

Hebrews

Hebrews 2:9-10 - “But we see Jesus...”

Part 5 was about catching on to what God made us humans for, because it helps explain why we Christians suffer. And that for the author of Hebrews was important, because the Christians in his care were losing heart.

Their confidence in Jesus and in Christianity had been hit hard by what was happening to them. Opposition to Christianity had been increasing, to the point that many Christians had been turfed out of their homes, and some had been killed. So why on earth was God letting them suffer like that? What possible connection could suffering have with this “new and living way” of salvation they were supposed to be experiencing?

And when it's confusing like that it's tempting to give up and lose interest and “drift away,” as some of them in **Hebrews 2:1** were already in danger of doing. So this was the challenge faced by the author of Hebrews. How could he wake up his people to what God had sent his Son for? Because it was tough watching the light dim in their eyes. But at least they were still meeting together - although things weren't looking so good on that front either, because some in the group were missing meetings already (**Hebrews 10:25**), and it sounds like their meetings were depressing and negative too.

It was time, therefore, for the author of Hebrews to get some serious teaching into their heads, that would make the basics of Christianity come alive and get the juices flowing in the right direction again. But that meant a strong reminder in **Hebrews 2:3** that they had a choice to make, because there were serious consequences if they continued the way they were. Making choices was nothing new, of course, because God had been putting choices before us humans from the very beginning - starting with the choice he faced Adam and Eve with in the Garden of Eden, to the choice that Job was faced with too, and so was Abraham, Israel, the Jews in the first century, and now it was these Christians in Hebrews as well.

The choice had always been the same too. It had always been a choice between two ways, which had never changed. So it hadn't changed for the Christians in Hebrews either, which was good, because it provided them with a clear explanation as to why they were depressed and in danger of drifting away, and why suffering was part of their Christian life too.

Well, for a start, they were suffering because “at present,” **Hebrews 2:8**, “we do not see everything subject to humans yet.” One day that would all change when they’d be “crowned with glory and honour” and they’d be ruling the world (verse 7), but until that time came they were stuck in this tough world, where life would be unsettling, upsetting, frustrating, confusing, and at times it would feel utterly pointless, futile and even crazy too, because suffering would get their minds focused on themselves, and in really hard and frustrating times they’d be tempted to question the sanity of God too, which in turn would make it very difficult for them offering any sort of hope to other people, including their own children and grandchildren.

So what help does the author of Hebrews have to offer us in such a world?

It comes in the next four crucial words in **Hebrews 2:9**, which are: “**But we see Jesus.**” And emphasis can be put on all four words too, starting with the word “**BUT,**” because “but” is stating emphatically there is an answer. Yes, it looks dismal, all this suffering we go through as Christians in a world that’s so opposed to everything we hope and stand for - “**BUT**” there is hope, because “**WE**” - we Christians - have been given different glasses to look through that enable us to “**SEE**” a completely different dimension at work, and a thoroughly **hope-filled purpose** to what’s happening to us and the planet at this time.

So yes, there is suffering that we share in too, but what we see above it all and in it all is “**JESUS.**” And that makes all the difference, because “**HE suffered (and tasted) death**” too, **verse 9**, and when you realize from Hebrews Chapter One that Jesus was also the mighty Son of God willing to suffer and die as a human in this world just like us, it has to mean there is a great and meaningful purpose to living in this world - and to suffering in it too.

And **verse 10** tells us what that purpose is, that “it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, **should make the author of our salvation perfect through suffering.**”

So the first great purpose in suffering was to “perfect” Jesus, so he could “author” our salvation next. But why would Jesus - as the human manifestation of the amazing Son of God and the radiance of God’s glory - **need** to go through any sort of perfecting at all? Because, **verse 10**, it takes us right back to “God, for whom and through whom everything exists.” It takes us back to what the great God was thinking when he thought this all up in the first place, and why he created humans. And **verse 10** tells us why: it was all about “**bringing many sons to glory.**” And that’s the “salvation” Jesus was being made the author of. But what did that mean exactly?

Well, again, Hebrews comes to our rescue, because starting with the word “**GLORY**” in the phrase “bringing many sons to glory,” we know from Hebrews what that means. It means us humans being crowned with glory and honour as kings and queens over God’s creation (verses 7-8).

But why give that job to humans? Because God made us humans so much like himself that we are “**SONS**” to him. We’re made of the same stuff as God, in other words. We have God DNA in us; we’re members of his family. So he’s not handing over the creation to some unrelated creature he came up with while doodling during a lunch break; he’s nailing up a board on this planet that says, “God and Sons Limited.” It’s a family business, in other words, involving both God and humans working together, which is why God made us so much like himself. He made us partners in the family firm.

