

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Following Jesus...ESPECIALLY when life gets tough!

(Studies in the letter to the Hebrews)

A Savior-King Who Has “Been There, Done That”

(Hebrews 2:5-18)

Study #3

Introduction: Gaining credibility by leading the way...

In some circles to say, “*Been there, done that*” is to say, “*I’m bored.*” Or it’s to say, “*I sure don’t want to go through that again.*”

But those aren’t the only possible meanings for “*been there, done that.*” For instance...

...if you’re looking for someone to mentor you in some life skill, you want someone who has “*been there, done that.*”

...if you’re struggling in a marriage, the couple you want to sit down with is one that has “*been there, done that*” successfully, over years.

...if you’re about to face combat, you want to know that your commanding officer has seen the worst, knows what he’s doing, and has earned the right to lead. He’s “*been there, done that.*”

Today we will be assured that we can follow our Savior when life gets tough because when it comes to facing challenges and continuing to follow God, Jesus has “*been there, done that.*”

We begin today, like we did last Sunday, with a comment about angels. The writer (whoever he is) orients us to his major theme.

The Current Low Station of Humanity (2:5-8)

The Role of Angels (v. 5)

[5] For He did not subject to angels the world to come, about which we are speaking.

Current theme: The world to come

First, just to be clear about what it is he’s talking about, he’s talking about “***the world to come.***”

The conversation is about the future. Not next year, but life on the other side. The theological term is *eschatology*.

The writer has been writing, thus far, about eschatology. He is still concerned with it as this section opens.

In fact, the letter to the Hebrews is laser- focused on eschatology.

Our author wants us to know that if we are going to lead God-honoring lives (which we do want to do) in a world filled with problems (which ours is), we must have an eschatological focus.

We need to learn to develop that 200-year plan. What do I want my experience to be when I’m with Jesus? How can I live NOW so as to hear, “***Well done!***” and to have a rich inheritance and to be Jesus’ “***companion***” THEN?

Then, in addition to orienting to “***the world to come,***” he mentions, again, angels.

Angelic do’s and don’ts

We saw last Sunday that angels are impressive beings who have inferior roles.

They do worship the Son. And they do serve people who, because of their faithfulness in this life, will receive a rich inheritance (what our author calls *salvation*) in the next life.

But angels don't rule. God never gave ruling authority to angels. God did, though, give ruling authority to humans.

The Roles of a son of man / a Son of Man (vv. 6-8)

**[6] But someone has testified somewhere, saying,¹
(Psalm 8:4) "WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU THINK OF HIM?
OR A SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?
[7] (Psalm 8:5) YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN
ANGELS;
YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR;
[8a] (Psalm 8:6) YOU HAVE PUT EVERYTHING IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS
FEET."**

Psalm 8

These three verses are all quotes from Psalm 8. The theme of Psalm 8 is the dominion that God gave over the earth to humanity.²

King David wrote this psalm and marveled that God had placed man "**over the works of His hands.**"

So, today, mankind is in an exalted position. This - ruling over creation - is the "**glory and honor**" with which God has crowned him.

That is how to best interpret the words of Psalm 8 in its Old Testament context.

But the author of Hebrews sees those words applying to both mankind, generally AND to Jesus, especially as he is thinking of the world to come.³

NOT currently ruling

A dual focus on mankind AND on Jesus

Both in Psalm 8 and here in Hebrews, we read the term "**a son of man.**"⁴

In the psalm, it is a reference to anyone who is a human being.

But, by using the term, "**Son of Man,**" the writer knew that his Christian readers were going to think of Jesus.⁵ After all, "**Son of Man**" was Jesus' favorite way to self-identify.

The term reaches back to Daniel 7:13, where we read about a heavenly being called "**the Son of Man**" coming to rule and reign on earth. "**Son of Man**" means "Messiah."

The Son of Man will inherit a kingdom. The Son of Man is the king described in Hebrews 1.

So, there is a dual reference here to both all people (who are sons of men) and to Jesus, THE Son of Man.

The point of the reference is that, while both were created to rule and reign on earth, observation tells us that neither humanity nor Jesus are currently ruling or reigning.

¹ Note the casualness of his reference to the Old Testament passage. He didn't think it was necessary to cite "chapter and verse" (which were added in the Christian era). The quote was from Scripture - whether from Moses, the Psalms, or the prophets. That was enough to establish credibility with the readers.

² See Genesis 1:26.

³ We might be tempted to say that the writer is not giving a correct interpretation of Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2, but that would be wrong. He is simply using a Messianic interpretive grid. This is not unusual for a New Testament writer. (See Matthew 2:15; Luke 24:25-27, 32, 44-45; 1 Peter 1:19-12) Our author would say that we have not understood the OT correctly until we have understood it Messianically.

