

Hebrews 2:14-18 “Love Song from a Savior”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! I'm excited to open the gospel with you this morning. We're going to continue our series in Hebrews. You may not know this, some of you may, but when I was in seminary about 20 years ago now, which is crazy to think, I was also serving as a youth pastor for a large majority of my life.

It's a very important thing in my heart, the youth. And so I was at a church in Washington, D.C. for nine years. And one day after, I was also in seminary, one day after the theology class, where we had been wrestling through two words that I'm sure you use all the time, infralapsarianism and superlapsarianism.

So we had been wrestling through these words, and I leave the class to go be with youth. And I'm like, who talks like this?

And there's a junior high student named Nathan, and he wanted to meet. And he was troubled. And so I took him to the AMC Theater food court at Tyson's Corner Mall, which is where I would always go.

[1:21] And Nathan wanted to talk, so we sat down in the food court, and he looked at me, and he asked, Derek, exactly when did God come up with a plan to save the world?

Now, my jaw hit the table because if you want to know the two theological words for that discussion, they're infralapsarianism and superlapsarianism. And I was like, God, you really have a sense of humor.

But I knew that, like, at that moment, my job wasn't to ism him. As a pastor and as a friend, what I needed to do was to hear the question behind the question, the question behind the theological question.

And I think he was saying something more like this. If things break, am I going to be okay? Derek, does God really have a plan? Will good things last?

Am I going to have to face life alone? You see, Nathan's question, it doesn't disappear when we grow up. We just learn to hide it under busyness and sometimes fancy words.

[2:37] Because deep down inside, I think we all, if we're honest, we can feel it. We can feel that things shouldn't end like they do.

And sadness feels out of place sometimes. And loss feels unnatural. And death, man, death just feels wrong.

So we fear. We get scared. And then that fear drives our need for control. And then that fuels anxiety in us. And then that sends us searching in all these different places for meaning and for security.

And you know what the fear behind all of our fears is? It's the fear of death. That's what the passage deals with today.

See, I believe that where death began is where fear began. So where did death begin? The author of life tells us this, that sin entered the world through one man and death through sin.

[3 : 52] And what happened the moment that sin entered the world? Y'all remember the story? Adam and Eve hid and they were afraid.

Right there it is. The birth of fear. Okay? That's where it comes from. We weren't originally created to be scared all the time.

Not of endings, not of judgment, and certainly not of death. We really weren't. But we have such a good God.

Okay? And the author of life, he doesn't minimize that fear. He doesn't shame us when we feel it. He names it honestly. And then he confronts it with hope.

So like Nathan, the seventh grader, I believe we all have a question. And what he was asking, and I think what many of us are still asking in many quieter ways, and perhaps this morning, is when life and death feel big and overwhelming, am I actually safe?

[5 : 06] Am I actually safe? Am I actually safe? You may be struggling with that this morning. Welcome. It's okay. And we have such an amazing God that we serve.

And he answers that fear. And he doesn't answer it with shame. And he doesn't answer it with silence. And he certainly doesn't answer it with huge theological words to comfort you.

But he answers it with a plan. A rescue plan. In the form of a love song, I believe. Written in the key of Jesus.

So as we walk through this passage today, I hope you find comfort. I want us to listen for the lyrics of that song. And I think it's a song that we can take with us, we can carry with us.

And when fear tries to take control, you can sing it in your heart like a prayer to God. So let's start by reading the first little section of Hebrews here.

[6 : 07] Here's verse 3.

The first lyrics to the song are in there in those verses. God is near. Do not fear. God is near.

Do not fear. When life and death feel overwhelming and you get scared, remember that God is near.

Okay? God has always had a plan to save the world. When did he create it? Does it matter? He's always had a plan to save the world.

And it meant that he had to come near. Okay? That's why we say God with us at Christmas. Emmanuel. God with us. God near us. Our God's not a distant God.

[7 : 27] He's not far away from our problems. He's not unable to hear our cries. He's near. And that's why it says that God himself partook of the same flesh and blood that we wear right now.

That through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death. That is the devil. Okay? So when God the Son dies in our place, it does something special.

