

Christmas

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[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 2, if you're using a red covered Bible. 1-2-0-2.

Hebrews chapter 2 starting at verse 10 through to verse 18. It's on page 1-2-0-2. Thank you Lucy. So Hebrews chapter 2 verses 10-18.

In bringing many sons to glory it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should be made the author of their salvation, perfecting it through suffering.

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers. He says, I will declare your name to my brothers in the presence of the congregation.

I will sing your praises. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again he says, here I am and the children that God has given me. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared their humanity, so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives have been held in slavery by their fear of death.

[1 : 21] For surely it is not angels that he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 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.

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Thanks Lucy. Please keep your Bibles open.

There are Hebrews. There were some sheets going around, some pens. You can take notes. So let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at his word together, and see how it applies to us as we think about the theme of Christmas.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that you do draw near to us, and we pray that you would pour out your Holy Spirit upon everyone present here this morning, that we would be able to hear you afresh, to take what is familiar to our minds, to make it real, that it would change us, that it would help us to see why Jesus came, and what it means that God is with us.

We pray that it would fill our lives with a sense of meaning and a sense of purpose, and that not one of us would leave without a renewed love for you, and a greater confidence in who you are.

[3 : 17] We pray for your help. Amen. Well, during this past year, we had two very important visitors to our country.

If you remember back in, when was it, April, I think? No, May? May. President Obama flew in for a quick visit. Do you remember that? Altogether, he was here for 12 hours.

To make that trip happen, there were three pre-visits conducted by his security team. There was a site survey, a pre-advanced visit, and then an advanced trip.

Total cost, \$16 million. When he actually did come, he brought 500 staff with him, including his own personal chef, 200 security personnel, six doctors on his medical team, not to mention his fleet of decoy helicopters, his \$300,000 armoured plate limousine, and 30 motorcycles.

All to have a pint of Guinness in money gone. When God arrived on Earth, he chose to do it quietly, in a courtyard, watched by animals.

[4 : 39] The Queen also made her first official visit this year. It's reported that when the Queen of England goes on one of her royal trips, she brings her own hairdresser, two valets, £4,000 in weight of luggage, and a host of other attendants, costing \$20 million.

And that doesn't cost the 25 million euro for the security for her four-day visits. When God came down, he chose to conceal himself in the tummy of an unknown girl.

The name given to that child, as we've seen already this morning, Emmanuel, God with us. It's what theologians call the incarnation, God as a man coming down into this world.

the message of Christmas. And it's the message of Hebrews 2 that we've just had read. Look at chapter 1, a minute. Chapter 1 of Hebrews, verse 2.

It tells us here who Jesus is. In verse 2, it says, in these last days, what we are right now, in these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son, Jesus, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom, through Jesus, he made the universe.

[6 : 12] The Son, Jesus, is the radiance of God's glory. He is the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

The God, think about it, who created this universe in all its vastness, we can't even measure the extent of the universe in space. The God who made all of that was formed as a tiny baby.

The God who provides everything that we have for every person of the 10 billion that live in this planet. The God who provides everything became dependent on a teenage mother.

The God who sustains us with the very breath that we are breathing right now, who sustains us as we sleep at night, used to cry for his feed of milk.

The God who stood outside of time and space entered in and intervened into our world. Philip Yancey in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew* captures it well.

[7 : 30] He says this, unimaginably, the maker of all things shrank down and down and down so small as to become an oven, a single fertilised egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and re-divide until a fetus took shape enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager.

God would become so vulnerable and so fragile as a tiny baby. It's incomprehensible.

Other writers of Scripture put it like this, the word who was God became flesh and lived among us. The image of the invisible God, the fullness of God dwelling in him, who being in very nature God made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.

and Hebrews chapter 2 verse 14 puts it simply like this, since the children, those who trust in him, those who have flesh and blood, people like us, he too shared in their humanity.

