

Hebrews 2:5-13
“Understanding the Existence of Suffering”

Introduction:

The previous four verses represent the first of several warnings that were given throughout the letter to encourage the readers to recognize what they stood to lose if they in fact turned away from Christ and returned to Judaism. Starting here, the author returns back to the flow of thought that preceded the warning. The conjunction “*for*” introduces the author’s contrast to the quotation he had cited in verse thirteen. In that verse the author had cited Psalm 110:1 to show the exalted status of the Son. That verse recorded God’s promise that He would make all the Son’s enemies His footstool. So here, the author was continuing His contrast between Christ and the angelic host. In this passage, the emphasis is upon how the Messianic Son will fulfill the ultimate role of the human race, by bringing the world under His dominion as God’s vice regent; a role that was never given to the angels.

I. Christ’s Exalted Destiny: (vs.5-8)

The passage begins with the words “*for He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels*” (vs.5). The expression, “*the world to come*” refers to a future age on earth, after the present age is done. The particular Greek word that the author chose, puts emphasis on how the world is inhabited with people. Throughout the New Testament, it is revealed that we are to see humanity’s time on earth divided into two distinct ages. The current age is the age of life under the curse, where human beings are allowed to live in rebellion to their Creator. The age to come will be characterized by God actively enforcing His will upon all creation, and on Him bringing that creation to perfection. This current age will conclude with the physical return of Christ to earth, after which He will actively rule over all creation in service to God. The author reminded his readers that God never appointed the angels to the exalted position of ruling over the perfected world of the future, indicating again Christ’s exalted status over the angels. The Greek word translated as “*subjection*” refers to something or someone being put under the authority of someone else. Therefore, the author was pointing out that angels were never given this privilege of having supreme authority over the rest of creation in the age to come.

The clause “*of which we speak*” refers to the author’s quotation of Psalm 110:1 (found in Hebrews 1:13), and it is that quotation that refers to God’s promise that He would ensure that the world would, in His time, be in subjection to the Messiah.

In verses 6-8a, we find the following quotation:

*“What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?
You have made him a little lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of Your hands.
You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”*

These words represent a quotation of Psalm eight, verses four through six. In the original Psalm, David was reflecting on the starry heavens and musing upon man's place in the cosmos. In response to seeing the grandeur of the heavens, he asked the rhetorical questions and made the observations that are contained in the above quotation. Hebrew poetry is built around expressing ideas in parallel forms. The first two lines cited above are intended to mirror one another. Therefore, the reference to the "*son of man*" is not a reference to the Messiah (even though that was Christ's favorite self-designation), it was simply another way of referring to a human being and was used as a parallel to the title "*man*". Also to be "*mindful*" and to "*take care of*" mean essentially the same thing, these words express in two ways that God makes Himself aware of the needs of humanity and provides for those needs. In asking why God does this, the implication from the original context is that though mankind would seem insignificant when set against the vastness and majesty of God's creation, yet God's goodness to man indicates that far from being insignificant to God; human beings are in fact the object of His affection.

In verse seven the quoted Psalm shifted to a progressive form of parallelism (meaning one idea builds upon another). David noted that God not only made human beings lower than the angels but also crowned them with glory and honor. The idea is that in some way, even in the present, human beings are an exalted part of creation. The reference was not meant to indicate the inferiority of human beings as much as it was meant to indicate the exalted status of humanity within the sphere of the earth and the creatures God placed upon it. In this way Psalm eight reflects the same truth that was articulated in Genesis 1:26-28. When the Psalmist noted that man was crowned with glory and honor; it refers to the fact that humanity alone was created in the image of God and were given dominion over the other creatures on earth.

However, following the quotation of Psalm eight, the author notes that "*for in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him*" (vs.8b). The point here is that despite the fact that human beings were given such an exalted destiny in creation, the obvious fact is that this destiny was never fully realized, mankind does not have absolute dominion over the rest of creation. The point is that because of the Fall, the dominion that man was to have over the earth was lost.

