

***Jesus the True Humanity***  
Sermon Series on Hebrews  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
February 19, 2017

**TEXT:** Hebrews 2:5-18

We continue this morning in our spring New Testament series on Hebrews, and we are



summoned again to fix our eyes upon Jesus. The last couple of Sundays, as we've begun this series, we have seen a towering, majestic portrait of Jesus, the Son of God, God's climactic Word to humanity in and about His Son. We saw that Jesus is the Heir of everything; that He is the Agent of creation; that He

is the radiance of God's glory and the One who is upholding the universe by His word of power. We saw that Jesus is the One who presents Himself as an offering to purify us and sits enthroned in heavenly glory. We saw last Sunday that Jesus is the One about whom God speaks repeatedly in His Word, passage after passage of Scripture, and this lofty, great picture of Jesus as Hebrews begins is now balanced in Hebrews 2 with the intimate picture of Jesus as the true humanity. In working through this passage this week, I came to this place where I thought I don't know if there's a more beautiful passage of Scripture than Hebrews 2. As Mike said at the very beginning of the service, when we fix our eyes on Jesus, we not only get Jesus, but we get ourselves. This morning's text is deep; it is rich, and I want to challenge you right from the beginning to stay with the writer of Hebrews, because he has a vision of who Christ is in the fullness of His humanity that will offer to us our very selves in the end.

We turn now to Hebrews to 2:5, and the writer begins and says:

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

Right at the beginning, there is a frame of reference that the Bible has that we have to remind ourselves about: the world to come. The Bible conceives of two worlds: this world and the world to come. There are many passages in Scripture that articulate this great transfer of the ages. Oftentimes this is expressed in the phrase, *the latter days*. Sometimes we see this as *in*

*the last day or in that day.* For example, Isaiah 2 uses this language when Isaiah looks out and sees that this world will be made into a new world. We must embrace this note of dissonance between what we see now and what will be. Isaiah says that something is going to happen in the latter days, and he describes it like this in Isaiah 2:2-3:

*“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’”*

All the nations will stream toward God with an earnest desire to know Him and walk in His ways. That is an amazing piece of hope. Park Street Church is one of the churches that I deeply respect, and I follow what they are doing. Recently they posted on Twitter a subtle reminder to the city of Boston that Tom Brady had invited the entire city to Park Street Church. I thought that was amazing. I looked at the video and there was Tom sitting on the float of the Super Bowl celebration, and he just shouted out: “Let’s go!” and as the camera panned, there was Park Street Church in the background. Isaiah says, though, that it is really going to happen. Hosea 3:5 describes it like this:

*“Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to His goodness in the latter days.”*

Isaiah 11:1 describes the new world, the coming world, as a world in which the Son of David will reign in righteousness and that all creation will be transformed. The Lord says in Isaiah 11:9:

*“They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”*

Do you long for that? The Bible longs for that. I don’t know about you, but I’m tired of violence, and I’m longing for that new world. The Lord says in Isaiah 11:10:

*“In that day the Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of Him shall the nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious.”*

Isaiah 12:1-4 says:

*“You will say in that day: ‘I will give thanks to You, O LORD, for though You were angry with me, Your anger turned away, that You might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation’. . . And you will say in that day: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted.’”*

The Bible envisions that there is a new world coming. There is this world and the world to come, and in Israel, around the time of Jesus, this expectation was crystallized around these

two expressions: this world, *ha-olam ha-zeh*, and the world to come, *ha-olam ha-ba*, in Hebrew. A teacher roughly contemporary with the time of Jesus, Rabbi Yaakov, said this:

*“A single moment of happiness in the World to Come is greater than all of the present world. This world is comparable to the antechamber before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the antechamber, so that you may enter the [King’s] banquet hall.”*

There is this world and the world to come. When you read the sources from Scripture and contemporaries of Jesus, you find much many writings that express the hope and longing for the world to come. In Hebrews 2:5, the writer of Hebrews says something that no one else is saying. Look closely. He says: “We are talking about the world to come. I’m talking about it.” As this passage unfolds, we will see that the conviction of Hebrews 2 is that this new world has in fact begun.

