

Fear and Freedom

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[0 : 00] Would you keep your Bibles open to this passage from Hebrews chapter 2? I've got mine basically at the bottom of age 203 and top of page 204 of your few Bibles.

We gather now in this wonderful warm time of the year as summer is upon us and we're getting into a relaxed vacation mode and we're continuing for a few more weeks our series on death.

So I'm very grateful to whoever it was gave me this passage today to work on because the passage from Hebrews today is hitting at a very real fear that afflicts every human being.

It is touching on that one event that every one of us is going to have to face and for which many of us is the subject of great denial and fear. And that of course is death.

You see him picking up on this in verse 15. It talks about how Jesus delivers all those who through fear of death were subject to a lifelong bondage. See the Bible tells us that there is a problem facing every human being and that problem is death.

[1 : 01] We face not just the death of our physical bodies but the destruction of our human being and a destruction and a sentence that is the result of sin and is eternal and irreversible.

And try as we might, there is little or nothing we can do about the inevitability of death in our lives. There is no law you can pass, no program you can follow, no vitamin you can take or workout you can do which will shield you from the sentence of death.

What is it that you can do that will take off this mortal body and place on immortality? How can you do it? Our society in which we live has a very mixed view of this fact of death.

We deny it and yet for so many of us our actions demonstrate that death is a terrible prospect. Here in Vancouver, we think that we are particularly wonderful human beings. We've got glorious weather.

We believe we are created in the image of God and are immeasurably wonderful as we are. And yet we lay our tithes and offerings at the cult of youth because the aging of our bodies holds such a fearful prospect.

[2 : 10] We work terribly hard to keep ourselves young and the people we see on television have faces that have been airbrushed, surgically enhanced, or Botoxed into perfection with an ageless look that simply never fades.

I've noticed over the years how soap stars get younger and younger. We sow glory in our lives here and now but the prospect that youth will flee and health will fail, that our immortal bodies will die is a fear we push off into the very remote future.

But the Bible tells us that we don't need to fear death and that the end of our physical mortal bodies is not the end of who we are but the beginning of something better. The Bible tells us we need not fear that God has better plans, that God's plan was not that human sin should have the final word but that we should enter into everlasting, immortal, perfected life, the life that was ours at creation before we sinned.

God's plan was to lift the sentence of death so that we need not fear distractions but see the physical death of our bodies as the transition to a life more glorious than anything we can imagine.

And the solution to that problem, as we see in this passage from Hebrews chapter 2, the solution is Jesus. And if you look, I want to show you there are three things that Jesus does to remove the fear of death upon our lives.

[3 : 38] The first thing he does is he dies. The second thing is he identifies. And the third is he delivers. First, Jesus dies.

And that really is verse 10. For it is fitting that he, that's God, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

So he is pointing us right here to Jesus as the source of our salvation. And he is opening up before us the death of Jesus as the place where our salvation was wrought.

Pioneer. That means he is the author or the captain, the leader of our salvation. And see what he is saying there is that Jesus is the place. Jesus is the person where salvation begins.

It doesn't begin anywhere else. It doesn't begin within myself. It does not reside in something I have done or not done. Before Jesus, there was no faith, no salvation.

[4 : 42] Without Jesus, there can be no salvation. It was Jesus who created salvation through the physical act of dying on the cross and rising again. And see, we don't want to empty Jesus of his true purpose.

That is a temptation that this group of Christians were falling into. He did not come as a great moral leader or teacher. Jesus did not come to simply gesture us towards God.

Jesus came to make salvation, to create it, to bring it into being, to win it. He is the pioneer. He is the one who made it all possible.

He charts a course that we can follow. He is the pioneer of our salvation and he is made perfect through suffering. That doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't somehow up to the task and had to be perfected.

The word for perfect here simply means complete, effective, adequate. See, his death has secured our salvation. There is no need for anything more.

[5 : 48] There is nothing else we have to do. See, that is why we do not have to be afraid if you are a Christian because Christ has done everything. You just have to receive and it is through his suffering.

See, here our attention is directed to the cross of Jesus, the cross which was the place of his suffering and what the author is doing is filling out the content of that suffering. For it was in the suffering of Jesus, that physical, bodily, emotional and spiritual dereliction of Jesus that the pioneer of our salvation was made perfect.

