

Hebrews 2:16-18 "Jesus Christ: Faithful High Priest and Perfect Sacrifice"

Hebrews 2:16-18 ¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Last week we ended with the truth that the enemy has been defeated by our Champion, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We no longer belong to the rule of Satan, he has no claim on us as we now belong to a new master who paid our debt in full with His own blood.

In the world of spiritual reality there are only two camps to which a person can belong. He is either the child of Christ through faith in Him or he is the child of his father Satan who only has his destruction for eternity in mind.

Jesus spoke of this to a group of religious people who thought they were quite safe because of their religious and cultural background. These were Jews who had placed their faith in their traditions, not in the truth of the word of God they had received through the prophets.

JOH 8:43-45 "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!"

These were people, (not unlike all people who rely on themselves rather than God), who had been deceived and held in bondage by the enemy of God. All of the religious fervor in the world will not add one cubit to one's ability to reside with God forever. Only the truth will set one free to enter into God's presence and Jesus made it clear who that was.

John 14:6 ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Living with a lie is what the world gravitates toward and they are quite content to live in the dark so as not to be exposed by the light.

2CO 4:4 "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

But this is why the writer of Hebrews rejoices in the truth he shares with his readers in HEB 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

This is what Jesus Himself had spoken of shortly before His death on the cross.

JOH 12:31 "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out."

Christ came to defeat the power of sin and Satan. Through His death He would fulfill the promise made to Adam and Eve in the Garden that God would send a Savior into this world to redeem mankind.

Christ's victory over Satan didn't mean that Satan could not continue to deceive, it simply meant that there was a greater work going on in the world drawing men to Christ who would no longer be bound by the one who had deceived them for so long.

In Christ we no longer need to follow the one who wants to lead us to destruction, we now have the ability, by the Spirit, to follow Christ as we love and serve Him all our days.

There is no longer a fear of standing before our God because He has taken that fear and replaced it with hope and love for the God who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son into the world for you and me, that we might have life with Him forever more through faith in Christ.

That fear is that which the writer of Hebrews speaks of in HEB 2:15 "and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death", speaks of a fear of knowing that we are not able to stand on our own goodness to be reconciled to God. This fear is very real.

We see it for the first time in GEN 3:8-10 "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And it will continue with unbelievers to the end until the Father has put all authority under Christ in the final day. On that day, those who have rejected the Son will know first-hand the ultimate fear of standing before Him in their own unrighteousness.

REV 6:15-17 "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

None will stand, outside of being covered with the blood of the lamb. Most people you talk to in the world fear death. They may not be able to fully articulate their reasons, but it's real none the less.

I remember back in the 60's where a new technology had been invented to freeze the body of those who died in hopes of finding a cure in the future and then trying to resuscitate them after they were thawed out. It's called cryogenics.

The fear of dying is so great that people will go to any length to ensure immortality in these mortal, corruptible bodies. The search for the fountain of youth continues to be sought after because the fear of growing old and dying doesn't sit well with people and they will do anything to defeat death.

But only one has defeated death and that was Christ. He is the fountain we should be going to. The fountain where the living waters run. Only in Christ is fear swallowed up in victory and we are given, not a spirit of fear but as Paul says in 2TI 1:7 "a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Fear has been replaced by God with hope and this hope drives us to the God who is hope. This life can be pretty scary and tempt us to live in fear. But Paul tells us again that we have a God who has adopted us into His family and we can call on Him as our Father.

ROM 8:15-17 "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs -heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

Christ suffered for us that we might have life and He tells us that suffering for His name is something that in this world may be a reality. The other truth is that because this world has been cursed with sin there will be suffering that no one can escape whether you're a Christian or not, the ultimate suffering being physical death itself.

But in Christ, death in this life, is simply the door through which we enter into our Lord's presence. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. That's why fear is not something that drives us; it's hope in Christ.

Just remember HEB 2:14-15 "he too shared in (our) humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - 15 and free (us) who all (our) lives were held [past tense] in slavery by their fear of death."

Now as our writer continues he points out that this work that the Son of God did in coming into this world as a man was done just for mankind. It was not done for any other class of being in the world.

HEB 2:16 "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants."

