**JESUS IS THE PIONEER OF OUR SALVATION**

January 17, 2016

Hebrews 2:1-18

Key Verse 2:10 “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.”

In chapter 1, we learned that Jesus is God’s final Word. God spoke and revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ. Why seek God through inferior means when we have God’s full revelation in Jesus. Now in chapter 2, the author explains further why Jesus became fully human and suffered death. It is to bring salvation for us. In the Old Testament salvation has various meanings: salvation from enemies, poverty, disease, or natural disasters. But here “salvation” means from our sins, death and eternal condemnation. Not only that, it is a new life. It is a new family. It is a new land. It is a new everything. Even though we were created lower than the angels, after being saved, we will reign with Christ even over angels. 2 Timothy 2:12a says, “If we endure, we will also reign with him.” 1 Corinthians 6:3 says, “Do you not know that we will judge angels?” It is unbelievable. Jesus made it possible by coming to this world as a man and die on the cross. By his death he became the perfect leader, the perfect pioneer, who would open the path of salvation and lead us to God and to eternal glory.

**First**, Jesus became fully human to restore mankind (5-9). Look at verses 6b-8a. “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.” This is a quotation from Psalm 8:4-6. It reveals God’s purpose for mankind at creation. God crowned mankind with glory and honor, and intended us to rule the earth (Gen 1:28). God endowed us with great dignity and special favor, making us just a little lower than heavenly beings, and putting everything under our feet (6-8a). Yet at the present we do not see mankind carrying out God’s original purpose for us (8b). The world is chaos. It is full of corruption, immorality and violence. Why has this happened? It is because of man’s sin of disobedience. The first man—Adam—sinned and was subjected to futility and death. But God did not leave mankind under sin and death. He sent Jesus as a man to die in our place so that we may be restored to be rulers again.

Look at verse 9. “But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” Here, “lower than the angels for a little while” refers to Jesus’ incarnation. Jesus is God. He is the Creator of angels. He is the ruler of angels. He is worshipped by angels. Yet, for a little while, he became lower than the angels. It is really amazing that Jesus, who is fully God, came into the world as a human being. In the TV show, “Undercover Boss,” high level executives disguise their identity and take low level jobs in their own companies. They experience life on the bottom and find out what their employees really think of them. It is a step toward incarnation. Jesus did much more than that. The Eternal God became a man who was limited to time and space. The Almighty God became subject to the weakness of human flesh. The glorious God came into this world as a poor, ordinary man. This is beyond our imagination.

But it didn’t end there. He suffered death, death on the cross. It was accompanied with outward torture and inward agony. His death was an excruciating and painful experience for him. At the cross, he experienced what it means to be separated from God. Even though it was a few hours, he tasted the eternal condemnation, abandoned by God. Because he tasted death for me, I can escape it all together. Because he took the full judgment in a few hours, I can escape having to feel it forever.

Because he suffered death, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, and that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. In Revelation 5, we see a glimpse into heaven, and we hear the angels and the saints all saying, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” In other words, Christ was the first man to be restored to the magnificent destiny of Psalm 8. He was crowned with glory and honor over all creation. But he does not enter his glory by himself. Verse 10 says that he “is bringing many sons and daughters to glory”—the glory of Psalm 8. Our great salvation is that, united to Jesus, we will experience the fulfillment of Psalm 8 as well. We will rule over all creation, even over angels. Jesus is the great forerunner of our salvation. What has happened to him will happen to us.

**Second**, Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation (10). Now the author explains how God made Jesus perfect as the pioneer of our salvation. Look at verse 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.” A pioneer is one who goes first into unknown territory and makes a way for others to follow. Jesus opened the way to God for mankind. He goes in front of us and clearly marks out the way that leads to salvation. Jesus endured the bitter experience of death for us in order to lead us to the glory of God. He calls us to follow him in the way of suffering and glory.

The word “pioneer” in the Greek is archegas. An author would be another translation of that. An author is somebody who inaugurates or initiates, who is the beginner of something. It is a word that could refer to a trailblazer, somebody who blazed a trail on which trail others could then come. It is Jesus who alone authored salvation. He is the trailblazer who opened the trail to God. He threw the gates open, invited us to come in. He is the one who inaugurated a new kind of life and ushers into that life to be enjoyed forever. Sometimes it is also translated as captain of our salvation, the great leader. He opened the family of God to us. He blazed the trail to God for us. He gives us new life and eternal joy. He is our sovereign leader. Now that tells us more about salvation. Salvation is not just the forgiveness of sin. It is a new city. It is a new life. It is a new family. It is a new everything and Jesus blazed the trail into that newness of life. And he did it by being perfected through suffering. God made His son, for a little while, lower than the angels. Brought him down into the realm of humans so that he could do what no angel has ever done or will ever do, die. Die in our place as our substitute and by that death become the perfect leader, the perfect trailblazer, the perfect pioneer, the perfect general, who would open the path of salvation and lead us to God and to eternal glory.