⁴ The lack of the definite article - "*the*" - indicates that the psalm was speaking about humanity, generally.

⁵ Jesus cited Psalm 8 during His passion week, referring to Himself and the praise and worship that the children were giving Him. (See Matthew 21:16)

Neither humanity nor Jesus currently rule and reign

[8b]...For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

God has subjected all things to **“him / Him.”** Humanity’s original mandate was to be caretaker of the world. And the Son is the rightful Heir of the world. Nothing is excluded.

But clearly, at this time, God’s subjection of creation to people for great caretaking and to Jesus as sovereign ruler is not in effect.

Mankind is subject to creation more than the other way around.

And we haven’t been the sorts of stewards of the world God had in mind at the beginning. Far from ruling, people are often subject to creation’s messiness.

And Jesus is not now ruling and reigning over a righteous kingdom. Nobody would argue that He is. The world is an unholy mess that only gives us fleeting glimpses of grace here and there.

We don’t see humanity OR Jesus ruling and reigning over the world now.

So, the words of Psalm 8 don’t describe how the world is now. They are promises of what the world will one day be. The words of Psalm 8 are eschatological.

One day Jesus will reign, and His faithful followers will rule and reign with Him.

But not now. Here is what we see now.

[9] But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of His suffering death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Jesus: Made Lower Than the Angels

If it wasn’t clear before, it is now clear that the author has Jesus in mind because he mentions Him, by name.

At the incarnation, when He was born in Bethlehem, the Son became what He had not been before. Human. A Man.

And, while still fully God, His humanity made Him **“a little lower than the angels.”**

Jesus: Crowned with Glory and Honor

This humble Jesus has now been **“crowned with glory and honor”**⁶ because of His faithfulness to carry out all of God’s will for His life: perfect life, sacrificial death.⁷

Jesus: Tasted Death for Everyone

And, by that sacrificial death, He tasted death **“for everyone.”**

A major purpose of Jesus’ incarnation, His being made human, was for Him to identify with humanity in the experience of death. Jesus not only lived for the benefit of everyone.

He **“tasted”** / experienced death on behalf of everyone.

The rest of our passage for today explains a few of the many purposes of Christ’s death AND some of what His death means for us.

⁶ This is relevant to the readers who are told that if they (we!) will be obedient to God in their difficulties, God will exalt (us) them as well.

⁷ See Philippians 2:5-11.

The Lowering and Raising of Jesus (2:9)

Jesus Helps the Children of God (2:11-16)

Jesus: Perfected Through His Sufferings (v. 10)

[10] For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the originator of their salvation through sufferings.

Let's first pay careful attention to that phrase, "**bringing many sons to glory.**"

A future marked by a shared ruling authority.

Jesus' mission was to bring many of those who are sons to glory. That implies that some of those who are sons will not be brought to glory.

Many men and women will share in the glory of ruling with Christ, of having dominion over the works of God's hands.⁸

These are Christ's "**companions**" (Hebrews 1:9, 14; 2:3) who will inherit this role to serve in His kingdom in the world to come.

This inheritance is available to all Christians, but it will be given only to those Christians who faithfully follow Jesus in this life.⁹

In my Bible, Jesus is identified as "**the Originator**" of our salvation.¹⁰

The thought behind Originator is of Jesus being the Pioneer and Founder of our faith. He is the One who has gone before us, blazing the

⁸ We can see what salvation (Greek: *soteria*) means in Hebrews from all of this. "**Bringing many sons to glory**" = salvation. But the salvation in view is the glory of dominion over the creation in association with the Son of Man. Not eternal life.

⁹ A believer can never lose eternal life and go to hell. A believer can, though, neglect and lose his inheritance in God's kingdom.

¹⁰ While the idea may be present, I have not found the military idea (seen in the translation "**Captain**" in certain versions) prominent in the use of the Greek word used here. (*αρχηγος*)

trail, leading the way, serving as our Example. A good rendering of the term is "**Leader.**"

The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus became such a Leader via suffering. He says that it was only "**fitting**" that He should suffer and be made "**perfect.**"

How fitting that Jesus should suffer

Humanity was added to the already perfect Son of God, enhancing His perfection. And in the same way, suffering was added to His experience, further perfecting His perfection.¹¹

And why was it "**fitting**" for Jesus to suffer? Because many of those who faithfully follow Him will also suffer.

And how could He lead His suffering followers through the temptations they face to stop following Him if He hadn't already faced and triumphed over those same temptations?

Jesus blazed the trail that we are to follow. His life points the way we are to go. He can lead us because He has "*been there, done that.*"

So, first, our Savior-King is now perfectly qualified to lead us into this rich experience because of what He has suffered.

Second, Jesus and we who believe in Jesus are as united with each other as united can be.

