

Hebrews 2:8b-18 Early Morning

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Date: 06 April 2025

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[0 : 01] Heavenly Father, I pray you'd open our ears to listen, open our eyes to see, plight your word deep in our hearts and make it bear good fruit in our lives.

Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You can be seated. So this is our last week in our Lenten sermon series on the cross of Christ.

And if you imagine that God's redemptive work in Christ is like a finely cut diamond, over the last few weeks we've been turning that precious jewel over to see and consider different facets of what God has accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord.

And this week we will see how Christ's death liberates us from fear and bondage to live in joyful hope and confident faith.

Now fear is actually a big topic throughout the Bible. And the Bible teaches that fear is more than an unpleasant feeling. Fear, especially when it's allowed to rule our lives, can actually become a very cruel master.

[1 : 14] And no fear grips us more powerfully than the fear of death. In our reading from Hebrews, we see that Christ came to deliver those who, through the fear of death, were subjected to lifelong slavery.

Did you see that? Life long slavery. In a fearful world, full of sin and death and darkness, we are born captives.

We are like people held in chains behind tall, dark walls who need someone to come to destroy the strongholds, to throw down our enemies, and to lead us into freedom.

And we see in Hebrews 2 that this is what God has done through the death and resurrection of Christ. Now, in our reading today, we see two ways that Jesus liberates us from this fear and bondage.

The first is that as our champion, Jesus defeats the powers of death and darkness. That's verses 10 to 16 of our reading. And then second, as our great high priest, Jesus atones for our sin and guilt.

[2 : 29] That's verses 17 and 18. I feel like I have to say, like last week, I think this could be two to four sermons all on its own. But we have about 10 minutes, so we should get on with it.

So we'll start in verses 10 to 16, where we see that Jesus is our champion who defeats the powers of death and darkness. So look with me at verse 10. 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.

So here we see that God's purpose is to bring many sons to glory. And he does this through Jesus Christ, who is the founder of our faith.

The word here is the archagon, the pioneer, the hero, the champion of our salvation. Now, as a quick sidebar, when the writer of Hebrews says that God is bringing many sons to glory, it doesn't mean that God prefers men or sons to women and daughters.

He's saying something profound about inheritance and rule. He's saying that in the work of redemption, God is bringing lost men and women, boys and girls into his family as heirs of his kingdom, who will actually rule with Christ in God's glorious new creation.

[3 : 56] And he is doing this through the suffering of our champion, Jesus. The writer of Hebrews says that it was fitting, even good, for Christ to enter into the fullness of our suffering.

This was the perfection or completion, the telos of his life and mission. And Jesus doesn't shy away from this. He's not embarrassed to empty himself and take the form of a servant to be humbled to the point of death upon a cross.

He's not even ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, because identifying with us in this way, Jesus sanctifies us. He makes us holy and he delivers us from death.

Now, in our day and age, even within the church, there can be a reluctance to celebrate the suffering of Jesus. The message of the cross has been criticized as being violent, even abusive.

The picture that some contemporary people have in mind is an angry, abusive father taking out his wrath on his weak, submissive son.

[5 : 11] Now, this is galaxies away from what the Bible proclaims or what the church has always believed and taught about the cross. Far from being a helpless victim, Jesus is portrayed here as the heroic champion, who in his humiliation, death and suffering was waging war on the powers of death and evil.

Look at verse 14. For us, the children, flesh and blood is not a choice.

It's a part of our embodied human nature. But for Jesus, for the eternal son of God, flesh and blood was a choice. He chose to partake of our nature.

He chose to partake of our flesh and blood. Why? So that through his 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.

Now, I don't know if there's any fantasy or mythology fans in the congregation this morning. I'm a big fan of epic fantasy. And a common theme or motif in epic fantasy and mythology is the champion who fights on behalf of his people.

[6 : 48] In many stories, this takes the form of the 1v1 duel, where the best and strongest warriors fight on behalf of their nations or people.

