

A Better Brother

Hebrews 2:5-18

For some reason I've always been intrigued with the legend of Billy the Kid. Which is kind of weird, because the guy was a murderer—not a good person. But maybe it's because I saw *Young Guns* a bazillion times as a kid, or growing up in Nebraska where the history of the Wild West is kind of a thing—I've always been fascinated with his story.

And so I was intrigued a couple years ago by a National Geographic special about an attempt to verify the authenticity of a recently discovered photograph of Billy the Kid and his gang of Regulators.¹ Prior to this there was only one verified photograph of him in existence; if they could prove this was real, it would be worth millions. Some were convinced, and valued it at \$5 million. Which is kind of cool when you consider the guy paid \$2 for it at a junk shop in California. That's a pretty good return on investment.

But the poor junk shop dealer! Right? He didn't know what he had. And the poor family who left it sitting in a storage unit for years, only to be cleaned out by the junk dealer—they didn't know what they had either.² This picture was an inheritance; it had been clearly passed down from family member to family member. But at some point, someone in the family ended up neglecting their inheritance. They didn't realize the value or significance of what they had until it was too late.

We have an inheritance in Jesus Christ. And it is worth far more than a rare picture. According to Scripture, those who belong to Jesus are set to inherit the entire world. To reign with Jesus over his new creation forever (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 22:3-5). We have a glorious inheritance waiting for us in the end. And yet it's surprisingly easy to neglect it. To get distracted with the worries or opportunities of the present. To lose sight of its value. To allow ourselves to be satisfied with lesser things. Eventually to forget that it even exists, or willingly leave it behind because the cost of holding onto it seems too much. It doesn't seem worth it.

These were some of the pressures facing the church to whom the book of Hebrews was written. The pressure to drift from the gospel of Christ (2:1), to give up or fail to hold fast to their confession of faith (e.g., 4:1, 11; 4:14; 6:11-12). As he puts in ch. 2:3, the temptation to neglect the great salvation we have in Christ, our inheritance (cf. 1:14; 13:14).

And so the author has made it his goal to convince us in every way of the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the great salvation we have in him. In his introduction he persuaded us that Jesus is better than the prophets of the Old Testament, since he is the full and final revelation of God's

¹ "[Billy the Kid: The New Evidence](#)," *National Geographic*, Oct. 2015.

² For that detail, as well as current discussion on the authenticity of the photo, see Mark Boardman, "[The Croquet Kid](#)," *True West*, Jan. 26, 2016.

salvation (1:1-4). Then last week we saw how Jesus is superior to all angelic messengers, which makes his message of salvation all the more urgent (1:5–2:4).

Our passage this morning actually expands on that same topic, the superiority of Jesus and his message of salvation over the angels and the Old Covenant message they delivered (2:2; cf. Gal. 3:19; Acts 7:53). Notice how he mentions angels again in verses 5, 7, 9, and 16, and how he’s still talking about salvation in 2:5 (“the world to come”) and 2:10 (Jesus is the “founder of our salvation”)—the same salvation we are to inherit according to 1:14, the great salvation he warns us not to neglect in 2:3.

So the author continues to make a case for the superiority of Jesus over angels, and therefore the superiority of his message of salvation over their message of the Old Covenant. But the way he makes his case in these verses is different. In ch. 1 he showed how Jesus was better by *contrasting* him with angels (e.g., Jesus is the Messiah, the angels are not; Jesus is creator and king, angels are created servants), but here he shows his supremacy over angels by *connecting* Jesus to us. By showing that because of our brotherhood with Christ—the family bond we have in our shared humanity, something we don’t share with angels—and because of what Christ has done to secure our inheritance as our brother (to bring many sons to glory through his suffering, v. 10)—we must pay much closer attention to him and his message, lest we neglect our inheritance. We can summarize the main point like this: *Jesus is the better brother who brings us to glory by sharing our humanity and suffering for our sin.*

So how does he make this case? He starts in vv. 5-9 by reminding us who the rightful heirs of salvation are, and what kind of inheritance we have to look forward to. In other words, he tells us what’s waiting in the storage unit and who it belongs to.

The Salvation We Are to Inherit (2:5-9)

His first point: it’s not for angels. Verse 5: “Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.” The salvation we are to inherit (1:14), the great salvation we cannot neglect (2:3), “the world to come” as he puts it here—the heavenly kingdom waiting in the end—this is not something angels will rule over. It’s meant for humanity. Humans are the rightful heirs of the world to come, the ones who will reign with God and Christ over his new creation for all eternity (cf. Rev. 22:3-5). And the evidence for this comes from God’s original design for creation, which the author describes by quoting Psalm 8.

It has been testified somewhere, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.” (Heb. 2:6-8; citing Psalm 8:4-6)

God’s design in the beginning, clear back in Genesis 1, and as celebrated in Psalm 8, was to display his greatest glory not through the heavens above (as we might assume, given the majesty and magnitude of the universe, cf. Ps. 8:3), but through *humanity made in his image*, whom he made a little lower than the angels, and whom he called to rule creation on his behalf. In Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”

So God's original intention was for his creation to be ruled, under him, by people made in his image—by humans. And if that was his original intention, then it follows pretty clearly that this is also his ultimate intention. That's the point Hebrews is making—that the world to come, the completion of his salvation and kingdom—the *inheritance*—will be in subjection not to angels, but to humans, the rightful *heirs*. “Now in putting everything in subjection to him [to humanity], he left nothing outside his control” (2:8).

