



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Jesus Christ, the Victor

Hebrews 2:14-18

March 1, 2009

¹⁴Since 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, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore 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. ¹⁸For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

- ❖ In 1988 Martin Scorsese directed one of the most controversial films of that decade, entitled, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The movie included such famous actors as Willem Dafoe, Barbara Hershey, and David Bowie. The movie depicted Jesus Christ facing such “human” experiences as fear, doubt, depression, and even lust. In one of the most controversial scenes in the entire movie, as Jesus hangs on the cross, he begins to speak with a young girl who looks like an angel. She informs Jesus that he is not the Son of God, not the Messiah. However, according to the angel (Satan), God still loves him and wants him to be happy. The “angel” then brings Jesus off of the Cross and leads him away to be with Mary. In this “vision” Mary and Jesus become husband and wife and are then seen engaging in intercourse.
- ❖ Not surprisingly, many within the Hollywood community hailed the movie as a masterpiece. In fact, Scorsese was even nominated for an Academy Award that year for Best Director. Famed movie critic Robert Ebert even commented that makers of the movie:

“paid Christ the compliment of taking him and his message seriously, and they have made a film that does not turn him into a garish, emasculated image from a religious postcard. Here he is flesh and blood, struggling, questioning, asking himself and his father which is the right way, and finally, after great suffering, earning the right to say, on the cross, 'It is accomplished.'”

- ❖ Another critic wrote, “Paul Schrader's screenplay and Willem Dafoe's performance made perhaps the most honestly Christlike portrayal of Jesus ever filmed.”

- ❖ Yet, why would Scorcese’s depiction be described as so “Christlike” when it involved Christ sinning – even if His sin was the “harmless” sin of lust? Why would the film be so highly praised when it was clearly so blasphemous? I believe the reason is quite clear: **the idea or concept of a righteous, sinless Messiah is absurd and even highly offensive to those who are without Christ.**
- ❖ **And, so it would make sense that Hollywood would portray a Jesus that is so “like us” that His own sin would be something they would even celebrate.**
- ❖ Yet, the Church can also be guilty of the other extreme with respect to Christ’s two natures. Rather than elevating His humanity above His divinity, to the point of even making Him sinful, the Church often elevates Christ’s divine nature over His human nature, making Him, in some way, *more than* human. Both extremes are wrong. Both make the sacrificial work of Christ impossible. Both must be rejected.
- ❖ However, as we complete the second chapter of the Book of Hebrews, the author holds firmly to both truths regarding the two natures of Christ – (1) **He is fully Divine** (1:3, 6, 8, 1-12; 2:11); (2) **He is fully Human** (2:11, 14).
- ❖ And, here in Hebrew 2:14-18, the author now shifts his emphasis to Jesus Christ, our Perfect High Priest, as one who has fully shared in our humanity.

- I. **Jesus Christ Defeated Death**
 - a. **He Destroyed Satan**
 - b. **He Delivered His People**
- II. **Jesus Christ Propitiated the Wrath of the Father**
- III. **Jesus Christ is our Merciful Help**

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I. Jesus Christ Defeated Death

- ❑ The author of Hebrews opens **Verse 14** stating, “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.”
 - It is likely significant that the phrase “flesh and blood” is actually in a different order in the Greek, reading, *blood and flesh*.
 - As Donald Guthrie writes, “It has been suggested that ‘blood’ alludes to Christ’s shedding of blood, which is then given as the reason for his becoming flesh, i.e. the atonement required the incarnation.”
- ❑ It is in this short passage that the author of Hebrews now emphasizes **necessity of the Incarnation**.

- ❑ Athanasius, the 4th Century Church Father, famously wrote that “that which was not assumed was not redeemed.”
 - In other words, he had to assume human flesh *fully* in order to save those of human flesh.
- ❑ Also, in his most notable work, *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius states:

“The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father Who could recreate man made after the Image. In order to effect this re-creation, however, He had first to do away with death and corruption. Therefore He assumed a human body, in order that in it death might once for all be destroyed, and that men might be renewed according to the Image. The Image of the Father only was sufficient for this need. Here is an illustration to prove it.