The writer turns our attention to the calling of humanity, because humanity plays a singularly important role in God’s world. The writer of Hebrews reflects on Psalm 8:4. He says it has been testified:

*“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”*

Those of us who know the Bible well will recognize this quotation from Psalm 8. Psalm 8 begins with celebration. It is a Psalm of David, and he says in Psalm 8:1:

*“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens.”*

The Lord is mighty and powerful and His works are amazing. When David looks up at the night sky, he says in Psalm 8:3:

*“When I look at Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, . . .”*

He is overwhelmed. It is glorious: its grandeur, its beauty, its design. And then he looks at little tiny man and says in Psalm 8:4:

*“. . .what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?”*

Humanity seems utterly insignificant. When you look at the size and scale of the world, when you look at the universe, do you ever feel very small? If you have made it to one of those planetariums and you get a sense of the scale, the size of the universe, you feel very small. Yet David continues in Psalm 8:5 and says:

*“Yet You have made him a little [while] lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.”*

Humanity seems very insignificant at first glance, and as we live today in an increasingly inhuman environment, humanity can seem like something to be readily overlooked or discarded. Yet the Bible has this lofty vision of humanity, a humanity that plays a unique role in God's intention and purpose in the world and in the world to come. Humanity is crowned uniquely with glory and honor—the only thing in all of creation made in the image and likeness of God. Psalm 8, David's reflection, reflects the vision of Genesis 1 when the Lord says that it is His intention to make humanity in His image, after His likeness. The expression of being in the image and likeness of God is to exercise a wise, righteous, benevolent dominion over all creation as royal sons and daughters reflecting God's rule in righteousness. The humanity made in God's image is said to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord and to bring that back to God in praise. The vision of who you are supposed to be from the Bible is nothing less than a royal son, a royal daughter, reflecting God's righteousness in the earth. In response, you are like priests and kings offering back to God in worship all that creation yields. There is no higher vision of humanity. The Bible has a much higher vision of who you and I are called to be than we do. It is a much loftier vision. The Bible says that this is our calling and it is to be displayed. This is our genuine human vocation. It is a beautiful description.

Hebrews 2:8 then says:

*“Now in putting everything in subjection to him, He left nothing outside his control.”*

The ESV renders this *outside his control*. Other versions translate this a little bit more accurately, that *there is nothing outside the scope of his responsibility, nothing outside the realm that can be under his exercise of image-bearing dominion*. This is a staggeringly lofty call, and yet, if you look around the world, this calling does not seem to be carried out. Hebrews 2:8 introduces a note of cognitive dissonance when he goes on to say:

*“At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.”*

Do you see the world that is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord? Do you see a world that is filled with humanity reflecting God's righteousness and offering the works of creation back to God in praise? As royal sons we are called to be wise stewards in sympathy with creation, and yet when we look around this world, or even within ourselves, we often find that we are foolish exploiters in cold isolation from others. We are to reflect God's steadfast love that brings light to the darkness, and instead when we look around, we see humanity racing after immediate gratification of their own pleasure and leaving others in deep darkness. We are called to be priestly image-bearers reflecting and bringing back the praises of God in worship, and yet we find ourselves trapped in idolatry and the worship of created things. There is an immense dissonance between who we are called to be and what we see. Hebrews, in the ESV, says *at present . . .* Others simply say *but now we don't see it*. The NRSV says *as it is we are*

*not seeing it.*

There is a strong lament over this dissonance. We hear this anguish in greater literature and even contemporary voices. For instance, Hamlet, in Shakespeare's play Act II, scene two, is depressed. He is depressed when he looks out at humanity. He says to his companions: "I have lost my mirth," that is his joy, his happiness. He goes on to say:

"Indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'er hanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire: why, it appeareth no other thing to me, than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours."

Have you ever felt that way—this amazing earth looks to me this morning like a "foul and pestilent congregation of vapors"? I know you think this. You may not express it so eloquently. But Hamlet puts his finger on the problem. It is not global warming; the problem is humanity. Hamlet continues and says:

"What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an Angel! in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor Woman neither."

He is depressed because of the chasm between who we are called to be and who we are.

We move from the lofty heights of Hamlet to an Internet blog, because that's the voices of our culture. I picked up a few blogs on what the state of humanity is. This is from Robert F at 7:15 AM, which is prime time for social media. He wrote this on October 26, 2016, and this is pretty eloquent for social media:

"Many days, looking at myself and at the human race, it's hard to believe that we have such a high-calling. When we aren't behaving atrociously, our actions seem so paltry and feeble, even the good ones, with unintended consequences even at their best, there seems to be a lack of symmetry and proportionality between them and the calling described."

