



July 16, 2023

"Jesus: Crowned with Glory and Honour"

Sermon – Rod Harding

Deuteronomy 33:1-5

Matthew 22: 41-46

Hebrews 2:1-18

Pay attention! How many times did you hear your teacher say that when you were at school, either to the whole class, or maybe just to you? Or if you are, or have been, a teacher (as I once was), how many times have you said it?

When those words are spoken, they usually mean that what is being said is important – it's significant enough that everyone needs to listen well, because those who don't will not be able to follow the instructions or complete the project or understand the principles – and they will be the poorer for missing out. It's possible that those who do pay attention will gain an advantage or learn something that will make a difference to their understanding, and possibly even equip them more meaningfully for whatever is about to happen next. So when you hear those words, it's usually a good idea to sit up and take notice – it always helps to pay attention.

Today's passage, Hebrews chapter 2, begins with these words –

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. (v.1)

The sentence contains both a challenge and a warning – clearly '*what we have heard*' is important enough to highlight and to properly understand, before we can move on – that's the challenge – and if we do move on without fully grasping '*what we have heard*', then we might be susceptible to '*drifting away*' – and that is the warning!

The sentence also contains the word '*therefore*' – and whenever that occurs, it always points backwards to what has just been said – on the basis of what you have just heard, '*therefore*' pay attention. While the author goes on immediately to summarise what has been said,

it will help us to briefly look back to what we skipped over last week, when we focused only on the first three verses of chapter 1.

Chapter 1:4 says,

So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

– and the rest of the chapter goes on to show beyond doubt why that is so, quoting from the Old Testament scriptures – mostly from the Psalms – 2, 104, 45, 102, 110 – all instantly identifiable to his original readers. Having established beyond question that Jesus is superior to the angels, the writer concludes his argument with verse 14 –

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

This statement finally explains the difference between Jesus and the angels – the angels are the ministering spirits, Jesus is the one who brings salvation – or ‘*purification for sins*’ (1:3) as we saw last week.

But there is a bigger point to this focus on angels, as we’ll now see. The writer goes on to say,

The message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment... (v.2)

‘*The message spoken through angels*’ is a reference to the giving of the law on Mt Sinai – as we read in Deuteronomy 33,

The Lord came from Sinai ... with myriads of holy ones from the south ... at your feet they all bow down, and from you receive instruction, the law that Moses gave us.

The ‘*myriads of holy ones*’ were angels, and the Jews clearly believed that the giving of the law to Moses was accompanied by angelic ministrations – Stephen, in his speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7) accuses the Jews of murdering Jesus with these words,

“... now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.” (vs 52-53)

Again, Paul notes in Galatians, *‘The law was given through angels ...’* (3:19), confirming this belief, even though it may seem strange to us, because we’ve seen the movie (and if you haven’t, it’s on at the end of the month) – The Ten Commandments – and though it’s a long time since I’ve seen it, I don’t remember angels being present.

But the point being made here by the writer to Hebrews is that this *‘message’*, delivered by angels, *‘was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment...’* (v.2) Not only was it important enough to require angelic delivery, it also carried severe implications for ignorance or disobedience – implications under which the people of God had lived for centuries, experiencing the good times when they remembered and obeyed the law, but also many bad times as a result of ignoring and disobeying it.

And this *‘message spoken through angels’*, important though it was, has now been superseded by the Son, already shown to be superior to the angels in every way, and the one through whom we *‘inherit salvation’* (1:14). We read here at the beginning of chapter 2, that it was Jesus himself who first announced this salvation (*‘The time has come – the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.’* – Mark 1:15) and it had been passed on to the current author by those who heard him. And...

God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.’ (v.4)

The Gospels and Acts abound in testimony to the veracity and the efficacy of this message of salvation, as miraculous events became almost commonplace and the gifts of the Spirit were seen to be widely distributed amongst the followers of Jesus, who preached and taught this message of salvation, across the civilised world, with many people responding to the gospel of the Son.

Once again, the writer returns to the comparison with Jesus and the angels –quoting this time from Psalm 8:4-6, which he doesn’t actually identify because, given his expected readership, he knew he wouldn’t need to – and it’s not the only time he does this in this letter. So (he says) *‘there is a place where someone has testified,’* (v.6) –

and then repeats these verses from the Psalm. The thrust of his understanding of the Psalm is that, although God made humans to be ‘*a little lower than the angels*’, such is his intent for humanity that he then ‘*crowned them with glory and honour and put everything under their feet.*’ (vs 7-8). This reflects the Genesis accounts of creation, where God tells the humans, ‘*fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*’ (Gen 1:28). However, the author correctly observes that ‘*at present we do not see everything subject to them.*’ (v.8)

So Psalm 8 must have some other meaning, some alternative point of reference, for his argument – and it is immediately made clear. ‘*But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour ...*’ (v.9) Here is the turning point of the first two chapters, and the reason why the author has gone to such pains to show the superiority of Jesus over the angels – because the point he is making is that it is Jesus, and Jesus alone, who properly and fully fulfils the messianic significance of this Psalm. It is Jesus, the one true Man, who so often referred to himself as the ‘*Son of man*’ (the term used in the Psalm) who has had everything put under his feet – he alone (as we saw last week) is both the beginning and the end of all creation, the One in whom all things find their fulfilment – the King in God’s kingdom (though the writer to the Hebrews doesn’t use that expression).