But there's a problem. This was God's design, this is God's ultimate goal, but it is *not* our present reality. Middle of v. 8: “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him”—to Adam, humanity. We see signs that that inheritance has begun; the signs and wonders and various miracles talked about in v. 4 are all indications that the age to come has broken into the present, in part. But it is not yet here in full. Creation is not in subjection to us. Rather this world is a mess. And we're a mess in it. We don't rule the world on God's behalf, according to his standards, for the sake of his glory. We make everything about us. Nor do we perfectly reflect the image of God anymore. Just look at your neighbor: your neighbor was made in the image of God with inherent dignity and value. But does your neighbor perfectly display God's glory and honor? When you look at them, do you see a perfect reflection of God's holiness and majesty, his righteousness and love and mercy? No offense to your neighbor, but *no!* None of us do. Because we've all been stained by sin. By our rebellion against God. And that sin not only distorts God's image in us and dulls our hearts and destroys relationships and decays this very world we are supposed to rule and inherit; that sin *separates us from God*. Through our rebellion we forfeit our relationship with him, and with it, our inheritance. It's like a royal son, a prince, who's tired of waiting for his father to die so he can become king, and instead attempts to just steal his throne. Not only does he destroy his relationship with his father, not only does he now forfeit his inheritance (he's not getting the kingdom now!), he has committed high treason against the king and brought upon himself the sentence of death. That's us before God! That's the story of fallen humanity.

And so of course we don't see this world under subjection to people. We don't see the glory of our inheritance realized and enjoyed. Not while *sin and death* remain a problem.

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

The inheritance that humanity forfeited through sin—that we forfeit through sin—is not lost, because there is one human crowned with glory and honor—one brother who shares our status below the angels and who has been found faithful before the Father to receive his glorious crown. But the glory he receives comes not only from his faithfulness, his moral perfection, but as v. 9 emphasizes, from his *suffering*. He was “crowned with glory and honor *because* of the suffering of death, *so that* by the grace of God he might *taste death for everyone*.” Jesus did this for us. He deals with the very problem that keeps us from receiving and enjoying our inheritance—sin and death. In fact he's the only one qualified to deal with it. And that's what the author explains in vv. 10-18—the brother who secures our inheritance.

The Brother Who Secures our Inheritance (2:10-18)

When you think about it, it's not even remotely fair that Jesus suffers. He didn't do anything wrong. In fact, he's the only person in history who can actually say that. He doesn't deserve to suffer. But he was crowned with glory and honor *because* he suffered (v. 9). Or as v. 10 puts it, "For it was *fitting* that he [God], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation [Jesus] perfect through suffering."

So why is it so fitting or appropriate, so necessary for Jesus not just to suffer, but to be *perfected* by suffering—to receive his glory through it? According to v. 11, it's because of his connection to us—the brotherhood between humanity and Christ, the family bond between the heirs of salvation and the founder of salvation, the common origin between those sanctified and the one who sanctifies. Verse 11: "For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin." We're part of the same family. "That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers . . ." And again, the author quotes several Old Testament passages to illustrate Christ's connection to humans, to people—a connection the angels can't claim. He puts the words of Psalm 22 on Jesus' lips (which is fitting, as that's the same Psalm Jesus quotes from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matt. 27:46; cf. Ps. 22:1): "saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise'" (v. 12, cf. Ps. 22:22). And then from Isaiah 8, v. 13: "And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Behold, I and the children God has given me'" (v. 13, cf. Isa. 8:17-18). Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.

This is the great mystery of the incarnation—that Jesus shares our humanity. In ch. 1, the author emphasized Jesus' divinity to show how he was better than angels; now he emphasizes his humanity to make the same point. The eternal Son of God had to become like us in order to save us. The Creator stepped into his creation; the truly divine took true humanity into his divinity—fully God and fully human at the same time—so that, as v. 10 puts it, he could "bring many sons to glory." He became like us in order to save us, to secure our great inheritance.

And this mystery is so great that the author continues to try and unpack it for us in vv. 14-18. And as he does so, listen to how he emphasizes two points: the necessity of Christ sharing our humanity, and the necessity of him suffering for our sin. Both had to happen for him to secure our inheritance and bring us to glory. Verse 14:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things [he shares our humanity], that through death [suffering for our sin] he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps [they're not the heirs of salvation], but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect [sharing our humanity], so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people [suffering for our sin]. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (2:14-18)

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And only Jesus is qualified to do this. Because only someone truly like us can truly represent us and stand in our place before God. If he's not like us in every way, he can't really be a substitute. We kind of throw that word around loosely today—the word 'substitute.' You substitute applesauce for vegetable when baking a cake—try and reduce the cholesterol. But if we're honest, that's just a really good way to ruin a cake. Or we have all sorts of sugar substitutes today. But if you've ever compared *Sweet 'n Low* or *Splenda* or *Equal* or whatever, to *real* sugar—you know that's not a substitute. That's a sham. They don't taste anything alike! For something to truly count as a substitute, it has to be of *like kind*—just like the original. Otherwise it doesn't count.

