

Hebrews 2:10-18

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. The questions we raise about human suffering are many, and they come from all disciplines and every corner of our life.

Many philosophers have attempted to answer the origins and the cause of human suffering. Social scientists study its effects and calculate its costs.

Legislators enact laws to alleviate it. Activists stand ready to march against it. Even some philanthropists are kind enough to devote vast resources to find a cure for it.

Human suffering from every angle. The Egyptians of old had a pantheon of gods that they would appease in an effort to keep suffering away.

The ancient friends in the land of Ur at the time of Job had a more compact view of God and spoke of suffering as the lot of those who deserve it.

[1 : 44] The Greeks put forward an array of gods hiding in the clouds on the mountain that, in the words of Homer, well, the gods terrorize us as if they were playing with us.

The Romans, of course, had temples everywhere where you could seek the assistance of gods. Atheists all through those ages have disregarded it as just a natural phenomena of life and nature.

And yet, for all the mental energy the centuries have given and all the material activity that we engage in on human suffering, we, at the end of the day, all know this.

It is simply impossible for us to escape it. Human suffering is universal. We all have experience with it. We all share in it.

And in some measure, this morning, I want to say it's okay to ask the question, where is God in it? And what about Christianity in particular?

[3 : 02] Does it provide an adequate response to it? The letter to the Hebrews arrived in the mailbox of a church whose congregants were familiar with suffering.

And they'd had enough of the philosophy classes and didn't plan on treating it in empirical ways. Their problem with suffering was more visceral than intellectual.

They felt it every day. And in particular, their sufferings had a source which was often their confession of the Christian faith.

And so they began to wonder, do I go on with it? Do I remain Christian when it would be much easier for me to accommodate my convictions if it would enable me to get along with a little more well-being in the world?

In other words, what they believed was the source, increasingly so, of how they were treated. And so then, he picks up his pen and writes, for they had come to understand that Christianity, while free and a gift, had come at a great cost.

[4 : 37] would God be willing to suffer for us? Would there be some understanding that he would demonstrate solidarity with us?

Does the Christian gospel present a plan where the underlying causes of suffering are dealt with for us? In a nutshell, why should I be compelled to become a Christian or go on in Christ if what I believe is increasingly the source of the ill treatment I experience?

To which the writer now comes in verse 10 and demonstrates something related to the Christian faith and human suffering.

For it was fitting that he for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

He writes to this embattled church that Jesus by the will of God shares in suffering for us.

[6 : 07] It's as though at this early moment in the letter he wants to say wait a minute before you abandon the message that saved you on account of all the difficulties your faith has brought down upon you remember that God is not indifferent toward you.

he is not unfamiliar with you in fact it was fitting says the author by way of argument to have Jesus enter into the condition of human suffering long before you.

Now this is a very unusual truth in the Christian faith. The verse was meant to be a source of encouragement to the reader to let them know that they had not been abandoned by God that Jesus by whom notice and for whom all things exist has pioneered the path for you.

That word the founder of their salvation complete through suffering. The founder is really the leader of the pack. the head which all the army is following.

In other words it isn't just that he did something for you he experienced something that you follow in after. of it.

[7 : 42] I was just on the phone with my uncle the other day my mother's brother one of them and he gave me the strangest highlight of a recent vacation he had had.

He said they had gone bushwhacking and by that he meant cutting a trail through his own for I don't know three miles or something and he was all invigorated about it and I responded simply on the phone well you and I take very different kinds of vacations I have no desire to be cutting my way through weeds and thickets and then spending money and calling it fun we turn the conversation to other things but what what the writer is saying here in verse 10 is that Jesus has gone on ahead of you in your sufferings that he's actually carved out a way that he intends for you to walk in he makes the path actually easier for you although it's taking everything you've got he's found a way through back into the presence of God and as he brings many sons and daughters with him this is the road they walk it was fitting he says for whom and by whom all things exist isn't that interesting when you consider the argument of chapter one that Jesus was the son who is the rightful heir of all things in this present world chapter one verse four to fourteen not only that but

Jesus as the son is the one to whom all the next world has been subjected he gets all of this and all of that for all time and that one that one brings his own family home through the path that he has carved it was fitting he says for he says he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source Jesus this morning when you consider human suffering that's more visceral and experiential than it is intellectual or theoretical Jesus when you look at the sufferings of your life and you begin to wonder should I go on if this faith is increasingly the source of my conflict he says well

Jesus is the way that he bring people home to glory in this path he has been completed through suffering G.K.