It satisfies God the Father's wrath that was left because of our sin and it satisfies it forever. You see, no normal human being could do that. But an eternal one who took upon flesh could because the sacrifice counts here and in eternity.

It's accepted. It's paid. It's finished. It's finished. So in order to do that, God had to come near and he had to become a little lower than the angels.

And he had to enter fully into human weakness, limitation, vulnerability. Now that, that's a loving author. Okay?

[8 : 41] That's someone you can trust because they understand where you are right now. Isn't that beautiful? And think of this. This is a beautiful thing about God to me, that this concept, that he would choose to use death, the thing that we fear, as his weapon of love to overcome death, ultimate death.

Isn't that amazing? See, when Nathan had asked me that question, underneath his question was that fear and overwhelmed feeling of life and death and chaos all around.

You may get that. Just turn on the news. You'll feel that. Right? But what he needed to hear in that moment was the truth that God has always had a plan to save the world.

And maybe that will help you today. And that plan has always included God coming near. Okay? God is near. But that means that we don't have to fear.

See, in verses 15 and 16, he's going to deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Because Jesus came near, we don't have to be afraid or worried about the ending of the story.

[9 : 58] Sin doesn't get the last word anymore is what that means. And Hebrews teaches us that Jesus came to deliver those who were held in lifelong slavery, it says. By the fear of death.

You may not even realize that you are in lifelong slavery right now. It's an invisible slavery. And notice what God's doing here. He's not saying, and shame on you for being scared and being in chains and not realizing it.

Shame on you. He doesn't say that. He names it so you know you can trust him. And then he embraces it. And then he confronts it honestly.

And he's also teaching us that fear doesn't have authority over you if you belong to Jesus. It has no authority over you. Freedom's not something that you achieve.

Okay? It's something that you receive from the one who has achieved it. It's something that Jesus gives. It's a free gift. It's something you see in this world was broken.

[11 : 00] But we know the one who's able to fix it. And then he lets you enter into that. And who does Jesus help, does it say there? According to verse 16, it says that he helps the offspring of Abraham.

Now, who does that? You're like, well, that's weird. Does that count for me? Well, look at Galatians 3.29. If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

That's good news. Okay? So, it's the fear of death that Satan uses to handcuff, sometimes with invisible handcuffs, the offspring of Abraham, those who belong to Christ.

Have you felt the attack? Look at the handcuffs. Because it's very effective. But it's not real. Okay? It has no power over you.

The problem underneath the problem, the invisible bondage to the fear of death, is that he uses it like a spell. And God calls it out. It's just a spell.

[12 : 09] It's got no power over you. And if you're Christ, it's only a trick. Now, I love it when an epic 1980s movie illustrates a biblical point.

And there's this scene at the end of one of the greatest films ever made, The Labyrinth, where Sarah, played by Jennifer Connolly, realizes that Jareth, the Goblin King, played by the, I don't know what we call him, David Bowie, he really has no power to keep her in this maze that she thinks she's been trapped in.

So, let's check this out in all of its greatness. Stop. Wait.

Look, Sarah. Look what I'm offering you. Your dreams. Just let me rule you. And you can have everything that you want.

Just fear me. Love me. Do as I say, and I will be your slave. You have no power over me.

[13:36] I have no power over me. You're welcome.
That is cinema at its finest. Move over CGI. That's special effects. And acting.
Right? Do you see the concept there? He's got no power over you. I think of that all the time when I go back to that fear. I think of that line.
You have no power over me. And the truth is that the one trying to hold us in slavery to fear and sin and condemnation doesn't really have any power.
It's like money. Does money have power over you? It's just a piece of paper. You give it power. Okay? But it doesn't really have power over you. Right? It's the same with Satan.

[14:43] He doesn't have power over you. The truth is that the one trying to hold you, he wants you to think that he does have the power. But we struggle with it, don't we?
Artist, not artist, author and theologian Curtis Chang, he calls it cave fear when it starts creeping up, that power. Right? That fear. It comes in your mind.
It's like, welcome to WKFEAR. I'm your DJ, death and destruction. You thought you were going to be happy today. But I'm going to tell you, you are going to be awful. Everything is awful and everyone is going to die.
Have a great day. Right? Plays in your head. Cave fear. I struggle with this when my family goes on travels or anyone is away. Cave fear. Cave fear.
It comes into your head. It's that spell of fear. Are you living under that? Do you listen to cave fear? Because you can change the station. You can turn off the radio.

