

Our Brother and Champion able to help us when tempted

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[0 : 00] The reading today is Hebrews chapter 2, verse 5 to 18. He left nothing outside his control.

At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, but we see him, for who a little while was made lower than angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

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.

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will tell of your name to my brothers.

In the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, behold, I and the children God has given me.

[1 : 29] 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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 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.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Well, good morning, everyone.

So, the letter to the Hebrews was written to encourage Christians whose practical experience of living as Christians was not in any way, shape, or form what they'd expected.

Obviously, the readers, the background of the readers was that they were Jewish. But they had turned their back on their old, age-old Jewish religion when they had encountered Jesus.

[2 : 58] They were convinced, of course, like all Christians are, that acceptance with God and heaven was only possible through Jesus. But all in identification with Jesus had resulted, it would appear, in personal hardship, which was unexpected and for many unacceptable.

Now, I want you just to come with me for a minute as we try and imagine their excitement as they come to Jesus. They've just embraced the concept of once-for-all forgiveness.

New acceptance by God. A new forever relationship with God. New certainty of heaven in the future. And all of that as a free gift of God's generosity to them.

And on top of that, freedom from the day-in, day-out religious rituals that had marked their lives to that point in time. It's easy to imagine how they assumed, therefore, in their excitement that that meant being in Jesus would mean they would live happily ever after.

But their practical experience was very different. Taking a stand for Jesus, they soon realized, put them at odds with, and even found them excluded from, their biological family and their wider clan, which was big in a Jewish context.

[4 : 41] More than that, they may well have found themselves at odds with or excluded from, their local community. Life was just getting really hard.

And then out on top of that, Emperor Nero brought in persecution. From Nero, the Roman Empire tended to blame everything that was wrong in the world on the Christians.

And so, increasingly, Christians were being arrested. There was already rumors flying around of many having been beaten.

And yes, some even having been killed. Their property, if not when this was written, certainly a few years after, was being confiscated.

Their right to work was being restricted or removed. Some of these Christians ended up in poverty. The result?

[5 : 46] We can well understand them saying, hang on a minute. All that excitement about Jesus, that's wonderful. But I didn't sign up for this.

New life in Jesus is not what I assumed it would be, is not what I expected it to be.

And probably, if I was being honest in the depth of my soul, is not what I demand it to be. Now, from that point, if you're with me in the imagination, from that point, it's not hard then to imagine these Christians starting to look for some ways to ease their circumstance.

And obviously, they started to think about toning down their identity in Jesus. Or some of them might have been starting to think about walking away altogether and walking back into the Jewish religious way of doing it because the Romans were quite happy to accept the Jewish religious system.

They started to think, well, maybe because there's not total disconnection between age-old Jewish religion, Judaism, and Christianity.

[7 : 01] Maybe we can work a blend. Maybe we can do something that we can still hang on to Jesus in a fashion, but will be acceptable with our family again. Will be acceptable in our local community again.

Will be acceptable in the Roman Empire again. And life will settle down. So the challenge of the letter of Hebrews is repeated.

Don't allow yourself to drift away from Jesus because serving him in a hostile world is really hard. And the way I've tried to set up the scenario, you should be able to see what it means to drift away.

It just starts and you think, well, maybe I could do this and that. And by drifting, you wake up one morning and you find you're kilometers away from where you thought you were or where you started.

And I think in those terms, we understand what it is to drift away from Jesus. When life gets hard for us, we automatically start thinking about ways we can make life easier.

[8 : 20] The writer encourages these anxious believers, and they are anxious. And you can understand why they're anxious. You can encourage them to remember who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. In other words, remember what caused you to respond to Jesus in the first place.

And in chapter 1, verse 1 through to chapter 2, verse 4, I'm just going to try and recap and bring the argument forward with me. The writer walks them through some key elements of Judaism. Contrasting what Judaism or the old Jewish religious practices offered against Jesus.

And the point is that there's nothing to go back to. Jesus effectively stamped the old Jewish religion, Judaism.

He stamped it past its use by day. And that he is the key to the good life. Now, in Judaism, prophets, priests, kings and angels had a huge part in God's plan of salvation.

That's what was worked out in the history of Israel. But we're led into this argument in Hebrews with the fact that Jesus is God. And because Jesus is God, he's in a category of his own in terms of status, authority in God's work.

[9 : 40] His part in God's salvation plan. His achievement. And when you put those things together, Jesus has done more than all of the prophets, all of the priests, all of the kings, all of the angels in some.

