

A Tarnished Crown

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Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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by S. Michael Durham
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Hebrews 2:5-9

For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

The room was dark and the only light that poured into the room came from under the crack of the door. When the official opened the door, he found him in the corner in an over-sized chair, moderately intoxicated. His tie was loosened, his shirt was disheveled, and his face bore the weight of the last few months' crisis. Here was a man that had ascended to one of the greatest political positions of power. He had the might to call armies forward or to draw them back. He had done so to end a major war and conflict. He had established foreign relations even with enemies, and opened up trade charters that had been closed because of the communism that had controlled those countries. He was the future and hope to perhaps turn the presidency into an imperial reign. It was certainly his attempt to do so, and he was appearing to accomplish it. All was going well until one night a third-rate burglary was botched. From that moment on, his rise to power fell to the removal from power. I speak of none other than Richard Nixon and the scandal of Watergate. He resigned as President of the United States, being the first and only president to have done so.

It's a tragic thing to see such a rise to power and such a devastating fall from it. It is reported by the official, Henry Kissinger, who found Nixon alone in the dark room that the night before his decision to resign as president, Nixon actually asked Kissinger to kneel on the floor and pray. With drool coming from his lips and tears coursing down his face, the beleaguered president uttered a prayer to God for mercy.

What is it that would take a man to the height of power, prestige, and position and then render him helpless and bring him to his knees? What is it that would strip the most powerful man in the world of his power and leave him all alone?

As tragic as Nixon's fall from power was, there was even a greater fall from power that occurred in the Garden of Eden. The Bible tells us that man was given the most high and exalted position of all of God's creation, and that God had placed everything under man's dominion. And because of a blunder, a tragic mistake, man was toppled. But I must be more specific. It was not just a mistake in judgment, it was a heinous, high-handed act of treason against the Creator. I call it what it is, sin. Because of man's sin, man fell the most tragic fall that has ever been recorded in human history. It is worse than Watergate, worse than any deposing from any throne or dominion. This was the fall of all falls as far as human history is recorded.

It would be a very bleak picture if we ended here, but the Bible gives us hope in Hebrews chapter two verses five through nine. Man was given a crown, but that crown has been tarnished. However, one day man's tarnished crown will shine new again, and man will once again be able to rule and reign with Christ in an exalted position.

In the book of Hebrews we have discovered, that through chapters one and two, the writer of Hebrews is laying out his case with great precision. He has stated clearly that Jesus Christ is the best revelation of who God is because He Himself is God. Secondly, His message is far better than any angel's or human messenger's message because He is superior to the angels and to man. Since Jesus is far better than any angel or human messenger, then we ought to listen to what He says and to heed it. Far greater will be the punishment of those who don't heed this superior revelation than the punishment of those who did not heed a lesser messenger. This is what the author has stated thus far.

Now in verse five we pick up his argument that Christ has dominion over the angels.

For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands. Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet."

Once again the writer of this epistle of encouragement delights in quoting the Old Testament Scriptures, mainly the book of Psalms. He again dips his cup into the refreshing streams of the Psalms, chapter eight. His whole doctrine rests upon the truth of Scripture. Fabrication he leaves for another. In fact, when it comes to doctrine he will have no part in anything invented by man. He is writing to a Jewish audience, and he must substantiate everything he says from the Bible of the Jews.

What a lesson for any teacher or preacher! Our words must consist of the Bible. As Spurgeon said, we should bleed Bible if cut. Our teachings and discourses must not rest on human wisdom and philosophy. Our proclamation must rise or fall on God's Word. After quoting his source, the author of Hebrews continues his brilliant exposition of the quoted text,

Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Now in these words the apostle Paul has reminded us of power, position, and of a new world order. I want you to take another look at verse five where the writer states that there is a new world order to come. It's not the new world order prescribed by the United Nations; it's not a new world order that's achieved by military might or global takeover; it is rather a new world order that God will establish. He says, "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come." He says concerning this new world to come, the rulers of this new world order are not going to be angels as it is now. The Bible teaches that at this present time the earth is under the dominion and rulership of angelic beings. In Ephesians chapter two and verse six that there is a "prince of the power of the air;" in other words, Satan. When man fell in the garden, Satan took dominion over the earth. Along with Satan fell one third of the angels. These angelic rebels have been given temporary dominion over the earth. But we also know that righteous angels have been given dominion as well. In Daniel chapter nine, the Bible speaks of certain archangels who had certain areas in which they exerted their leadership. For example, Michael the archangel had leadership and dominion over the country of Israel.

