

21 September 2008

A Man on the Throne of the Universe

Hebrews 2:5-18

There is a real irony to the human situation. Mankind, at its best, is amazing to say the least. Don't you sometimes find yourself astonished at science and technology? About three months ago, in the spectacular and meticulously coordinated Phoenix space mission, we landed a craft on Mars and soon began remotely investigating the surface of the planet and relaying pictures back to earth.

We have discovered the amazing capacity of the microchip. Do you remember how proud you were of your amazing Commodore 64 computer? I can recall a member of my first church, who ran Shell and BP's computer services, giving me a tour of the facility that housed those huge mainframe computers. We have come a long, long way in a few decades. We can probably accomplish a whole lot more with a laptop today than we could with an acre of mainframes forty years ago.

Towards the end of last week, we may just have survived the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression, thanks to the timely intervention of a number of bi-partisan financial experts, who applied themselves to the crisis. Time will tell, but when the chips are down, mankind seems to come up trumps.

We have harnessed the energy of the atom. My son-in-law works at a nuclear power station. He showed Ruth and me around shortly before he asked for our daughter's hand in marriage. I was fascinated by the prodigious power of nuclear fission and the intricacy of the process required to unleash that energy.

But, *ironically, we have created an explosive situation.* Hiroshima and Nagasaki are stark reminders of the destructive force of nuclear power. We now have the ability of "overkill" and are capable of destroying life on earth hundreds of times over. We speak of dirty bombs and clean bombs. Clean bombs are bombs that destroy people with minimal destruction to property. How sick is that? We use the capacity of the mighty microchip to advantage, but we have invented new bugs and viruses and worms and increased our capacity for crime. We have hopefully averted the worst financial crisis of all time, but the greed and exploitation that helped to cause it continues unabated. We spend trillions of dollars on technological advances and space exploration. We can land a craft on Mars, but we seem unable or unwilling to deal with human poverty and starvation on Earth.

This is the human family of which we are a part! There is something indomitable about the human spirit. We cannot keep off the highest mountain, but neither can we stay out of the deepest pit. Clearly *something* is wrong! But what is it? Is it simply part of the human condition as we evolve towards better things? Or have we gone off track somewhere?

It is precisely this problem that our passage addresses. In fact, we could say that this passage is "God's plan for mankind in microcosm." So let's see the picture under three main headings:

- Here's what we **don't** see;
- Here's what we **do** see, and
- Here's what we **shall** see.

I. **First of all, HERE'S WHAT WE DON'T SEE**

A. **HEB 2:5-8.**

It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6 But there is a place where someone has testified:

"What are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"

7 You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honour

8 and put everything under their feet."

*In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. **Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them.***

B. **Vice-regent.**

We were accorded the privilege to exercise dominion on his behalf and, of course, under his authority.

C. **The Fall**

At the beginning of the Bible we read about the fall of mankind.

1. Interpretations

Some understand it in very literal terms. They even have the forbidden fruit Eve ate as an apple and the Hebrew-speaking serpent as a cobra. Others accept that God has provided us with a symbolically valid picture of the fact that he created us in his own image and gave us the unique gift of free will. Whether we read it literally or symbolically, the point is just this: God did not create us as

automatons. We are free moral agents. That means that it was possible for us to choose to go against him.

C S Lewis puts it very well. He comments: "If you choose to say, "God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it, you have not succeeded in saying anything about God. Nonsense remains nonsense, even when we speak it about God."

2. The Essential Point

The world as it is now is not the world as God intended it to be. And especially, we are not what God intended us to be.

3. The Fall

We cannot dispense with the Bible's teaching on the Fall. Nothing else in the Bible makes real sense without it. If we removed the first three chapters of Genesis, we would have to invent an explanation for the human condition. The point is: Something went horribly wrong. God's grand plan for mankind got derailed.

4. God's "Response"

Let me suggest that God could have responded in one of at least four ways.

- He could have said: "I will turn back the clock and make as though this never happened." Theoretically God could have said, "Let's remove both creation and the fall from the record."

Have you ever had one of those days when you wish you could have started all over? I need to tell you that my colleagues and I have a serious difference of opinion. For some reason, they think I am a dangerous driver. I regard myself as an *adventurous* driver. What's wrong with a creative and legitimate U-turn or an imaginative lane correction every now and again? I mentioned to them the other day that I had never had an accident. I forgot. I was involved in one about forty years ago, and it was not my fault. But I can remember the awful feeling as I surveyed the damage. I thought to myself: "If only I had taken a different route! I wish I could turn back the clock!"