So that’s the “sons” and “glory” part of **verse 10**, but there’s also that word “**BRINGING**” in bringing many sons to glory. And that suggests a process we go through first. So even though we’re God’s children with God’s royal blood flowing through our veins that destines us for rulership as members of God’s royal family, we need some “bringing” first to make us ready to rule.

And it’s this bringing bit, or training period, that can get a little rough for us, because it involves testing and suffering, which the Christians in Hebrews were having trouble accepting. “But,” the author of Hebrews reminds them, “**WE SEE JESUS,**” right? - in first of all seeing **Jesus willingly going through this same process of testing and suffering to get him ready too.**

He was being made ready to become the author of our salvation, so that he could then ready us to join him as partners in God’s royal family ruling God’s Kingdom on this Earth. But how did suffering fit in with all this - for both Jesus and for us? What was in God’s mind, and what was he aiming at, in facing us with tough choices and even exposing us (and Jesus) to the power and cunning of evil?

Was there anything specific God was after, or that he needed to know from us, or that could only be found out by going this route? Yes, there was, and it soon becomes apparent what it was in the first test God faced the man with in the Garden of Eden. He placed two trees in the middle of the Garden, with a clear warning attached to one of them, the one with the knowledge of good and evil in its fruit, that guaranteed death to anyone who ate off it. But how strange was that, when the man had no way of knowing what “good and evil” was, or what death was? He had no experience in either of them to know how dangerous and deadly they were.

So was it wrong and unfair of God to throw this poor man into a situation he was totally ill-equipped to handle? It's like telling a two year old child that if he keeps stuffing sugar and fat laden junk down his esophagus his chance of contracting Type 2 Diabetes increases by 79.2 percent. It's gobbledygook to a child. But it's obvious that the adults telling him this are concerned, and they obviously know a whole lot more about life than he does, so what should the child so obviously do in this situation?

It's shut up and listen, right? And **TRUST** enough to obey. And of course it's trust that the child needs to have, because he isn't equipped yet to make right choices. But nor was the man in the Garden of Eden either, so the obvious thing for him to do was trust as well. In other words, God was making trust in him the obvious way to go.

It was clearly trust, then, that God was after, and rather than make it difficult for the man to trust him, he made it easy, by making the choice of which tree to avoid so obvious. And trust was so important because only trust would lead to the man following **all** God's instructions willingly and without resistance. And that would mean God and man could happily work together in ruling this creation, exactly as planned in God making man in his image.

But then comes the second test, when God lets the cleverest of all the creatures he's made (in Genesis 3:1) come under the sway of Satan the devil (Revelation 20:2), who, being the father of lies (John 8:44), does just that, he tells a bald-faced lie to Eve. Well, this was something Eve had never come up against either, and even though it was so so obviously a lie she felt herself being sucked into a whirlpool she could not resist.

So was it wrong of God - to face Eve this time - with such a crafty creature, when the consequences for all humanity were dreadful, and she was totally ill-equipped to handle it? But what was God after in facing her with such an impossible situation like that? It was obviously Eve trusting him, because what other choice did she have?

God had set things up perfectly for both man and woman, therefore, in making trust the only and obvious way to go. It was tough, yes, because Adam and Eve were both flying blind, but isn't that the way it is for all of us? We all arrive in this world just as ignorant and vulnerable as Adam and Eve, with no concept of what God made humans for, or what the devil is up to. So, being ignorant and vulnerable, what other choice do we have as raw, inexperienced humans but trust in the one who made us, since he obviously knows a lot more about what's going on than we do?

And that need hasn't changed since Genesis either, because Satan is still as real and crafty as he ever was, and he's still "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), so it's guaranteed we'll be faced with all sorts of mind-bending and mind-numbing situations we cannot sort out for ourselves, or make sense of, and especially when they're happening to us personally.

And that's when we're faced with the same choice Adam and Eve were faced with, and so were the Christians in Hebrews. Will we make the obvious choice of trusting God - because he knows a whole lot more than we do - or do we go for the knowledge of good and evil tree, and make the right and wrong of a thing the god we bow to instead?

Because that's what it boils down to, and it has always boiled down to for us humans. It's the choice between those two: Which God - or small 'g' god - do we trust in? Is it big 'G' God, **Hebrews 2:10**, "for whom and through whom everything exists," or is it what we believe to be right and wrong? Because God has made absolutely sure we are faced full on with this choice by leaving us in this world and up against the devil and all his crafty temptations, so that impossible situations arise that will mean suffering of all kinds - physical, mental and emotional - that we cannot handle.

So, do we accept our ignorance and inability to cope and turn in trust to God who set this whole thing up in the first place, or do we judge a situation - and judge God too - by what we believe to be the right or wrong of it? Because this is the determining factor and the crucial test in bringing a royal child of God to glory. Jesus had to face it and so do we: same test, same purpose.