It was in the suffering of Jesus on the cross that he offered, as we say in our communion service, the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Will you consider that with me right now? Now, as Jesus hung there on the cross, all of the sin of rebellious humanity began to bear in his body and he bore in his body the rejection, the alienation from God that is our destiny because of sin and the wrath of God for human sin which was rightly upon us was placed upon him and was satisfied.

He is made perfect in suffering. Because, you see, the suffering of Jesus on the cross was no empty gesture. It was not an accident. It is not a symbol.

[7 : 15] The cross is the place where God's wrath was satisfied and redemption as one. When Jesus suffered on the cross, he offered a sacrifice for you. See, it's important we don't empty the cross of Jesus of its meaning.

People will tell you that Jesus was executed because the religious conservatives didn't want to release their grip on power. People will tell you that Jesus' death was an accident or a gesture.

It was a symbol of the love of God for the human race. But the author to the Hebrews is pointing us resolutely to the cross of Jesus as the place where payment for our sin was made, the sacrifice was accepted, and we might be free.

It was completely adequate. And so there is nothing more we need to do. And you see, already there is a source of great hope for us. We don't need to be afraid.

You don't need to wonder. When you die, will it be okay? You don't need to have uncertainty about that. Because Jesus' sacrifice was perfect.

[8 : 21] It was adequate. It completed the work. We just need to receive. Jesus dies, and so wins salvation. The second thing is he identifies, and here I'm looking at verse 11 and following.

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren. And then he goes on with those three quotations from the Old Testament there.

Now this is a terribly important point the author is making here about why it is we don't have to fear when we die because Jesus identifies with us. He does not save us from on high.

He does not demand that we work our way up to him. But rather he who is the Son of God, he who is the eternal Word of the Father, has come and entered into our human flesh and blood.

He has taken our life upon him. He says it again in verse 14. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself partook of the same nature.

[9 : 25] And again in verse 17. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect. See, this is about Jesus.

This is about the real thing. Jesus didn't come down as a kind of apparition and just gesture us to God. Or Jesus was not just a human being who was born and had a great vision and told us about it.

Jesus is the divine Son of God who took upon himself human flesh and entered into our life, accepted our frailty, took upon himself descendants of death so that we might be free.

This is about the total identification of Jesus with us. It's quite the opposite, of course, of being a teenager, I think. When my big sister became a teenager, I remember suddenly our life changed greatly.

And she used to say to me quietly when my parents were listening, she'd say, I'm glad I'm not related to you. I was the little brother person. I never knew quite what she meant, but I generally felt the same about her, actually.

[10 : 28] But that is not the case with Jesus. In working out our salvation, Jesus came and totally identified himself with us. Jesus came to live among us, as one of us.

There is nothing about the human condition he has not experienced himself. He was God who came to live among us. He was the perfect man but he wasn't Superman.

Superman could catch a bullet with his teeth or repair the San Andreas fault. But Jesus didn't come and do that. He came to us in a vulnerable condition.

He shared in our human pain and suffering as well as our joys. He was tempted. He felt the pull. If he was hit, he was bruised. When he was nailed to the cross, he suffered intensely.

You see, he comes. He was amongst us. I don't know if you remember, some of you, we had an Essentials teleconference about a year ago. Anyone go to that? When we went to First Baptist, First South Delta Baptist Church, whatever it is, that church out there anyways.

[11 : 29] And there was this big screen and I remember all of a sudden our rector popped up on the screen, David Short, and there he was in super life-sized form. And then he did something which we didn't know he could do.

He dematerialized. It was quite extraordinary. There was a glitch and all of a sudden David broke up into a thousand tiny pieces and disappeared before our eyes. I'm glad to say that he managed to rematerialize quite quickly and we got the rest of his talk.

You see, Jesus is not like that. Jesus doesn't come in super life-sized hero form and just come down and save us by divine fiat. He came and lived amongst us as one of us.

And it's like that with David. Isn't it better when you have David in the flesh? Not super life-sized, but one-on-one with us. And so it is with Jesus. And if that is true, then you see the implications are immense and you can see them there in verse 11 and following.

