

Part 1: When I Feel Limited

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In 2019, one British talk show interviewed a man who identified as a piece of broccoli. In order to push his agenda of plant-based diets, this man, claimed—seemingly in jest and much to the difficulty of the man trying to interview him—that all he was, was broccoli. His job was to grow and be a plant.

Just this past week it was reported, joking aside, that a teenage girl in Melbourne, Australia is identifying as a cat. Her school is even allowing her to act according to that identity as long as it doesn't interrupt the class.

These two stories hold together the unique world we live in right now. It is a world where legitimate issues of mental health and outrageous claims about existence promote worry, anxiety and hyperbole. It's hard for anyone to speak with clarity on the issues either way because at the heart of these issues is the bedrock idea of what it means to be human. Which is a difficult question to answer apart from a worldview perspective.

Is there something essential to being human? Are humans distinct from anything else? Distinct among themselves?

This constant chatter is all around us. But the significance of this question isn't seen exclusively in whether we wake up and use the litter box, or if we are processing light to energy with photosynthesis. We are making micro-decisions about the essence of our humanity on a moment by moment basis.

We are taking a break from our study through the book of Luke to prepare us to talk back to our world, and to talk back to ourselves in the midst of that never ending, and sometimes crushing monologue of life. Over the next few weeks we are going to discuss how we can preach the gospel to ourselves when we are anxious, depressed and angry. But the truth is, if we want to understand the true realities at play behind each of those experiences we must answer the question of what it means to be human.

Science is helpful to certain degrees in this area. Science helps us understand the nature of what is. It can divide what is physical and observable into categories and attempt to measure the sum of our parts. But science as a discipline cannot tell us who we are. It can tell us essentially what a human is by observing a human in contrast to a tree. But it cannot tell us the essence of humanity, its purpose, its intent, its design or essence.

For this we need something more, here is where the intersection of science and philosophy meet. It is good for us to consider more than what is material, but for the Christian our understanding of all things begins not with a blank sheet of paper and some good ideas, but with a God who speaks to us—a creator who created us, and who has explained to us who we are by also revealing to us who he is.

In other words we cannot understand the trials of this life without understanding what it means to be human, and we cannot understand humanity apart from understanding the God who made us.

Today we are going to look at this intersection and here is what we are going to see: **The fullest experience of humanity is living in dependence on an unlimited God.**

We are going to be looking at Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 this morning and we will unpack this main point by looking first at Psalm 8 to see humanity is **Distinct among Creation** and **Dependent upon the Creator**, then in Hebrews 2, the author of Hebrews is going to apply Psalm 8 to Jesus where we see **Redeemed in the Christ**.

To begin let's read Psalm 8 together: **Psalm 8:1-9**.

So here we see a poem that begins and ends with the unparalleled majesty of God, but in the middle of it is the significance of humanity.

If you're familiar with the story of scripture at all, this Psalm is directly echoing the creation account of Genesis 1. Over the course of six days God created the world, the light and the dark, the day and the night, the land and the water, the birds of the air and the beast of the field, and as a centerpiece to his creation—he made man in his own image, male and female he created them.

We can learn a lot about God by looking at the heavens, and studying the strength of lions. But because man is made in the image of God, it was in humanity that the majesty of God was to be reflected most fully. That was the original design, it was why he made us in his image, it was why creation was repeatedly "good" before man was created, but when Adam and Eve were created God said his creation was "very good."

Because it was humanity that was exclusively made in the image of God we must comprehend that we can only know so much about ourselves without understanding the one in whose image we are made. Yet, we can still learn somethings about the essence of humanity by comparing ourselves to the rest of the created world and this is what David does in Psalm 8 and is our first point this morning: **Distinct among creation**.

Humanity is part of creation, but it is distinct among it. It is limited in that it is lower than the created angels, but also made to rule over other aspects of creation.

Humanity is not a bird, nor is it an angel. Humanity is not a fish, but neither is it a star. It finds its place in between what it is not. Humanity is not the Lord whose majesty reigns over all the earth. But neither is humanity a fish swimming in the sea. Humanity is not the angels in their raw spirituality but neither is it a beast of the field. Humanity is not the cosmos in the heavens, but neither is it as ordinary as a sheep or an oxen.