That's how unique Jesus is. That's the argument of Hebrews. He's the best prophet ever. Chapter 1, verses 1-4.

He reveals God's word with a clarity and authority like no other prophet before him. He's the best king ever. Modeling God's character of justice and mercy and subduing the unruly hearts of his rebellious people like no other king before him.

And he's the best priest ever. He finally sorts the problems of his people's sin. He finally makes them acceptable to God.

And then consistently prays for their spiritual well-being, which was one of the key jobs of a priest. And he does all that like no other priest before him.

[10 : 45] The argument continues then, verse 5 through to the end of chapter 1. He's even in a category of his own in terms of comparison and contrast with angels.

Vastly superior even to angels. Those incredibly powerful messengers of God tasked with implementing every part of God's salvation plan in history.

Compare and contrast. Well, they were created beings. Jesus was their creator. They followed God's orders in implementing God's purposes.

Jesus gives the orders. Jesus gives the orders. Jesus gives the orders. So, given all that, chapter 2, verses 1-4, given all that, the writer's saying to these anxious Christians, don't allow yourself to drift away from Jesus.

Remember who he is. Remember what he's done. Remember the thing that attracted you to Jesus in the first place. Don't allow yourself to start thinking that you can blend in with this world.

[11 : 57] while still being religious and doing religious things and still hang on to Jesus in some shape or form. Don't think that you can live a life driven by avoidance of ridicule and hostility.

Don't think that that's preferable to a strong identification with Jesus, even though the latter will bring you trouble. It will also bring you life.

And then the writer continues in our section this morning, chapter 2, verses 5-18. The writer, I think, anticipates the response of his readers at this point in time.

I think it would go something like this. Now, this is my reading into the text, so if you don't like it, then just ignore it. But tune in after I finish this, because I do have other things to say. So, it goes something like this.

Well, thank you very much. We really appreciate being reminded of how majestic Jesus is. His unique authority, his power as ruler of God's world.

[13 : 07] His centrality to God's big picture salvation plan in history. We really appreciate all that. But I'm still stuck on this question.

Does he really understand my daily struggle, my daily suffering as a believer? Does he understand how hard it is to have all-in identification with Jesus?

Does he care for me? Now, the next sentence is the big theme. So, if you don't take anything else away this morning, take this away with you. His encouragement in these verses is Jesus does know and care.

In fact, the argument is, you guys have been rabbiting on about angels. Well, let me tell you, Jesus is far more close to us than angels could ever be.

Why? Because Jesus has shared our situation. He's shared our humanity. Therefore, he knows exactly how we feel. He knows our daily needs.

[14 : 20] And he is the best placed person to help us in our struggles. That's the big picture of where I'm going this morning in the next few minutes.

So, let's jump into verse 5 then. And it talks there about the world to come. It was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.

Now, just a little note there to make sure you're on board on the right page here. It's the world of which we've been speaking. That is, not some vague future time, but it's the edge of salvation that has been mentioned in verse 3.

It's the new world order of the gospel, which had already begun in Jesus, described in chapter 1, verse 2, as these last days. So, what he's about to say now about Jesus, comparison and contrast, that's how the whole letter works, is applicable to us now.

United with Jesus, believers are experiencing now God's future. And what is that future?

[15 : 30] Well, it's created and defined by Jesus' identification with his died-for people. And that is something far more personal than angels could ever deliver.

Two main points. Jesus is our purpose-built trailblazer, verses 6 through to 9. Now, a trailblazer, for those who, it's very obvious, I think, from the word itself.

A trailblazer is someone who sort of pushes into uncharted territory, wilderness territory, and does the hard work of cutting out a track.

So, before there's just jungle, impenetrable, scary, darkness, lostness, trailblazer goes through and cuts a track.

And there it is. The comparison is so clear, isn't it? And everyone then who follows the trailblazer can, on the one hand, be perfectly thankful for the one who's gone ahead of them and done all the hard work.

[16 : 38] But they can be perfectly thankful also because they get the benefits of that hard work and the safety of following a clear-cut track.

Well, Jesus is our trailblazer. He came into our world as an image-bearer or a human like us.

Now, there's lots I could do with that verse, but I'm just going to have to keep moving and just do a sort of summary. What does that mean? Well, it means that nobody understands us better than one who's like us.

Jesus isn't just as it were talking down to us from up there. He's actually been down and dirty with us. Nobody understands us better than Jesus.

Our feelings, our fears, our specific needs as we struggle to serve Him daily. And angels, again, by contrast, angels for all their involvement in God's world, and it was clear that they had a massive involvement in God's world.