[15:40] Right? It doesn't really have any significance over you. And if you need me to say it more plainly, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.
The outworking of that means this, that the slavery of fear has no more power over you than David Bowie with his visually assaulting hair and pants. Okay? It's about as much power as it has.
And you're welcome that I edited out his pants in that. Okay? But God is near. You don't have to fear. Okay?
But there's a concrete reason why you don't have to fear. And that's the next line of the song. It's in verse 17. I'm going to read that first. The line in there.
Death is dead. Christ instead. God is near. Do not fear. You don't have to fear. Why? Because death is dead. Christ instead. You see, Satan's power is not absolute.

[16:52] Only God's is. And death is dead. But though death is dead, it doesn't mean that Satan won't try to resurrect it. And that's the spell that he gets us with.
Trying to make us forget. Trying to hold us in that slavery to fear. To live as if we are condemned. To live as if we do need to fear the end. But Hebrews goes even further and it tells us it was through Jesus' death that Jesus destroyed the one who has the power of death.
The devil. The devil has been destroyed. It's through death that Christ has conquered. It's through death. He rules now. And he didn't just die. He came back to life. So death doesn't own us.
Fear doesn't own us. But it still intrudes. Death still exists. Right? But it doesn't rain. It hurts. But it no longer gets the final word.
Because through Christ's death on the cross, death has been dealt a final, final blow. Okay? A fatal blow. So on the cross, that pain of death is the beauty of it too.

[18:00] God uses death to overcome the death. But also on the cross, the pain of death was not ignored. It was embraced. And you were replaced. Death is dead.

Christ instead. See, Christ died in our place. Scripture speaks of two kinds of death. The death of our bodies here and the eternal separation reserved for those who enter eternity without the forgiveness of Jesus.

You'll hear that referred to as the lake of fire. It's called the second death in Scripture. We all die once, but we don't all have to die twice.

Okay? But Jesus stepped in. Right? His death paid for the sin. The debt that we owe but could never pay.

And now there's life on the other side. Okay? He paid it in full. It was costly to him, but then it's free to us. Let's not overlook that. But that means that to him, you were worth it.

[19 : 08] You were worth it. This is salvation, y'all. It's not this vague religious idea, but it really is God rescuing us from the penalty of sin, saving us from having to pay that with our own souls.

We are all desperately needing a Savior in those moments when we're crying out or we're listening to K-Fear. And right now, God offers you that salvation as a free gift, and he offers you that peace as a free gift.

See, the writer, God himself, has always had this plan to save us, and it's always included him writing himself into the story, into our story, Christ instead of us.

What author writes himself into the story and dies for the characters, and then uses the thing that was holding them under slavery to break the thing?

It's beautiful. Only the mind of the Almighty would come up with this. You see, Hebrews calls this death a propitiation, a helaskamai was the Greek word, an atoning sacrifice that puts away sin and satisfies God's wrath.

[20 : 20] And that just really means him instead of you. And what's left instead of death and fear is peace and reconciliation. Propitiation. But only if you accept the gift.

Only if you trust the one who was put there instead of you. And I love how John Piper describes propitiation. He says this, It refers to the removal of God's wrath by providing a substitute.

The substitute is provided by God himself. The substitute, Jesus Christ, does not just cancel the wrath. He absorbs it and diverts it from us to himself.

God says, I'll do it for you. Why would you ever turn your back on the free gift of salvation?

There's someone who wants you to, but it's a free gift. It's right there. But if you think about it, on the cross, God the Father would turn his back on God the Son.

[21 : 21] But it was only for a time. And it was so that we never have to see him turn his back on us. And his sacrifice was perfect and eternal.

And all that was necessary. And this is why the writer says it was necessary so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest. Not a distant one. Not a ceremonial one only.