Jesus: Joined to His "Brothers and Sisters" (vv. 11-13)

[11] For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father;¹² for this reason He is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters,

¹¹ It was Jesus' faithful suffering that led to His being seated at the right hand of the majesty on high.

¹² Better to translate "*from one*" (Greek: "*ex enos*") as "*all have one origin*" since "*Father*" is not in the original Greek text.

[12] saying,

"I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BROTHERS,

IN THE MIDST OF THE ASSEMBLY I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE."¹³

[13] And again,

"I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM."

And again,

"BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME."¹⁴

"Sanctified" in Hebrews

You heard me read that word **"sanctified."** That word has a special, particularly Jewish, meaning in this letter.

(Remember: The author of Hebrews was writing to Jewish believers in Jesus, so there is a definite Jewish slant throughout the letter.)

In Hebrews, this word is equivalent to what many Christians today mean when they use the word *"saved."*¹⁵ In Hebrews, those who are **"sanctified"** are what we would call born-again, or justified.¹⁶

To sanctify is to make holy. And Christ is the One who has made those who believe in Him holy. Those who believe in Him for eternal life are sanctified. Made holy forever.

The one who **"sanctifies"** (Jesus) and those **"who are sanctified"** (believers) are united.

The unity we have with Jesus.

¹³ The writer quotes Psalm 22. In this psalm, Messiah is delivered from suffering. Christ was also delivered from His suffering by resurrection from the dead.

¹⁴ From Isaiah 8: The message from Isaiah is that, rather than trust in other nations in a time of calamity, he will trust in God. Same for the readers; same for us. The prophet told the Jews that even though they will go into captivity, God will bring them back to the land. AND He will destroy their enemies. It happened just as Isaiah predicted. The people were brought back. God's word is to be trusted.

¹⁵ The author of Hebrews doesn't use the word *"sanctify"* in the sense of "practical Christian growth" as we often do.

¹⁶ The Apostle Paul used the term "justified" and John used "born-again" to indicate receiving the gift of eternal life. Hebrews, though, does not. Theologian James Denney writes, *"The 'sanctification' of the one writer (Hebrews) is the 'justification' of the other (Paul)."*

You and I come from a common source. We are all human. We understand the human experiences of pain and loss and sadness and joy and illness and longing and death and more.

And...being human - so does Jesus. Which means that with no pretending or make believe involved, Jesus can call us who believe in Him, **"brothers and sisters."**

This is the same Jesus who in chapter one is called **"the heir of all things"** and the One through whom God **"made the world."**

This Jesus **"is the radiance of [God's] glory."** He is the **"exact representation of [God's] nature."** Jesus **"upholds all things by the word of His power."**

He also **"made purification of sins"** by His death on the cross and has now **"sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high."**

We are united to THAT Jesus. THAT Jesus is our brother. So how can we not love and follow Him?

THAT is the point of Hebrews. Given who Jesus is and all that He has done for us, of course we want to follow Him!

Third, Jesus has forever changed the way we look at death.

Jesus: Removing the Fear of Death (vv. 14-15)

He has destroyed the devil (v. 14)

[14] Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood,¹⁷ He Himself likewise also partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil...

God's plan was that the Son would take on flesh and blood and would become fully human.

¹⁷ Repeats the idea from verse 11 that we and Jesus are all from one source.

That was exactly what happened, and the unavoidable result of that happening was that Jesus would die. He came to earth to die.

The author tells us that His death's purpose was to engage the enemy of all that is holy - the devil - and defeat him. To utterly and completely destroy him.

So, among the finished works of Christ on the cross was the destruction of the power the devil had over people by having the power of death.

That is what Jesus did. Remember that on the cross, He said, ***[John 19:30] It is finished.***

Jesus ripped away the devil's most powerful tool when He turned death into something redemptive. He died for our sins.

Then, on Easter Sunday, He defanged and declawed the devil, triumphing over death by resurrection life.

The result of this is that we who believe in Jesus need no longer fear death.

He has liberated us from the fear of death (v. 15)

[15] and free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

What a gift.

For lots and lots of people, the universal human experience - death - controls. The prospect of death enslaves.

The enemy wants to use the threat of death against us. When we are facing desperately hard times and huge challenges, he wants to leverage our human fear of death to tempt us to stop following Him.

He wants us to think that the worst possible thing that can happen to us is death.

The irony is that the only thing that can free us from this slavery is the truth that Jesus, our Savior-King, our Brother, has already defeated death.

It is undeniably the case that sometimes following Jesus will result in death.

That was what happened to Stephen, the first Christian martyr. We read his story in Acts 7. He was stoned to death by an angry crowd for his bold witness for Jesus.

Stephen knew full well that death was a possibility if he kept on speaking. But his passion for Jesus and his confidence that Jesus was going to welcome him after his last breath pushed fear aside.

We look at Jesus' life to death to life story and find release from that fear, too.