[18 : 03] But they cannot feel for God's people as Jesus feels for them. Why? Because angels, in a sense, have only observed God's world from the outside.

They've not experienced it from the inside, as has Jesus. Nobody, therefore, can have more empathy towards us or for us, however empathy is expressed, than Jesus.

He lived as a true image bearer or human for us. So He came to be like us, and then He lived for us. He actually did perfectly what God always intended His image bearers to do, but were never able to do because of sin.

Humans were created to rule over God's world as God's representative, as expressed in the theology of Psalm 8, which is quoted here.

But sin or rebellion just never, ever happened as God intended. Not even close. Well, Jesus fulfilled God's original intention in terms of His image bearers, His humankind.

[19 : 29] He models perfectly how to live in God's world. Even more, He models perfectly how to live in a rebellious world.

A hostile world. He models how to live as God intended us to live as His image bearers. And the third thing Jesus does, He restored true image-bearing humanity in us.

So He's like us. He's lived for us. But He does more than just model the good life to us. He transforms our humanity. Jesus renews us from the inside out, putting His Spirit within us.

It's mentioned in chapter 2. At the end of chapter 1, right? Chapter 1, verse... It's mentioned in chapter 2, verse 4. Somewhere before, anyway. He puts His Spirit within us to enable us to live the good life of obedience.

And He gives us the privilege in Him as a true humanity of sharing in the rule of God's world with Him. And also, verse 8 and 9, also sharing in the reward of glory and honor in heaven forever.

[20 : 57] Remember... That's who Jesus is. That's what Jesus has done for us and is doing in us.

And here's the application. And all of that, behind the scenes, as it were, because it's not all evident in our daily circumstances, but all of that is true. All of that is happening.

All of that has already happened in the background, if you want to put it in those terms. Even as the world despises, rejects, and ridicules us for our identification in Jesus.

There's the contrast. When we feel so abandoned, so alone, so cut off for Jesus, we need to remind ourselves that it's not possible to be closer to Him than what we are.

Second point, Jesus is our personal champion. Verses 10 through to verse 18. Verse 11, He's described there, it's one of the lovely verses in the Bible.

[22 : 14] Verse 10, it is. For it was fitting that He, that's Jesus, for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

So I read that long. For it was He, that is God, the Father, for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Jesus is described as the founder of our salvation. Other words that could be used there would be the author of our salvation. Some translations use that word. Personally, I like the idea of the word champion.

And it fits with the semantics of the word. To be someone's champion is to be totally identified with them.

Totally committed to their well-being. and acting for their good no matter the personal cost. These anxious Christians need to remember that Jesus is their champion.

[23 : 25] Not just a majestic king and lord and ruler of the world, but He is their personal champion. He's bringing all His power, all His knowledge, all His love to bear on their circumstances for their good.

He's got a single-minded focus on family. It's in there. What's His purpose in coming into this world?

To bring many sons to glory. I love that phrase. When Jesus came into the world on His salvation rescue mission, it was never just a job.

It was never just a formal assignment. For Jesus, it was personal. It was family who were in trouble, and it was family in trouble that He came to help.

And it was family He determined to renew so that He could set them apart for lives lived for God as they were intended to be lived.

[24 : 50] It was for family that Jesus took upon Himself huge cost even to death. confidence confident that God would reward His actions by opening the door of heaven to all His died-for people.

So the champion, as it were, if you could visualize this, would march in with all those people He championed following in His wake. And three passages from the Old Testament pick that up.

There's a whole bit to say about how the writer to the Hebrew actually uses those passages from the Old Testament, but there's too much to talk about that here now. I can talk to you about that some other time if you want to. Essentially, there's three passages here from the Old Testament used by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews that picks up the family nature of Jesus' focus.

Sons, daughters, children. Friends, you can't get a closer connection than a family connection.

Some would argue you can't get a greater concern than a broad-based family concern. We often say that a mom or a dad would do anything to protect their child and to keep them safe.

[26 : 27] We know that has its limits in human terms, but it's a good picture here, isn't it? Jesus was prepared to do what was necessary to be done for the family, his family.

nobody is more committed to the well-being of his people than Jesus. Not sparing himself because he wanted to free them from fear.

We'll say a little bit more about that in a minute. Fear from, fear of death. He wanted to guarantee that they'll get home to heaven. He wanted them to rest in that security, in the toughness of life, to just be able to say, to settle their anxiety, he will bring me as his son home to glory.