Verse 17, for this reason he had to be made like his brothers. he had to be made just like you and me.

[9 : 14] God became like one of us. Why did God do this? Well, look back at verse 2 of chapter 10.

It says there about him bringing many sons or many children to glory. God came down to bring us to glory.

He came down into the mess of this world and of our lives to bring us into his paradise. This earth, this life that we're experiencing right now is not our destiny.

We were created for something far greater, something much more beautiful, something much more wonderful. Look back at chapter 1 verse 10. Here he's speaking about the present creation, the way it is right now.

It says in chapter 1 verse 10, In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. It's talking about his creation.

[10 : 23] Then he says, verse 11, they will perish, but you remain. they will all wear out like a garment, just like our old clothes that get holes, they get thrown away, or the dirty washing that's crumpled up on the floor and put into the basket.

Verse 12, you'll roll them up like a robe, like a garment, they will be changed, but you remain the same, and your years will never end.

this is the world that we live in, and one day he says it's going to be done away with, it's going to go, so what's going to replace it?

Well, jump forward to chapter 11, because there we're given a hint as to what will replace it. Chapter 11, a great chapter of people, before Christ coming, looking forward, to something that God had promised, and here we're reading about Abraham in verse 10, chapter 11, and it tells us there that he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

Verse 13, all these people, people like Abraham, were still living by faith when they died, they did not receive the things promised, they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, and they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth, just as we are, strangers and aliens, this is not our home.

[12 : 08] Verse 16, instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

You see, this glory that we're talking about is a picture here of a city designed, crafted and built by God, a place of peace, a place of protection, a place of provision, a place of no wars, no fears, no famine, no pain.

This is going to be paradise itself. This is what they were looking forward to. This is what we're looking forward to. God came down to bring many sons and daughters to his glory.

But why? Why did God have to become a human being? Why did he choose to share in our humanity?

Why did he have to make all that hassle of coming down as a baby and living and growing? Could he not have done it another way? Well, the answer is no, he couldn't have done it another way.

[13 : 27] Because there are too many obstacles and too many barriers that stop us getting to that promised paradise, that stop us getting to glory.

So God had to become, like one of us, a human being to defeat and remove and destroy all those barriers that stand in the way of us getting to glory.

To ensure our safe and guaranteed arrival. So, the first barrier is that death has been defeated by Jesus who came down to us.

Look at verse 14 of chapter 2. Chapter 2, verse 14. 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, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Do you see it? He became like one of us to destroy death. Now I know it's Christmas and we're not meant to talk about death at Christmas.

[14 : 57] But it's a reality, isn't it? And it's still one of our greatest fears. years. And as a church family we have come to know two people in recent days who have suddenly died.

Families who have lost loved ones. And it doesn't matter whether they are young, whether they are old, whether they are a grandson or a granddad. The sense of loss is tangible.

it's painful when we lose a loved one because it hurts. Because deep down we know that we're not meant to say goodbye.

There's something about this world that when death happens it's going against what should be. It robs us of our joy and our happiness and it breaks us and it destroys us.

And even though that we know it's going to happen someday, the very thought of it fills us with fear. The reality of death defeats us every single time because we all know that there is nothing we can do to stop it.

[16:17] The one who holds the power of death, that is the devil, destroys us every single time. Do you fear death?

Are you afraid of getting old, getting ill, of something happening? Well you know what Christmas reminds us? That we don't have to.

God came near to destroy death and to free us from its fear. Look back at verse nine of chapter two. it says there, but we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

us. The Christmas story tells us that Christ went from a crib to a cross and we know that when Christ was hung on the cross when he cried out as he was dying he cries out my God my God why have you forsaken me?

Why have you abandoned me? and at that moment in time as Christ died he was separated from his father. Jesus tasted death for us.

[17:50] He endured the separation that death brings so that you and I don't have to. And when Christ rose from the grave he broke its power he destroyed his enemy and he broke its power and its hold over us so that the grave is no longer the end it is merely the gate to glory to our eternal city.

