerns inferiority of status or position, not essence; cf. John 3:30.) David anticipated the day of man's exaltation (made lower than the angels *for a little while*), and the Hebrews writer recognized that that day had come in Jesus' person and work. He took upon Himself man's lowliness as a son of Adam under the curse, but for the sake of all of Adam's children. Jesus' solidarity with Adam's race in sharing their lowly state and condition had its goal in them sharing His glory and honor. *He became all that they are so that they should become all that He is*; the suffering that secured His own perfection as man, the image-son (2:10), looked to the perfection of mankind. God saw fit to make the incarnate Son the *pioneer* (founder) of salvation, so that He should become “the firstborn among many brothers” (cf. Romans 5:18, 8:3, 16-17, 28-30; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

This is the reason the Hebrews writer associated Jesus' suffering and death with “*the grace of God*.” His suffering, culminating with His death at Calvary, was the outworking of God's grace, because it had its object in God's gracious recovery of His image-children. The Father perfected His Son through suffering with a view to His goal of “bringing many sons to glory.”

All of this, then, highlights the crucial truth that Jesus' exaltation in glory and honor through the suffering of death must be understood as His *personal* realization as the Son of Man of God's goal for His *human creature*.

- Jesus was "crowned with glory and honor" in His enthronement, but this was simply the intended climax of His resurrection, which attested Him to be the "Son of God with power" (Romans 1:3; cf. also Acts 2:29-33). The Son's glorification at the Father's right hand, then, focuses on the fact that He is *True Man* – man as God's exalted and honored Image-Son. (Thus the Hebrews writer associated this outcome with Psalm 8).
 - Jesus' suffering and death brought Him the glory of fully realized humanness, but not for His own sake alone; His dereliction unto glory and honor served God's gracious purpose to bring *many sons* to glory.
- b. All of this has profound implications for how we must understand Jesus' atoning work, the nature and process of that atonement, and the effect of it. The Hebrews writer spoke of that work in terms of several key ideas.
- 1) First, he presented Jesus as the *pioneer of salvation*, rather than merely a substitutionary sacrifice. The language connotes the idea of a trailblazer – of Jesus leading the way into salvation so that others can follow.
 - 2) This trailblazing path went from *lowliness* ("made lower than the angels") to *exaltation* ("crowned with glory and honor"). Most importantly, this is the path God ordained for His human creature. This is the point the writer was making in connecting Jesus with Psalm 8.
 - 3) Third, this path was the path of *suffering*. It was through "the suffering of death" that Jesus ascended from lowliness to glory and honor. In context, this exaltation refers to His resurrection from the dead and enthronement at the Father's right hand (ref. 1:3; cf. also Acts 2:32-33).
 - 4) But Jesus blazed this trail from lowliness to glory and honor, not for His own sake, but *for the sake of Adam's race*: He became True Man for the sake of man. Jesus "tasted death for everyone," so that *His* triumph and exaltation at the Father's right hand should be the destiny of *mankind*. Again, the writer situated Jesus in Psalm 8, not because the psalmist did, but to emphasize that He embodies the vision of man depicted and celebrated in the psalm, *but in order that the psalm should speak truthfully about the creature man, as it purports to do*.
 - 5) Jesus, then, is the pioneer of salvation, but in the sense that *salvation* speaks to the human destiny God ordained for His image children. In this way, Jesus was *Himself* the firstfruits of salvation; He was the first to experience this human destiny; He was the first man to be "saved."

This is a profound point that must not be missed: All Christians acknowledge and celebrate the fact that Jesus is *Savior*, but perhaps most oversimplify that truth and its implications for human beings. Jesus is *Savior*, *but as the first man to experience God's saving work*. He isn't merely the sinless Son of God who saves men, He is the *Last Adam*. Jesus walked the path from lowliness to glory *as a true son of Adam*, bearing in Himself the Adamic curse of alienation, sin and death. He embodied fallen man and underwent man's just condemnation, then to be raised to newness of life. In that sense, *Jesus Himself experienced the very salvation that God determined for mankind*, but He did so as blazing the path for others.

- 6) Thus the writer emphasized that Jesus' path of lowliness, suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation had Adam's race in view; it was the Father's ordained gracious process to "bring many sons to glory." Jesus' experience secured salvation for men, *but in the sense that their salvation would involve them undergoing the same experience*. God's intent was that human beings should follow Him as the appointed trailblazer, and this means taking up the cross as He did and losing their lives as they know it, in order to find their life in Him (Matthew 16:21-25; Romans 8:16-17).

