

The Son Like a Man in Every Respect

Psalm 8:4-6; Hebrews 2:5-18 (text); Heidelberg Catechism 14 & 35

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Congregation of Christ: Today, we look forward to gathering with our families on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day is probably our most treasured holiday, even more than Christmas Eve or Christmas Day itself. But many people today only look forward to all the drinking and eating, turkey and football, ignorant of what Thanksgiving Day is supposed to be: a day to give thanks to Providence for the bounty he has given to us throughout the year. The Pilgrims celebrated this day because after severe hardship and deprivation, they finally had a good harvest and plenty of food.

But our text today as we continue to study the Book of Hebrews reminds us about what we Christians should be most thankful for: the salvation brought about by the descent of Christ from his glorious place in heaven to a most humble estate as a mere human being. He accomplished this by willingly sacrificing himself on the cross. And in return for his obedience to his Father in heaven, Jesus was raised from the grave, ascended into heaven, and is now seated at his Father's right hand in glory. His humiliation and exaltation was all for the exaltation of all believers themselves, including those of us here who believe and trust in him as Savior and Lord.

Our text tells us that Jesus our Savior came down from heaven as both God and man to save his people from their sins. So today, we will meditate on three things: first, **The Son's Humiliation**; second, **The Son's Exaltation**; and third, **The Son's Humiliation for the Exaltation of Sons**.

The Son's Humiliation

After opening Chapter 2 with an exhortation to “*pay much closer attention*” to the gospel that they have heard, the Preacher continues with his argument that Christ is better than the angels, “*For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come*” (verse 5). To whom then did God subject or submit the world to come? The Preacher then quotes Psalm 8:4-6.

In Psalm 8, David says that in spite of man being a speck in a vast universe, God considers man the crowning glory of his creation. Who are we, puny, insignificant organic entities, to command God's care, love and attention? “*You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings.*” Here, “heavenly beings” is *elohim*, the same word translated as “God” in many places. So “heavenly beings” or “angels” is a good translation.

God “*crowned [man] with glory and honor.*” How? He made man his representative, vice regent, or steward on earth. God ordained his immense creation to be subdued by and under the dominion of this insignificant piece of creation. The LORD has “*put all things under his feet.*” Of all creation—the beasts in the fields, the birds in the air, the fish in the seas—only man was created as God's image (Gen 1:26-27). He shares in God's attributes of holiness and righteousness and has personal knowledge and communion with God.

Tragically, in sinning, man fell from this honor and glory bestowed upon him by God. So he forfeited his perfect state of holiness, righteousness and communion with God. His dominion over the whole creation was tarnished. From that sad day until the end of time, man has been in constant enmity against God.

But when the Preacher quotes Psalm 8:4-6, he clearly applies it to Christ, since he was speaking of the superiority of Christ even over heavenly beings. When Christ came down from heaven, he assumed our human nature. For about 30 years from birth to death, *“a little while”* compared to his eternal divine nature, he was *“made lower than the angels.”*

The Preacher also says *“we see him.”* How could he say that he has seen Jesus? The author might be one of Jesus' disciples, but the Jews who were reading or listening to his sermon probably never saw Jesus in person. This is because after Jesus ascended into heaven, we “see” his *“suffering of death”* spiritually by faith. How? Through his Word and the visible sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

What kind of Savior then do we see? We see One who shared in human *“flesh and blood.”* Our Heidelberg Catechism reading says that God had sent him to assume human form to suffer for sins committed by human beings. This is because humans sinned, and humans must be punished, not any other creature. This Savior must also be God since no one could bear God's eternal wrath on man other than an eternal God, Christ himself. The Preacher then concludes that Christ *“had to be made like his brothers in every respect, 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.”* Now, Christ is our Great High Priest who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to cover and atone for all our sins.

Later, in Hebrews 4:15, the Preacher also says, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.”* The word “sympathize” is a transliteration of the Greek word *sympatheo*, which literally means “to suffer along with.” He can truly “sympathize” with us because he was like us in every respect, just as a person can fully sympathize with and feel for one who has lost a loved one only if he had himself experienced the loss of someone he loved. Jesus himself can “sympathize” with us *“because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*

This is the Son of God's humiliation: from his glorious existence in heaven, he came down to earth to assume lowly human flesh and blood to save his people from their sins.

The Son's Exaltation

But then comes his exaltation, or his elevation as One Who is superior than all others in heaven or on earth. After he resurrected from the grave, he gave his Great Commission to his disciples to preach the gospel to all the nations. What assurance did he give his disciples that they will be able to accomplish this mission? He tells them, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* (Matt 28:18). Since he has all authority over all things, the disciples will surely accomplish their mission.

After this, he ascended into heaven, where he is now reigning over all creation, although we do not fully see this yet. In verse 9, the Preacher frames “we see Jesus” into parts. First, we see him “made a little lower than the angels.” Then, quoting Psalm 8, the Preacher says that “*we see him... crowned him with glory and honor,*” and seated at God's right hand.

In Psalm 110:1, David sings, “*The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'*” The right hand of the LORD (YHWH) is a position of divine authority and power. David calls someone “my Lord” or *Adonai*, which means that this Lord is greater than him, the king of Israel. Who is this *Adonai* seated at God's right hand? None other than the man Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who is now seated on his heavenly throne. This is confirmed by Jesus himself (Matt 26:64), Luke (Acts 7:55-56), and the Apostles Peter (Acts 2:32-35; 1 Pet 3:22) and Paul (1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1).

