

Triumph That Produces Trust

Hebrews 2:14-18

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How can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me? That's the question. We're filled with a lot of questions as believers. That may be the most profound of all.

This past Monday at the Flora house was just a bit depressing. It's that inevitable day after the Christmas celebration where we have to take down everything that we put up. All the external recognition that Christ is to be celebrated. So lights inside and out. You remember the outside was I think twenty-three degrees, but it felt like eight or something. So the roof lights were no fun. And all the little things that we stick in the garden, and the wreaths on the walls inside, and the ribbons and tags and all of the packages, boxes, and bags. Right? And then after we vacuum, and vacuum again, take the tree down out the front door. If all is done well, then it doesn't appear as if Christmas has happened at all. At least, not the external version.

But for the believer Christmas never stops—our celebration of what God has done in sending Christ to become for us that one who would plead our cause, that one who would give himself in our place. Christmas 2014 is only eighteen days old, but Christmas for the believer continues always. I want to suggest to you today that for the follower of Jesus Christ, the wonder and mystery of what we celebrate serves as a remembrance to guard our heart, to renew our minds, and to equip us—to strengthen us in this present age as we pursue God-pleasing purity and as we struggle with the temptation to sin. Christmas does that for us. This God who would take on flesh, who would become man for us. Seeing the triumph of what God accomplished and giving Jesus Christ—I believe can, should, ought, must, does produce a trust that will see us through to the end of our days, to that last moment of life on this earth when for the believer life everlasting gets translated into heaven. That's what Christmas is about.

Christmas, you see, is essentially the story of a rescue mission. There's been some movies out recently of prisoners being rescued from adversity and conditions that are almost indescribable. The cruelty of man upon man. But Christmas is essentially the story of a rescue mission in which our God who created all things became a man, stepped into his creation, so that he could serve as that perfect substitute. So that he could live the life that we could never live. That he would die the death that we deserve to die. We hear this language every week, and yet every week this language is what refreshes our souls. Is it not? It's the gospel, the good news. The one who came to rescue sinners didn't stay dead, but he rose triumphant from the grave and is even now serving as the mediator between God and man.

The key part of the Christmas story, this rescue mission, is that God became man. Many questions arise when somebody says God became man. The who, the what, the where, the when. But the greatest question of all is the why. So today I'd like to offer a possibility—five reasons why I believe God became man. They're contained in the Scriptures and the text that we have before us today. Hebrews chapter two, verses fourteen through eighteen. Why did God become man? Listen, and see if you can hear them falling out of the Scripture for us. Hear God's Word.

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.

God's Word. Powerful picture of God our great and glorious, triumphant Savior. Five reasons, then, why. Why would God lay aside his divine attributes? Why would God become a man? Why would God do this mysterious union of two distinct natures—fully God, fully man—without any mixture of the two, found in one person: the Lord Jesus Christ. Why?

Well, the first reason I think we can see is that Jesus, in the wisdom of God's plan of redemption, became man in order to dedicate himself to his people eternally. To dedicate himself to his people eternally. We know all about pie crust promises. Right? From Mary Poppins? Easily made, easily broken. That's the kind I make, ask my family. But when God went about saving his bride, bringing her to a holy and blameless, spotless presentation once and for all eternity, he did so by becoming man. He dedicated himself to his people eternally. Remember, it's a rescue mission we're talking about. God created man in the state of being that at one time was holy and happy. In the garden, our first parents Adam and Eve did not have any sin. There was nothing that tainted them. Their fellowship with God their Creator was face to face—full, free, beautiful. And one command was issued forth to our federal representation, Adam. Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And in so obeying, Adam would show that the recognized as a creature he was willingly submitted to his Creator.

The beauty of the relationship would be glorified and magnified, but Adam and Eve through a series of things—Eve being tempted and offering the fruit to her husband—they disobeyed. When they disobeyed, we disobeyed. When they died as a result, we died as a result. Ezekiel chapter eighteen verse twenty says the soul that sins, the soul that disobeys God, will surely die. So if God was going to remain just and holy and accomplish the rescue mission of Christmas, then God would himself have to become like one of us. That's what verse fourteen is all about. Since we the children share in flesh and blood—the word “share” there is *koinonia*. It's the fellowship. It's the communion. Since all of us have the fellowship of the same thing, we're made of flesh and blood. We're creatures. We have this kind of components and essentiality to ourselves. We are flesh and blood. Since we share in flesh and blood, he himself then likewise partook of the same things. The word here that's translated “partook” is a Greek word that means: “to take hold of something that is not naturally of one's own kind.” It's to take hold of something that doesn't naturally belong to you or wasn't yours naturally.

