

Christ's Supreme Kingdom

Hebrews 2:5-9

Last week we studied the supreme salvation of Jesus Christ and the warnings not to let anything cause us to drift away from it. Basically, chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2 focus on the supreme exaltation of God's Son, but now we will begin to turn our attention for the rest of chapter 2 to the Incarnation of God's Son, and what that accomplished for His people.

Story about climbing one of the 14'rs of Colorado in college. First time I had ever climbed such a tall mountain, snowshoeing up for the first half, steep ascent to the very top the second half. Hard to keep focus at times, only focusing on my feet in from of the other, not wearing great cold weather clothes, super long hike. What helped was to keep the summit in my view, so I knew where I was going, and could see the end in sight. At the top, I could see for SO FAR! It was beautiful, breathtaking, otherworldly.

This is the main point of this next section of Hebrews 2:

We must keep our focus on the Kingdom Jesus Christ inaugurated by His Incarnation, and secured for us in His death.

Hebrews 2:5-9

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 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.*

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we 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.

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD:

THANKS BE TO GOD

I. Future Kingdom

The Writer now circles back to the discussion and thought flow he started back in chapter 1, where he was comparing the supremacy of Christ over the angels. Hebrews 2:1-4 is a parenthetical thought, expanding on the salvation God's people will be inheriting and warning about not neglecting such a great salvation.

Now the Writer returns to the previous topic, while at the same time also speaking more to the salvation we will inherit. He directs the reader's attention to the promise of a coming world, which is included in the inheriting of salvation. We all know that there is something after this life, a life after death. Virtually every religion in the world has some version of this, including Christianity. We all know that there is meaning and purpose to life, including death, which has a meaning and purpose as well. And if there is meaning and purpose in this life, and death has a purpose, it is for the purpose of crossing over into the next world... don't want to do comparative religious studies... keep to the Biblical understanding and imagining of the coming world.

However, the world the Writer is eluding to is not some vague idea of a life after death, nor is it just a hope that there is something after this life. But the phrase is anchored in a rich tapestry of successive revelation of God to His people throughout history. So what is this world to come? It is the world of salvation, or the world which is post-Second coming. It is a specific and particular world which is intended to give God's people hope and inspiration in the present time...

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. – 2 Peter 3:13

Promise

This was promised in various ways and at different times throughout the OT, especially by many of the prophets. The promise of the new heavens and new earth to God's children was given as a means to encourage them to keep going in the midst of difficult circumstances, and to remind them that the nations and governors of the world are not the final rulers of cosmic history, but the person of the LORD Himself

Protoevangelion

Genesis 3: promise that the strife between God's people and the world would cease by the Seed of the woman

Genesis 12: promise that the Seed would come from Abraham's line and would include all the nations of the world

Genesis 49: promise that one from the tribe of Judah would reign over the nations forever (fulfilled in Revelation 5)

2 Samuel 7: promise that the reign of the Great King would have no end, and the kingdom would be a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy

Picture

This new heaven and new earth is not just promised without any inkling of what it is like. God at different times would give clear glimpses into the kind of world to come.

*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD. – **Isaiah 65:17-25***

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Also he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. – **Revelation 21:1-5***

Putting these back to back passages, we get a very clear idea of what this coming world will be: the wonder and glory of the new will cause the blemishes and bad memories of the old to fade away. There is joy and gladness. Us in God, God in us. No more crying, nor pain. Neither shall there be death. All our labors will yield good fruit, which we shall be able to fully enjoy as we are created to do. There shall be full contentment, no envy or covetousness. Immediate relationship with God. Physical peace. Holiness.

This is a wonderful description of the New Earth which will be established in glory when Christ comes to finally consummate His eternal reign, with us as His co-regents in bodily form. What will happen?

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a

word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Jesus is the eschatological image of what we are to become. Jesus is in a physical body, eats, drinks, laughs, and lives in a physical body, yet it cannot be killed or experience death ever again! This is the image of what our own resurrected bodies will be in the world to come

We must remember that heaven is not our forever home, but the new earth in our resurrected bodies is our forever home.

What happens when we die before that day?

The soul after the death of the body will have rest, and will at length receive the body into glory.
– **Augustine of Hippo**

The souls of the saints, divested of their bodies, still stand in the courts of the Lord, admitted to rest but not yet to glory. Into that most blessed abode they shall neither enter without us, nor without their own bodies. – Bernard of Clairvaux

Why am I spending some time detailing this out?

We must have a clear understanding of how events in the future will play out because it impacts how we live out our faith today. The simplicity of God's plan frees us up to live for Him to the fullest here and now. When we get too wrapped up in the end times stuff, we lose our focus for what God has called us to in the first place, which is to be witnesses of His truth and power in the world today, and to be His ambassadors bringing the reconciliation that is offered in His Son.

II. Present Kingdom

Obviously we are not in this place now, but we experience suffering and hardship here and now. What is going on with that?

Original Intention

Psalm 8

Writer anchors human history with the original intention of mankind.

Psalm of David as he considers the creation itself, how wonderful it is that God cares for humanity at all! Think of camping and looking at the stars and gazing in wonder.

And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. – **Genesis 1:28-29**

Cultural mandate: to get married, have lots of babies, spread across the face of the earth, be good stewards of the earth for God's glory, reflecting Him to the world He created.