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. Even so was it with the All-holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father, came and dwelt in our midst, in order that He might renew mankind made after Himself, and seek out His lost sheep, even as He says in the Gospel: ‘I came to seek and to save that which was lost.’”

- ❑ And, in this context, according the author of Hebrews, the reason that Christ became human was to (a) **destroy Satan**; and (b) **deliver His people from death**.

a. He Destroyed Satan

- ❑ Jesus Christ, as stated the author states clearly in Chapter 1, is the agent of all of Creation. Given this truth, one can begin to understand why Satan’s work in the Garden of Eden was so *personally* offensive to Christ.
- ❑ Furthermore, Satan, an angelic, created being masquerades as the “king” of this world. Consequently, one of the main reasons why Jesus came to this world was to crush the power of Satan that he had (providentially) exercised since the Fall.
- ❑ In one of my favorite sermons by the great Charles Spurgeon, speaks of *what actually happened on the Cross of Calvary*:

“How dreadful was the contest! In the very first onset the mighty conqueror seemed himself to be vanquished. Beaten to the earth at the first assault, he fell upon his knees and cried, ‘My Father, if it be possible let this cup passed from me.’ Revived in strength, made strong by heaven, he no longer quailed, and from this hour never did he utter a word which looked like renouncing the fight. . . . But the cross was the centre of the battle; there, on the top of Calvary, must the dread fight of eternity be fought . . . We hold our breath with anxious suspense while the storm is raging. I hear the trumpet sound. The howlings and yells of hell rise in awful clamour. The pit is emptying out its legions. Terrible as lions, hungry as wolves, and black as night, the demons rush on in myriads. Satan's reserve forces, those who had long been kept against this day

of terrible battle, are roaring from their dens. See how countless their armies, and how fierce their countenances. Brandishing his sword the arch fiend leads the van... Sin is there, and all its innumerable offspring, spitting forth the venom of asps, and infixing their poison-fangs in the Saviour's flesh. Death is there upon his pale horse, and his cruel dart rends its way through the body of Jesus even to his inmost heart... Hell comes, with all its coals of juniper and fiery darts. But chief and head amongst them is Satan; remembering well the ancient day Christ hurled him from the battlements of heaven, he rushes with all his malice yelling to the attack. The darts shot into the air are so thick that they blind the sun. Darkness covers the battle-field, and like that of Egypt it was a darkness which might be felt. Long does the battle seem to waver, for there is but one against many. One man—... one *God* stands in battle array against ten thousands of principalities and powers. On, on they come, and he receives them all. ... At last the darkness is dispersed. Hark how the conqueror cries, 'It is finished.' And where now are his enemies? They are all dead. There lies the king of terrors, pierced through with one of his own darts! There lies Satan with his head all bleeding, broken! ... As for sin, it is cut in pieces, and scattered to the winds of heaven! '*It is finished,*' cries the conqueror..."

- ❑ The work of Jesus Christ on the Cross is the fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 3:15.
- ❑ **It is difficult to escape the beautiful irony surrounding Satan's defeat by Christ. Consider this: Jesus Christ was made for a little while *lower* than the angels in order to "crush the head of the serpent", that is Satan, who himself was one of the greatest of those angels.**
- ❑ And, in destroying the power of Satan, Christ also destroyed the sting and power of death.

b. He Delivered His People

- ❑ **Verses 14 and 15** state, "...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."
- ❑ Consider how, with the devil defeated, that Christ delivers His people from the power and fear of death itself!
- ❑ Just as Moses gave up his royal rights in order to deliver his people out of bondage, so Christ voluntarily did the same in order to deliver His people from the power of sin and death.
 - Christ dealt with both sin and death, for biblically it was and is sin that leads to death ("for the wages of sin is death").
- ❑ Death is most certainly the great equalizer. Death comes to all, and we as humans have absolutely no control over it.
- ❑ One scholar, Richard Phillips, writes, "Death is the rod of Satan's rule and the source of his laughter at our expense."