And in the story of redemption, Jesus is that champion for us. He's the champion of humanity. Look again at verse 16.

Jesus did not become a man to help the angels. He came to be the champion and savior of God's redeemed people. He didn't come to help the angels.

He came to help you. So first, through the cross, Christ, our champion, liberates us. He frees us by defeating and disarming the powers of death and darkness.

And this brings us to the second part of our reading, where through the cross, we see Christ, our priest, atoning for our sin and guilt.

[7 : 51] So look, look at verse 17. 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.

Now, there's a lot going on, even in this one verse. So I'm just going to do some rapid fire observations. First, look at the necessity of Christ's incarnation.

The writer of Hebrews said he had to be made like his brothers in every way. As we've already said, Jesus freely chose to take on our nature.

He wasn't coerced. He wasn't unwilling. He chose to take on our nature. But this was necessary for him to become our high priest. It was necessary for him to be our savior.

We need a mediator. We need someone to stand between God and sinful humanity. And this is why Jesus had to become like us in every way.

[9 : 03] He's the one who deals with the problem of sin and unites us to God. If we keep reading, we find that Christ's humanity makes him a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.

As God, Christ has the authority, power, and holiness to be our champion. And as a man, he mercifully identifies with our suffering and trials.

He can advocate for us before God the Father because he knows what it's like to be a human being. And yet, he never sinned. He was always faithful in his service to God.

And finally, as our great high priest, Christ makes propitiation for our sins. This word, propitiation, has rich and deep connections to the big biblical story of redemption.

In particular, it has deep resonances with the Day of Atonement and the sacrificial system in Israel in the Old Testament. Propitiation refers to the satisfaction of God's justice.

[10 : 22] The satisfaction of his holy anger and just judgment against all sin, evil, and idolatry. But to make atonement for our sins, to free his people from the penalty, power, and presence of sin, Jesus doesn't offer bulls and goats.

He offers himself. He offers his own perfect, sinless life as the one full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

If we were to think of the imagery of the Old Testament, Jesus is the priest, the temple, and the lamb, all in one.

And through his willing death on the cross, Jesus makes atonement for our sin. He doesn't just cover it up.

He takes it away altogether. He removes every shred of guilt and condemnation that we rightly brought upon ourselves because of our sin and rejection of God.

[11 : 34] And in his person and in his death and resurrection, Jesus forgives us, he cleanses us, and he reconciles us to God. This is why the Apostle Paul can say with such confidence, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Because he is our great high priest who has made propitiation for our sins. So finally, what does this mean for us?

What does this mean for our life and faith? I fear I don't have time to do this justice, but here's the big takeaway. Because we have Jesus as our champion and our great high priest, we can face trials and sufferings with joyful hope and confident faith.

Life is hard. The people who received this letter to the Hebrews knew this. Most scholars believe that what occasioned the letter was a time of persecution and intense pressure that were causing these converts to Christianity to rethink their faith in Jesus and even maybe go back to the older Old Testament faith.

And we all face things in life that cause us to ask these kinds of questions. The reality is we are not good enough, not strong enough, not impressive or virtuous enough to withstand all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

[13 : 17] I wonder if you've ever heard someone say, God will not give you more than you can handle. That's baloney.

It's just, it's a nice idea, but it's simply not true. Here's what is true. You will not face anything bigger in your life than what Christ has already overcome.

God won't give you anything more than he can handle. That might be a more faithful way to say that. There is no stain of sin and guilt that the devil or any other accuser can throw in your face to drive you toward shame or despair.

You are a forgiven, reconciled, and redeemed child of God who has Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as your champion and your great high priest.

So I don't know what life holds for all of you right now. You may be in a season of joy and blessing, or you may be in a season of suffering and trials.

[14 : 26] But whatever it is, know that you can face it with joyful hope and confident faith, because Jesus has gone before you and he walks with you.

He is your helper. He is your champion. And there's truly no one better to have on your side. Amen. Amen. Amen.