So we see at this present time a world order where angels, good and evil, do conflict. Don't misunderstand me, the good angels are not fighting that God might be able to have supremacy. He has supremacy. Even though at this moment the prince of the power of the air may have some dominion over the earth, it's only by the divine and sovereign permission of God. God has allowed that temporarily. But there is coming a new world order where that will change.

But this new world order will not be governed by the holy angels. David and the writer of Hebrews say someone else. As to whom it will be, we'll look at that in just a few moments. For now, I want you to see that there is a new world order to come.

Let us next note that the preacher of Hebrews refers to an exalted position of man. But first he mentions man's inferiority to angels. In verses six and the first part of verse seven, he says man is inferior to the angels. This inferiority refers to man's power and intelligence compared to that of the angels. In the degree of God's created order, men are under the angels. Verse six notes man being created under the angels in God's creative order, "In a certain place testified, saying, What is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels."

In God's creative order there are angels, and in the creative order of angels you have a hierarchy or a chain of command among the angels. After the angels, you then have man. There is no argument that as far as our abilities are compared to angels', we are substandard to them. But yet, even in this substandard condition, the Bible is very clear that God has promoted man over God's creation. This is what the Psalmist means in verse seven, "Thou crownedst him with glory

and honor, and did set him over the works of thy hands: Thou has put all things in subjection under his feet.” God has placed everything that He created under the authority of mankind. Please note that it says all things, “Thou has put all things in subjection under his feet.” Is Jupiter one of the works of God’s hands? How about the farthest regions of the universe where the nebulae and black holes of outer space exist, are these the creative work of God? Absolutely. What about the extreme regions of the deepest ocean, or the farthest glaciers of the North, or the summits of the mountains, are they the works of His hands? Absolutely. Then all of these things have been placed under the control and the leadership of man. This is amazing! A lesser creative order than angels, called man, would be given the subjection of all things that God made. It would stand to reason, to me, to place the most intelligent and the most powerful and the mightiest to rule and reign over God’s creation. But not God. You just can’t figure Him out, can you? It was not angels but man that was promoted to such responsibility.

In Genesis chapter two when man was created, God told man that he would have dominion over creation. Adam was in charge over the plants and every creeping thing that crawled on them, birds of the air, fish of the seas, over every animal, everything! When God created man he put him in a garden to tend that garden. The Lord caused all of the species of animals to come before Adam, and Adam named them one by one. Man was given the dominion of this earth.

But the text also tells us of a terrible fall. Man fell from his exalted position. In the last part of verse eight, “But now we see not yet all things put under him.” That’s a tragic statement, because in that one sentence the Biblical writer is referring to the greatest fall from power that has ever been known in human history. As a result of sin, the fall occurred, and with it, man lost his dominion over the earth. Satan, the prince of the power of the air, deceived Adam out of his dominion, and now Satan has been given occupation of earth. He is an enemy that occupies our territory.

Friends, the reason that there is chaos, suffering, and misery today is because of man’s rebellion against God. Although, man, by his own brilliance has captivated by his abilities many things in the world of physical science and the world of politics, man is still far from having dominion over all things. In outer space we’ve shown our strength and might, but all things are not under our dominion. People still get sick and people still die with cancer. From time to time we hear how the elements of nature claimed the life of another human being. People still go hungry. There are still wars, there are still crimes, there are still acts of anarchy, and there is still chaos throughout the world. Why? It’s always the same answer, because of man’s sin.

The question of, “why suffering” has been posed as an unanswerable question. But, dear friends, that is a wrong premise and a wrong assertion. It is not an unanswerable question. It is very much answerable, and the answer is a derivative of one thing----sin. Why misery in the human race? Why are there problems? Why does man suffer so? The Bible answers resounding, “Sin!” God said to man, “obey me or else,” and man said, “I don’t think I will, thank you.” In Adam we all turned our backs on our Creator and God, and the result is every tear that’s ever been shed, every drop of blood that has been spilt, and every heart that has been broken. The political chaos that is now upon this nation is a result of man’s rebellion against God. Every ache in your

body is a result of man's rebellion against God. Every time you sit down with your bills and the money is not sufficient, it is a result of sin. Friends, it's not a difficult answer to find. The Bible says, "the soul that sinneth it shall surely die." With death comes all manner of suffering, misery and predicaments that you and I are suffering or will suffer. God prescribed for man a means for blessing and prosperity. The means was simple obedience. The moment that man disobeyed, the consequences which God intended for man to escape, if he would only obey, came upon mankind. Suffering could not be avoided. Problems and pain cannot take their leave of us until Christ returns to occupy planet earth.