First of all, that we are sanctified and second, that he calls us brother and sister. Isn't that amazing? See, it is he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified.

[12 : 37] He comes and calls us to be his people. And because we have a relationship with Jesus, he makes us holy. And it is because we have that relationship with Jesus and because he makes us holy, we need to live out that holiness in our lives.

It's not about us being holier than the next person. It's about us being like Jesus who is like us. But also, he calls us brethren.

Is that not extraordinary? He calls us brother, sister. Is that not amazing to you? See how much Jesus identifies with you.

That he comes and calls you brother, sister. That's the point behind these quotes here. If you look at the first quote in verse 12, I will proclaim thy name to my brethren in the midst of the congregation.

I will praise thee. See, that is a quote from Psalm 22. The opening words of Psalm 22 are, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[13 : 45] These are the words that Jesus quoted on the cross as he gave his life as an atoning sacrifice. And Psalm 22 does not stay in that despair but moves on to triumph.

See, when Jesus cried out those words, they were not words devoid of hope but filled with promise. The promise that God would hear and deliver him. And so this triumphant verse cited in Hebrews, I will proclaim thy name to my brethren in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee.

This is about Jesus identifying with the people who follow him and for who he died. And that's what happens when you become a Christian. You can picture Jesus standing in the court of heaven with a throng of people around him who are his people, those who follow him and whom he has saved.

But you need to picture for yourself here, if you are a Christian, is Jesus standing in the court of heaven before the throne of God. There is a great multitude of the saved all around him.

And Jesus has his arm around you. And he is introducing you, everyone. He says, yeah, I know you.

[15 : 01] my friend. This is my brother. My sister. That's how he saves us. Calls us brother and sister. Jesus identifies with us.

But finally, and with this I'm going to close, Jesus delivers us from death. And that's verse 14 and following. Therefore, since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

And that is the real crux of it all, isn't it? That is the point of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He delivers us from sin and death. The writer to the Hebrews says in verse 9 of that chapter, we see Jesus now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

See, the Son of God dies so that you might become a child of God. He does that on the cross. As it says in 1 Timothy, there is one God and one mediator between God and men.

The man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all. See, Jesus delivers us from death.

[16 : 30] People will tell you that Jesus is a great moral leader amongst others. People will say that Jesus is the way we follow, but others have different pathways to God. But the Bible says the opposite. For we do not follow Jesus as disciples following a guru or a way of life.

And being a Christian is not about self-improvement or becoming enlightened. As Christians, we throw ourselves upon the mercies of God. We receive the free gift of everlasting life given to us by Jesus.

And that is the witness of the Bible to Jesus that he suffered and died for our sins and rose again to everlasting life. And those who follow him will have nothing to fear in death.

For we have been delivered from death and the passing of our mortal bodies marks that the opening of a door to immortality made possible by Jesus.

See, the death of my body does not mark the end of my existence but the beginning of glory. If you are a Christian, the death of your mortal body will be but the flash of an eye and you will receive a perfected, spirit-controlled body like Jesus and you will live with him forever.

[17 : 43] But there is a confrontation there. A confrontation between what the cross says about me and what I say about myself. Between my own self-will and submission to Jesus.

Between my own inherent sense of goodness and gloriousness and perfection and that the cross says I need to repent and I need forgiveness. And the place of confrontation where your sinful humanity is exchanged for glory is Jesus.

The human life and suffering of Jesus on your behalf confronts you with the truth that you are sinful and in need of rescue. Our society says the opposite. Most of us believe that we are already glorious and near perfection.

When I work out at the gym, the mirrors are filled with people who know that they are glorious and who can't take their eyes off themselves. We lesser mortals must labor in vain on the treadmill as we simply try to hold back the tide.

Our society and even many within the church will say to you you are inherently good as you are, that God has created you to be who you are and loves you just as you are. But the suffering of Jesus on the cross confronts you with the truth that God does love you as you are but does not contend to see sin of the last word.

[18 : 59] He wants to save you for immortality. We are called here to look beneath the surface of our lives and admit the sin, the sorrow, the emptiness of who we are.

You can wear the latest fashions, you can tone your muscles into perfection but you cannot do is put off this body and take on immortality.

Only Christ can do that. Christ has done that and you need not fear. Only receive. Amen.