So, in essence, God who is light of light, very God of very God, took on flesh and blood, and he did so eternally. God who knew no boundaries took on a body eternally. That's precisely what Jesus did. He added to his own nature our nature, so that he might be able to taste death, and through his death we might be able to hold life. Life that was not our naturally. God in his essence could not taste death, but God who took on flesh could taste death. We who were by nature flesh and blood were condemned to die, but through Christ we can now have life.

For surely, it's not the angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. In order to help the offspring of Abraham, verse seventeen says, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect. He helps us where we can't help ourselves. Isn't that a glorious God and Savior? He knew what we needed, and he met that need perfectly. About nine hundred years ago, Anselm of the Bishop Canterbury wrote this everlasting dedication of Christ. He wrote about this in his work, *Why the God-man*. Listen to this quote from Anselm:

It could not have been done unless man paid what was owing to God for sin. But the debt was so great that while man alone owed it, only God could pay it, so that the same person must be both man and God. Thus it was necessary for God to take manhood into the unity of his person, so that he who in his own nature ought to pay and could not should be in a person who could.

God becoming man made it possible for you and for me to have everlasting life. That's a marvelous truth when you mix that truth, then, with the heartache of this world. The heartache of this world that

you feel pressing in even now, as one of your peers speaks out loud of death. We feel the sickness and sorrow. We feel the anxiety, as Wayne prayed earlier, of what tomorrows holds. We feel that. We just sometimes decide not to talk about it at the parties or the get-togethers—but we feel it.

Isn't that a wonderful truth to consider that Jesus Christ knew what we needed, knew where help was necessary, and partook of flesh and blood, in that same body in which he lived and died and rose from the dead. In that same body, he ascended to the right hand of God the Father. In that same body, he is now seated on the throne of God on high. In that same body, he intercedes for you and for me. In that same body, Acts one tells us, he will return again. In that same body, he will bring his bride to himself. I don't understand it all. It's a mystery. But that's what the angels revealed to those men of Galilee who stood in Acts one looking up into the heavens because the physical body of their Lord had just ascended into heaven. "Men of Galilee, why do you stare up into the heavens? This same Jesus who was taken from you will return in the same way." He took on flesh so that he might show forth his dedication to his people eternally. Have you ever thought about that? That is amazing. Amazing truth.

He also took on flesh and blood so that he might destroy the devil and the power of death—that's the second point. "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."

Have you heard the old adage, "if you don't bring a pair of nail clippers to a swordfight..." Maybe that was just me. Maybe you heard it this way: "don't bring a knife to a gunfight." Or maybe the modern version: "Don't bring a gun to an intercontinental ballistic missile fight." Take your pick. Think up your own. Today at lunch, think of an analogy between two weapons, one that is far superior and one that is definitely inferior. This is what's happening here. If your weapons are more powerful than the weapons of your enemy then you win, because your enemy's weapon is no longer a threat. Nail clippers. Samurai sword. You lose, every time. But your nails are nicely trimmed. Right?

Life conquers death. In the rescue mission that is Christmas, God became man in order to destroy the devil and his greatest weapon against us: death, and the power of death. Death comes as a result of our sin. This is like Math 101. Follow the syllogism. Death comes as the result of our sin, and the power that death holds over us is found in the righteous requirements of God's holy law. Those righteous requirements raise a standard of holiness for each of us who are God's creatures, but we can't possibly imagine achieving that standard. So, if left on our own to achieve that standard of righteousness that's pleasing to God, we are completely undone and we are without hope. Woe is us if our record is what's evaluated in that day. The accusation against us as lawbreakers is found to be true, and we stand condemned. First Corinthians fifteen, Paul says the sting of death is sin. We can personalize it: the sting of death is our sin, and the power of sin is the law. Because we don't meet that standard. But the one who willingly partook of the same flesh and blood as we have did so in order that he might destroy the one who has the power of death—that is, the devil. That's the second point.