Do you feel that dissonance? Hebrews invites us to walk through the gateway of paradise to a world that has begun, and we look at that gate through staring at Jesus Christ. Hebrews invites us yet again to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Hebrews 2:9 contains one of the most glorious *but*s in the New Testament. Hebrews 2:8 ends with *we do not yet see*, but we read in Hebrews 2:9:

*"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 first mention of the name of Jesus in Hebrews, and for those looking at the text in the original language, Hebrews 2:9 is another staggeringly beautiful sentence. It is a sentence that says to us that the vocational calling of humanity described in Psalm 8 has been assumed and taken up by Jesus. The writer says that we see the One who was made a little while lower than the angels and that this is Jesus Christ in His incarnation. We see Jesus not leaving humanity to ourselves but picking up your calling and mine, assuming full humanity in the incarnation, descending a little while lower than the angels, and we see Jesus crowned with glory. We see Him crowned with glory through His suffering, through His death, through His resurrection, and Hebrews 2 tells us that Jesus embodies the imagery of Psalm 8, and that He realizes the true human vocation. He is the one made a little while lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor, and that this has changed the world, and that this has marked the beginning of the new one. This is such an overwhelming insight that is certainly not original to me. It is one of the New Testament's superhighways of communication. It is an insight that needs to be considered for length of time, and yet the Word of God is telling us, the voice of our heavenly Father is telling us, that the world to come, *about which we are speaking*, has happened, that it has really burst forth on the scene in Jesus, and that we discover in Him the meaning of our own humanity. Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection has made this world a different place, and it has launched the world to come, and all who believe in Him then follow in His train. Hebrews 2:10 says:

*"For it was fitting (right, appropriate) that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory (this glory that is ours in Christ), should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."*

Jesus' suffering is not a sign of dishonor. Carrying the sin of the world actually turns the ages from this world to the world to come. Jesus our Savior is made perfect. This is language used in Scripture, not to describe that He was imperfect and has become perfect, but it is language that is used in Scripture to describe the perfection of fully taking on an office. We will talk more about this later in our series. Jesus' perfection is that He has fully assumed our humanity, that in His taking on of human flesh He has been confirmed with an oath as our Great High Priest, that He is the Royal Son, the image-bearer offering back to us the humanity that was lost.

Hebrews 2 concludes with three portraits of Christ in the fullness of His humanity. I know sometimes in church that when we focus our attention on the grandeur and the glory and the transcendence of Christ, sometimes He seems so far away. Yet, Hebrews 2 balances this with a portrait of Christ the Son of Man in the fullness of humanity, closer to you than you can yet imagine. The first portrait of Christ, the fully human Savior, is Jesus the true humanity as Royal Son and our exemplary older brother. Hebrews 2:11 says:

*"For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers."*

We have a common humanity that comes from Christ, and that is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers. Jesus, in His full humanity, calls you *brother, sister, members of the family of God*. Hebrews 2:12 quotes from Psalm 22, speaking as though Christ Himself is speaking in this Psalm:

*"I will tell of Your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise."*

The gathered people, the redeemed family, this is not an image of individuals but a corporate image of a family. In Hebrews 2:13, Christ speaks again, this time the Word of God through Isaiah:

*"I will put my trust in Him. Behold, I and the children God has given Me."*

Jesus speaks as our exemplary older brother, calling us in the fullness of His humanity into the family of God, restoring human vocation and calling.

Not only does Christ in the fullness of His humanity call us members of His own family, but the second portrait is that Jesus in His true humanity is our victorious champion who banishes evil. Hebrews 2:14 says:

*"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil . . ."*

That's good news. Hebrews 2:14 says that Jesus took on humanity so His death destroys the devil. Have you thought about that lately? We really need that verse! John Owen, whose commentary on Hebrews stretches no less than seven volumes, single-spaced, over two million words. Owen was the spiritual advisor for Oliver Cromwell during the height of the glorious Revolution. If you think you're busy, that was his day job, and at night by candlelight, he wrote two million words on Hebrews over many, many years. In reflecting on Hebrews 2:14, Owen describes what happened at the cross with this wonderful phrase: "It was the death of death, the death of Christ." Christ, our victorious champion, has destroyed the devil, and as a result, there is an immediate consequence for you and me in Hebrews 2:15:

*"and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."*

It is usually a neck and neck race for Americans over their greatest fear: fear of public speaking and fear of dying are closely related. For some, these are just inextricably linked: "If I am invited to do public speaking, I will die." Others say I'd rather die than be invited to publicly speak. But, Christ in the fullness of His humanity has defeated the devil on your behalf and is offering you freedom from your deepest fears.