The angels being referred to here would be the angels who rebelled against God in following Satan. For reasons which God deemed just, no angel was given a chance to repent of his sin and return to his God. Once they made their decision they were sealed in that decision and therefore angels do not receive the redemptive work that human beings do.

We discussed this a little last week that this angers Satan to no end to think that mere human beings, sinful human beings, God-hating human beings, are loved by the Lord so much that He would come to their rescue in sending His Son.

Satan has no hope and he has nothing to lose in his own eyes. Why not be as destructive as possible and deceive as many of these human beings as possible in following him?

This is one reason he is seen as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. For the believer the teeth have been taken out of his bite and though he may have strong jaws he's limited to a lot of gumming on God's people. For the unbeliever the bite is fatal unless that one embraces His God and deliverance found only in Christ by faith.

And so "surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants." Well, who are Abraham's descendants? When we were studying through the book of Romans we saw very clearly who this group is.

ROM 4:16,8 "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

ROM 9:6-8 "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

What Paul is saying is that both Jew and Gentile alike were meant to be Abraham's offspring, but only to the degree that those Jews and Gentiles believed in the promise of the Messiah. Paul expands on this in the book of Galatians.

GAL 3:6-11 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." 11

Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

Faith in what? Faith in God and His promises, the greatest promise found in the fulfillment of the Messiah who is none other than the Son of God taking on flesh. He is Jesus Christ. And only Christ can give us the same life Abraham received by faith.

GAL 3:14,29 "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit." 29 "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

You, as a believer in Christ Jesus, are a spiritual descendant of Abraham, whether you're a Jew or Gentile. The law is not our Savior. In fact HEB 7:19 says, "(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God."

ROM 3:19-22 "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

This is what we saw last week. God, being a righteous God, demands perfect conformity to the law. That's what was demanded of Adam and Eve. And being made perfect they were certainly able to abide by God's law. When they rebelled they lost their righteousness and judicially were declared guilty before God.

And so, for us to be reconciled to the Father we need a perfect righteousness to conform to the law. Since none are perfect, the perfect Son came into the world, fulfilled the law and gave us His righteousness by dying in our place as He took our sin. And so through Christ the law was fulfilled on our behalf and we reap the benefits of it through faith in what He did on our behalf.

And so now we abide in a new law. This is what James touches on.

JAM 1:23-25 "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does."

This perfect law is the law written on our hearts which Christ has put there. It's His righteousness and His life, and as we abide in Him we will follow and obey Him, and as we do we will find the blessing of that new life which is always realized through faith in Christ. The righteous will live by faith.

But this perfect law came not through our righteousness, but through Christ's, which is why He had to come into this world. Where else could he fulfill the law, which was demanded of man, but in this world in the flesh? And so the writer of Hebrews continues.

HEB 2:17-18 "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. And in this way only is He able to become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, that He might make atonement for the sins of the people.

When you study the O.T. law and its ceremonial regulations you find that God appointed special men to serve as priests in Israel. In fact, when Moses brought Israel out of Egypt the first appointed priest was his brother Aaron.

But what is the function of the priesthood in Israel? Very simply, the priests were allowed to enter into the presence of God in the form of the Holy of holies which is where God tabernacled with His people. The priest would approach God on behalf of everyone else in Israel.

And so in one sense the priest represented the people before God. But there was another function of the priest and that was to bring sacrifices to God for the atonement of the sins of the people. And in this sense the priest was God's representative to the people.

And so, in essence the priest was the conduit through which the people could approach God and where God would approach the people. This is why Jesus is referred to as a priest in service to God.

Jesus Christ is that conduit or bridge through which God reaches down to us and where Christ brings us before the Father. Jesus represents us before God and God comes to us through Christ. But this arrangement comes only through death.

Remember what we read last week... HEB 2:14... by his (Jesus Christ's) death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil -

As a faithful High Priest Jesus has access to the Father, but the Father demands a death of a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the people. This is also what the priest in Israel would do. The High Priest would sacrifice a lamb for his own sins so that he could approach the Holy of holies and then he would sacrifice a lamb for the sins of the people.