- William Lane rightly states, “Hopeless subjection to death characterizes earthly existence apart from the intervention of God. Moreover, the presence of death makes itself felt in the experience of anxiety.”
- Yet, as the Apostle Paul writes, in 2 Timothy 1:10, Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.”
- Consequently, the fear that grips humanity over death has now been dealt its death-blow.
- John Calvin encouraged his readers, writing: “It is from this fear that Christ has released us, by undergoing our curse, and thus taking away what was fearful in death. Although we must still meet death, let us nevertheless be calm and serene in living and dying, when we have Christ going before us.”
 - **Consider now that death is even a blessing – a source of great joy – to the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ** (Philippians 1:23).
- Then, in **Verse 16**, the author of Hebrews, once again, considers the angels, saying, “For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.”
 - It seems here that the author thinks of Isaiah 41:8-9: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off;’”
 - The principle point here is that angels are not the offspring of Abraham. They are not the object of God’s deliverance.
 - Rather, Christ came into this world as *a descendant of Abraham* in order to make even Gentiles Abraham’s children (John 8:39; Romans 4:1).

II. Jesus Christ Propitiated the Wrath of the Father

- **Verse 17** states, “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.*”
 - Only Christ is a merciful and faithful High Priest. No priest in the Aaronic Priesthood could have ever rightfully said this. The reason was that, although the high priests of ancient Israel represented the people in their humanity, and in the fact that they, too, were from the nation of Israel, each high priest, ultimately, had his own sin to worry about.
 - Also, the words of Verse 17 echo God’s words of judgment upon the house of Eli when the LORD prophesied, “And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who

shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.” 1 Samuel 2:35

- But, the idea in this Verse is clear: in order for Christ “to make propitiation for the sins of the people,” **He had to be made like his brothers in every respect.**
 - In other words, Christ had to be fully human. He could not have been something other than “like his brothers in every respect.” The reason was, once again, Christ had to be our **exact representative and substitute in His propitiatory work.**
- Anselm of Canterbury, writing in the 12th Century, wrote in his work *Curs Deus Homo* (“Why God Became Man”): [Speaking of the payment that must be made for our sins] Anselm wrote: “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 is his own nature ought to pay and could not should be in a person who could.”
- The concept of **PROPITIATION** is something the Church does not speak of much today. However, this was an absolutely necessary aspect of the atonement of Jesus Christ. In fact, Christ accomplished two primary works with respect to our salvation on the Cross: (1) Expiation and (2) Propitiation.
 - **Expiation** was the act of Christ whereby He *removed our sin from us* performing perfectly the work of the scapegoat in the Old Testament during Yom Kippur.
 - **Propitiation**, on the other hand, was the work whereby Christ *fully satisfied the eternal, infinite wrath of God the Father toward our sin.*
 - **And Christ could only have performed these two essential works if He was fully man – just like us.**
 - Notice as well the **particular nature** of Christ’s propitiatory work: He made propitiation NOT for sin, in general, but rather for the “sins **of the people.**”
 - Notice also that it is GOD who provides the propitiation FOR HIMSELF.

III. Jesus Christ is our Merciful Help

- **Verse 17** states, “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...”
 - As our High Priest, Christ had to represent us before God. In fact, in the Old Testament, this was the function of the high priest – to represent the people before God when presenting the sacrifices before Him in the Tabernacle.

- This is why the high priest wore a gold ephod containing **twelve (12) stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel (upon each stone was written the name of one of the twelve tribes)** (Exodus 28:9-12).
- But, then, in **Verse 18**, the author of Hebrews explains *why* Jesus Christ is the Merciful and Faithful High Priest: “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”
 - Because Jesus Christ condescended to us and lived the life of a man, he experienced the full range of sufferings temptations that every man does. Yet, what made Christ so different was that **He never gave into those temptations – He never sinned – in thought, word, or deed.**
 - Some would say that this truth – that Christ never sinned – would in some way indicate that Jesus Christ “does not know the full human experience” because He never sinned.
 - In order to fully sympathize and empathize with the sinner, the critics would say, Christ would have had to have sinned Himself.
 - To them, sin is an integral part of what it means to be human.
 - Many believe that sin is an integral part of our humanity; yet, it is not. Sin is a result of the fall. **Man, at the apex of his *humanness* walked with God in the coolness of the day in the Garden of Eden – prior to the Fall.**
 - Biblically, there are two basic aspects to our *humanness*: (1) we are created beings; (2) we bear the Image of God (the *Imago Dei*). This is what it means to be human.
 - Yet, after the Fall, we did not lose the Image of God; rather, the Image of God in us was perverted.