And it's because of Christmas that I can say with absolute confidence without a hesitation that Jamie little Jamie and Wally are at home in heaven in that eternal city.

and we've got to draw our comfort from that today because that is the hope of Christmas. God came near to us to defeat death to destroy it to bring us to glory.

sin. The second barrier that gets in the way is sin and Jesus has come to save us from it all.

Look at verse 17 of chapter 2 for this reason he had to be made like his brothers.

[19:21] He had to become like one of us in every way. He came to experience life as we experience life with all its up times, all its down times, the joyful times, the struggling times.

he was made in every way like us in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God that he might make atonement for the sins of people like us.

You know if we were to define sin it's not a list of bad things we do or good things we don't do but sin is the removal of God from the very centre of our lives.

Sin is an attitude of the heart where we replace God with things and people. We fill our lives with things and other people and God gets pushed out. And the results are evident all around us.

A broken and a hurting world full of chaos and disorder where relationships and families break. All because we push God out and we fill our lives with things and people.

[20 : 39] And that's a huge big problem because paradise this city that God has is the absence of all sin. It's the place where God takes centre stage where he rules his world with justice and goodness.

So unless sin is dealt with we can have no part of it. And the Christmas story is there to tell us that Jesus was made like one of us to deal with the barrier of sin.

Now we're going to have our Christmas celebrations next weekend but I want to introduce you to a Jewish festival. It happened way back in October.

It's called Yom Kippur the day of atonement. You can read all about it in Leviticus 16. Atonement it's mentioned here also in verse 17 reminds us about how God turns aside or takes away his anger so that we can be at one and be at peace with him and be right with him.

And when it talks about God being angry or wrathful it's not uncontrolled and temper like he's not a grumpy so and so who just flies off at somebody. It is his just and fair and controlled response to all that is in opposition to him.

[22 : 01] And in this festival of Yom Kippur the day of atonement there would be a priest and he would make a sacrifice for the people and they would take this animal a goat and the priest would come and put his hand on that animal as a sign of identifying with that animal.

And what it symbolised was there was almost a transferal not literally but symbolically that the sins that the failings of the people would be somehow transferred from them to this animal just symbolically and then they would take that animal and it would be sent out into the wilderness into a desert place.

It was basically a place of punishment a place of death. nothing survived out there. There was nothing to drink nothing to eat and an animal was sent out there and it would die.

And it all stood there as an example as a sign of sin being dealt with that God was angry with the way in which the world had gone and the way in which people were living.

And it taught them that somebody would have to die in their place. Somebody would have to die in their place. And in verse 17 we're told that he became like one of us to become the faithful high priest so that he might make atonement for our sin.

[23 : 40] But he didn't just come into the world to make the sacrifice. Jesus was the sacrifice. Hebrews is full of that whole imagery.

Just let's have a look at one briefly. Chapter 9 verse 26. Hebrews 9 verse 26.

He's talking and referring back to what they had to do and we'll pick it up midway through verse 26.

But now he has appeared once for all at the end of it ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face the judgment so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people and he will appear a second time not to bear sin but to bring us salvation to those who are waiting for him.

This is the amazing grace goodness and generosity of God this is what sets Christianity apart from every other religion and every other philosophy and every other system that there is.

[25 : 14] It's not about us down here trying to somehow find our way to get to God but it is all about God who comes from there down to us to be near us.

It's not about us trying to perform and outdo one another and trying to better ourselves. It's all about Christ who has performed for us on our behalf.

And Christmas is telling us the story that God came down to identify with us. He became like one of us. It's like he literally put his hands upon us and identified with us so humanly speaking that our sin was transferred from us onto him.

And he went to the cross and was punished. And the wrath of God fell on him on the atoning sacrifice. And the wrath of God is turned away from us forever so that we can be loved and treasured by him.

