

Waiting with Wonder | Life in the Spirit

“The Ascension”

Hebrews 2.5ff

5.24.20

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. ⁶ But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? ⁷ "YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; ⁸ YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

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

¹⁰ *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹² saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." ¹³ And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME."*

¹⁴ *Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. ¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*

We've been looking at the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, “the Lord and Giver of Life” (Nicene Creed). And as we move toward the celebration of Pentecost we've focused on His work in history, the world, the church and our lives.

Last week we considered the Spirit of Sonship – that God's very Heart, the Spirit of God testifies within people who receive Jesus Christ that we ARE the sons/heirs of God. That changes WHY we do WHAT we do. Today we look at another motivation... an additional impulse to walk with God in a new way.

Hebrews has a pastoral bent, (some say it's a sermon). It's a practical approach to spiritual life and... yet ... today's passage... lacks any imperatives... no command words... just an enthralling explanation of what happened, behind the scenes of Jesus Christ's work/ascension. It's fascinating but... very practical.

This section and other sections in Hebrews are aimed at the "WHY?" behind the doing... In other words, unless you have this mind-set, all the so-called spiritual/moral or Christian things you do ... will soon degenerate in something merely perfunctory (or worse!) There's a story that keeps all of life AMAZING and fresh and to focus on that story and bring it into our motives – that IS an engine FOR the doing.

This passage makes a really important contribution to a "Biblical Anthropology", i.e. what is the reason for human life? How should we think of ourselves as beings in the universe?... It speaks to the whole idea of the meaning of our existence... What on earth are we doing? What's our purpose? "WHAT IS MAN?"

Let's look at: **1) The Ultimate Man**

2) The Necessary Brother and

3) The Mysterious Singer

In today's reading, the paragraph in caps is a quote from the 8th Psalm, a reflection on human life "What is man that You, O God, should think about him?"

And then Ps 8 expresses this WONDER at humanity's role in the world: among all the creatures, WE are the ultimate! Even people who claim there is no God, have to agree: man rules the world Tigers are magnificent ... Blue Whales are awe-inspiring and bald eagles are breathtaking ...but the human being IS the DOMINANT species.

And FROM the perspective of the Hebrew Bible, this is no accident or the product of chance... This is God's design...humanity was made to be like God ("Imago Dei") ...to cooperate with God in ruling over God's world... in tending the garden. Everything is to be subordinated to the vice-regents of creation.

But, end of v.8 says, "But we do NOT yet see all things subject to man-kind" And WE know, also by common observation, that we are not doing so well in our dominion over the earth.... In many ways, we're messing it up ...and in many ways we don't even have dominion over the smallest microscopic organisms: viruses and bacteria and cancer cells can all take us OUT!

Typhoons and tsunamis do not obey us but instead terrify us... and the invisible world of spirits seems to drive people to hideous acts of evil and cruelty toward creation and toward other

human beings... (end of v. 8) “we do not see all things subjected to man.” And undoubtedly... that’s a good thing... Bob Dylan wrote a song with the refrain “Who’s gonna take away his license to kill?”

But Psalm 8 is quoted here in order to say, “Though man is fallen and creation isn’t responding to man as God intends and man isn’t governing creation as God intends... we DON’T see it... but it’s not as if God is worried about it...not like God is wringing His hands, saying “Well, maybe the angels will have to take over?”...We don’t see man-kind in perfect harmony with creation and universal flourishing ...

“BUT”, v. 9, “we DO see Him... namely Jesus... crowned with glory and honor” i.e. at this point, humanity is NOT what it’s supposed to be... BUT ONE Man, the Ultimate Man is enthroned over all creation. He ascended and all creation is under Him!

Jesus Christ came as the New Adam, the Originator of a new race, to take up the task forfeited by the Old Adam and our race. This new humanity hasn’t come into its place... yet...but for now, we do see Him, the winds and waves, disease and spirits, even time (Luke 8.41ff), even DEATH...all creation is subject to Him.

Who is “Man” in Psalm 8? Jesus Christ became Man ...made, for a time, lower than the angels, now crowned with glory.” Humanity is ascended and now sits in the very presence of God... And in time all creation will joyfully confess Him. And why not? He rides that donkey into Jerusalem, the colt, that had never been ridden (remember?) and the donkey colt is at ease... even a donkey recognizes the Ultimate Man, the just and rightful King of creation.

So this is a huge statement of Biblical anthropology: it trumpets the purpose and destiny of humanity. An intended kingship, a forfeited reign and now in the ascension of Jesus Christ, a dominion reclaimed.

AND (2nd) this passage is concerned to tell us HOW this dominion has been and will be fully reclaimed: God Himself, stoops and lowers Himself and adds humanity to His deity, and becomes ONE OF US.

He’s made lower than the angels... is made the perfect Rescuer by suffering all the infirmities of humanity... He identifies with us: v. 17 “He HAD to be made like His brethren in all things”

This is the “deeper magic”, the metaphysical necessity: the lost reign of Adam can only BE reclaimed if God, Himself, will live the way Adam was supposed to live and WILL DIE the way Adam deserves to die.