Hypothetically, God could have wished it out of existence, but that's not his way. It would make a mockery of creation and of existence itself. *That's not how he operates!*

- He could have said: “Let justice take its course. It’s not my problem. I was perfectly clear. I gave adequate warning. I provided every incentive for obedience. It is a pity it didn’t work out, but I cannot take responsibility for that over which I chose not to exercise control. Mankind will have to bear the consequences of disobedience.” *But that’s not how he operates.*
- He could have said: “I will have to go to Plan B. Plan A did not work, so here’s what Plan B will be: Mankind has forfeited the right to be my vice-regent. I will settle for a more modest goal. Yes, in a sense mankind will be sub-human. My gracious intention for humanity cannot be realized. I can live with that.” *But **that** is not how he operates.*
- OR he could do the unthinkable. He could say: “I will restore mankind to the position I originally intended. Actually I will do more than that. I will bring good out of bad. And here’s how I will do it:

I will myself become human.
 And, as a human being, I will do what mankind would not do.
 I will surrender the prerogatives of my divinity.
 As man, I will live in obedience to the Father.
 I will feel fatigue.
 I will experience heartache, loneliness, and rejection.
 I will face temptation.
 I will deal with the devil.
 I will taste death.”

*As Paul says: “Who being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
 but made himself nothing,
 taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself and became obedient to death—
 even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8).*

“In doing this, I will lift fallen humanity back to the position of honour and responsibility for which I created them. Indeed, I will do so in such a way that they will have more at the end than they had at the beginning.”

D. So, **here is what our passage tells us:**

1. God did not subject the world to come to angels, but to mankind (Ps 8). We are the crown of his creation.
2. The Psalm says he put everything under us. And everything means everything.
3. That's not what we see now. We see a world that is full of natural and moral ambiguity.

II. But HERE IS WHAT WE DO SEE

A. HEB 2:9

9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

B. We have a human problem and it calls for a “human” solution

So, no sooner has mankind sinned than God promises that his salvation will come through a member of the human race (Gen 3:15). Here's the picture. Through Isaiah, God promises that his salvation will come through a single person. *“The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Isa 7:14). For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders” (Isa 9:6).*

C. And so, the Writer wants us to know that there is a man on the throne of the universe.

1. He has already told us in chapter 1:3 that *“After he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”*
2. This is exactly what Peter said in the church's first sermon: *“Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit . . . Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:33-36).*

3. Let's complete Paul's Philippians quote:

"Therefore God has exalted him to the highest place and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11).

4. The rest of the chapter underlines the importance of Jesus' humanity. More about that later.

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷For this reason he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

I shall simply mention the following:

- He is at the Father's right hand as our pioneer and representative.
- In view of the role he would play, it was appropriate that he entered into our suffering.
- At the crucial point in human history, he took our place and made full atonement for sin
- In doing so, he dealt the death blow to the devil, sealing his fate, and limiting his power.
- Right now, he is able to understand every trial and hardship we face.

He understands *fully*, not only with the comprehensive knowledge of omniscience, but also with the compassionate knowledge of experience.

I shall not take long on the third heading. **Here's what we don't see** (Mankind does not occupy the position God intended for us. **Here's what we do see.** (There is a man on the throne of the universe).

III. And HERE'S WHAT WE SHALL SEE

- A. It is clear from this passage that **God's intention is that we should be restored** to our position as God's vice regents in "the world to come." He came not only to save us from our sin but also, in the words of this passage, to bring "many sons and daughters to glory."

- B. Jesus has gone ahead of us as **the pioneer of our salvation.** God's Word declares that "*if we endure, we will also reign with him*" (2 Tim 2:12). Indeed, Paul tells us that as God's children, "*we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory*" (Rom 8:17).

Conclusion

So, we have a tragic past, but we have a glorious future, and a significant present. Your sins have been paid for in full. God has revealed his attitude to you right now. His love hasn't changed. The same love that caused the eternal Son of God to become human is extended toward us today. And we have a High Priest who understands fully how tough it can be to be human.

I may be speaking to someone who is experiencing the heat of the battle right now. It could be opposition from the outside or battling with contrary emotions from the inside.

I don't know about you, but when I think of the lengths to which God has gone to save us and the future he has in store for us, I want my life here and now in full and glad surrender to him.