

HUMANITY AT ITS HIGHEST

SERIES: THE SUPREMACY OF THE SON

by Steve Zeisler

Wilt Chamberlain is 7'1 3/8" tall and weighs more than 250 lbs. Although he is 50 years old, by all accounts he is physically undiminished with age. Frank Deford has described him as "the greatest athletic construction ever formed of flesh and blood; a natural who was big and strong and fast and agile, accomplished in virtually every challenge he accepted." Chamberlain is also a very wealthy man. He is the sole resident of a palatial home that sits on a hill overlooking the city of Los Angeles, seemingly unfettered by responsibility of any kind. Wilt Chamberlain is immense in almost every respect, and by himself seems to be a walking argument for human greatness. But that depends on our standard of measurement, doesn't it?

David asked a penetrating question in the Psalms:

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars
which you have ordained,
what is man that you are mindful of him
or the son of a man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:3, 4)

Are human beings impressive? When he is set against the scale of all that God has created, against the scale of the universe and the sweep of history, can man be counted impressive? The core and kernel of David's question to God is, of course, "Am I of any value? Is there something about me that is worth caring for?" Max Lucado has written:

Someone has convinced us that the human race is headed nowhere, that man has no destiny, that we are in a cycle, that there is no reason or rhyme to this absurd existence. Somewhere we got the idea that we are meaninglessly trapped on a puny mud heap that has no destination. The earth is just a spinning mausoleum, and the universe is purposeless; the creation was incidental and humanity has no direction.

Is the earth really a "spinning mausoleum?" Will it turn out in time that we really do not amount to anything, that there is nothing to commend us to God, to history or to one another? Some seek to avoid that question. Using aggression and bluster, they suppress such questioning feelings and instead force the world to pay attention to them by becoming competitive and pushy. Some remain lonely and fearful all their lives, afraid to ask the question. Some are so convinced they are worthless they deliberately hurt themselves with drugs and other harmful things as a way of punishing themselves for being inadequate. Truly, David's question lurks at the back of everybody's mind, "What is man? Who am I that anyone should care for me?"

The second chapter of the book of Hebrews is, I believe, the most powerful setting forth of human value in the Word of God. Here we are reminded that human beings are worth something. Here we find a resounding affirmative to David's question, "What is man?" This book was written to a group of persecuted and discouraged Christians. They were drifting

from the faith, losing sight of the figure of Christ, drifting back to their past in Judaism. But Hebrews is a book with a vision: a vision of who Jesus is, a reminder of his person and work. In Hebrews 1 we read of him, “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews has many words of encouragement for us, for here we are reminded that God understands what we must experience on this earth. At the end of Hebrews 2 we are told, “He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” But Hebrews has many warnings also, stern and frightening warnings about the consequences of our choices. In Hebrews 10 we are reminded, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

So this is a book of vision, encouragement, and warning. It is addressed to Christians who are losing their way, calling them back to the centrality of Christ. In our study from Hebrews 2 this morning the focus is on the significance and the wonder of being human, the great value that God places in the human beings that he has created.

Previously, we have seen that the argument of Hebrews contains a series of comparisons proving the superiority of Jesus to various rivals, the first of whom were angels. Jesus is greater than angels, declares Hebrews 1. In the fourteenth verse we learned that angels are “ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation.” Thus we see that the assignment of angels in eternity will be to serve men and women who will inherit salvation in Christ. Angels, in other words, are to be servants of and therefore less important than human beings. That argument is picked up again in chapter 2, beginning with verse 5:

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying,

**“WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM?
OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED
ABOUT HIM?
YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE
LOWER THAN THE ANGELS;
YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR,
AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM
OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;
YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION
UNDER HIS FEET.”**

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. (Hebrews 2:5-8)

In chapter 1 of Hebrews, we saw that because Jesus is God’s Son, begotten of his Father, he is greater than angels. The thrust of the argument in these verses, however, is that because Jesus was a man he is greater than angels! Angels will not rule in the world to come, when the cosmos is rolled up as a garment and thrust aside, when the enemies of Christ are made as a footstool under his feet. In the age to come, angels will serve human beings, who will inherit salvation with Christ. Because Jesus is God’s Son he is superior to angels, because he is a man he is also superior to angels.