What a counter-cultural way to live it would be if we fully embraced the truth: Death - and anything that might lead to death - is not worthy of our fear. Illness. Pain. Poverty. Alienation.

I have watched as many of you here have faced one or the other of these and have continued following Jesus.

You have ignored and rejected the message, "*The most important thing in life is your health / wealth / popularity...*" - a message straight from the enemy's lips.

No. The most important thing in life is obeying the call to follow a Savior-King who has "*been there, done that.*"

His death and resurrection obliterated the power that the devil had to enslave us to fear.

His triumph in resurrection assures us of our own life after this life is over. Neither death nor the things that might lead to it pose a threat to our well-being.

Christians need not shrink from death at all. We may face persecution, illness, dangers of all kinds fearlessly because of the victorious death of Jesus. (10:32-36)

Jesus: A Help to Abraham's descendants (v. 16)

As the author says, ***[16] For clearly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham.***

This section began with an assurance that angels will not rule the world to come (v. 5). It ends with an assurance that Jesus did not become a man to give aid to angels.

Jesus came to live and die and live again to give aid to the seed of Abraham.¹⁸ That's us.

We are sons and daughters of God, made so in the same way that Abraham was when he believed in the LORD's promise to him.

Our passage ends with a description of your Savior-King that will strengthen you in your darkest moments.

Jesus Serves as a Merciful and Faithful High Priest (vv. 17-18)

In All Things Human, Jesus is Just Like Us (v. 17a)

[17a] Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brothers so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God...

We have already seen that Jesus became "like us" in every human way, except for sin. He got tired, hungry, thirsty, and sleepy.

He experienced a full range of human emotions. He was tempted. He suffered and He died.

Those human experiences qualified Him to be our high priest.

In the Old Testament, priests fulfilled a vital role in the life of the Jewish nation. They offered sacrifices. They took care of the tabernacle (and later, the temple).

They served as mediators between God and people. They spoke to God on behalf of the people.¹⁹

Since the old way of the Law of Moses is now obsolete, Jesus serves as the priests used to. He serves as our high priest in the following two ways.

Like Every High Priest, Jesus Makes Propitiation for Us (v. 17b)

First, ***[17b]...to make propitiation for the sins of the people.***

We don't use the word *propitiation* every day. So, if you aren't familiar with it, boiled down to its essence, propitiation means: *to turn away wrath by means of a sacrifice.*

In Old Testament times, God's righteous wrath was temporarily turned away from the people by the regular sacrifices.

The priests, in a sense, were the mediators who stood between the sinful people and God. They offered those propitiating sacrifices every day, year after year.

Then came Jesus. Serving as our high priest, He offered Himself as a propitiating sacrifice. God's righteous wrath was turned away - forever - by Jesus' one, perfect sacrifice on the cross when He took our place.

And Jesus continues to serve as our high priest to this day. No longer making propitiation (that was a once-and-for-all act), but reminding us when we sin...
....God's wrath is turned away.
...there is no condemnation.

¹⁸ See Galatians 3:7, 29 where all believers are called the seed of Abraham.

¹⁹ This, in contrast to prophets, who spoke to people on behalf of God.

Everything necessary to secure our never-ending relationship with God has already been done. Again, ***"It is finished!"***

Your high priest did that work of propitiation. And your high priest continues to work on your behalf.

Knowing Temptation Firsthand, He Can Help the Tempted (v. 18)

[18] For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Jesus now understands the temptations we face in a way that He didn't before He was born in Bethlehem.

During the thirty-three years of His earthly life, He learned (yes, the Son learned) what it was like to be tempted to stop following God's will.

Think of Jesus in the wilderness, after having fasted forty days and nights, tempted by Satan to use His miraculous powers for His own benefit (to make food) and against God's will. How hard would that be?!

Think of Jesus, exhausted at the end of a long day of teaching and healing and interacting with crowds, some of whom were hostile. Wouldn't He have been tempted to follow a different path than humble servanthood.²⁰

Well, He now knows temptation. He "gets it" in the same way that the priests of the Old Testament, who were also human, got it. They could sympathize with the weaknesses of the people because they had the same weaknesses.

The difference with Jesus is that He never gave in to the temptation to stop following hard after God.

And He is not only our high priest who sympathizes because of His own experience. He is our Leader who points the way forward and calls us to follow.

So, when you face a challenge in life of any variety that tempts you to slow down or to stop following Jesus, you can go to Him in prayer and find a high priest who is able to come to your aid, because He has *"been there, done that."*

²⁰ Think of Peter's "rebuke" of Jesus when He told His disciples that the cross was coming. Jesus turned to Peter and said, ***"Get behind me, Satan!"*** (Matthew 16:23) recognizing Peter's words for the diabolic words they were, refusing the temptation to avoid the cross.