

**“WE SEE JESUS”**  
*Hebrews 2:8,9*

As many of you know, I had a few days in Prague a couple of weeks ago. The hotel we stayed in, as is pretty well the norm now, had a television in each room, with a variety of channels available. So I was able to watch – albeit briefly – an episode of *My Family* dubbed into Czech. But there was also the usual English language twenty four hour news channel, on this occasion BBC News Worldwide. So at any time of the day or night you could tune in to see what was going on in the world and catch up on the weather forecast for Australia or the state of the markets in Shanghai or the Indonesian football results. But as far as the news was concerned, it seemed that there was a relentless torrent of violence, disaster, tragedy and crime pouring out of that little flat screen. Of course there were plenty of good things going on as well, and they got the odd mention, but there is certainly enough that is going wrong in our world to fill the airwaves twenty-four hours out of every twenty-four.

It can get very depressing (and maybe that does have some bearing on the higher incidence of depression and stress that seems to be part of our lot these days) and we end up, if not actually despairing, at least questioning what on earth is happening to our world. Let me just say once again, as I have often said before, I’m not sure that the world is necessarily any worse now than it’s ever been: we’re just able to see it more easily. But whether we are living in more violent, tragic times or not, it’s certainly not the way things are meant to be, surely.

We read in the opening paragraphs of the Bible, the first chapter of *Genesis*, that God created a world which was good, in which everything had its place. It was, we believe, a place of beauty and harmony. And into that world God put human beings, created in his image, perfect in every way. To them he gave the responsibility for looking after the world: they were to be his managers. Look at *Genesis 1:26-28*. It was a world under the control of humanity, a world of order and structure, a world of peace and co-operation. Human beings were made a little lower than the angels in God’s plan – a point made by the writer of *Psalms 8*, which we read earlier and which is quoted in the chapter we’ve just read from *Hebrews*. Humans were “*crowned with glory and honour*” and everything was to be under their stewardship.

And yet, as the writer of this letter so rightly says, “*at present we do not see everything subject to him.*” Some people argue that we are talking here about Jesus, rather than about humanity in general. I’m certainly not convinced that we are talking only about Jesus (in v9 it seems that Jesus is introduced as someone else) – and even if we are, he is being spoken of here as the ideal human being, the perfect example of humanity. The point remains that the world as we see it is in a mess. This wonderful creation

which God has spoken into being is quite clearly in a state of confusion and chaos. It is by no means under the control of humanity.

Tennyson, in his great poem *In Memoriam*, writes of “*Nature red in tooth and claw*”. Nature, creation, is tainted with blood. Disaster and tragedy are integral parts of creation as we see it. Humans, rather than taming it, are at its mercy, whether it is the damage caused by earthquakes and volcanoes or the devastation brought about by extreme weather, as we’re seeing in Pakistan at the moment. And at the other end of the scale of size, there are the plagues caused by germs, viruses and other microscopic organisms. Foot and mouth, leprosy, TB, Aids – are we in control of them? It doesn’t seem so, however cynical you may be about government policy or the plans of profit-driven drug companies. We are at the mercy of creation even in the relatively civilised and prosperous developed world where we don’t have to deal with the real extremes of climatic disorder, or the close proximity of wild and dangerous animals. We certainly do not see “*everything subject to him.*”

And that situation is exacerbated when we stop to look at the way we *have* managed this creation. Where there have been parts of the world that have remained unthreatening, human beings have tried to impose their will and their design on it. This world is not as God made it, nor, I believe, as God wants it. Look across the English countryside – that “unspoiled beauty” which we so love. It’s nothing like the way God made it. Forests have been systematically destroyed over the centuries and even now what remaining hedgerows we have are being grubbed up. Roads criss-cross the landscape, great chimneys and cooling towers loom large from miles away. And the flora and fauna that once flourished are now depleted or extinct. But that’s small beer compared to the devastation that has been visited on other parts of the world. To satisfy our western demand for burgers and similar foodstuffs, huge swathes of rainforest have been destroyed. To provide cheap energy for the great cities, far away communities are literally washed away to build dams and reservoirs. The community based agriculture of many developing countries has been destroyed to clear great prairies for the growing of cash crops to meet our outrageous appetites. That is not what God meant when he gave humankind the mandate to “*fill the earth and subdue it*”, surely. It’s a recipe for continuing disaster – and, indeed, we see those disasters happening, as often as not because of humanity’s own pigheadedness. Climates change. Areas become unstable. Weather patterns are affected. Deserts form. The basic resources become scarcer.