The third point goes right hand in hand with it. He not only came to destroy, but he came to deliver—to deliver his people from slavery of the fear of death. These two points are interconnected. They're distinct, but they're interconnected, because he came to destroy the devil who has the power of death, and he came to deliver us from slavery of the fear of death. Verse fourteen again: "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." Everyone who lives has within them the fear of death in some form or fashion, some degree or intensity. I asked my brother Randy to pray for me today as I preach this, because this is a heavy, heavy weight. We're going to go in there and we're going to talk about death and judgment. Because Hebrews—a couple of chapters later, chapter nine—the writer of Hebrews says, "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."

Eventually, it's facing the judgment that causes us to live in a slavery to the fear of death. That's what's happening internally. Whether or not we suppress it with our wickedness, whether or not we

deny it, whether or not we create an entire entertainment structure in order to put it off from our thinking—it still remains within us, this slavery to the fear of death. Why? Because on the authority of God's Word, that's a description of us.

This past week, I had an interesting set of three days where I was kind of forced—and I thank God for it now—to see the idea of God's judgment in a very demonstrable way. I was—like many of you have been—summoned to the Circuit Court of Howard County to possibly serve on a jury. So they gave us Monday off for some reason, and Tuesday we reported bright and early in all that snow and ice and sliding and slipping. Fifty-three of us sat in a jury waiting room for three to four hours until, by the end of that day, out of fifty-three, God in his providence seated me and eleven others with two alternates on a jury for a criminal case before the Circuit Court of Howard County.

And I have to be honest with you, I was immediately struck even entering the court room with the authority wielded by the judge. The court is the master of your time at that point. You're told when to stand up, when to be seated, your breaks are determined for you, the length of your break is determined for you, when you are to report for duty the next day and when you are released from duty at the end of that day or evening. And each issuance of his authority carried with it the implicit or explicit sanction for violation of those court orders. I'll be honest with you, it made me anxious. It was very intimidating, because I was out of control. As if I ever really had control. We get that whole point. But you are in subjection to another who has the authority in that setting.

Just in case I hadn't quite grasped the weight of the law and the authority of the court, I was seated on this criminal case. On the third day of the trial, at a certain point, the case is given to the twelve randomly selected individuals who made up one of the most diverse groups of people I've ever been a part of. We're responsible to hear, evaluate, deliberate on the sworn testimony and admissible evidence, and then tasked with determining by unanimous—all twelve of us had to agree—decision the guilt or innocence of the accused. Simply put, if we were compelled beyond a reasonable doubt by the evidence that the law had been broken, then the defendant was found guilty as charged. That was our responsibility. I'm telling you, it is a heavy, weighty, intimidating idea to come into contact with the law at work.

We ended up after several hours of deliberation and reviewing the evidence finding the accused guilty of three out of the five charges that we were tasked to consider. We were released from our jury duty service at that point, and the condemned man was at the mercy of the judge for whatever sanction, whether lenient or severe, seemed fitting for him to enact. When the verdict was ready by our jury foreperson, I looked at the judge for the first verdict read because I didn't know where to look. When the second verdict was read, I looked at the accused. The first and the second were both guilty verdicts, the third was a nonguilty, the fourth was a nonguilty, and the fifth was a guilty. I saw the accused visibly crestfallen, shaken, whatever you want to do with that. Interpret it how you want. I'm not inside his skin. I don't know what his reaction was. But it was evident that he was feeling the weight of that guilty verdict.

I saw again the picture of our bondage to the slavery of the fear of death. The holy judgment seat of God is what drives our slavery to the fear of death, because apart from Christ as our covering, each of us stand condemned before a holy God. I didn't want to be on a jury. I wanted to be released. I wanted us to have a snow day. I didn't want to have to spend those three days doing that, but I believe that God in his sovereign providence caused me to tremble for those three days before the idea of a human judge and a human court so that somehow, in this moment in time, we all could feel what it is that awaits every human. Romans twelve says that we each must stand and give an account before a holy God. We must give an account of ourselves.