And so Jesus shares our humanity. He's no cheap substitute; he's the truest human that ever lived. The only one who perfectly reflected the image of God. He didn't just appear as a human; he *became* human. Even to the point of truly experiencing temptation and suffering.

And because he shares our humanity, he is able both to *represent* us before God as our high priest, and to *replace* us before God as a substitutionary sacrifice to bear his wrath against sin. He tasted death for everyone. He dies in our place, as a *propitiation* for our sin—a sacrifice that bears God's holy anger against our sin and completely exhausts it.

Which means, only Jesus is able to help us. He's the better brother. The brother who is able to secure the inheritance that we forfeited by paying the debt we owed. He's the one member of our family who never forgot the true value of what was waiting for us in the storage unit, and when we long ago turned our attention elsewhere and stopped paying the rent and forfeited our right to whatever was inside, our brother shows up, slaps down the money, pays the debt, and secures the inheritance *in order to share it with us*. He kicks down death's door, disarms the devil of his greatest weapon, unlocks our chains of fear, and sets us free.

And it's not because we deserved it. It's not because we still have right to that inheritance; we forfeited our right through sin. He shares it with us by his *grace*. Because he wants to bring *many* sons to glory; he wants to redeem a people who will one day receive that crown of glory and honor and share in his righteous rule. Who will give glory to God as he intended from the beginning.

He does it by his grace. Out of his own mercy and kindness. By the *grace of God* he tasted death for everyone (v. 9). And grace is not like declaring bankruptcy, where your past debts are erased and you're set back to zero, and you can now either build a positive balance or start racking up debt again. No—when we trust Jesus as our Savior and King, by his grace he *breaks* the slate.³ He destroys it. Because his death is so sufficient, and his life so worthy, that he has paid our debt a million times over. If we belong to Christ, he erases our debt forever, and then deposits an infinite inheritance in a secured account that no one can ever remove our name from. Because it's signed with God's own hand, and no one can erase that.

So why would we ever neglect that? If this is what Christ has done for us, why would we ever want to live as though we have to earn it ourselves? And why would we ever settle for a lesser prize? It's like forfeiting a billion dollars because someone promises us a shiny nickel.

³ This illustration comes from Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991, 2008), 20.

And if we neglect this great salvation, how shall we escape? (2:3). There's nowhere else to turn. Apart from Christ we are dead in our sins, and we look forward to death as our inheritance. That's it—that's the best we can do. As it's been said before, without Jesus, this life, in all its pain and sorrow and fleeting pleasure, is as close to heaven as you'll ever experience. In Christ, this life is as close to hell as you'll ever experience. It only gets better from here.

So may we cling to Jesus. May we keep our eye on the prize that he has already secured for us, and may we depend on him in the meantime when we're tempted to look elsewhere or settle for lesser things.

He knows what that's like—that temptation. The draw of the world, the lure of escape. Think of his temptation in the wilderness, when the devil offered him a kingdom without a cross. He could have received the inheritance without shedding his blood! But he knew the will of the Father, and he chose to obey. He knows what it's like to endure suffering in the present for the future joy set before him (12:2). As ch. 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." He knows what we're going through while we fight sin and wait for our inheritance. But he also has the power to overcome. He was tempted but without sin. And "because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (2:18). Our prize is secure and his power is present.

So may we trust in him. May we not neglect such a great salvation. Because Jesus doesn't neglect us. He's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. He is our better brother, who brings us to glory by sharing our humanity and suffering for our sin.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions for Study and Understanding

1. What similarities do you see between this passage and the previous one (1:4–2:5)? How does the previous passage provide context for this text?
2. What does the author seem to be emphasizing in 2:5-18 (for clues, look at things like structure, repetition, etc.)?
3. What point is the author trying to make in 2:5-9? How does his quote of Psalm 8 help shed light on that?
4. Based on the portrait in 2:10-18, describe the relationship between Jesus and humanity.
5. Why was it so necessary for Jesus to share our humanity? What would be lost if he didn't?
6. Why was it so necessary for Jesus to suffer for our sins? What would be lost if he didn't?

Questions for Reflection and Application

7. For many Christians today, it's easy for us to think about our relationship with Jesus with respect to his deity. It's less common to think about our relationship with Jesus with respect

to his humanity—the fact that he is our brother. How does our shared humanity impact your view of or interaction with Christ?

8. Verse 17 tells us Jesus gave himself as a “propitiation” for our sins—a sacrifice of atonement that exhausts God’s holy anger against our sin. How should this glorious truth shape our lives in everyday terms?
9. If you truly believe that you have the kind of inheritance described in vv. 5-9, secured for you by the kind of brother described in vv. 10-18, in what ways should your life look different?