But let's get practical here, because it's when we can't see any logical or legitimate reason for our suffering (or someone else's suffering), it's easy for our minds to blow fuses and for all sensible thinking to fly out the window, and we come to a grinding halt in our relationship with God. We can't move on, because our minds won't let go of how unfair and undeserved and wrong our suffering is, whether it's happening to us personally, or to others. You'd think, though, that in recognition of our utter helplessness and powerlessness in coping with these situations that we'd automatically turn to God for help, right? - **because what other choice have we got?**

And that's exactly the place God intended our suffering to take us. But it's such a tough place for us to get to, because our minds are screaming, "How could God let these awful things happen?" - which the author of Hebrews fully understands because - as he wrote in **verse 8** - we're stuck in a world we don't rule yet, so, yes, awful things will and do happen - "BUT...."

And in that one word “BUT” in **verse 9** we have God’s answer. It’s the missing ingredient we need to enable us to trust him when these awful situations arise. So what is this “but”? It’s “But we see Jesus,” **verse 9**. We see God allowing totally unfair and undeserved things to happen to Jesus as well, meaning Jesus faced exactly the same impossible tests we do.

We see that in the very first test Jesus was faced with, right after his baptism, when he “was led by the Spirit into the desert,” In **Matthew 4:1**, “to be tempted by the devil.” So this was God’s doing. He wanted Jesus tempted. And if that doesn’t sound crazy enough, Jesus then starved himself for forty days as well, deliberately making himself helpless and vulnerable. The devil then tries to tempt Jesus into proving he’s the Son of God, believing he had the right to do so, because he, Satan, ruled the world, not Jesus.

Well, it was a totally pointless exercise on the devil’s part because Jesus wasn’t interested in proving anything, or in proving who was in the right or in the wrong here. His only interest was trusting God, but that, take note, was all that was needed for Jesus to say, “Get away from me, Satan. For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’” (Matthew 4:10).

But what was it that made Jesus trust God in the first place? Well, HE SAW something too. And what he saw, according to **Hebrews 2:9**, was “the grace of God” in how merciful and gracious God was in coming up with a plan to pull us humans out of the soup of our stupidity so we could still be trained up to become his royal sons, when God had every right to give up on us and throw in the towel - but he didn’t because of his grace.

And that’s what gave Jesus the trust to see him through the temptations of the devil and the craziness of his death too. Because it was crazy. There was nothing right about Jesus suffering and tasting such an awful death. It was totally unfair and undeserved, but Jesus never judged what was happening to him on the rights and wrongs of it. He only saw “the grace of God,” that by “tasting death for everyone” God would then make him “the author of salvation,” so that one day he could change the world and make life better for every bird, fish, cat, tree, plant and human.

But to qualify for that position, Jesus had to go through the excruciating mental pain of trusting God when everything in his human brain was screaming “this is crazy” what God was asking him to do. At one point Jesus even said, “Let this cup pass from me,” meaning “You don’t really expect me to go through with this, do you?” - because to a human mind it wasn’t right. To die as an innocent man didn’t make sense; it was bonkers.

Faced with Jesus' example, therefore, which is exactly what the author of Hebrews is doing in these verses with his congregation, what does that make us think when we're suffering, or someone else is, and our brain is also screaming "How can that be right?" How, for instance, do we react when hundreds of Christians die in a terrorist bombing of a Christian church?

Was it wrong of God to let it happen? Well, it's certainly tempting to think that way if we're judging the situation on the knowledge of good and evil, or on the right and wrong of it, because how can there be anything right about God allowing Christian families to be wrecked by evil maniacs?

But read the story of Job, and we see God allowing awful things to happen to him as well. Anyone reading Job for the first time must shake his head in wonder at how completely bonkers that story is, because God lets Satan kill off Job's family and destroy his livelihood - and right after saying Job was the best good guy on the planet too (Job 1:8). It makes no sense at all. But read the story through to the end and two things become clear.

Most of the book is about Job's friends basing everything happening to Job on the rights and wrongs of it. Job must have done something wrong to deserve such treatment from God, right? And even Job said God needed to be taken to court to defend himself. So on the one hand it's about how we humans judge things. Our brains are geared to right and wrong, so if something doesn't seem right to us we fume and scream and even think we've got the right to judge and blame God as well.

But the moment came in **Job 40:1-2** when God says to Job, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?" - or as The Message phrases it, "Are you going to haul me, the Mighty One, into court and press charges?" In which case, God continues in **verse 7**, "let me ask you a question, Job: You think I'm so wrong in allowing bad things to happen, right? Well (verses 12-13), if you can 'crush the wicked where they stand and bury them all in the dust, then I will admit to you (verse 14) that your own right hand can save you.'"

