

Hebrews 2:8b-18 AM

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray as we stand. Our Father, we thank you for such a great hero as the Lord Jesus Christ.! Strengthen us now to run the race set before us, looking to Jesus, who is the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the shame, despising the shame, and it is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

We pray in his name. Amen. Now we're going to pick up Hebrews 2 that was just read for us, back on page 1001.

If you can find your way to that, starting at halfway through verse 8. I add my welcome to Jordan's. Great to have you if this is your first time with us, or even if you've been here for 75 years.

Welcome. Today we drop into this book of Hebrews. Just, we drop right into it. Written to a new church, a youngish church of young believers.

Believers who had discovered the joy and freedom of Jesus Christ. Some out of a pagan background, many from Jewish background. But it didn't take long for them to suffer persecution.

[1 : 24] Probably in Rome, they were publicly humiliated and harassed. This comes later in chapter 10. Wealthy middle class believers had had mobs of their neighbours, attack their homes, ransack, steal everything of value, throw them on the street.

And the police had cheered the crowds on. Some had been thrown into prison for being Christian. And there was no release date for any of them.

And they had joyfully received this suffering for Jesus Christ. And in chapter 10, the writer tells them that worse is coming. They are going to face the real threat of being killed for their faith.

So you can understand why their knees are wobbly. This is where we get the weak knees phrase from, from the book of Hebrews. They're a bit shaky about this persecution.

Perfectly understandable. And their temptation in the face of this out of control world, where things are happening so fast and they're so hostile, is not a great return to paganism, but to shrink back from following Jesus and to return to the safety of Judaism.

[2 : 50] Because Judaism was a legal religion, whereas Christianity was still illegal. So what do you say to a group of believers who suffered for Jesus, but for whom worse is coming?

What do you say to them? You know, when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Who are facing the possibility of dying for Jesus, who are tempted to shrink away from Jesus.

The whole book is a massive word of encouragement. That's what the writer calls it. To see Jesus and to see their lives and their world through Jesus.

So the first chapter is all about the person of Jesus Christ and how exalted he is. He's the most exalted person in all the universe. He was there at the beginning. He's going to be there at the end. And he's come to bring the greatest possible salvation. He's risen again. He's seated in heaven, crowned with glory and honor. And therefore, all things are subject to him. And the readers, as they hear chapter one, say, well, then why don't we see it?

[3 : 55] I mean, everything seems so out of control. We're facing mobs who want to come and destroy us. Where is Jesus and his rule? Does he even care? And why does God do things this way?

I mean, why is suffering so much part of the Christian life? Why can't we live quiet lives with our families and not face this public shaming? And this is where the passage starts.

Halfway through verse 8. In putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. But at present, we do not see everything in subjection to him.

You can say that again. But we see Jesus. And if you look at Jesus, what do you see? Verse 9. A little while, made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor, that he, because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone.

So the writer is saying the key to understanding our lives and the world we live in is to look at it, not just through Jesus, but through the lens of Jesus on the cross.

[5 : 07] You see how he says it in verse 9? He was crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death. So that the way to glory is through death.

The way to honor is through shame. And Jesus was brought so very low. And the reason he went so, came deliberately so very low, was so that he would taste death for us by the grace of God. It's a beautiful phrase. Comes straight out of the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus talks about the judgment of God as a cup that he doesn't want to drink, but he does drink. Jesus tasted death for us.

It's a great phrase. It means he actually took it into himself and yet it wasn't permanent, couldn't permanently hold him. And the surprise in the rest of the passage, this is all by way of introduction, by the way.

Some introductions are short. My sermons are all short. The rest of the passage, where was I? From verse 10 onwards, The writer pictures what God is doing in the cross and what Jesus is doing on the cross in military battle images.

[6 : 18] The cross is an invasion into our world where Jesus acts as a champion, a warrior, the word means, as a hero, and defeats the powers that are infinitely more powerful than us, Satan, sin and death, by the decisive victory he wins on the cross.

Now, just before I go any further, we are rightly suspicious of battle imagery as Christians.

Whenever Christians start to use this imagery for ourselves, the results are never good.

But we cannot escape the fact that we are part of a cosmic conflict. And that the death of Jesus always turns battle imagery on its head.

Because the way the cross works is paradoxical. He won by weakness. He had victory by becoming the victim. So I've got two points that correspond to the next two paragraphs.

The first is the invasion. Of the cross. And the second is the victory of the cross. So verses 10 to 13. The invasion. And the picture of Jesus and his death, if you look down at those verses, at verse 10 particularly, is he calls Jesus the founder of their salvation.

[7 : 36] And this word is a battle word. The founder. The trailblazer. The champion. The warrior. The path maker. The one who makes a way through death, sin and Satan to create a family of brothers and sisters.

And to bring us to glory. We have lost the glory of God that God gave us at creation. We still bear the image of God. But the image is defaced and disfigured.