And so, Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, goes back into the Garden, into Gethsemane, and there faces the great fork in the road: but unlike the first Adam who said, “MY WILL BE DONE”, the

New Adam, the Brother we need, He comes to the Garden and says, "Not My will but Thine be done". He's saying, "I have represented them in life... now I will stand for them in death". (V. 17)

"I will be a merciful and faithful high priest and make propitiation (big word)... I will pay the penalty that the standard of justice deserves."

He becomes one of us and is not ashamed OF us but is instead... ashamed FOR us... He wears our shame.

He absorbs my shame (that emotion that most closely approximates the experience of Hell) the Ultimate Man, the Necessary Brother, says, "I will be stripped, I will be mocked, BE HATED AND BECOME repulsive in the sight of men and loathsome in the sight of God I will be clothed in their shame/guilt."

"HE IS NOT ASHAMED to call them brethren" (11).

How great is that? Jesus is not ashamed to own me. He will not say to me, "Yuck! You're a disappointment to me...until you prove yourself... until you measure up...until you become profitable."

Instead, He says, "Come to Me... all who know guilt and shame... just come..., who know what your sin deserves... you, who fear death ... you slaves of the devil and of fear, you powerless to save yourselves come and I will represent you. I'll be your Brother."

You know, the "Parable of the Lost Sons" (Luke Ch. 15): the younger brother, takes his inheritance and squanders it. He becomes the big spender and wastes it all ("prodigal"). But when he's spent it all and when he's a nobody and no one gives him anything... his older brother (who stayed home) should be reading the troubled eyes of the father.

The older brother should see the worry on the father's face... the older brother should feel the father's heartache and he should rise up and say, "Dad, I'll go and find him and bring him home."

But of course, that's NOT how the Parable goes... the older brother (the Pharisee) doesn't feel the father's anguish...he's only self-absorbed.

But HERE is the Brother we need. In perfect harmony with His Father, knowing the love of God for the lost, the True Brother leaves heaven. He goes into the Far Country... He comes down.

He comes after us, He enters our pigpen and embodies our weakness and lives in our place and is blamed for our sin and dies for everyone who trusts in Him... and in His dying he undoes death! And then He ascends ...takes us Home, and prays for us.

Lastly, He is the Mysterious Singer. It's a bit of a puzzling verse: v. 12 says, "I will proclaim your name to My brethren, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE"

It's a quotation from the 22nd Psalm. And it's quoted here because the New Testament writer is putting those words INTO the mouth of the Ultimate Man, the Necessary Brother.

The writer is saying that these words apply to Jesus; HE IS THE SINGER! He is the fulfillment of the 22nd Psalm. David wrote it but finally, it belongs to Jesus Christ. (Fulfilled by Him! He's the Singer!)

He quoted this 22nd Psalm from the cross. The Psalm starts famously, "My God, My God why have you forsaken Me?"

And then a description of a man destitute and abandoned and surrounded by wild animals, creation awry with ravenous lions, wolves and bulls and ... and evil men ready to tear him apart.

It says his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth and his bones are out-of-joint and they pierce his hands and feet ... and gamble for the Man's clothing.

But the Psalm ends with THESE words, quoted in Hebrews ch. 2

*"I will proclaim Your Name to My brethren,
IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION,
I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE"*

See the writer is showing us that the whole Psalm belongs to Jesus Christ. Both the cry of abandonment (at the start) AND the song of victory at the end.

Jesus Christ is the Singer of the Psalms. Look how this opens up the songbook of the Bible!

Edmund Clowney pointed out, when Jesus Christ sings the "we" Psalms, He's putting His brotherly arm around our shoulders and saying to our Father, "We are Your people and the sheep of Your pasture" – See? He's including us! Singing with us! Not ashamed to own us!

And in the psalms of abandonment, that we often read... and we feel like they express our loneliness or our grief... but Jesus Christ is the Singer! He sings that song from the Cross... He knows a depth of grief and pain that we can never know in this life.

We can read those Psalms and sing with Him... because He sings in the Psalms! Some Psalms ONLY make sense if you read them THIS way.

And His singing ends in the song of TRIUMPH and ASCENSION! This quote here in Hebrews 2 is a redemption song; He celebrates AMONG us His Father's goodness...in the congregation!

Jesus Christ is celebrating that He DID indeed lower Himself and that God, the Father, has gifted Him with US! And now He ascends carrying our humanity.

And as I look at myself... I think "Wow! That's all Jesus Christ received for that perfect life and sacrificial death... His only reward was...ME?"

But He is not ashamed of me! He is singing over me, (it's too good to be true but here it is: Zephaniah 3.17)

The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.

And see... when I GET that ... when I really believe that... when I get a sense of it on my hearts... when I hear Him singing, THEN His burden is easy and His yolk is light...

What He calls me to do... no longer seems unreasonable or even difficult... when He calls me to love or to forgive or to pray or to sacrifice... or to die to my desires and follow Him...

When I really believe/receive that He stood in my place... has taken my shame... and sings for joy over me... it frees me from the PROPS I have relied on.

See, this is the engine for it all. Not a specific thing to DO but a life-pervading mindset to be received and celebrated from the ASCENDED Christ, a GIFT (Eph 4.8) that changes the quality of obedience and makes it a joy (Heb. 12.2).