But a merciful and faithful high priest who steps into our story. I put it in your bulletin at the meditation. How Tim Keller describes what a priest is.

A priest's job is to get us into the presence of God. And to get the presence of God into us. And that's what Jesus does if you think about it. He brings us near to God by washing us clean with his blood.

And then he brings God near to us by giving us himself. The only sacrifice that could bring forgiveness, restore relationship with God, and make us God's own children through adoption.

[22 : 26] As our faith is put in him. You see, Christ instead. And where Christ stands in your place and my place, life now stands where death once ruled.

But someone wants to trick you into believing that none of that is true. And that person, if you want to call it a person, has no power over you. Okay? God is near.

Do not fear. Death is dead. Christ instead. And now let's listen to the final line of the song. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he's able to help those who are being tempted.

Ever been tempted? He's able to help you. Do you believe in Jesus? This is for you. You're an offspring of Abraham. Help is here.

There's something that Tim Keller once said that captures the heart of this passage in such a practical way. I just thought it was, let's just listen to him say it rather than me say what he said.

[23 : 30] If we're suffering something, if we're really hurting in some way, and somebody else comes over to try to comfort us who hasn't been through what we've been through. But they're well-meaning and they come and they sit down. They say, oh, come on.

You can do it. You can get through it. Maybe we shouldn't. But here's what we do. We go inside at least, and sometimes we say it outside. We say, you have no idea what I'm going through.

Get lost. You're not helping me. You have no idea. Ah, but what if you meet somebody who not only has gone through every single thing you've gone through, but ten times more.

When they sit down and they say, now do this and this and you can get through it. See, when they try to strengthen you, you're strengthened. Sit down with Jesus.

That's what Hebrews is saying. There is no other religion claims that our God suffered everything we suffered. Sit down with Jesus. You feel lonely and misunderstood?

[24 : 37] Are you betrayed? So is Jesus. Destitute? Facing death? So did Jesus. Oh, you say, but I feel abandoned by God. Think. So was Jesus.

On the cross. Well, you say, but I've prayed to God and he hasn't answered my prayer. Jesus had the same experience. The Garden of Gethsemane. Every single place you could ever go, he's been there.

Every darkness that you might be in right now, he's been there and more so. That's what a merciful and high priest does, what he described there, right?

He sacrifices for us, but then he sits with us. He sits with us. He sits with us in the darkness.

He leads us through the darkness. Help us here. Sit with Jesus. I'll never forget the time that we were sleep training our son, JP, and we picked one moment where we said, we're not going in when he cries.

[25 : 44] So we grabbed the baby monitor and a bottle of wine. Not joking. We sat outside and it was almost an hour and it was painful to hear him cry and watch him, but we knew that it was necessary and that it was worth it.

But here's where that illustration breaks down and the gospel gets so much better. See, as parents, we stayed outside the room, but God doesn't stay outside ours.

When we cry out, he comes in and he enters our suffering so that we can rest. That one who defeated death is the one who helps you when you are weak.

And there's nothing that we face yesterday that we'll face tomorrow or the next day that Jesus doesn't already understand and where he's not already been. And there's nothing that he cannot rescue you from.

So if you're here today and you're not sure what you believe yet, welcome. Okay? You don't have to have it all figured out.

[26 : 49] I want to tell you that. To start moving toward Jesus. Every fear you carry, every question that you have, that you hold on to, he's already seen it.

Okay? He's already seen it. And what if that longing that you feel for safety inside you, for meaning, for a world where the good things don't end, what if that longing is an argument against God's existence?

What if that's a nudge from the God who made you to draw closer, to turn around? If you even feel that slightest pull towards him today, I want to encourage you to follow it, to turn.

All you got to do is turn. Go listen to that. Follow it like a good aroma of bread baking. Go find the kitchen. Well, hold your hand. It's okay. Take that step.

And maybe you're here today and you're a believer. You've been a believer for a long time. Christ is central to your life, but you've drifted. And you feel like maybe you've wandered too far to go back.

[27 : 49] And you're embarrassed or shameful. And you've been away too long. Or you've forgotten the lyrics to that love song for whatever reason. If that's you, hear this. Jesus has not forgotten you where you are.