We are treated as Christ deserves to be treated and Christ is treated as we deserve to be treated.

[26 : 33] This is the grace, this is the amazing message of Christmas. It's unique, it's different. But there's another barrier that Jesus has to overcome and that's the barrier of temptation.

Look at verse 18. chapter 2. He comes down to share in our humanity.

He becomes like one of us. Verse 18, because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he was able to help those who are being tempted.

tempted. I find that so encouraging. Any of you find temptation this week? Or am I the only one?

He became like one of us and he suffered the struggles that we all go through when we face temptation. All those inward battles, he faced that same temptation because he was like one of us.

[27 : 56] The problem with us is we always give in to temptation. We just, the pressure increases and we just fail.

So what hope have we of ever getting to glory if we keep messing up? Well, this is the story of one who came into our world to be like one of us, to face everything that we face, to deal with it, to overcome it, to bring us to his glory.

One of our great family traditions when we were growing up was to go on these ridiculous long walks on St. Stephen's Day. Don't know why we did.

Mother used to say it was something about needing fresh air after all the rich food and that sort of thing. Five miles in, six hours later, hail, rain, everything, didn't matter, we had to go for this walk.

It was no surprise that me being the youngest would always be left behind, strolling along. Invariably somebody would have to come back and help me to the end, maybe even pick me up, carry me.

[29 : 06] Look at verse 18. It tells us that Jesus is our helper, one who is able to help us through our journey in life because we can't get there on our own.

We can't do it. And he's already completed the journey for us and now he comes near to us to help us get to our destination. And to better understand this, look at chapter 4 verse 15.

You think you struggle alone and you're, those moments of greatest temptation, whatever it may be, you think you're alone and nobody understands what it's like, the struggles you go through.

Well look at verse 15. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses. But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

isn't that a comfort? That God would come near to go through that full range of emotion and struggle and temptation.

[30 : 25] He would go through it all. In fact, he endured so much greater than us because he never gave in. We give in and so it lessens. But for him the pressure increased all the time but he defeated it.

He was the perfect man who finished the journey on our behalf so that he is able to help us. Verse 16, so then let us approach the throne of grace with confidence.

It's not about coming with perfection. Come with all your mess and all your failure and come confidently so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

The truth is we fall and we fail. But when we do Christ will respond in mercy. He won't desert us.

He won't leave us to our own devices and say that's too many times tough luck. He will reach out to us in mercy. He will not treat us as we deserve to be treated but he will forgive us.

[31 : 35] And the truth is that by ourselves we are just too weak. We give in so easily to temptation but what does and how does he respond to us?

Verse 16 he gives us grace. He's not going to abandon us. We're his children. He was made like one of us to identify with us to bring us to his home to his city to his glory to paradise.

Christ. He's not going to abandon us. He will give us all the grace that we need. Christ came near to triumph over temptation to bring us to glory.

The big theme of Christmas and if you can take this away with you for this week is that God came down to bring us to glory.

because Christ defeated death for us. He saved us from sin. He's triumphed over temptation. He will bring us to glory.

[32 : 46] Look at verse 11. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are being made holy are of the same family.

We're of the same family as Christ. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. That's what he calls them.

If we trust in him, a brother and a sister. Christmas tells us that God came to share in our humanity so that we might share in his glory.

Emmanuel, God with us. Let's pray. God's our father God, we stand back amazed.

Our little minds, we cannot comprehend the vastness and the wonder and the greatness of God coming down, down, down, down, and down to us.

[34 : 08] To become like one of us. To feel what we feel. To grieve what we grieve. To experience what we experience. To live life as we have lived life, but yet to do so perfectly.

To overcome death, to destroy it. to face sin and defeat it. To go through temptation and overcome it, all for us, so that we can go to be with him.

God came down for us so that we can share in all that he has. We praise you for Christmas, we praise you for the whole year because it's relevant to the whole year.

Help us to celebrate you today, this coming week. We praise you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.