Fallen Reality

However, we know the story, that our first parents failed in the mandate that God gave to us, and ever since then things have not gone well. We are striving against one another, we strive against the animal world, we strive against the planet itself. We have made a mess of things for sure (I mean, there is snow in Houston, TX for crying out loud!) Creation is going crazy due to our failure to care for the earth.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

– **Romans 8:18-23**

Notice again the full adoption as children is tied to the full glorification of the final resurrection. It is here that the creation will be set free from its bondage corruption, and experience the same kind of freedom that comes in the final glorification of the children of God!

Yet, though we do not see *everything* in subjection to Christ, we can and do experience *some* of His benevolent rule and reign by His Spirit in the Church.

Not only is there a tension with not seeing His benevolent rule here and now with our governing authorities, but also in our own hearts. We must submit to Christ's rule and reign in our hearts with ever increasing authority. Outward change requires inward submission and acquiescence.

Where in your life are you not submitting to Christ's gracious and benevolent rule? Where are you still living as your own authority? Where do you feel the strain of your fallenness? Let us turn our eyes to Jesus now and see how He redeems us.

III. Redeemed Kingdom

The Writer moves into a final discussion about how Jesus is the true fullness of humanity, and links the fulfillment of Genesis 1, Psalm 8 with the Son of God. The Writer is beginning now to focus on the importance of the Incarnation of the Son and what was accomplished in it. Remember how the Writer

begins the letter by teaching on the Deity of God the Son, now he is turning his attention to the Incarnation of the Son as man. The Kingdom is redeemed through the Incarnation of God the Son and specifically through the death of God the Son.

There are two ways that the Incarnation of Jesus is important for us:

Jesus as New Adam

True fullness of humanity. Even though Adam is not specifically mentioned, the connection to Psalm 8 and Genesis 1 is extremely strong. The readers would not have missed the allusion to Adam's failure as the federal head of humanity, and now the Writer is seeking to emphasize the victory of the Second Adam.

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. – **Romans 5:12-17***

Paul is comparing the first Adam with the Last Adam. Both are representatives of humankind. The first Adam caused the whole human race to fall into sin and the power of death. The Last Adam secured justification and God's grace for all who would receive it by faith.

Jesus succeeded where Adam failed. It is good that we have a representative, for just as the first Adam's failure was my failure, so too is the Last Adam's victory my victory. However, the victory is not like the failure, in that it must be received by faith. There is a limit to who is justified, and the limitation is faith in the New Adam.

Important to remember Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness. Where first Adam failed to protect and keep the garden, including his wife, the Last Adam succeeded in saying NO to Satan and YES to trusting God. Jesus' life begins to undo all the wrong things that had gotten in to the world due to our sin. Jesus' life continues to undo all the bad and wrong things we do and have done, and have done to us, in our lives.

Jesus was fully man, this is why the Writer says that He was made a little lower than the angels, just like His brothers and sisters: us. His deity was veiled for a time while He was on earth as man, and was only peeled back at the resurrection when the Father declared that all His angels should worship Him.

*though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. – **Philippians 2:6-7***

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – **John 1:14***

Jesus as Forerunner

Going ahead into death in order to remove the fear of death for all God's people. This is why He was crowned with glory and honor, because He humbly, obediently, lovingly, drank down the bitter poison of death, so that He might give life to all His elect.

You want to see the glory of God? Look at the cross! See the Son of Man crucified in my place, in love taking my place so that I might receive His love and know forgiveness and grace.

Jesus had to live and experience all that humankind does so that He might be a fit and acceptable representative of humanity in order to set us free from the penalty and power of sin.

It is God's grace that Jesus tasted death for us

*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done. And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. – **Luke 22:42-44***

He tasted the fear that we all face

Christ at the Mount of Olives, praying to have the cup of death and God's wrath be taken away from Him, but in the end He submitted to His Father's will.

He tasted the sorrows we all feel

He tasted the anguish we all experience

He sweat drops of blood

He tasted the loss we face

He lost the Father

We will see this in greater detail next week, but God's grace for sinners that Christ died is that we receive the gracious declaration of our redemption, and we have a perfect High Priest who can perfectly sympathize with us in our trials and distresses.

It is God's grace that Jesus Christ died, it is this which acts as the substitutionary atonement for sin. This is what justifies us in the sight of God the Judge, and what gives us hope for when we must cross

that Jordan River of death and join with our Big Brother in the Celestial City one day. He drank the bitter poison of death, so that when we drink it, it may not be bitter, but become sweet to our souls as we live eternally in the presence of our gracious God and King, our Savior, Lord, and Lover of our souls forever!

Lord's Supper

Here at the table we get a foretaste of the celebration that will happen on the New Earth when Jesus comes again. As He told His disciple the night that He died, He would not drink of the fruit of the vine again until He drinks it with us in His kingdom. Here and now we remember His death and wait with great expectation His coming again to consummate His forever Kingdom. The bitter sweetness of the wine reminds us of the bitter poison of death which Christ drank on our behalf, so that while it may be bitter to our taste now, it brings a sweetness to our souls when we remember that our sins are washed away. May we today eat and drink in gladness and gratitude for all that Christ is and has done for us!