II. The Path to Realize His Destiny: (vs.9-13)

Next, the author wrote, "*we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor*" (vs.9a). This verse opens with a contrast (indicated by the conjunction, *but*). The conjunction introduces a contrast between how the destiny of man has gone unrealized due to the Fall, and what God ordained Christ to do because of man's failure. When the author wrote that Jesus was made "*a little lower than the angels*" his point is that the Son, through incarnation, became human. The writer then went on to observe that the incarnation was for the purpose of Jesus suffering death (the conjunction "*for*" indicates that what follows reveals the reason behind what was stated in the

previous clause). In other words, Jesus became mortal in order that He could suffer and die. Then the author noted that Jesus was “*crowned with glory and honor*”. This is the second description about mankind in the Psalm that is applied to Jesus. Since the “*glory and honor*” attributed to mankind was dominion over the earth, then the point here is that the dominion that was intended for mankind was realized in Christ, and according to the Greek text, Jesus was “*crowned with glory and honor*” because of His death. Therefore, Christ’s death was the necessary prerequisite that would enable Him to reign over creation in the age to come.

Then the author elaborated further by writing “*that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone*” (vs.9b). The author’s point was that God’s redemptive plan was motivated by His own goodness and compassion; and not in any way by the merit of those who are saved. To “*taste*” death, here meant to fully experience death, and not simply to sample it. Then the author added that Christ experienced death “*for everyone*”. These two qualifying words have created a significant amount of theological debate. Some have argued that these words mean that Christ’s redemptive death saves everyone, regardless of whether or not they believe. Others argue that Christ’s death was for every single individual but is only applied to those individuals who exercise faith in Christ. And finally, still others argue that the best way to understand the word “*everyone*” is that the author had in mind everyone without distinction instead of everyone without exception. This last view means that the reference is to people of every sort (for all races, ethnicities, cultures, and language groups). The last view seems to fit with the way the scope of Christ’s death is spoken about by the redeemed in John’s vision of Heaven (“*You... have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation*”-Rev.5:9). The point here was to emphasize that Christ is the only Savior that exists; there isn’t any other whom God has provided as a payment for the sins of humanity. This fit into the author’s overall purpose, which was to convince his readers that to depart from Christ was to separate oneself from the only remedy that exists for sin and death.

In verse ten, the author explained why Jesus tasted death for everyone; “*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*”. That it was “*fitting*”, simply means that it was appropriate that God do what He did (specifically sending His Son to die). It was “*fitting*” given the situation and circumstances (the realities governing the sinfulness of human beings, and what was necessary to be done in order to redeem human beings from that sinfulness). The pronouns (*Him, whom*-2xs) refer to God the Father. He is the one to whom everything belongs, and all things exist for His purposes. Here the author was writing about what the Father required Jesus to do in order to accomplish the Father’s plan to save human beings. Therefore, it was “*fitting*” in light of His purpose (*bringing many sons to glory*) “*to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*”. The one designated as “*the captain of their salvation*” is Christ. The word translated as “*captain*” in the NKJV is translated in a number of different ways in other versions. It is translated as “*founder*” (ESV),

“author” (NASB), *“source”* (HCSB), *“leader”* (NLT), and *“pioneer”* (NRSV). As these various translations suggest, this word does not have an exact English counterpart. The word was used in ancient Greek to describe a mythic hero who established an ancient city out of the wilderness and gained a significant following of those who wished to walk in his steps and perpetuate what this hero set in motion. The word itself carries the idea of an originator or a source, one who establishes something which others follow as a pattern. The word also conveys the idea of providing leadership and authority. As applied to Jesus, the idea is that He created the new life of holiness and acceptance with God that we are now a part of. He set the pattern of life that all God’s people are intended to follow.