Blaise Pascal, the brilliant mathematician and faithful Christian once said that "humanity exists halfway between immensity and that which is infinitely small."

In other words, beyond ourselves is endless vastness in both directions. There are galaxies upon galaxies—stars, planets, and black holes that we cannot yet even detect let alone understand. There are moons the size of our earth and stars brighter and hotter than the one that cooks us in the summer.

But at the same time, below us are galaxies of cells, mitochondria, bacteria, molecules, protons, neutrons, atoms, and quarks beyond our field of vision or understanding.

In a world of seeming infinity, here sits humanity drastically limited.

David picks up this unique tension. It is the world beyond humanity, the stars and brilliance of the Milky Way which sparkle with radiant glory, yet God has chosen to crown humanity with glory and honor.

It is bird who defies gravity to soar up in the air, and the fish who breathe effortlessly underwater yet it is the air breathing, gravity bound man who is given the task of dominion and ownership.

More than that, going back to the creation account man was bound by his hunger. He was placed in a garden to meet his need. He was subjected to day and night where he had need for sleep. The stars never hunger, the peaks of the Andes never sleep, but man is bound to want and rest.

Here is where I think we need to pause for a moment. Because whether you admit it or not, we are all theologians. We all have thoughts about God and theology and that shapes our life by what we actively believe and actively disbelieve (talking to ourselves).

So I want to ask you a theological question: will humans, risen to resurrected glory in heaven, will we have limitations? Your answer to this question goes back to the very answer I opened with. What is the essence of humanity? Is humanity essentially limited? Or is humanity essentially unlimited?

Looking at Psalm 8, and considering the Garden of Eden before sin entered into it, we would find that the essence of humanity is limited. It is limited by what it is not (not a bird, or a tree) but it is also limited in its dependence. This is again where the image of God idea is key. We cannot understand who we are fully without understanding the one in whose image we are made.

Look again at **Psalm 8:5-7** and I want you to notice who the primary actor is in each verse.

Who is the actor? The majestic Lord of all the earth. Even in the garden look at what God said to Adam and Eve **Genesis 1:28-29**.

God gives the air-breathing, ground-walking man and woman dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. But then what does he do? He gives them food. He provides for them what they need. He meets their limitations not by making them unlimited, but by meeting their limits with his unmatched provision.

We were made to reflect God's glory, laboring in all our efforts, in a distinct reliance upon the God who is unlimited. Though man is the center of Psalm 8 grammatically, it is a Psalm about the Lord and his majesty. More than stars which burn without any effort, or mountains which stand without draining their strength—the majesty of God is made most visible in his care and consideration for limited humans.

This is where we encounter our second point this morning: **Dependent upon the Creator**.

God is by nature, unlimited. God has no needs. God has no wants. God's essence is eternal, unending and unaffected. This earth-filling, majesty-sitting, power-wielding creator made man in his image to show that our essence is only fully understood in relationship to his essence. We are not God, but who God is shapes who we are.

We are first and foremost his. He made us in a physical form with a spiritual life. We are not bodies with souls. Or souls with bodies. We are made body and soul together to be in a direct relationship with the God who gives us all that we need even though we will always have needs.

This is extremely important for us to understand especially in our own day. We live in an era that sociologists and philosophers are calling "the era of expressive individualism." That is that if you want to be who you really ought to be then love yourself and give yourself everything—satisfy yourself endlessly.

But there's two problems here. The first is the problem of idolatry. Because God is the creator, creation can never satisfy itself. That's idolatry. To think that you can satisfy yourself, to think that another created object, even as glorious as the moon or the stars can make sense of and satisfy you, is to commit idolatry. James points out that everything good we encounter on this earth is meant to drive us to the creator and not the creation: **James 1:16-17**.

James solves the problem of idolatry by showing the God who alone brings about good, but then assumes the second problem. That is the problem of experience. He knows we are going to be deceived into thinking we can find all that is good on our own. But what's the problem with that? Those good things always change. Why? Because those good things are themselves limited. It is God alone who is unlimited, and he alone is to be relied upon for salvation and satisfaction.