Let's go back to the first part of Psalms eight and the question that the preacher asked, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or who is man, that thou visitest him?" Knowing that man purposely, and without hesitation when tempted in the garden, chose to disregard his Creator, isn't it amazing that God would still be mindful of or consider man; that He would still want to have anything to do with us? It's amazing! So amazing that David asks the question and the writer of the Hebrews simply echos it. Who in this world are we that God would have anything to do with us? We are made out of dirt. We're worth as much as a handful of dirt is, nothing. From the soil we came and to it we will return. We are nothing but a few minerals and when we die, we will return to this earth from which we came. Yet, God is still mindful of us. He has not forgotten us. He has visited us, and He has a plan for us.

What's amazing to me is that over fourteen years ago God would visit me one morning in December and take me from the lowest parts of hell and exalt me to the highest position in heaven, in Christ Jesus. I am still stupefied over that fact. I, who knew the truth and yet hated it. Hated it? Some would ask, "How could you have hated it, if you preached it? How did you know you hated it?" Because, I refused to submit to it, that's how. And though you may profess it with your mouth, if you do not live it, if you do not obey it, if you do not heed it, then you hate it.

The tragedy of man's fall is eclipsed by the awesome love of God. In verse nine we see that Christ Jesus has, by His death, restored man to his exalted position. Read verse nine, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." How timely this passage is in light of the season we are in. Here, in just one phrase, the author has stated the great fact of the incarnation. God visited man by coming and being one of us. How could we not be amazed as we look at this passage? Not only did God not write us off and completely annihilate us, but He remembered us. He still thought lovingly toward His creation that had rebelled against Him. But even more amazing is that He literally came among us as one of us. God became man; He was subjected to being formed in a woman's womb, lower than an angel. Physically, Christ Jesus as a man was lower in His creative order than an angel. Now I'm speaking in words of which I have no true conception, so I only state them and refuse to try to explain them. Forgive me, I pray, but I dare not say any more than what the text says because I'd probably say something that is not right. Jesus, who is God, having all the powers and attributes of God, did not lay those attributes aside. However, the Creator, who has no beginning and has no end, who was not created, became, in the created order, a little lower than the angels. My mind is reeling with the fact of this, and I can only stand back amazed and say, thou art an awesome God! Praise be unto thy name forever and ever.

This He did for us, but don't stop there, keep reading the text, "But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." Here, it is stated, the hope of our restoration. The fact that Jesus suffered death is our hope. Sin brings death, and the only way to vanquish sin and put an end to sin, is to pay the penalty of sin. Now how could you and I pay the penalty of sin? "The soul that sinneth it shall surely die," this is the only payment. But we speak not just of physical death but of what the Bible calls the second death. What is the second death? It is eternity separated from God in the furnace of His righteous indignation. That is the only way in which to pay for sin. If the payment of sin is an eternal payment how shall I ever finish the paying of the payment? I can't! To be eternal means to be without end. Therefore, I never conquer death and sin.

If there's a hope of us to be restored to the position we once had, somehow, somebody would have to die for us. But oh! Not just physical death, but also a death that would suffice as the payment which is an eternal payment of sin. Somehow, somebody had to fill up and to satisfy the entire justice of God. Remember, the justice of God against sin is an eternal justice. God's holy justice must demand a payment that is sufficient and equal to the person who has been harmed, who in this case is an Eternal Majesty. The Bible says that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels that he could suffer human death, in the place of sinful human beings.

Jesus died. There is tragedy in Jesus' death. What tragedy could there be that He died? That's our hope! Yes, it is, but it's a tragedy that the eternal God who was holy, who was not guilty of sin and who could not even think of sin, suffered as the sin substitute. Do you understand the import of this? It means all of our guilt of sin was placed upon Him. That's tragedy, friends, that my God's hands should be besmeared with my sin. The holy and blameless Christ must be considered by the Father as unholy. Now He's not unholy as He hangs there on Calvary's cross, but He is considered as such by the Father because He is sin's substitute. Would you let your mind think on this for a few moments? Reach out and grab your mind's attention and bring it back to these few words. Jesus willingly suffered His Father's rejection, hatred, anger, wrath and justice when He deserved it not. That's tragic. He was made to feel the pangs of rejection by his Father; He had to feel and to know the torment of being separated from His Father because of you and because of me, in order that He might restore us to where we once were and to what we once had. How can pity not flow like rivers from our hearts towards Him? Are we so hardened in our sin that we cannot muster a drop of feelings for the Crucified as we consider His agony?