Chesterton I am not going to tell you about him if you don't know him look him up but G.K. Chesterton wrote a little play that I always appreciated called The Surprise it is an interesting play it is a play where the playwright is creating a world of characters that make a mess of it all and and they have made such a mess of it that all he can do in the play as the play ends it has the playwright leaning over the curtain before the stage saying stop enough I am coming down that is Christianity not that God dwells high in the heavens and you merely appease him through some sacrificial offering not that God is somehow to be bought or placated by your religious observance but that

[11 : 42] God sent his son down and the mess that we're in he walked in let me put it this way Christianity is unique in this sense God knows what it's like to walk in the muck of the human condition and suffering so now let's then begin to think about how you would apply this here's the son of God through whom the world was made here's the son of God to whom the next world is subject it is that God whose son shares in our sufferings ahead of us and for us not only does he share in sufferings look at 11 to 13 he shares a solidarity with us not merely suffering for us he stands in solidarity with us verse 11 for he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source they're all of the same there's a sameness here between

Jesus and us that is why he's not ashamed to call them brothers interestingly now note what he does there are three quotations from the Old Testament put forward as proof texts that God's savior was even in a predictive way one who would be a sufferer and he does so from three sections in the Hebrew scriptures he quotes from the Psalms Psalm 22 in fact one that Jesus quotes from while on the cross he quotes from Samuel in reference to David's prayer that the Lord delivered me the anointed one out of all my sufferings he quotes from Isaiah who's a prophet who was looking even in the midst of waiting for the Lord in all of his sufferings that through his children they would be a comfort to him all three texts point to Israel's past to prove that the anointed one shared solidarity with the people and that while anointed either the prophet like

Isaiah or the king like David would indeed share with them that that's what he does there in 11 to 13 in other words he's laid out your human sufferings are so overwhelming that you're wondering don't I just need to accommodate!

a bit on what I believe to make it a little easier to get through life wait wait wait wait Jesus shares in suffering for you Jesus shares a solidarity with you in fact it's always been that way as he's revealed himself to you my son just is studying this term abroad in London and I was talking to him the other day it's amazing now what you can do you can be driving down Lakeshore Drive looking at a picture of your son not while driving of course if you're in the passenger seat and you can be exchanging live face to face conversations it's quite extraordinary anyone over 50 come and I'll tell you how you can do it he said he was writing a paper I said what's your paper on he didn't initially tell me what the paper was on that's not important when you're a student he said

I have to find 25 sources I said is that to support the paper you've already written or is that a demonstration of the research in order to put forward the paper he didn't want to get into it the writer of the Hebrews is submitting an argument to the church and he's laid out in those three Old Testament texts source material that demonstrates Jesus shares a solidarity with you and you shouldn't be surprised by that because the historical record indicates that that is the way it's been what's interesting then is the text moves from his sharing and suffering for you his sharing a solidarity with you he now begins to answer a different kind of question what do

[16 : 39] Jesus sufferings and solidarity secure for you what do we get by coming to Christ what should you expect to get this morning if you're considering Christ 14 to 16 answers it very clearly very simply two things this is what Jesus sufferings accomplish or secure one he was able to destroy the power of death verse 14 and he's able to deliver you from the fear of death verse 15 and those two things can be summed up in a single word verse 16 he has secured help for us who suffer take a look at it verse 14 he destroys the power of death that's what he did since therefore the children share in flesh and blood he himself likewise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death that is the devil see the scriptures don't think in terms of your physical death the final expiration of your last breath merely on material terms the scriptures present a different story than one that is naturalistic it presents a story where God breathed into man male and female unique characteristics that separate them from the rest of the created order indeed he gave them dominion over his world to them and as long as they lived under his word they would rule for him and live that is have life but if they were to disobey him walk away from him not rule under him then they would be subject to death and that death in the scriptures is not merely physical it is a separation from God so on the day that they ate of the fruit and God comes into the garden it's interesting the physical death is actually a delayed reaction the spiritual death came immediately he cast them out of his presence he puts an angel at the edge of the garden says you don't get back to that life anymore spiritual death is already in play according to the Bible and then the physical death of course followed so death the power of death is that it is the just recompense for all who walk under their own rule what Jesus then does in his own death is destroy the one to whom all that power now belongs namely the devil and he does that because he had no internal characteristic that walked in a wayward way before God in other words he couldn't possibly have been dying as just recompense for his own sins he must have been dying in some strange other way even the centurion servant who stood there at the cross while not actually making a

Christian like confession was willing to say this was the son of God when he saw how he breathed his last because when you died on a cross you suffocated you expired weakly meekly without voice but when he saw how Jesus died namely full of air full of breath full of conviction full of power it is finished he had never seen anyone die like that Jesus death was unlike yours and the writer here says he was destroying the one who had power over it here was finally a man in the world who had never walked in a wayward way toward his God this is why all these hymns we had earlier today keep talking about Jesus friend this is one who shared and suffered this is one who is a solidarity with you this is why

Christianity is so unique on the world stage today this is what his death secured verse 14 it destroyed the power of death that the devil had over all people and then secondly verse 15 it delivers you it has the power to deliver you from the fear of death verse 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery summarize verse 16 Jesus can help you you need you need a little help today tell me about it I know you need help today I don't know what situation you have but I know you need a little help today and you are going to get help through one who has cut through all that entangled mess of human sufferings and given you a trail to walk now