Psalms 8, which is quoted here, is not about Christ in particular. It is about any human being, any son or daughter of a man. David asks the question, “What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” In other words, how can human beings be valuable? Then by inspiration he answers his own question: humanity is intended to rule. The destiny of those who are in Christ is glorification—like Christ: “Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honor.” Human beings were intended to be crowned by God with glory and honor. Thus our destiny, if we are in Christ, is greatness. In the age to come we are to rule, and angels will be servants of men. Hebrews 2:9:

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 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 author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying,

**“I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME
TO MY BRETHREN,
IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION
I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.”**

And again,

“I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM.”

And again,

**“BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN
WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.”**

In Hebrews 2:10 we are told that “it was fitting for [God]...in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of salvation through sufferings.” The point of that statement is to say this: God the Father so valued men and women like us that he did not consider it unfitting for his Son to suffer horribly to win us back to himself. That is how much God values us. David’s question articulates the cry of every human heart, “Do I have worth?” The stirring answer of Scripture is, “Mankind was made by God to rule with Christ forever. God values us so much that though it cost his Son the ugliness of the cross, it was worth it to win back this race of Adam that he loves so deeply and values so highly.”

We are told in verse 11 that Jesus is not ashamed to call us “brethren.” He unashamedly declares that he is the brother of men and women like us. Some of you have a “black sheep” in your family. We remember the agony of the Hinckley family whose black sheep son almost succeeded in assassinating President Reagan. We heard of the family’s efforts to establish a good relationship with their son, of their anguish over how they raised him. If the truth were known, most families probably have one member whom they have nothing to brag about. But Jesus is not ashamed to say that we are his brothers and sisters. God the Son will be united to the human race for all eternity. When he ascended again into heaven he did so in a resurrected human body. He did not give up his commitment to humanity. He will forever be tied together with human beings. He is not ashamed to call us brothers.

In Hebrews 2:13 we read the quote from Isaiah 8, “Behold, I and the children whom God has given me.” We hear Jesus calling attention to himself in the heavens: “Look at me (Behold!), and look at the children of God whom he has given me.” During softball season this year, I was given a big lapel button with my daughter’s picture on it. You may have met other parents wearing the same kind of buttons, ready to say proudly, “Yes, that’s my child playing first base! Here’s her picture.” Proud parents like to call attention to their offspring. In the same way, Jesus will stand in the heavens, unashamed to call us brothers, saying, “Behold, look at the children of God who have been given to me.” We matter to him. He loves us deeply. So David’s question, “Can humanity be worth anything?” receives a tremendously affirmative answer in Scripture. God loves us so much he became man to save us.

There is widespread and proper concern today among Christians over the secular religion of our day, secular humanism, and its effects as it is promoted in schools, in the media, etc. But the operative word there is “secular.” The Christian announcement that human beings are valuable because God loves them and they are redeemed in Christ is very biblical. When God is left out of the equation, however, problems ensue. It is only when people are taught that they—in and of themselves—are capable, that they can find within themselves worth and self-esteem apart from God, that problems begin to surface.

But the Christian message to the world is that God loves man, that he values people utterly, and if they will believe they are destined to have dominion in the age to come. Human beings are incredibly valuable! If they will hear and believe the gospel, they become like their older brother Jesus Christ. They will be crowned with glory and honor, as he is. That is the gospel. Human beings who insist on being rebels will never find within themselves the kind of value that occasioned David's question. They have no answer to the fear, "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" No matter how hard they try, they never succeed in dredging up from within themselves a sense of worthiness. But the message of the gospel is that God loves us so much that he was willing to allow his Son to die so that he could win us back to himself. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren. Christians are destined to rule with him, to be crowned with glory and honor as he is.

Because human life is so valuable, not because we are smug and self-righteous, Christians ought to oppose abortion. It is precisely because human beings are so valuable that we ought to be concerned to see democracy spread, the kind of democracy that says everybody counts, not just the elite. That is why Christians ought to regard apartheid in South Africa as reprehensible. Governments who hold that some people are less worthy than others ought to be resisted and spoken out against.