Here the word “perfect” signifies the perfection or completion of a process. Jesus had to go through a process of suffering as a man to become a perfect pioneer. Through suffering, Jesus became perfect in obedience. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and, once made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” It was through disobedience that Adam lost his dignity and failed to fulfill God’s purpose. Jesus obeyed God perfectly, restoring mankind from Adam’s failure, and then offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice. In this way he became our pioneer, author and captain of salvation. Now those who trust him and obey him can receive eternal salvation.

**Third**, Jesus helps us in our weakness. People wonder, “Does God understand the battles I face every day?” They wonder, “What does God know about the difficulties I face trying to do what’s right?” The answer is that, in Jesus, he fully understands our battles and our difficulties. In Jesus, we now have a God who has gone through what we go through. He knows what we go through. Look at verses 14-15. “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—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

First of all, Jesus understands our suffering and fear of death. As a man, Jesus entered into the reality of our suffering. From birth to death, life is suffering. When a baby is born, he or she is not laughing, but crying loudly. This crying continues until they go to the grave in sorrow. So Psalm 90:10 says, “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.” When Jesus assumed our humanity, he became like us, exposed to all hazardous perils of life. Jesus became a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering (Isa 53:3b). When we find ourselves immersed in the harsh realities of human experience, he knows exactly how we feel. Jesus took upon himself all our sufferings, and even experienced the anguish of death. Human beings live under the threat of death throughout their lifetimes. This terrifies us more than anything else. This threat of death is most reflected in our achievement-oriented culture. People find their worth and value based on their achievements. When they achieve something, they feel valuable. When they fail, they fall into condemnation. In such a culture, Christians can begin to think of their own lives in terms of their achievements. But Jesus does not receive us on the basis of our achievements. He welcomes us as we are, in our weaknesses, and helps us as our merciful and faithful high priest. His help enables us to do what we should do in small things. Even if we do not do achieve anything in this world, Jesus welcomes us and give us the kingdom of God as our inheritance.

Jesus himself is the example: he was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He didn’t go to college. He had no degree. He never travelled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. Yet, he is considered the greatest man in history, even by worldly people.

Secondly, Jesus helps us overcome temptation as our merciful and faithful high priest (17-18). Along with the fear of death, temptation is another strong weapon of the devil. We are vulnerable to temptation due to our sinful desires such as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:16). Because of these desires, we are easily tempted by the devil’s prompting. We are tempted to worship the idols of money, fame, and power. We are tempted to be self-centered and complacent, avoiding self-denial and taking our cross and suffering. Because we are weak and these temptations are so strong, we cannot overcome them by our own effort and will. Each person feels alone in times of temptation. Sometimes we fail and fall into despair. We lose the joy of life and our appetites, and develop insomnia. Who can understand and help us? Look at verses 17-18. “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. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” In order to understand and help us, Jesus became fully human in every way. He was tempted just like us, but he did not sin. When he was on the cross, Satan tempted him, “Come down from the cross. Prove that you are the Son of God. God abandoned you.” How much he wanted to come down from the cross and crush all the evil men! How much he wanted to call down the angels and show that God loved him! But he did not come down. He endured the pain of misunderstanding and shame and agony for us.

Jesus lived a perfect life and offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to make atonement for our sins. In this way he became a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. People often say, “You just don’t understand me.” It is true. No one fully understands another person. But Jesus understands us. In his mercy, he is ready to help us in our time of need. He does not despise us in our weaknesses because he understands us. Jesus never rebukes us for our failure when we come to him. He does not say, “After failing again, do you now come to me shamelessly?” Rather, he understands us and helps us. He does not help us just one or two times, but again and again because he is faithful. Jesus welcomes us as we are and gives us victory over the devil.

**Fourth**, pay attention to the message of salvation (1-4). In light of this great message of salvation, what should our response be? We need to put our faith in the promise of this great future grace—that what we see in Christ today will someday be our destiny. Fix your eyes on Christ, not on the pain and futility and frustration and sickness and death of this age. They will not have the last word. Christ has conquered death and all the sin and pain that leads to death. Think on him. Consider him. Look to him. And say to cancer and frustration and depression—say to every unsubjected enemy—“Psalm 8 is my destiny! In Christ Jesus all things will one day be put under my feet, and I will rule with him in glory forever and ever.” Believe that and say that—in the face of every calamity and every frustration in life. Because it is true. Jesus has made it true.

But if we do not pay careful attention to this message of salvation, we will drift away. If a ship is not steered with clear direction, it drifts away. Whether the waters are calm or rough, there is an undercurrent that is always moving. It causes the ship to drift gradually and aimlessly until it is caught in dangerous waters and wrecked. So the boat should always be steered. In the same way, if we do not pay careful attention to the message of salvation, we can drift away in the tides of worldly ideas or the devil’s temptations which always circulate around us (1Pe 5:8). So we must be alert and hold firmly the message of salvation.