The problem of experience is then that the more we try to satisfy the longing of our humanity in things which are limited, the more desperate, depressed, anxious and alone we feel.

This idea, is not new by the way. Augustine wrote in the year 397 to a similar culture and this is what he said: **For, however far a man may fall away from the truth, he still continues to love himself and to love his own body.**" He goes on to say that no one then is able to hate himself or to hate his body. This is the exact opposite of what our world today says. If you are weak, love yourself more. But look at what he says next: **"And when some people say that they would rather be without a body altogether, they entirely deceive themselves. For it is not the body, but its corruptions and its heaviness, that they hate."**

This is a profound glimpse into our own souls. How many of us think our problem is that we don't love ourselves enough. But Augustine echoes Paul when he says, "No one hates his own flesh!" What we hate is where our bodily existence, our weaknesses, and our limits don't match up to the picture of humanity each of us carries in our hearts. We are all living in light of who we think we ought to be.

Some of us are frustrated because we don't have the kind of existence we would expect a human to have. But that begs the questions again! What is the essence of humanity! What is the kind of existence we are to have?

Each of us knows something is corrupted. That's because sin has corrupted us. But we always misidentify what is actually corrupted. Without the help of the gospel we will always assume that our limits are our corruption. We must therefore fix our limits.

We strive for unlimited income, unlimited sex, unlimited peace, unlimited work, unlimited energy and unlimited wisdom. But what if our understanding of humanity is in itself wrong?

What if the greatest act of human flourishing, what we were truly made for, was not to find ourselves unlimited but instead to find ourselves desperately dependent upon the God who is himself unlimited.

How many of us are not so much frustrated that we are human, but instead we are angry, upset, depressed and anxious because we are not God?

This was in fact the first sin. Look with me at: **Genesis 3:1-7**.

What was the Devil's logic? God is holding out on you. He whispered into Eve's ear that being made in the image of God was not enough—to be truly content you must be like God. You must be God. So take, and eat.

And in that moment everything changed. We were made with creational limitations, limitations like sleep, days, nights, labor, food and resting which were meant to lead us into the act of glorifying God as he met our perfectly limited needs. But now a new limitation crept in: sin and death.

Now we are not only limited by nature of our created humanity but we are limited by the morality of sin that stains our souls and turns us from God, and we are limited by a world which wears away at our physical bodies like water wears constantly against a rock.

The way back is not to make the same mistake as Eve—trying to reach a level of unlimited existence—but instead to return in joyful dependence upon the God who lives to satisfy us in his majesty.

But sin soiled everything. The great inversion continued in Genesis 11 where we read this: **Genesis 11:1-4**. At Babel the war for unlimited power waged on, hope misplaced led us to seek to reach beyond what God had made and to find a name for ourselves. The desire of humanity was the inverse of Psalm 8, it was not the Lord's majesty upon the earth, but the majesty of a limited, finite, fallen and fickle creature.

You see if we do not understand the way in which God created us as humans we will always be frustrated with two things. First, our own limitations. We will wrestle with our constant needs of food, of shelter, and of sleep. Every new day will appear to be a new trial and a new threat. Second, it will lead us to be frustrated with the God who made us. We will refuse to see him as good because we by nature view any limitation as something wrong and opposed to our flourishing.

We need a solution to show us God's faithfulness and his goodness in true human existence.

But this is where we see our final point this morning: **Redeemed in the Christ**.

Where Adam rebelled against dependent humanity, the new Adam, Jesus Christ would humbly submit himself to human limitations in a perfect way. Where Eve sinfully reached up seeking to become like God, God in Jesus Christ humbly came down to become like us.

In Hebrews chapter 2, the author actually preached on Psalm 8 and notice what he says: **Hebrews 2:5-9**

What's the significance here? Did you notice the difference here? Where in Psalm 8, David speaks generally about all humanity saying we were made lower than the angels, here the author of Hebrews speaks of someone who was "for a little while" made lower than the angels.