Pause. Have you heard the glorious good news of Jesus Christ given for sinners? Have you heard the marvelous, wonderful, matchless grace presented in the God who became flesh for you and for me,

sinner? Have you heard Paul to Timothy, in first Timothy chapter one verse fifteen: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

I was reminded last night as I was trying to wordsmith some of this sermon of that old hymn that I used to sing growing up in the Baptist church. I would sing at the top of my lungs:

We have heard the joyful sound:
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Spread the tidings all around:
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Shout salvation full and free,
Highest hills and deepest caves,
This our song of victory,
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Oh for a thousand tongues to sing, my great Redeemer's praise. We were helpless and hopeless. You know that. If you give yourself a moment to consider the truth of the Scripture, there is nothing you could do about the condition. But he came to destroy and deliver, and he accomplished both of those acts through his death. That's why God became flesh.

Now, we know that the devil still exists. We know that he's not ultimately done. So, how is it that we understand this word destroy in the text? It means that his power—the weapon that he has, his nail clippers—they've been neutralized. He has no weapon. His weapon is condemnation. His weapon is unforgiven sin. His weapon is our guilt. Christ came to destroy and deliver.

I've got one Christmas illustration in here. Do you recall the old Rankin & Bass animated Christmas special, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"? I hope so, because this illustration has got characters from that show. It's not just about the shiny red-nosed reindeer and the jolly old elf with the white beard. Maybe you remember Hermie the elf who wanted to be a dentist. And eventually, along with Yukon Cornelius, they encountered the Abominable Snow Monster. Bumble, for short. And after Yukon Cornelius and Hermie knocked the Bumble unconscious with a big glacier thing, Hermie—who wants to be a dentist—goes out and extracts all the Bumble's teeth. And then Hermie tells everyone standing there, "Listen! You don't have to be afraid of the Bumble anymore. You can walk right past him." Why? Because he's been neutralized.

When Jesus Christ came to live and to die in our place, he neutralized the enemy. He took the power of death away. The devil's greatest weapon is that he accuses us of our sin. We see this in Revelation chapter twelve. He accuses the saints day and night before our God. In Colossians chapter two, God's Word spells out Christ's death on the cross. It destroys death and delivers us from the fear of death. Listen to Paul's words to the Colossians:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

When the devil brings an accusation of your sins against you, you plead the blood of Christ, because that blood is what covers those sins. Jesus partook of flesh and blood so that he might die in order to nail to the cross the record of our sin debt with all its legal demands, and to forgive all our trespasses and to make us alive together with him when we were helpless to do anything about our condition, because we were by nature dead in our sins.

Can you picture the courtroom I described just a little while ago? Can you picture the accused standing there? Can you picture his shoulders falling? Looking at his defense attorney like “What in the world did I employ you for?” Can you picture that same courtroom, and imagine that judge as he’s about to exact the punishment on this one who is guilty as charge—beyond a reasonable doubt the evidence showed that. Imagine that judge saying, “I’d like to ask my son to come in now.” And his son comes in, and his son and the accused exchange seats. The judge issues the punishment for the crime to his beloved son. And that dirty, rotten scoundrel, law-breaking sinner, gets to walk out the back of the courtroom scot-free.

What does that do to your heart? Well first, you might think, “I don’t want no guy walking the streets who’s guilty.” I don’t either. But what that does for our hearts, believers, is we see ourselves. We are the ones escorted free, full and free. What would cause a judge to do such a thing? Is he cruel? Is he malicious? Does he hate his son? No. It was in order that he might demonstrate his matchless love. His amazing grace. His unfailing love.

Never forget that God’s love for sinners is why Jesus became a man. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life. If you go back and read transcripts of the sermons that brother Randy preached in December—I think maybe I said John 3:16 last week as well. I think we should have a unwritten policy around here that we should review John 3:16 at least once a week. God so loved that he gave. It’s not some malicious, capricious act of a sovereign that never shows up.

It is true love demonstrated. That’s the fourth point. Jesus became man to demonstrate the love of God. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make a propitiation for the sins of his people. That verse can be taken in Jesus’ person and work as a whole, but there’s a specific emphasis on the cross on which Jesus died there. He was serving as our faithful and merciful high priest, and he made a propitiation for our sins. He made an atonement. He was reconciling two parties that were at enmity. He was satisfying the wrath of God against your sin and against my sin. He was doing that as our merciful and faithful high priest.

I came across a really interesting take on the two components of Jesus’ priestly work that this verse highlights. The first is that he’s a merciful high priest. That mercy is that which is directed toward us, sinful men. We’re not getting what we deserve when we believe in Christ. What we deserve is God’s wrath, and we’re not getting that. He’s our merciful high priest.