Despair must give way to delight as we keep reading. Don't stop here. Here is not where the gospel ends. The gospel of our Lord moves from tragedy to triumph. Look at verse nine, "But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor." Don't gloss over this, "for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor." The word "for" here means "because," "the reason is." The reason for the "suffering of death" was for the crowning of glory and honor. What can the apostle mean? His point is that Christ suffered the death that He died on our behalf as our substitute, but God has now crowned Him with glory and honor. "Wait a minute," you say, "He was God, is God, therefore He already had glory and honor." Yes, He did. In His preincarnate state, before Bethlehem, before his virgin birth,

He is God. The writer of Hebrews has sufficiently proved his belief in this great doctrinal fact of Christ's deity and preexistence. But in Christ's incarnation He became lower than the angels. We are not talking about His preincarnate state, but rather, we are talking about His humanity. As a man, made just like you and me, except without a human father, He was subject to human limitations. He could suffer hunger, weakness, pain, and everything you and I can suffer. But now, He as a man is exalted with honor and glory. This is what David meant when God gave him the prophecy. The writer of Hebrews understands David to be saying this about the Messiah. Christ as a man suffered death but has been highly exalted to honor and glory.

Christ prayed for this in His prayer before the crucifixion in the Gospel of John chapter seventeen and verse five, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Jesus prayed for the glory that He had before He came to earth to be restored to Him. This is the glory that belonged to Him.

We shall find out in Hebrews chapter five and verse eight that Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered as a man. He as a man was obedient to the Father's plan which was to suffer as a substitutionary death offering for us. As a result of our Lord's obedience, God said in so many words, "As a man I am going to take You, Christ My Son, and exalt You as a man to the position that I intended man to have." What was that position? That everything, that is, all creation be placed under a man's authority.

Christ has been exalted as a man, to the right hand of the Majesty on high. This is the point of Hebrews, first chapter and verse four. All of this ties together. Read the last phrase of chapter two and verse nine and don't contain your joy. Don't just sit there. Let the truth grip you and let it rapture your soul to joy unspeakable. Read it! "He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." If you're saved today, if you're truly the child of God, it is because He tasted death for you. And in His exaltation, you too have been exalted with Him. You have been restored to, by the last Adam, what the first Adam lost. The apostle Paul understood this concept of being a joint-heir with Christ when he wrote, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with [him], that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:17). And again to the Ephesians Paul says that we are seated in heavenly places since we are in Christ (Ephesians 2:6).

Man wants to deify himself. Man wants to make himself like God. Friends, there's only one way for us to have the authority of God, and that is through the Man Christ Jesus. No other way. I am not insinuating by that statement, that you will be God when you die and go to Heaven. There are cults that teach such lies. What I am telling you is that you, through the grace of God, have been given the position of dominion over the created works of God. What you and I had in the garden, and Adam lost, has been restored to us through our Lord Jesus. One day you and I will be exalted even above the angels. The Bible tells us in the book of Corinthians that we shall judge even the angels in our exalted position of ruling and reigning with Christ.

We must never forget that when Christ returned to heaven, He did not stop being both divine and human. He did not lose His humanity when He returned to heaven. The epistles of the New Testament often refer to Christ glorified in His humanity as well as His deity. For example, I Timothy chapter two and verse five, which says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." In Christ, humanity has been exalted to the throne of dominion.

Dear friends, let every believer with a cancer ridden body know that Jesus triumphed and was exalted. Let every believing parent mourning the loss of an infant know that Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Let every child of God who has been a victim of crime and injustice know that Jesus reigns. Let every poverty stricken Christian know that they too, like Him, shall enjoy the riches of his or her Father in heaven. May we all know the final conclusion and hour of our exaltation. It's important we remember these truths. Go back to the very introductory message of Hebrews and remember to whom the author was writing. He was writing to Christians who were suffering, and he wanted to encourage them by reminding them of their destiny.

There are Christians listening to me who are suffering right now. You're going through some severe trial. Perhaps you are being tested like you've never been tested before. How will you be encouraged today? How can you sing today? How can you have cheer and joy again? How can your heart be at peace today? Here's how, remember your destiny. You say, "Right now I wait and nothing seems to change. Christians are still getting sick. Christians still struggle to make ends meet. Christians still die." The fact that we wait does not change the reality of the outcome. Because we wait for something does not mean that something will not occur. Because you do not have what you hope to have right now does not change by one degree the reality of it coming to pass.

We had an election over a month ago and we still don't have an outcome, but that does not throw out the possibility that because we're waiting right now, we're not going to have an outcome. I guarantee you, January 20th somebody will become the 43rd president of the United States. We may not have that now, but waiting does not negate its happening.