But it is significant to note how the writer describes the way in which Jesus has become the ultimate fulfilment of the messianic prediction of Psalm 8. He is, ‘*crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*’ (v.9) Clearly this is not a normal way to describe the rise to power, the victory in battle and the ultimate glory of a conquering king – he was ‘*crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death.*’ That seems more like defeat than victory! Surely, being crowned with glory and honour results from defeating the enemy, surviving against all odds, and returning victorious with all the spoils of the battle, receiving the crowning honour as the victory procession marches through the city streets, acclaimed by the adoring populace.

But wait a minute – do you see where this is going? Jesus actually did defeat the enemy – ‘*by his death he [broke] the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.*’ (v.14) Jesus did survive against all odds – he was alive again on the third day, his resurrection proving for all time that the power of death had been defeated. Jesus did bring with him the spoils of the battle – he was able to ‘*free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*’ (v.15) Jesus ‘*suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*’ (v.9)

This was always God’s plan – the result of his grace and mercy extended to all humanity – the only way it was possible to put everything right again, after the humans had gone so wrong. Jesus became fully human, identifying completely with all of us, so that as one of us, the only ever perfect one of us, he could suffer on our behalf, and ‘*taste death for everyone,*’ and so be crowned with glory and honour.

But it really wasn’t his own ‘*glory and honour*’ which was at stake for Jesus, important though that was – and is! Rather, it was about ‘*bringing many sons and daughters to glory*’ (v.10) as the writer goes on immediately to say. This was God’s plan for the salvation of the people he had made and with whom he had entered into a covenant relationship – but who had sadly broken the covenant, had ignored his pleading with them, his many communications through the prophets, his attempts to correct their wayward behaviour, and had consistently gone their own way, rejecting him as their Lord and God. Does that sound at all strangely familiar? Has anything about the sad state of humanity ever changed? There was every reason for God to have given up –but those words are not in his repertoire – God doesn’t give up and can never be untrue to himself or his promises.

That’s why it was so important for Jesus to not only be fully God, but also fully human – there was no other way to be able to stand alongside us as his people, and to bring us with him to glory.

Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. (v. 11)

The last section of this chapter goes to considerable lengths to ensure that we understand that Jesus has so fully identified himself as human, that he *'is not ashamed to call [us] brothers and sisters.'* (v.11)

The author, in verses 12-13, quotes from the Psalms (22:22) and Isaiah (8:17-18) to draw attention to these descriptions of family relationships – brothers, sisters, children – and once again affirms that not even angels are the recipients of such focus and love – *'surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.'* (v. 16) We are Abraham's descendants, we who were *'made ... a little lower than the angels,'* yet who now are *'brought to glory (v.7)* with Jesus, who became *'fully human 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.'* (v.17) We'll pick up another day on this matter of Jesus as our great high priest – suffice it now to say that through his full and perfect humanity, Jesus' sacrifice of himself pays the price for the ignorance, the disobedience and the human brokenness of every one of us, providing us with the promise of reconciliation and restoration with God our maker.

Have you been paying attention? Remember how we began this passage today?

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

A challenge – and a warning! Then the author asks, *'how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?'* (v.3) Today we have reflected on the nature of that *'great salvation'* – it is greater than the law given by angels; it fulfils the Old Testament ritual requirements; it was first announced by Jesus, then attested to by God's Spirit; it was ushered in through Jesus' sacrifice of himself, the one true man, who by his death and resurrection completed the role of the high priest, providing atonement for the rebellion of the people – and that, of course, includes us! There is nothing greater than the salvation offered through Jesus – yet *'drifting away'* can be so easy, if we do not persevere.

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Hebrews 2:1-18

2 *We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ² For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴ God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

⁵ *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 is mankind that you are mindful of them,
a son of man that you care for him?*

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. 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.

¹⁰ *In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says,*

*“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the assembly I will sing your praises.”*

¹³ *And again, “I will put my trust in him.”*

And again he says, “Here am I, and the children God has given me.”

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—¹⁵ and free those who all*

their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human 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. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Deuteronomy 33:1-5

33 *This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death. ² He said:*

*“The Lord came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir;
he shone forth from Mount Paran.*

*He came with myriads of holy ones from the south,
from his mountain slopes.*

*³ Surely it is you who love the people; all the holy ones are in your hand.
At your feet they all bow down, and from you receive instruction,*

⁴ the law that Moses gave us, the possession of the assembly of Jacob.

*⁵ He was king over Jeshurun when the leaders of the people assembled,
along with the tribes of Israel.*

Matthew 22:41-46

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

“The son of David,” they replied.

⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

⁴⁴ “‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’

⁴⁵ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.