Later, the Preacher says that Christ our High Priest who is “*holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens*” (Heb 7:26). In his first sermon on Pentecost Sunday, Peter declares to the Jews that Jesus is already “*exalted at the right hand of God*” (Acts 2:33). Later, he again preaches to the Jews that God “*glorified his servant Jesus*” whom they delivered to Pilate to die on the cross (Acts 3:13; see also 1 Pet 1:21). Now in heaven, Christ is already worshiped by all the saints and the angelic host, “*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*” (Rev 5:12)

In our earlier reading in Philippians 2, Paul says that after Jesus accomplished his mission by being humble and obedient all the way to the cross, “*God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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).

At the end of this present age, he will return to make all his enemies his footstool and present all his people before his heavenly Father. That day will be the consummation of all things, “*Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet”* (1 Cor 15:24-27).

No king, authority or people on earth will escape submitting to Christ on that day. Those who resisted, despised, reviled and persecuted Christ and his people will confess, even while in hell, that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of Lords. All the great kings and emperors in the past ages knew this all too well, so we ought to be encouraged when we see civil authorities persecute or ridicule Christians.

The Son's Humiliation for the Exaltation of Sons

Our Scripture reading tells us that when the resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven, he presented his people to his Father. He is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters, and sings with them songs of praises to God in the great heavenly congregation (Heb 2:12). Christ

also calls them his children because as the Son of God, he associates himself with the children of his Father (Heb 2:13). Through his sacrificial death, he is *“bringing many sons to glory.”* So we look forward to that day when Christ himself will come down from heaven to bring us to our final, glorious heavenly home.

When the Preacher says that Christ is the *“founder of our salvation,”* he means that he is more than the “author” or “guide” or “trailblazer,” but he is the “champion” or “hero” of our salvation. He perfectly accomplished the salvation of all believers. And this is why he says that Christ was “made perfect through suffering.” He doesn't mean that Jesus was not perfect, but that his obedience in suffering and death on the cross was the perfect, complete and all-sufficient accomplishment of the mission given to him by his Father.

The author of Hebrews says in verse 11, *“For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.”* Literally, “all have one source” is “all are of one.” Many scholars interpret this as the unity between the Father and the Son, or the unity between the Father and his people. But in this passage, the Preacher is explaining the unity between Christ and all believers. He participated in the whole human existence of those whom he will save, *except sin.*

The outcome of this unity is that his people also receive God's grace. The Preacher uses Psalm 22:22, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” After the LORD rescues and vindicates the psalmist, he will proclaim to his brothers and sisters in the congregation that the LORD rescued him. The psalms of praise and thanksgiving that the congregation always sings in the morning and evening sacrifices will have an even more profound meaning to him.

The Preacher pictures Jesus as leading the congregation—“my brothers”—in singing God's praise. Since he was “made like his brothers in every respect”—human flesh and blood—he is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters, since we are his Father's adopted children.

So in our worship services, we do not have worship leaders. We have one Great Worship Leader—the Lord Jesus Christ himself! After he shared bread and wine with his disciples on that last meal before he was crucified, he led them singing the Passover hymns, “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Mat 26:30). These hymns were usually Psalms 113-118 or 136. In the Temple and in the synagogues, which Jesus customarily attended, the Psalms were the only songs the congregations sung. In heaven, we will be singing praise and thanksgiving to God because he has chosen us, called us, justified us, and finally, glorified us (Rom 8:29-30).

The last five verses, 14-18, explains how Jesus, in participating in human flesh and blood, also died as a man. Why did he die? It was “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.” We often think that the resurrection of Christ destroyed death and the devil, as we see in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, “death is swallowed up in victory.” But it is also

true that the death of Christ also destroyed death and the devil. The whole act of his life, death and resurrection destroyed sin, death and they tyranny of the devil.

This is why the Preacher says that in his death, Christ “deliver[ed] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” The certainty of death enslaves everyone to fear. But those who trust in God, like Christ, can now face death without fear.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this Thanksgiving week, meditate on things for which you are thankful to God. Give thanks to him for family, friends, provisions, jobs, homes, cars, and all good things that he had given you this last year. Enjoy the weekend catching up with your loved ones!

But above all, give thanks to God for giving us Jesus our merciful High Priest, who gave his life to bear our sins on the cross. Give thanks to God for adopting us as his own children, brothers and sisters of Jesus our Elder Brother. All of you who have received Jesus as your Savior and Lord are adopted children of God, heirs of all of God's good promises to his children.

Do not despair when it seems that God is blind and deaf to all our sufferings; that even if Jesus is now exalted in heaven, we are still on earth with all its tears, death, mourning, crying and pain. For our hope is that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18). Even in this life, you who believe already share in the resurrection of Christ, but those who reject him are already condemned (John 3:18).

Like Christ, you and I will be “made perfect through suffering.” But while we suffer in this world, Christ continues to reconcile his chosen people to his Father, until their number is complete. Only then will he return in power and glory, and the not yet of our glory and honor be completed and perfected in heaven.