And that's the big choice we're all faced with when we think God is so wrong for all the terrible things he's letting happen. We can say God is wrong, but do we have a better solution for dealing with evil, or a better way of changing the world? Does the sour-faced grumbler judging God know how to solve the impossible dilemmas we humans face every day in this world? Is he ready to rule the world, because he knows what the solutions are? And does he have the wisdom, patience and power to make those solutions happen, or is he just an armchair critic spouting nonsense he knows nothing about?

God isn't pulling punches or softening the blows here. He's demanding an answer from Job, because he knows all too well that we humans think our view and our knowledge of right and wrong is the be and end all in making this world function successfully.

But surely our horrible history has conclusively shown us by now that we don't have a clue how to rule this world, or how to stop evil. Because look at the mess we're in. Look at the suffering we have no control over. Look at the children born with cancer and autism and handicaps they will never recover from. Look at the quality of life we've created for only the few, while billions of others have to starve and scour garbage dumps for survival. Why do we think we can judge God, then, when this is the awful world **we've** created?

Well, it woke Job up with a jolt, because what made more sense? Was it trusting in his own view of right and wrong, or trusting in the God who made everything and therefore knew exactly where he was going with it - and who had the power to make it happen too? Suddenly, Job saw the immense patience, mercy and grace of God, in sparing him from his delusions and ignorance and terrible short-sightedness. He saw what Jesus saw, that if it wasn't for God's grace we humans would have no future and no hope at all.

So suffering has taught us that the knowledge of good and evil does not work. But it's such a tough one to accept, the proof of which in my own life is how quick I am to judge people on what I perceive to be the rights and wrongs of their actions and beliefs. And what that has done, unfortunately, is hold me back from trusting God, because I don't see God correcting all these wrongs in people as I would, or as I (in my 'great wisdom') think he should. Why isn't he doing something about practicing homosexual Christian priests, for instance, or bishops sexually abusing children?

Surely I have the right to demand that God answer for all the awful, crazy things he allows and he's done, like telling Abraham to kill his son, of all things. But we know what God was after in that story in order for him to one day bless every person who's ever lived forever. It was trust. But not any old trust. It had to be trust that not only survived the most excruciatingly, mind-bending circumstances, it had to survive the temptation to doubt God's sanity too. Well, Abraham passed that test, but Job nearly didn't. I find it interesting, then, that the stories of Abraham and Job were written around the same time, with Abraham's story proving beyond all shadow of doubt that trust is what God is after, while Job's story shows us **what holds us back from trusting God**, and it's so clearly about how we judge things, including God, by whether they (or he) are right or wrong, and what our own brains perceive as good or evil.

You can see, then, why God created the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It's because the knowledge of good and evil is the only alternative we've got to trusting in God. If we don't trust in God, for instance, what do we humans trust in instead? Our history tells us we trust in what we believe to be right and wrong, and our entire system of law and justice is based on that. It's how we judge a person fit to live as a free citizen and not throw him in jail.

But that isn't how God judges a person as being fit to rule in his Kingdom. He bases our fitness on our trust in him. But we live in a culture, meanwhile, that determines and judges everything, including God, by its rightness or wrongness. So in everything that happens on this planet, we either trust a merciful and brilliant God, OR we trust in our knowledge of good and evil. That's the choice God faces us with, and it has never changed since he first set it up in Genesis.

It's a tough one, though, because Satan is still the "god of this age," so he has all sorts of situations he can use in this world to get us thinking God can't be trusted. Like children being abused, for instance, because how on earth could a loving God allow innocent children to suffer?

But here's the test: Do we head straight for the tree of knowledge of good and evil and judge God on what fits our view of right and wrong, or can we look past that and say, "But we see Jesus," because in him is our salvation - or the solution to all our ills - including what happens to children?

It has to be the most difficult choice we make as humans, though, because our minds are so tuned by the devil to judging everything, including God, on our perception of right and wrong. But when you realize this is the great test God is facing us all with, which if we pass qualifies us one day to join Jesus in changing this world for the better so we can stop this kind of evil ever happening again, does that help us think differently?

Because that's what the author of Hebrews appeals to his people with. Can "we see Jesus, now crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9), "sitting at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 1:3), whose entire purpose as ruler of all God's creation is to bring all of us to glory and honour, including all those abused children, but only through enough pain to finally convince us that we don't have the solutions without God?

We're so fortunate being Christians, because when difficult, upsetting situations arise "we see Jesus," who did not react to his own suffering and death on the basis of the rights and wrongs of it, but on believing that God, "for whom and through whom everything exists," knew best.

We see in Jesus' life, then, the first and most crucial step in transforming a human into a son of God in preparation and training for joining God's royal family and running this world the way it was meant to be.

And that first and most crucial step is trusting God, no matter what.