And out of that comes a situation in which we cannot even control ourselves. Not only have our appetites run out of control – at least in the prosperous west – but our relationships and our communications have also taken a turn for the worse. How does what we regularly hear of on the streets of Lozells and Brixton fit in with this? How can we claim that humanity is living in the way that God wants when we see scenes of hatred, bigotry and violence such as those in the market places of Baghdad, behind the wall in Israel

Palestine or in the villages of Helmand? (And let's not be too smug about it: there are folk in this city, possibly in this congregation, who have some pretty bizarre opinions on all this.) What do we say when we look at the situation in Zimbabwe, in Colombia, in Somalia: when we look into the refugee detention centres of western Europe, into the young offender institutions and prisons, into the ghettos and slums of Easterhouse and Calcutta, into the brothels of Soho and Berlin? Do we say, "there is man, 'crowned with glory and honour', with 'everything under his feet'"?

I doubt it very much. If we bother to look at all, and if we can bring ourselves to care at all about it, we surely despair. Whatever the good things we see, the advances of science and technology, the apparent "progress" we have made, the overall picture is depressing and degrading. It is an offence against the God who created a world of order and beauty – and then handed it over to us to look after. Much of it is incomprehensible to us. We cannot understand it, but we are saddened by it. We express our shock and gasp in amazement. But we are all part of the problem. We are all as much to blame as the next person: our nation as much as any other nation. Our sin and our fallibility have dragged us into it. So even our own local, personal situations are tainted. We cannot control our own health, our own ageing, our own lusts and desires. G K Chesterton once wrote: "*Whatever else is or is not true, this one thing is certain – man is not what he was meant to be.*" What a depressing picture! Humanity should be in control, but isn't. At present we do not see what we should.

V9, though, begins with an emphatic "*But ...*" We may not see everything as we would like it to be, or as God wants it to be, "***But we see Jesus.***" If we look up for a moment from our newspaper, from our television screen, through the awful mess that we call our world, shining in the very midst of it, we see Jesus. We see what humanity should be like. The writer here echoes the words of the Psalmist to stress his point. Jesus really is what we were meant to be: he is the ideal human being, the perfect expression of the image of God. Look – there's the answer, there's the solution to this great problem of a sin-spoiled world.

As we've already said, it's our sin, our weakness, our fallibility that has got us into this mess. So Jesus became like us. He took on the form of a being "*a little lower than the angels*", a human being, and limited himself physically in order to identify with us. He suffered the problems of this mixed-up world along with us. He had to cope with temptation, with illness, with weakness and tiredness, with opposition, with frustration, with dangers and storms and all kinds of other things – just like us. The problems of this world affected him just as they did anyone else.

And Jesus suffered, just like us. But, as the ideal human being, the perfect image of God, when he suffered death it was a redemptive act. He had no need to die on his own account. After all, he was

sinless, perfect. So when he was nailed to that cross of wood, “*by the grace of God he tasted death for everyone.*” Jesus died on that cross in order to provide a way out of the chaos and confusion. He died to show that there is a love that can overcome all things. He died to “*bring many sons to glory*”, to restore to fallen humanity the potential to get back to where we belong – reconciled to God, brothers with Christ (v11).

Shining through the gloom and despair, through the scenes of devastation and deprivation and depravity and depression, we see Jesus. He is there and he holds out the prospect of a better life to come. Just as the death of Jesus meant that he is now “*crowned with glory and honour*” (v9), so we can look forward to that privilege, to becoming what we were originally meant to be. There is a great future for us when God finally sets to right this mess. As we see when we read through the amazing vision that John had of the final defeat of evil, which he recorded in the book of *Revelation*, those who put their faith in Jesus will be vindicated and will have their opportunity to rule with Christ himself over the new creation. The mess we see around us is not all there is. God has a plan that will sort it out once and for all. The frustration and despair that creation experiences now – that **you** experience now when you look around – has been dealt with through the death and resurrection of Jesus. If you believe that, and can accept that he did it for you, then you can be in on it.

Just a word of warning, though. This isn’t “pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die”, the kind of thing we sing about in choruses like *Turn your eyes upon Jesus* or *Forget about yourself and concentrate on him*. The temptation is to say that we’ll put up with this now, or even ignore it, because there might be something better along later. As we turn to look at Jesus we should be motivated by that sight, inspired to do something about this world. It should force us to rethink our use of resources, to renew our relationships with those around us, to get involved in telling other people about Jesus and his redemptive love. We don’t become blinkered by looking at Jesus – on the contrary, our vision should be widened, our horizons broadened, so that, spurred on by his example, motivated by our gratitude for his love to us, fired with the anticipation of that crown of glory, we actually **do** something to help our struggling world.

The writer of this letter makes that very point a bit later on, in *12:2,3*. Don’t just *see* Jesus, “*fix your eyes on him*”. As I said, this is not advocating some kind of escapist “looking the other way”, but actually looking through the pain and suffering of this world to Jesus, who stands above and behind and beyond – and within – it. He has actually done something about it: the only one who really could. And he’s calling out to you this morning to give him a chance to change your perspective. Look at him. Focus on him. Listen to him. Follow him. There’s really no other way to deal with the situation that confronts us in this world.