I'm aware that not everyone here today feels a need for such a thing I know that there are some who don't attribute the power of death to the wrath of God in accord with a record that speaks that we're accountable nor do some here even this morning walk around with a fear of death as though it were the opening of the last door before you found yourself standing before God needing to give an account before some accuser who without a proper advocate to intercede on your behalf leaves you eternally destitute I know the world in which we live I think of Cicero he didn't fear death at least he wrote about it in his treatise on aging listen to what he says oh you sorry old man if after all these years you have still not learned that death is nothing to worry about there are only two possible views either death is the total extinction of ourselves in which case it is of no importance whatever or it conducts us to a place where we shall live forever in which case it is something to be desired obviously!

there is no third possibility so says Cicero Stephen Hawking famous theoretical physicist likewise doesn't allow for any possibility that death is something to be feared in fact he disbelieved in an afterlife or heaven these are what he said in an article to the guardian I regard the brain as a computer that will stop working when its components fail there's no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers this is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark Christopher Hitchens do I fear death no I'm not afraid of being dead because there's nothing to be afraid of I won't know it that said what if all three simply have the wrong information what if their assumptions are wrong what if our physical death is connected to a spiritual death suppose for a moment that in your final breath of expiration you find yourself on the other side of what the

[24 : 59] Bible accurately stated as our end imagine that it that is this inscripturated word offered you as long as you were in the land of the living an answer that was appropriate to your questions to your experience to your sufferings what if in that very moment which will come for us all what if the very things I'm saying at this very hour turn out to be true what if Jesus shared in suffering ahead of us and what if he did it for us what if Jesus unlike any other God we could fashion stands in solidarity with us what if Jesus secures these two wonderful things for us what if they're all true then what will you do then will you make an attempt to appeal to your good deeds but we're not those the very things that should mark all your dealings on earth all the time will you make an attempt to appease

God's wrath would you offer to pay some fine would you perform some religious ritual on the spot in his presence as though his justice could be bought in a moment or belittled by your oblation perhaps you'd make an attempt to lunge at an angel who was nearby as though some angelic created being could scuttle you in through some side door under the shelter of their wing really perhaps you'll make a Hitchens like open throated gasp of amazement and claim ignorance all along no in that moment all appeals that stand outside of Jesus will not be heard all appeasements will be put aside all angels will stand down all amazement awe wonder worship will be for naught away will be the word away away to deal everlastingly with the shame of having been so bold as to live independently from your

God ashamed to see others walk in who walked among you while you turn on your heel ashamed when you see Jesus to know that you have rejected all of his sufferings and solidarity and the results for which he secured it's simply the truth of what the author would tell a congregation who wants to give up perhaps on going on with Christ because the congregation is just worn down and increasingly understands that their sufferings have a source and more often than not they began to found it was their confession the summary comes in 17 and 18 where he started saying it was fitting he kind of ratchets it up here a bit not only was it fitting but all this suffering of Christ was necessary really there wasn't another way home in other words therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of

God to make propitiation for the sins of the people in other words Jesus had to do it this way if the wrath of God was actually to be turned away put it this way if you and I stand in the presence rightly says they have flaunted your law they have not loved you in what they have done in fact they have undone in fact their heart has never fully been yours in that moment you either have to combat that accusation or look for an advocate and that advocate is offered to you in this life not the next it was necessary that he become like us and suffer for us that he might be a faithful high priest in the servants of

God on our behalf look at verse 18 for because he himself has suffered when tempted he is able to help those who are being tempted did you notice the word help twice in the text now verse 16 for surely it's not angels that he helps but he helps the offspring of Abraham where are you going for help where are you going for help with all your human sufferings!

[31 : 09] he wants you to go to Jesus because he can save you he wants you to go to Jesus because he can strengthen you the help you get isn't merely eternal and spiritual look verse 18 it's temporal it's experiential it's present he is able to help those who are being tempted the word tempted there is really the sense of you are being tried by your sufferings in other words he is an ever present help in the day of trouble Jesus is your help Jesus is your help Jesus is your help he sits presently at the right hand of God in fact he says oh it's a good thing I'm going away it's a good thing I'm going away because if I didn't go away I wouldn't be able to give you that helper because that helper is my spirit and he'll have the ability to do work all through time for all people through all ages whereas you know

I'm running around here on my own in this incarnated cell no but now that he dwells at the presence of God at the right hand he stands there to intercede for all those who have need and so we pray we lift up our voice we say Lord help him the African American church they might be saying that at a preacher especially if I was in there preaching on a Sunday morning oh Lord help him well I am the preacher today and I am looking at you and I am saying oh Lord help him help her help them as they're discouraged help them as they think about accommodating their faith help them as they wonder whether they should even come to faith and may they begin to see a picture of Jesus as their help our heavenly father we come now to the end of this simple chapter where we've seen the superiority of

Jesus over angels there isn't an angel you've created who can do what he did you are the son our Lord Jesus to you the coming world has been made subject in you we have one who shares in our sufferings who stands in solidarity with us who secures wonderful things for us and indeed whom even in this hour our voices can rise before that throne and in faith be heard by you and we will receive help oh god help each one today help the man or woman or child here who needs salvation help the one who needs just strengthening to go on help them in big ways and little ways and thank you especially for the little ways because it lets us know you're concerned about those as well spread it through our midst and onto these streets in Jesus name amen amen