You and I do not have the experience of the exalted position that this passage tells me we have, yet, it is as much ours today as it will be in the future. It is ours in Christ. Today, in reality, we don't enjoy the exalted privilege. Today, you suffer. Right now you hurt. But the waiting for the experience of the reality does not make the reality any less real. The more time goes by, the closer will be our experience. Every day you wait for this passage to become reality, is one day closer to it happening. Friend, there is a day of exaltation for you and it will come. As we look at the greatest disaster that has ever occurred, second only to Satan's fall, we must remember that through Jesus Christ the fall from power we have experienced can be overcome.

I began this message by telling you about the political fall of a president. Let me encourage those of you who may not know for sure that you are a Christian. I want to tell you about something

that also happened during those dark days of Watergate. Many of you perhaps know of Chuck Colson. You might listen to his radio program, "Breakpoint." He has written over 14 different books and is a syndicated columnist. Chuck Colson was known as the White House hatchet man, a man feared by even the most powerful political people in Washington during the four years that he served President Nixon. In fact, the media of the mid-70's one time said of him, "incapable of humanitarian thoughts." He was just that ruthless in his political power and in his exercise of it.

But during the dark days of Watergate Chuck Colson was converted and professed faith in Christ. He wrote a book entitled Born Again. In the book he writes of his conversion. I want to read to you some of his own testimony to show you that though one may fall, through Christ, one can rise again. He writes,

The White House works just like it does for those of you in business. You've all had the same experience. When I went to the White House, you get an office way down the hall from the President and then you move yourself closer and closer and closer, and I ended up in the office immediately next to the President of the United States. I can remember looking one day out over the south lawn, the beautiful manicured green lawns of the White House, and thinking to myself, 'My father was right.' He used to tell me in those depression years, 'Son, if you work hard, if you put your mind to something, if you really go for it, that's the great American dream. You can succeed.' Here I am sitting in the office next to the President of the United States, walking in and out of his office every day of the week. One of the most powerful positions in the world. Limousines outside waiting for me. Admirals and Generals saluting. Everything a person could want, and curiously enough, that was the first time in my life that I felt empty inside.

He had been under investigation and it was looking like the inevitable was going to happen, he was going to have to serve time in prison. One evening, while all this was swirling around Colson, he was in the home of a dear friend that had become a Christian. The friend shared with Colson what had happened to him and shared with him how he too could know Christ as his Savior and Lord. He also shared with him a book written by C. S. Lewis called Mere Christianity. He invited the beleaguered Colson to pray with him right there in his living room, but Colson refused. He left his friend's house under a deep work of the Holy Spirit. One of the most powerful men in the world, he got into his car but couldn't leave the driveway. Again here is Chuck Colson in his own words.

I left my friend that evening and I have to tell you that I was known as the toughest of Nixon's tough guys, the White House hatchet man. I was called in the newspapers "ex-marine captain." I found that evening that I couldn't drive the automobile out of the driveway of my friend's house because I couldn't get the keys into the ignition. I was crying too hard, something I would never do. I sat there for a long time in that driveway thinking about my life, thinking about what he had told me about Jesus and wanting more than anything else in the world to know God and to be at peace with him. I cried out that night. I'm not even sure of the words. I just said 'Just take me God, just take me the way I am.' I sat in that car for a long time that evening and the next morning I was sure when I woke up I would feel embarrassed, but I didn't. I felt a wonderful, wonderful sense of peace.

The rest of the story is that Colson has gone on to be the founder and president of Prison Fellowship, and has served distinguishedly in the cause of Christ. A few years ago during the twentieth anniversary of the Watergate experience, Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes interviewed Chuck Colson about his topple from power that occurred during those scandalous years. At the end of the interview Mike Wallace asked him this question, "Chuck, how do you now look back on Watergate?" Colson said to him, "Mike, I thank God for Watergate." The reporter looked at Colson with a startled expression, and the once politically powerful man said, "Because I learned the greatest lessons of my life during Watergate. The teaching of Jesus is true. He who seeks to save his life will lose it. He who loses his life for Jesus' sake shall find it."

Friend, if you're not a Christian today, I want you to know you're on the same road every one of us in this room who are Christians have gone down. We have gone down the same road of ruin and destruction. And the only way out of the pit that we were in, was by Jesus Christ reaching down and lifting us up by His grace. Do you want to rise up out of the pit you have fallen into? The only power you need is the power of Jesus Christ. Through His power can God change you. Go to Him right now and let Him take a tarnished crown and turn it into a crown of glory. Amen.