Because we exchange the glory of God for the glory of ourselves and for anything else. And when we do that, we willingly become slaves of sin and Satan and the fear of death.

And the way Satan does this is he seduces us into sin and then threatens us with the judgment of God in death and holds us captive between those two things.

These are not just words. Sin and Satan and death. The Bible says they are powers that block our way to the glory of God.

[8 : 46] And our situation is so desperate and so tragic that nothing less than an invasion by the Son of God can smash a path through these things for us to follow along.

Which is exactly what he does. Which is wonderful news for these readers who are facing persecution and death. And it's a very different way of thinking about the cross of Jesus, isn't it?

It's not just forgiveness of sins. I mean in the Old Testament the great salvation of God was when God rescued his people from the slavery to Pharaoh and to Egypt.

The greatest power in the world in those days. God acted as their warrior. That's the song of Moses in Exodus 15. They celebrate that God was a warrior.

Can you believe it? And he took them by the hand. He led them through the pilgrimage through the dangers of the wilderness to the promised land. And in Jesus we have a greater, greater, far greater salvation.

[9 : 46] And a far greater destination than some real estate in the Near East. Our destination is glory. So look at verse 10. It was fitting that he, that is God, for whom and by whom all things exist, and bring many sons and daughters to glory, should make the founder, champion, waymaker of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Now why does he say it this way? God has plenty of human advisors. You know, there are people who are very willing and confident to tell him what he ought to do things.

And he ought to do things differently. Surely, surely you don't need so much suffering, Lord. Surely my life can be a bit easier. And so the writer speaks with great reverence and reserve.

And he just tells us what God did. He says it was fitting. It was worthy of God. Because he is the one for whom and by whom all things exist.

He's the maker of heaven and earth and you and me and the sovereign Lord of all things. He doesn't really need our advice. And now in the cross of Jesus, as he begins a new creation, it's fitting to make Jesus perfect through suffering.

[11:04] Now, Jesus was sinless, morally perfect. That's not what he's talking about. This word has a Hebrew root and it simply means qualified for the job of being our saviour.

And since his job was to be the way maker for our salvation, and since he had to do it by entering our weakness and dying in our place, he became fully qualified for this by enduring suffering.

To bring many to glory, he had to come low to be our representative and our perfect saviour. It's only through his suffering that he could take our enemies and smash through sin and death.

That is why he is called the founder of our salvation. And I'm sorry, that word is a pale and weak word in English. It's champion and forerunner and pathmaker and leader and hero and all those things combined.

And one of the things I just love about the book of Hebrews is that whenever we get to deep theology, he turns around and he makes the application for us. We don't have to do any work around the application.

[12:12] Thank you, writer, to the Hebrews. When we get to heaven, I'll find out who you are and say thank you on behalf of all preachers. To verse 11, since he's our trailblazer through the cross, and since he did it to make us his brothers and sisters and bring us to glory, what's the application?

Number one, he's not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. It's exactly what they were experiencing. They were held up daily to shame and humiliation, which was brutal in a shame on a culture.

And they were tempted to be ashamed of Jesus, you know, to find a less clear and confronting way to be Christians, just as we're tempted to be ashamed of Jesus, right?

When we ought to be most proud of him and boast of him, you know, if there's one thing we have in our lives we ought not be ashamed of, it's Jesus. But the writer turns it around and he says it's Jesus who's not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters, which is the Hebrew way of saying he is proud.

He's delighted to call us his brothers and sisters. What did he die for? Now, I know some of us feel that the Lord is not very pleased with us, you know, that somehow we've been a bit of a disappointment to him.

[13:37] We haven't made a heroic contribution to the Christian life. We haven't bravely stood for him. And so we hold back from each other and we wait until our performance improves.

Jesus goes like this. He sweeps it all away and he says, I am proud. I am delighted to call every single one of you my brothers and my sisters.

I am bringing you to glory and I wish you could see yourselves as I see you. Listen to the words that God said in the Old Testament that I'm happy to speak over you.

I am in your midst as a champion to save. I rejoice over you with gladness. I quiet you with my love and I exalt over you with loud singing.

And just in case that's not good enough, the writer gives us three more applications, three quick quotes from the Old Testament to hear what Jesus is saying now today.

[14:40] Look down at them, please. They're all indented helpfully for us. In verse 12, the first one is Psalm 22, which I know will get you all excited because some of the groups are looking at Psalm 22.

And the scene is taken from the congregational worship, the end of Psalm 22. And the verse is saying that whenever true Christians gather, Jesus is there and what is he doing?

Psalm 22 tells us, Jesus is preaching and Jesus is leading the singing. I will tell of your name to my brothers in the great congregation.

That is literally the word for preaching. I will sing of your praise. So whenever we turn to the word of God in our gatherings, the true preacher and the true teacher is the risen Jesus.