He's not moved on. He's not grown weary of calling you and calling your name. That same God who came near in Christ comes near to you right now.

He's not going to scold you. He's not here to do anything but say, hey, welcome. Just like when Peter had denied him, after he saw him, Jesus is on the beach, resurrected Jesus.

Did he say, shame on you, Peter. He said, hey, come have breakfast with me. Let's talk. He's right there for you right now. Would you go sit with him on that beach?

Imagine him there right now saying, come have breakfast with me. That's all you need to do. Just go over there. He'll take care of everything else. Okay? And you'll find that he's already been there closer than you thought the whole time.

[28 : 53] And just like Nathan, when he asked me that question, we need to remember that we can bring any question to God. You can bring any question at any time. He's right there ready to have breakfast.

Okay? Same Jesus. He's alive. He hasn't changed. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's right there. And he's ready to scoop you up in his love and give you exactly what you need.

You know what you need? You need rest. You need rest for your souls. You need to know that everything's going to be okay and that he has a plan. You know that he's near. You don't have to fear. The one who created and wrote the beginning, he's rewriting the ending.

And the ending is not owned by fear, no matter what you've been told. And he's restoring us even now until he promises that he's going to come back. And here's why it matters.

What sin broke, Christ centered. What death ruled, Christ defeated. And what still feels undone, Christ is restoring. God didn't stand outside the brokenness, y'all.

[29 : 55] He stepped into it and he broke its power. And now he says, I'm here with you. Hold my hand. I'm restoring the whole thing.

I'm making it all brand new. Let's go do it together. And when you turn your life to Jesus, if you give your life to Jesus and you say, hey, not mine anymore, God.

I'm tired of this. Yours. I'm tired of carrying this fear. I'm tired of running by myself and living without peace. I'm tired of faking it.

I want the freedom that I see in the scriptures that you offer. I don't see it around me, but I want what you say. When you get to that point, you want friendship with God in every moment. But God, he does something incredible, okay?

He begins restoring you from the inside out. And I know you felt it if you're in Jesus, but you may have lost that feeling. It's okay. God's not a feeling, but he's still at work, all right?

[30 : 55] And that restoration doesn't stop with you. It moves through you and it moves into your relationships and into your wounds and into your hope. And then it keeps going on even into eternity.

And it's going to continue until the day that God restores everything back to the way that it was supposed to be a million times better. That's the plan, okay?

But until then, we're not sitting in the waiting room scared. That's the lie that the enemy wants us to believe. He has no power over you.

We're walking with the author. And we're holding the hero's hand as he saves us. And as he rewrites this story, what's he going to write with you today?

What's he going to write through you this week? It's a beautiful story, y'all. One relationship, one moment, one soul set free at a time. And as we go, and if we fear, sing that song in your heart.

[31 : 59] God is near. Do not fear. Death is dead. Christ is dead. Help is here. Praise Jesus. Let's pray. Father, thank you.

Thank you that the truth is that you have conquered. And it may not seem like it when we look around, and that's part of the deception. When we look at the seen, the seen is temporary.

But the unseen is eternal. Our momentary light affliction, you say, is building up an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison while we look not at the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen.

How can we see something that's not seeable? Well, you brought it here, and you gave us the eyes to see it through your scripture and by your spirit. And for that, we say thank you.

I pray our people here would live that way. And if people here are doubting or fearing that you would enter into that fear, Lord, we need to sit with you. Show us how to do that.

[33 : 00] How to come and sit and rest and feel your presence, Lord, and know the hope that we have in you that it's going to be okay and that you're actually working for good through us right now.

I pray everyone in here knows their purpose and their meaning, and they feel the power of your spirit and your gospel, Lord Jesus, at work. Use us. Use us. We thank you.

We offer ourselves as your instruments of mercy. Use us as your tools of mercy and peace. Walk in us as your temples of the Holy Spirit. Thank you, Lord Jesus.

I pray your blessings on this place. And thank you for your Holy Spirit. It's in Christ's name I pray. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Thank you.

[34 : 06]