Many wonder why Bible-believing Christians appear to meddle so much in the controversy over drugs, sexual perversity, etc. Why don't we just leave people alone? We hear. If people want to be sexually perverted, let them go ahead. The answer, of course, is because Christians value the individuals involved in such behavior. That is why a Christian will say, "I am going to try and influence you to stop destroying yourself. This kind of perversion is degrading you and I want to help you overcome it."

Today we read of anorexics starving themselves to death and alcoholics drinking themselves to death, but the gospel is the power of deliverance from all these kinds of abuses. It places an extremely high value on human life. Christians therefore ought to help those caught in these self-destructive practices by preaching the gospel to neighbors, fellow workers and friends. God loves them too deeply for them to live without knowing of that love. They need to know of the offer of dominion, glory and honor he holds out to the human race.

There is a problem, though, the problem that gave rise to David's question. As he gazed at the stars of the heavens he asked, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him?" The sight of the heavens above him made him feel small and insignificant. Further, Hebrews 2:8 declares of mankind, "We do not yet see all things subjected to [man]." And that is the problem. If you just measure by appearances, what you see seems to clash with the Scripture. We do not yet see human beings manifest the kind of value God places on them. Rather we see inadequacy, failure, inconsistency, hurt, bad habits, and only occasional success. We do not yet see human beings demonstrating what the Bible declares was God's intention when man was created. Our eyes tell us that we are quite unimpressive indeed—even those among us who are seven feet tall and very rich.

But that is what makes Hebrews 2:9 so important: "But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus...crowned with glory and honor." We do see Jesus. That is the magnificent announcement here. We do not see human beings as they will be, or as God sees them, and we do not place a high value on them or on ourselves. But we do see Him. And seeing Jesus Christ is what gives us self-worth. Seeing Him more clearly and loving him more deeply is what will convince us that we are worthy people. God became a man and that man is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, crowned with glory and honor, and he has promised that that is my destiny too. The way we find self-worth is through intimacy with Jesus Christ. As we see him we will become increasingly convinced that we too are valuable and worthwhile.

We see one psychological or pseudo-theological movement after another these days seeking to convince us that we can discover worthwhileness within ourselves. But that's impossible. No matter how thorough the investigation, fallen human beings will not find value and adequacy within themselves. And running off to the latest psychological seminar won't answer the problem; nor will getting a promotion at work elevate you to a plateau where you will feel within yourself that you are valuable. Joining the country club where you will be able to associate with wonderful people won't do it either. We do not see in this life humanity crowned with glory and honor. But if we are Christians we do see Him. And when we see him that message of God's great love and concern for human beings can be translated into value for ourselves. We see Him. That is our basis for believing that human beings are worth something. It is the basis for rest in our own hearts.

I was with a group of friends one evening recently and one of those present was a very beautiful woman. During the evening, someone made a comment in jest about this woman. When I spoke to her later she was in tears, as the thing said in jest had reminded her of something she used to hate about herself when she was a teenager, something she believed was true of her still despite the evidence to the contrary. That one comment had brought back all the inadequacies of the past. People carry with them memories of being laughed at or passed over. Deep down they wonder, "Am I really worth something? How do we get over that? How do we get well? How do we find evidence that we are worthwhile people?" Here is the answer in Hebrews: We see Jesus. We do not yet see humanity crowned with glory and honor but we see Him.

So there is an answer to David's question, "What is man—insignificant, short-lived, generally weak and incapable—what is man that anyone should pay attention to him?" God loves us. We mean so much to him that he has twined together God the Son and the human race so they will never be separated. And he is not ashamed to call us his brothers. That is what he offers in the gospel. Those who do not believe ought to believe and receive life in Christ. Those who do believe ought to grow more intimate with Jesus Christ because it is in our clear vision of him that we have the answers to all the fears, the inadequacies, the bad memories and the hurt feelings of the past.

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Catalog No. 4006
Hebrews 2:5-13
3rd Message
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August 31, 1986

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