And it is his joy to preach this message. And whenever we sing to God, he is the true leader.

Thankfully, we've got people who can play organ and piano and lead us as well.

[15 : 44] There's nothing reluctant or grumpy about this. Can you feel something of the overflowing joy that Jesus has, the risen son of God has, in the company of those he's leading to glory?

The second quote comes from Isaiah 8. That's in verse 13. Isaiah. Do you remember Isaiah? He was preaching at a time of great opposition and rejection and hardness. He preached the judgment of God.

He preached the salvation of God. The Jewish leaders of the day ridiculed him and began to persecute him. So he sealed up his prophecies and gave it to his disciples so that when they came true, they would know this was the word of God.

And then he says in chapter 8, I will put my trust in him. It's hard to suffer for Jesus Christ. But in the midst of that, we are to put our trust in God, our faithful creator.

This is what's happening now. And the third text is just, it's just sheer delight. Look at the third text. He says, Behold, I and the children he has given me.

[16 : 50] It's as though Jesus stands in this congregation and he says, I am honoured to be numbered among you. I know we look at each other and we think, well, I don't know what you think.

But Jesus thinks, doesn't matter what you think really. He says, just look at each other. We are the children of God. You are my brothers and sisters.

You're the ones God the Father has given me and I've broken a hole in death and sin for you. And you've chosen to follow me to glory. That's the invasion, point one.

Point two, the victory of the cross. And this is verses 14 to 18. So how does Jesus make a way for us to enter glory?

How can we trust him to bring us to glory? What did he blast through? Because we're under threat of death here. So verse 14.

[17 : 48] Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy, this is the victory word, the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death are subject to lifelong slavery.

Here we come to the great enemy we all face, far more powerful than any of us, that holds millions in slavery each day, that tears apart, tears our loved ones away from us and tears us away from our loved ones, that rips apart our material and immaterial selves, the great insult, the cruel reality that pursues us throughout life, the one reality we can't avoid, the one thing we're so woefully poor at preparing for, death.

And when Jesus came into this world, he did not come into neutral territory. These are the forces hostile to God and hostile to our sin and death and Satan.

And death is not just an event, it's not a natural end to a life well lived, it's a power, as I said earlier, it's an enemy. And the power of death is sin. And when the writer says the devil has the power of death, it doesn't mean Satan controls when you die, it's not he has full control over death, but since he is the tempter who brought us to sin, and since death always follows sin, so where sin spreads, death spreads.

He seduces and tempts us, and when we sin, he becomes our tyranniser and our accuser. Now, we live in a time where we're desperately trying to pretend that we have control over death.

[19 : 36] We're very busy trying to domesticate this tyrant death. One way is to claim it's the natural and inevitable part of life, and we need to learn to make peace with it, and there's an avalanche of books on how to have a good death.

And there's a good deal of wisdom in many of them, as we face end-of-life issues. But none of these books deal with the real issue. We're not just like trees and rocks that have a time and then fade away.

None of them deal with the fear of death and the power of Satan. And I think medical assistance in dying is another way of trying to take control of our weakness and our vulnerability, and even of dying itself, even if it's administered very compassionately.

See, what we really need is someone who can come and take death into himself and can break the power of death.

We're just having a phone call. What we need is someone who combines the power of God and our own human weakness and vulnerability.

[20 : 46] Verse 14. Since therefore the children share flesh and blood, he partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death. God cannot die.

So Jesus lowered himself so that he could submit to the cross. The sinless one who absorbed all the power and the pain and the grief and the sin and the accusation that Satan had.

Bearing the wrath of God for our propitiation, which is why he mentions it in verse 17, which simply means a complete satisfying of God's wrath. And by doing that, he destroyed Satan and he destroyed death and he destroyed sin.

And the word doesn't mean obliterated or annihilated it because we still die, but he has made it powerless over those who belong to him. He's pulled the sting of death.

And even though each of us will die, for those who belong to Jesus Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, not even death itself. So Jesus is the trailblazer, the founder of our salvation.

[21 : 59] He came into our place where we were held captive by powers greater than ourselves. He defeated the strong man who tyrannizes us with fear and he's leading us out on the path to glory.

George Herbert wrote, death used to be an executioner, but the gospel makes him a gardener, planting us in the soil, growing for glory.

And some of us know the fingers of death grasping for us, but Jesus has transformed death from the great terror to the way in which we will enter his glory. And so we grieve still, but we grieve with hope.

And the hope we have is the hope of Jesus Christ. And hope is like salt that we rub into our grief. It's still real grief and we don't stifle the grief, but we tenderize it by knowing that Jesus has created a path through death and it's he who waits for us at the end.

And as it comes time for us to die, he comes to us and he says, now my brother, now my sister, now is the time for you to cross over as I bring you into glory.

[23 : 18] And that's a moment I think we can all look forward to. Amen. Amen.