What's interesting about our High Priest in Jesus is that He didn't need to sacrifice anything for His own sins because He was sinless and because of that He was able to approach the Father, but He had to bring a sacrifice on our behalf. And it's here where we see that our faithful High Priest becomes the perfect sacrifice, a sacrifice which never had to be repeated again.

Rom.6:10 "For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all. but the life He lives, He lives to God."

That is what is meant in verse 17 when our writer says, that Jesus became our "merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."

The word used for atonement in the NIV is *hilaskomai* and it's more literally translated propitiation. This is the word the NKJV and the NAS uses. Propitiation is one of those words we don't often hear, and yet it has a wealth of meaning as it relates to Christ's sacrifice on the cross for us.

Propitiation secures our reconciliation with our heavenly Father. Let me explain as I quote A.W. Pink. He says, "reconciliation is between God and us: propitiation is solely God-ward. Propitiation was the appeasing of God's holy anger and righteous wrath;

reconciliation is entering into the peace which the atoning sacrifice of Christ has procured."

In other words we could not be reconciled to God, brought into that peaceful relationship until God's hatred of sin in our lives was dealt with. Only a death could appease God's wrath toward sinners. That's where propitiation comes in; an atoning sacrifice.

Now we don't usually hear much these days about God's wrath and anger toward sinners. But that doesn't mean that it isn't part of God's character. God hates sin. He is angered about sin because it's the one thing which separates us from Him.

PSA 7:11 "God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day."

ROM 1:18 "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,..."

Again, speaking of the unbeliever Paul says in ROM 2:5-6 "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12)

We often hear the statement that God hates sin but loves the sinner. This is true to the extent that He loved us sinners enough to make a way out of receiving His wrath through the shed blood of Christ. But we must never forget that God doesn't punish sin in hell forever, He punishes sinners. Unrepentant sinners receive God's wrath.

This is serious business, and this is why we can see both the wrath of God and the love of God in the same context at the cross of Christ. God's wrath was truly poured out on Jesus, but it was because of Christ receiving God's wrath that we have peace with God through Christ; propitiation. Christ took the wrath we deserved from God for our sin and then gave us His righteousness to present to the Father as our own.

Does that sound like Jesus cares for you? He took the wrath from the hands of the Father that you and I deserved. If Jesus cared enough for us to do that on our behalf does He care enough to be with us until He brings His joy home to Himself?

HEB 2:18 "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

The word tempt here in the Greek means to test. Jesus Christ was tested by the Father and so He proved Himself worthy to be called our Savior. We might have a problem with God testing Jesus and yet His entire earthly ministry was a test in the sense that He was being scrutinized by God so that Jesus could come to the Father and say to Him, 'I have passed the test, I am a worthy sacrifice to die for My sheep and restore them to the fold of Your Kingdom.'

Jesus knows what it's like to be under spiritual attack from Satan, He knows what it's like to be under attack from the world, He knows what it's like to experience the weakness of the flesh.

Yet in all of this He never sinned. Praise God! This is why He is called our Savior. But there's another aspect of this that we should rejoice in. Because Jesus knows what it's like to be intimately united to man, by taking on flesh, He knows what we're going through in this world.

His compassion and mercy for us is real. Sometimes we wonder, 'God do you really understand what I'm going through?' You bet He does.

HEB 2:18 "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

The word help in our text carries with it the idea, as A.W. Pink puts it, "(of) a running to the cry of one, as a parent responding to the cry of distress from his child."

This is the Jesus whom we know and who loves us. He's gone through the things we suffer in this world and suffered even unto death as an obedient servant that He might redeem us.

HEB 4:15-16 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

I rejoice in Christ's propitiatory sacrifice on my behalf, taking my sin and nailing it to the cross, but you know, I also rejoice that He knows when I'm tired and worn out and in need of His touch.

He knows when I'm spiritually weak and He strengthens me in the power of His Spirit. He is our all in all in every area of life. And like a Shepherd who wants to bring His sheep into green pastures, He desires to refresh us with His presence.

We're instructed to follow the Great shepherd, but it's nice to know that He's always looking over His shoulder looking to see that we follow Him and when we stray or trip up He's always there to run to our rescue.

He is a merciful and faithful high priest who became our perfect sacrifice, our perfect Redeemer and perfect friend who loves us with an everlasting love.