Who is that? The Son of God. The eternally begotten second member of the Trinity who was fully God who for a little while, here on earth took on full human flesh and all its limitations. Why did he do that? Let's read on: **Hebrews 2:10-18**.

Why did Jesus take on flesh? To redeem it. One pastor in the 4th century once said: "What is not assumed in the incarnation is not redeemed or healed."

When Jesus took on flesh as fully God, he was also fully man. Meaning Jesus did not come to deliver us from humanity but instead to deliver humanity. Jesus didn't come to save us from being human, he came to pave a way back to true humanity.

Did you notice the familial language the author used: he was bringing many sons to glory, the is not ashamed to call them brothers, he will tell of God's name to the brothers, they are children God gave him, the children share in flesh in blood and he partook of the same things, he helps the offspring of Abraham being made like his brothers in every respect.

Jesus became like us. In fact there is not one aspect of our human existence, even our sin, which Jesus did not himself assume.

The eternal son who had no creational limitations never sleeping nor slumbering, slept. The one who never hungered, needed food.

The eternal son who lived in perfect glory walked in the situational limits of a broken broken world. He had a runny nose. He had friends die young. He stubbed his toe, and struck his thumb with his hammer.

This alone is pretty scandalous. But Jesus not only shared in our natural limitations of humanity, he not only shared in the brokenness of life in a fallen world. But he actually shared in our sin. But here's the greater scandal.

Jesus encountered limitations, he encountered the effects of sin in this world, he was tempted with the same temptation Adam and Eve faced, the same temptation you faced to strive for unlimited glory and God-like satisfaction, but he never himself sinned.

Look at what the author of Hebrews says in **Hebrews 4:15**.

Jesus didn't become like us by participating in our sin. He became like us by taking the punishment for our sin. This shows that it is no sin to simply be human. It is no sin to be limited. It is no sin to suffer the brokenness of this world. Jesus lived all of this life in the way Adam couldn't, he faithfully subjected himself to the work of the Father which involved taking our sin not by participating in it, but by taking our punishment for it on the cross.

Look back at **Hebrews 2:14-18**.

Jesus delivered us from sin by dying in the place of sinners. He who was eternally un-subjected to anything subjected himself to the flesh and to the cross for your sake. He relied wholly upon his Father and in so doing became perfect through suffering.

Without Jesus' humanity, humanity is forever lost. But because Jesus came, there is hope even for humans. What is that hope?

Look back at **Hebrews 2:11-13**.

Who does Jesus proclaim to us as his brothers? The name of the Father. And what does he model for us? Trust in him.

Jesus redeems humanity not by making us unlimited, but by instead modeling the joy of limited dependence upon an unlimited God. He calls us to a life of flourishing where humanity is restored to trust in God as we were made. He shows us the goodness of living life in submission to the Father instead of the fleeting promise of unlimited idolatry.

We live in a world of natural wonders. Where billions of dollars are spent to preserve glaciers, natural beauties, and clean oceans. But the creator God spends his consideration, and pours out his cares on limited, weak, worried and broken sinners. And where do you see that care?

In Jesus, your brother priest. When we encounter the limits of sleep, and hunger—when we want to be all-powerful ourselves—remember the all-powerful Jesus laid down his infinite nature and proved his Father perfectly trustworthy.

When we face the pain of brokenness the limits of death, cancer, drought and famine—know Jesus lived here too—and that he proved God faithful and good and in his resurrection promised that one day what is broken will be made right.

When we encounter the temptation of sin—the cry of unlimited glory from limited sources—know that Jesus too felt that draw. Yet he found peace in his obedience and in his resistance. And he did so in order that those who tasted the fear of death and the consequence of sin, that he might take it away on the cross.

Right now we wrestle to see everything fully restored, but look at what the author of Hebrews says: **Hebrews 2:8b-9**. But we see Jesus.

This gives us pause as we move forward. When we encounter hardships we can ask ourselves: What is this and who am I? Is this a natural limitation God ordained? Then I can rejoice in it. Is this an unnatural brokenness which will one day be renewed? Then I can wait patiently for it. Is this a sin? Then I can repent of it, turning to Jesus.

For he is able to help those who are being tempted.