And this is why Christ came into the world – to restore the Image of God in all the children the Father gave Him – to restore our *HUMANNESS*. Another way of putting it would be to say that no one was ever *more HUMAN* than the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Christ is the perfect Image of God. He is the basis upon which our Image is restored, for He is the *exact representation of God the Father’s nature* (Hebrews 1:3).

Colossians 3:10:

¹⁰and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

2 Corinthians 4:4

⁴in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Colossians 1:15

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

- Once again, Christ was made like Adam (in His humanness) and did not simply **bear the image of God – HE IS THE IMAGE OF GOD**. Therefore, He alone – as the Second Adam – is able to restore that image that fell in the first Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:22

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:49:

⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Romans 8:29:

²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

- Yet, the skeptic who states that Jesus Christ could not truly sympathize with us unless He sinned is blinded to the truth that the opposite is actually true.
- **Jesus Christ is the ONLY one who is (a) able to *sympathize* with us in our weakness AND is (b) able to *help* us in our weakness. The reason is that ONLY Jesus Christ endured temptation fully – and defeated it.**

Consider the sins that we struggle with and then commit. Consider those temptations that we fight, yet ultimately give in to. When we give in, sin ultimately overcomes us and defeats us. As Richard Phillips writes, “Jesus knows far more about temptation than we do because he endured far beyond the point where the strongest of us gives in to the trial.”

- **B.F. Westcott echoes this truth, stating, “Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin, which only the sinless can no in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain.”**

- **Yet, only Christ was the victor over sin. Only Christ was stronger than the strongest sin. Only Christ defeated sin. And therefore ONLY Christ is able to sympathize with us and help us when we are tempted!**
- Tragically, though, we as Christians, do not appreciate and understand the degree to which Christ can sympathize with our own weaknesses. We fall into the sin and trap that thinks that we are unique...that our struggles are in some way unique to us and that no one – Christ included – could ever help.

- ❑ Yet, Christ was tempted in every way possible – yet was without sin. This is, to a large degree, a mystery, for we do not know *exactly* what this means. However, we may rest assured that there is no temptation that we might face that Christ has not faced head-on, and defeated.
- ❑ **And what god can say that? What god is able to not only sympathize with its people, but to help them? Where is Allah in his people's time of greatest need? Where is Buddha? ONLY Christ lives, reigns, and hears the cries of His people. And ONLY Christ is able to sympathize and TRULY help His people overcome the sin that so easily entangles all of us.**
- ❑ **Christ is, indeed, our GREAT High Priest.**
- ❑ **And so it is that not only does the Triune God infinitely surpass every other god in His TRANSCENDENCE, but through the work of Jesus Christ alone, no other god condescended lower than Him either!**
- ❑ Randy Phillips beautifully states:

God has entered into our world. He has walked through the dust of the earth. He who is life has wept before the grave, and he who is the Bread of Life has felt the aching of hunger in his belly...He has taken the thorns that afflict this sin-scarred world and woven them into a crown to be pressed upon his head. And he has stretched open his arms in love, that the hands that wove creation might be nailed to a wooden cross. Then he rose from the dead, conquering all that would conquer us, setting us free to live in peace and joy before the face of God.

- ❑ It is here that the words of the great Charles Wesley hymn, *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* ring so clearly:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
 Born to set thy people free;
 From our fears and sins release us;
 Let us find our rest in thee...

Come to earth to taste our sadness,
 He whose glories knew no end;
 By his life he brings us gladness,
 Our Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.