Proper 22 • Hebrews 2:1–13 (14–18)

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James is talking about, but based on James 1:6, I am inclined to think James is speaking about the rich who are oppressing Christians with a description of the Christian at the close of the verse. The attitude of the Christian, the righteous man, in light of the oppression he experiences by the rich is clear. While the rich oppressed and even murdered the righteous, the righteous did not resist. It might be tempting to preach about the sins of wealthy Christians, but I believe focusing on the response of Christians to the oppression of the rich is more in line with the overall theme of James as highlighted in the section on patience in suffering that follows.

The second exhortation on patience in suffering (Jas 5:7–12) is likely the easiest of the three sections to preach. In this section, James encourages Christians to endure suffering patiently in light of the imminent return of Jesus. He encourages a steadfast faith that resists the temptation to grumble, recalls the faithful examples of the saints, and displays an integrity that allows others to take us at our word as we await Christ’s return.

The third exhortation (Jas 5:13–20) to pray emphasizes the importance of prayer in the daily life of a Christian. Prayer in times of suffering, joy, praise, sickness, confession, and need is seen as a powerful mark of a righteous follower of Christ. Prayer is not only a cry of faith to God or a therapeutic practice; it is an essential quality of the Christian life. Included in verses 19–20 of this third exhortation is a statement that emphasizes the importance of the community of faith in assisting fellow believers in remaining on the path of truth until Christ comes again. In this section, we learn that James’s exhortations are not only explicating Christian identity, but are also designed to protect followers of Christ from wandering away from the faith.

Regardless of which section of the pericope one selects, all three share the following themes: we are to live out our identity in Christ even in the face of suffering, we are to assist our brothers and sisters in staying true to the faith, and in light of James 1:2–4, suffering works to test and refine our faith until Jesus comes again. If one desires to discuss all three sections in one sermon, using these three themes as a sermonic structure is one possible way. Another way to address all three sections is to consider James 5:1–6 as a contextual description of suffering, James 5:7–12 as the call for patience in suffering, and James 5:13–20 as the role of prayer in suffering.

Anthony Cook
Now, there has been debate as to whether this text refers to Adam and Eve or if it refers to Christ. The answer is probably yes to both. The language of Psalm 8 cannot help but evoke in the reader’s mind the imagery of Genesis 1:26–31 in which God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth. At the same time, this Hebrews text clearly connects to Christ. So, how might we do justice to both at the same time? We can do so by setting them within the overarching story of Scripture. Psalm 8 brings the past and future together.

First, Psalm 8 echoes the language of Genesis and asserts that humbleness of humans as creatures of God. What is man that God is mindful of him? He is simply a creature along with all the other creatures. Yet God has made him a little lower than the angels and given us dominion. Such dominion was to reflect God’s own dominion over creation. So how does God rule? So that everything blooms and blossoms like in a well-watered garden (Isaiah). God rules so that everything flourishes by his work. That includes the creation, animals, and humans. That was God’s vision for his creation. That became our responsibility as image bearers of God. That brings us to how the author to the Hebrews connects Psalm 8 to Christ.

Verse 8 of Hebrews 2 notes that we don’t see that dominion that God intended. Clearly something has gone wrong with the original intention. Humans did not rule for the benefit of creation. They did not want to rule as a reflection of God’s gracious rule. They wanted to rule and be in control as God himself. They wanted to rule for their own benefit. And as a result, everything has gone wrong.

Verse 9 then points us to Christ. Of interest is the language of 1 Corinthians 8 picked up here by speaking of the Son of God as the creator (“for whom and through whom all things exist”). Now we see a double honor by God. Not only did God honor us with the role of being responsible over creation, he now honors us by becoming a human creature so that in him, that right dominion would be restored. The Creator enters his creation by becoming incarnate. The wording about Christ, that “for a little while” he is made lower than the angels, suggests the state of humiliation. Jesus voluntarily set aside the divine majesty that had been shared with his human nature in the incarnation so that he might suffer and die for us. And even more, that he might be raised up and seated at the right hand of God for us.

In this, as a man the Creator becomes our brother. The man Jesus rules over all creation. As God, he had always ruled. But it is as man that he reacquires the proper dominion over creation as God had given it to Adam and Eve. He does so as one of us, as our brother.

The sermon can be organized into two parts for the double honor God has bestowed upon us: (1) Honored by God with the privilege of looking after his creation, (2) Honored by Christ’s incarnation and dominion.

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