The third portrait is that Jesus, in the fullness of His true humanity, is our Great High Priest who

bears our sins and stands in full solidarity and sympathy with us. The writer says that Jesus was made like His brothers in every respect, with the result that He would become a merciful and faithful High Priest making propitiation, atonement, for our sins. The fullness of Jesus' humanity, the glorious Son of God who is also the Son of Man is not only your elder brother calling you into His Family, He is not only your victorious champion defeating your enemy, He is your sympathetic High Priest who knows everything that you will ever face. When you face temptation, there is no temptation that you face that is outside Christ who has walked before you. Hebrews 2:18 says:

*"For because He himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted."*

Since He Himself suffered when tempted, He is able to help you. Jesus Christ can help you this morning, and He helps you out of the abundance and completeness of the fullness of His humanity.

What do we see this morning when we fix our eyes on Jesus? We see Jesus, Son of God, but also Jesus, Son of Man. We see Jesus taking on Himself human vocation and calling and living that out and calling us through faith in Him to follow. We see that the new world the Scriptures promise has begun and it is meant to continue to grow and extend and expand in this world through you and through me by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus assumed the fullness of our humanity to redeem it. Gregory of Nazianzus, the early Greek Christian Father, wrote: "What is not assumed is not redeemed." In other words, whatever Christ takes on, He fully redeems. Gregory of Nazianzus' formulation was done in the fourth century when the church was flirting with a heretical teaching that Jesus only seemed to be human. He is fully God and fully man, and He has taken on the fullness of our humanity to redeem it. I know this is lofty. I have staggered to keep up with Hebrews 2. So let me try to land this lofty vision for us in real time, real terms. What does this mean for us?

Our pastoral team meeting on Tuesday went an hour over as we together grappled with this, and Pastor Scott finally said, "What does this mean for Kenwood?" We generated a host of things. Part of what this means, and it is a challenge for us this morning, is to fully participate in the human vocation that is available in Christ. I want to challenge you to embrace your humanity in its fullness, not in a cheap, false, imitation version; not in a defaced version that this culture will offer; not in an escapist version that sometimes is motivated by piety; not in the scary, futuristic version that we see, which is sometimes called post-human. Have you seen this? There is subhuman; there is the defacing of humanity; and recently there has been language used of post-human. Do you know what post-humanism is? Post-humanism is when this world has gotten so enthralled with our technology that we think we can't keep up with our machines anymore and we need a new version of humanity. We need to embed microchips

into ourselves so we can do all the things that our machines can do, because our humanity is insufficient. One of the sessions of the Society of Biblical Literature meeting this fall is on post-humanism. That scares me. That needs Hebrews 2—that the fullness of our humanity is available in Christ.

So I want to challenge you to be a human being. This world can seem an increasingly inhuman place. Do you feel that? Let me give you some very concrete ways to be a human being. I want you to start using the names of the people that you interact with in the marketplace. I want you to start calling them out. As I have started to do this, I've had people say: "Wow, I have been working all day and no one has used my name! Can I take a picture with you?" which is a 21st-century way of saying "When you use my name, I feel happy." Use their names; be a human being; be an ambassador of the new world that has begun in Jesus Christ; manifest the grace of God, forgiveness; bring many sons and daughters along with you; emphasize what you share with the people around you rather than the ways you differ. Jesus, in Hebrews 2, assumes and takes up a full and complete solidarity with us. Manifest the true humanity in how you live and how you do your work. Be a royal son, a royal daughter. Do your work well, with righteousness. Extend the image and likeness of God in how you do what you do. N. T. Wright says:

“. . . the life, vision, achievement, death, and resurrection of Jesus himself. These events, taken together, constitute Jesus' followers as the true, image-bearing human beings.”

We need Hebrews 2. N.T. Wright goes on to say:

“To begin with, you have to grasp the fact that Christian virtue isn't about you—your happiness, your fulfillment, your self-realization. It's about God and God's kingdom, and your discovery of a genuine human existence by the paradoxical route—the route God himself took in Jesus Christ!—of giving yourself away, of generous love which constantly refuses to take center stage.”

This is who we were called to be in Genesis 1. This who it is promised that we will become, and this has happened in Jesus Christ, and you and I are to live into this reality now. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we extol You, glorious Son. I pray for us this morning that You would help us to catch up with the lofty vision You have set before us. I pray, Lord Jesus, that You would make us to be true humanity as we follow You, that we would follow in Your footsteps, and that we would reflect Your image where we go this week, that we would be human in an increasingly inhuman, subhuman, or aspirational post-human world. Lord, we have good news of who You are. We have good news of really finding out who we are, and we praise You for redeeming us. Lord, we ask that You would fill us with the Holy Spirit now, that we would walk in all Your ways. I pray that You would help us this week to enter into that cognitive dissonance, that gap

for so many, knowing who we are supposed to be and seeing what we see. Help us to manifest what You have manifested, that they might see something different as they look to Jesus and His followers.

In whose Name we pray, Amen.