- 7) And this life in Jesus is the life for which man was created and destined. It isn't a happier life in this world, or even the soul's blissful and everlasting rest in heaven. It is the glory and honor the psalmist spoke of, and that the Hebrews writer understood to have been realized in Jesus' resurrection and exaltation at the Father's right hand. The life that Jesus holds out to men is the authentic life of God's image-children. But these children are sons in the Son, so that their path of sonship is His path; it is the path of suffering unto death yielding glory and honor – the glory and honor that reflect the human vocation of dominion over the creation in God's name and for His sake (cf. Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 8:3-9; Romans 8:12-17; 2 Timothy 2:11-12; Revelation 5:1-10).

This is the framework within which Jesus' atonement must be understood. One might argue that this framework is too narrow, and only reflects the emphasis of this one passage. But, if the Hebrews writer rightly understood God's work in the Messiah, then his instruction must accord with the entire scriptural treatment of this topic – not simply in the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well. *For the messianic person and work fulfilled Israel's Scriptures, which the New Testament documents were written to demonstrate*. And in fact, a careful and proper reading of the Bible shows that the Hebrews author did indeed share the perspective and understanding of atonement found in all the Scriptures.

- 1) The foremost thing to recognize, then, is that the goal of Jesus' atonement was *sonship* – not legal satisfaction for law-breaking, forgiveness for sin, or even purification from corruption and defilement. God's concern was to realize human destiny, not uphold and secure a moral/ethical standard.

- 2) Therefore, atonement is *relational* rather than legal. It concerns the relationship between God and His image-children, not their conformity to a legal code or standard. Many might wish to point to the Law of Moses and its myriad commandments and sanctions in order to argue otherwise, but the Law of Moses was the covenant that defined and prescribed the *relationship* between Yahweh and Israel as covenant Father and son (sometimes expressed in terms of a husband/wife relationship; Isaiah 50-54; Hosea 1-2) (cf. Exodus 4:22-23; Isaiah 1:2-3; Hosea 11:1-4). Thus God treated Israel's lawlessness as relational *infidelity*; Israel was a harlot who pursued other lovers, not a rule-breaker (Ezekiel 16, 23).
- 3) Sin is fundamentally relational violation, and thus it yields *alienation*. God, in turn, acknowledges this alienation by imposing the judgment of *exile*. This principle emerged with the disobedience in Eden (Genesis 3), and was constant throughout the life of the covenant household, expressed in exile from the *camp* of Yahweh's habitation (Leviticus 24:13-23), exile from His *sanctuary land* (Deuteronomy 28:58-68), and ultimately exile from His very *life and presence* (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10).
- 4) Thus, atonement focuses on the restoration of the divine/human relationship – *the ending of exile* (Luke 4:16-21, 9:18-31). It includes forgiveness and cleansing, but as they fit within the concepts of liberation and ingathering, covenant renewal, and Yahweh's return to His people, so that Father and son again dwell together in intimate fellowship. These things are the marrow of the Old Testament's promise of the kingdom, which was to be inaugurated through the messianic person and work.

This understanding of atonement, then, helps to explain how it is universal without implying (or necessitating) that every human being is finally saved. First and foremost, Jesus' atonement was universal in that it pertained to the *entire created order*. The whole creation was subjected to the futility and death of the curse (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:20-21), not because it committed any offense against its Creator, *but because its relationship with Him is in and through man*. Therefore, when the God/man relationship was compromised, so was the Creator/creation relationship. Man's alienation resulted in the alienation of the whole created order. So man's restoration is the ground of the creation's restoration (Romans 8:19-22). God's great design in Jesus' atoning death looked beyond humans to the heavens and earth (Isaiah 65-66; Colossians 1:19-20).

But Jesus' atonement equally pertains to *all people*. If He was a true son of Adam – *and the writer insists that He was* (vv. 7-9, 14-18), then His suffering and death as man pertain to every son of Adam (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). He took up our corrupt humanness to put it to death in Himself, and emerge in the new and true human life that defines man as exalted, regal image-son. But He did so as the “pioneer of salvation”: *He led the way, and we follow by owning our death in Him, and so finding life – our true human self – through union with Him*.