He will bring me as his daughter home to glory. And friends, all that proves that Jesus is perfectly skipped a point, I have to go back.

Jesus was uniquely qualified to fight and defeat our key enemies, verses 14 through to 17. Rebellion reduces, or rebellion or sin, reduces people to being helpless, terrified victims of Satan or the devil.

[28 : 00] That's picked up in these verses 14 onwards. Now here's how it works. Death is a direct consequence of sin.

God said, where a person sins, a person has to die. Satan gladly plays on that reality in a way that enslaves people to fear for the whole of their life.

Fear of what? Fear of death, which is fear of God's wrath and that final accounting, fear of condemnation. Determined to rescue his people, that is, covering all those bases I've just mentioned, determined to shield his people from God's wrath, determined to pay the penalty of their rebellion in full, so that Satan could no longer accuse them of being guilty, guilty, guilty.

And giving his people the righteousness they need to be acceptable to God, so that God looks at them and says, yes, you are perfectly righteous, you are welcome into my heaven forever.

to be able to do that, the argument here for the writer of Hebrews is that Jesus had to become like his guilty people in every way, in every respect, verse 17.

[29 : 29] Why? Well, only a sinless person could step in as a champion and act on behalf of sinful people.

The same idea is also in verse 10. Jesus was made perfect, not in the sense that he was imperfect beforehand, as it's something deficient in Jesus, but he was made perfect in the sense that he needed to become a true human experiencing life, temptation to disobedience, suffering.

He needed to experience all of that to be properly qualified for every aspect of his rescue mission. And such is his commitment to his people that he willingly took all of that shame and humiliation on, ultimately to take sin itself upon his shoulders and become sin, so his people could be freed from infernal accusations of guilt and lifetime slavery to fear of having to face God's accusations and condemnations when we die.

It's all been dealt with. There is no fear. And all of that proves that Jesus is perfectly qualified to help us and represent us before God in the last two verses.

Now, priests had two jobs. One was to offer sacrifice for sin, to make sure that the relationship between God and his dirty people was continuous.

[31 : 16] Another really important job that often doesn't get mentioned is that the priest was responsible to pray for his people and advocate for them before God. He was to pray for them in their struggle to live faithfully because he knew as a priest that he'd be doing more sacrifices tomorrow for the same sins as he did sacrifices for yesterday.

Nobody knows the power of temptation. temptation to turn away from obedience and find an easier pathway in life more than Jesus.

Just think of Jesus in the garden on the eve of his crucifixion. Nobody knows the debilitating fear that comes with the prospect of suffering and cruel torturous death better than Jesus.

Jesus' own encounter with a sinful hostile world and the suffering of death means he is perfectly placed to understand, to pray for, and to help you and me in our daily struggles.

He knows what it's like and he cares. So, I wrap up with just a thought to challenge you for the week ahead.

[33 : 00] What have you been saying to yourself as you face your situation each day? Paul Tripp and others use this idea so it's not, I'm not claiming it's new to me.

The point is this, each of us is constantly in conversation with ourselves. We tell ourselves how to think, how to feel, how to react to external circumstances.

So, what have you been saying to yourself on the one hand about your circumstances and on the other hand what have you been saying to yourself about Jesus? And what have you been saying to yourself in terms of bringing those two together?

What have you been saying to yourself about who Jesus is? What have you been saying to yourself about the value of identifying with him even if it brings hostility and rejection and ridicule?

Each of us preach some sort of gospel to ourselves every day. Have you been preaching a gospel to yourself that heightens your fear and encourages you to distance yourself from Jesus thinking, well, okay, if I can just keep my head down, if I can just blend in, then life will be good.

[34 : 37] Or have you been preaching the gospel of Jesus who's been there before you, who's blazed the trail of suffering and death, who knows how you feel, who's committed to helping you because he wants to make sure he brings you home to glory.

A gospel like that which gives courage, trust, confidence, and hope to step in to trouble.

Have you been preaching a gospel to yourself in which Jesus is remote, perhaps unaware of your situation or aware but uncaring of your situation?

Have you been preaching that sort of gospel to yourself or have you been preaching the gospel of Jesus who is closer to you, more committed to you, more active for you than anyone or anything else in this world because he's taken you as a son or daughter home to glory.

This week, like last week, when it feels as if nobody understands your fears, failures, if they were known by those around you, would just destroy you, when your pain just rises up and grabs you around the throat and threatens to throttle you, will you preach the Jesus of Hebrews such that you rest in him rather than panic.

[36 : 30] Well, thank you very much for listening to me. Thank you.