But the second point that you see is that he is the faithful high priest. The faithfulness of Christ is directed towards God. He fulfilled all the laws and righteous requirements, and he willingly laid down his life as the lamb of God that was slain before the foundation of the world for our sins. And so God received—the just Judge received his perfect righteousness. The just Judge received his substitutionary atoning death. And the just Judge declares that all who believe in Christ are not guilty. Not guilty. Forgiven. Full and free. Freedom that comes from that. He became a propitiation for us, completely satisfying God’s wrath.

Man of sorrows what a name
for the Son of God, who came
ruined sinners to reclaim:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned he stood,
sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Guilty, helpless, lost were we;
spotless Lamb of God was he.

Full atonement—full propitiation, full expiation of our sins—how can it be? Hallelujah.

He was lifted up to die;
"It is finished" was his cry;
Now in heaven—in that body that he partook of the same flesh and blood that we have—now in heaven
exalted high. Hallelujah.

And the fifth point I want to make on why God became man is to make disciples like himself. Isn't that a wonderful story, what we've just rehearsed? Isn't that a grand and glorious thing that the Creator of all things has done? God knows it is. We're learning how good it is. What Jesus' design is, is that he wants to make disciples like himself that proclaim that same message. We proclaim it with our lips, our words. We tell the wonderful story. But we proclaim it also with our lives. He is making us into a people eager to do that which is good. We don't do the good things so that we can earn our salvation; our salvation has been purchased. Our forgiveness is full and free. And so, like Pastor Randy said, we respond to the grace of God—responding with thanksgiving, responding with gratitude, responding with a desire implanted in us by the Holy Spirit to be like our Savior.

Verse eighteen says that because he himself suffered when tempted, he's now able to help those who are being tempted. Earlier in the chapter, in chapter two verse ten, Jesus is referred to as the author of our salvation. Elder Coke read that he is the author of our salvation from Hebrew chapter twelve, I believe, at the beginning of the service. That word that's translated there, author, literally means the leader, the pioneer, the one who goes before, the first one on the scene. That's what a discipler does. We talk a lot about making disciples in this church, and we talk a lot about one on one discipline and life on life, and face to face, and so all we're trying to do in the human exchange of discipling is look for someone who's a little bit further down the path, a little bit more mature—sometimes a lot more mature—but someone who is further down the path, and they disciple someone who's coming along that same path. All of us, as those who are making disciples, look to who is making us his disciple.

Last week, as the elders gathered to pray and to talk in the afternoon on Sunday, Pastor Randy reminded us each that we're called to be undershepherds in Christ's church. We heard Mark submit himself to the session of the church. I get shivers up and down my spine when I think about the responsibility that that is. But the reminder that we were given, and the encouragement, even, in that, is that as undershepherds, we are sheep first. We're followers of Christ first.

That's for all of us. We're followers of Christ first. He wants to make us his disciples, and he's already gone ahead of us. He got tired. He got angry. He was hungry. Because he took on flesh, he was thirsty. He knew the pain and the loss of a loved one. He experienced the rejection and the betrayal of those who were closest to him. He was misunderstood. He was falsely accused. He was ridiculed, mocked, and mistreated. He's been there. He's done whatever you're facing, and even greater. Because never once in his temptation did he ever succumb to sin. We usually sin right off the bat, or quickly into it. Not so with our great and wonderful Savior. He is our discipler. He is our example. He is our leader, defender, guardian, Savior, and Lord. And we're going to pray in a moment, and sing in a moment after that, of the sweetness of what it means to trust this one and follow him. That's why we've gathered, and that's why we do it one day out of seven. That's why we encourage one another throughout the week. Because following Christ in this present age is really difficult to do. Let's pray for his strength.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we ask that you would please, Lord, work these Scriptures into our hearts. And Lord help us, then, to see what you've done and even, if you would be so kind, to see why you've done it. That you've dedicated yourself to us in an eternal and profound way. That you destroyed

the one who holds the power of death over us, that you've delivered us from the slavery of the fear of death. Lord that you, in that death on the cross, demonstrate for us love. Lord, help us to understand how much you love us. We doubt it way to often. And then, Lord, please work in us in such a way that we are submitted to your discipling of us. And help us, then, to make disciples in turn. We thank you for hearing our prayer. In the name of Christ we worship you today. Amen.