But in what way did Christ need to be made *“perfect”* in order for God to accomplish His redemptive plan? First, we must define our term. The Greek word translated as *“perfect”* means to bring something to completion or see that it is fully realized or accomplished so that there is nothing left to do. Clearly, since Christ was the sinless Son of God, there is no sense in which He had to improve morally or ethically. Instead, this reference is not about His nature or character; it is about Christ’s vocation. In order for Christ to fulfill His role, certain things had to happen. First, He had to become genuinely human and mortal (as noted earlier). The second thing that had to take place was Christ’s *“suffering”*. The suffering that the author refers to here, were the painful things associated with Christ’s death on the cross (that this is what was intended by the author is made clear in the next verse, which speaks of the sanctifying effect of those sufferings. This conclusion is also supported by what we read in 10:10, 14 where it is stated that our sanctification came from Christ’s death on the cross. The author’s point was Christ had to die on behalf of those He came to save in order to fulfill His God-given role.

In verse eleven, the author added that *“For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one”*. To *“sanctify”* means to make holy by removing whatever moral impurities that one has. Christ is the one who does the sanctifying by His substitutionary death, and believers are the ones who are passively sanctified by His death through their faith in Christ which saves them from their moral guilt before God.

But in what sense was the author saying that Christ and believers are one? It is clear based upon the flow of thought (which is centered in Christ’s incarnation), that the oneness that is shared between Christ and Christians is that they are all human. In light of this shared humanity and in light of Christ’s sacrificial death for their sins, the author adds that for these reasons Christ *“is not ashamed to call them brethren”* (vs.11b). In the ancient world, shame was a powerful force that influenced behavior and choice. If a family member did something that their society considered shameful, others in the family would often disavow them rather than be associated with that person’s shame. The point then is that Christ feels no such shame associating Himself with believers even though they were formerly sinners. In fact, the idea of shame is introduced as a way of emphasizing just how profoundly believers are accepted by Christ. Not only is He not ashamed of them, He embraces them as treasured members of His family. It is through this

exaltation to such a glorious privilege in relationship with Christ that restores human beings to the glory and honor for which they were created.

This passage concludes with two OT quotes. The author employed these to demonstrate that the Messiah would have a peer relationship with those He came to save. This was not an innovative idea, but rather one anticipated in the Old Testament.

The author indicates that the words of the Psalm prophetically reflect Christ's words to the Father, "*saying 'I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.' And again: 'I will put My trust in Him.' And again: 'Here am I and the children whom God has given Me'.*" The first quote is from Psalm 22:22, which was generally understood as a Messianic Psalm. Though the first part of that Psalm was a lament that expressed the sufferings of the Messiah (specifically on the cross), the latter portion (including the cited verse) is an expression of praise and faith in God in spite of the suffering. In that quote the Messiah is speaking of worshipping God in the midst of peers who are referred to as His brothers. The second and third quotes are from Isaiah 8:17-18. These verses are in the middle of messianic prophecies about how God will first judge and then deliver Judah. These words originally reflected a time in Isaiah's ministry when many Israelites were turning away from God in fear and unbelief. Isaiah was told to give his sons special names, making them signs and symbols to the people of Israel. The author quoted this passage to present the faith of Isaiah as prefiguring the faith of Christ Himself, when He endured rejection and suffering for the sake of those He came to save. In the quotation, the children of Isaiah are viewed as typifying the family of believers, who benefit from the Savior's faith and obedience. Therefore, this latter reference speaks not only to the immediate idea of the Messiah having peers and brothers; but to the larger issue of how He set the pattern for staying true to God in spite of resistance and hardship.

Conclusion:

The main thought of the passage is that being in Christ offers a hope of a wonderful future. Anyone who considers stepping away from Christ in order to make their life easier and more pleasant needs to realize the price they are paying in order to gain short term peace in their life. It means surrendering the phenomenal destiny that God intended for His people. It would mean trading everything for almost nothing. Therefore, this passage supports the author's recent exhortation that his readers needed to persevere in their faith in Jesus and not allow themselves to drift away into unbelief and rebellion.

This passage also gives the reader a timeless lesson in how to look at life. The Hebrews were considering abandoning the faith because their focus was on the unpleasantness of their current situation. This means they had lost sight of the fact that suffering is God's path to glory. Christ demonstrated this in His life and death. Believers are to follow Him on that path, understanding that faith in God and in our Lord is central to our calling as Christians, as is focusing on the life to come, rather than on our present existence.