

How Christmas Brings Everything You Need

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Now our Scripture reading this evening from the letter to the Hebrews in chapter 2, beginning to read there at verse 5 and you'll find the passage on page 1,001 in the pew Bible, and it would be helpful for you if you don't have a Bible with you tonight to use the pew Bible as we follow along in this portion of God's word. Hebrews 2 and from verse 5 through to the end of the chapter. I gave this title, as you'll see, "How Christmas Brings Everything You Need," and just before we come in, I thought maybe it would have been better to entitle it "An Insider's View of Christmas" because that certainly is what this is. Now says the author of this letter, verse 5, now

5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 6 It has been testified somewhere [in fact, as you'll see from the footnote, that somewhere is the 8th Psalm], "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? 7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, 8 putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 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. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12 saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." 14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he [that is, Christ] 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, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 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. 18

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

At Christmas time the advent season that we've been celebrating together now for a number of weeks in such a wonderful variety of ways, our minds tend to be drawn in the New Testament to the Gospels and to the narrative of the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ, but the Lord Jesus when he called the apostles to himself and immediately before his crucifixion, taught them that they were not only to give the Gospels to the church of God, you remember how he said, "When the Spirit comes to you, you will be able to remember everything that I have taught you"? The Lord Jesus also promised the apostles that the same Spirit who reminded them of everything Jesus had said and done, things that are recorded in the Gospels, also promised in John 15 to lead them into the truth. That is to say, when Jesus goes on to say, "I have many things to say to you but you can't bear them yet," it was as though he was saying, "You have seen the outside of my ministry, you know the facts of my incarnation, but there are many things that I still need to explain to you so that you can understand the heart of what I have done, and when I send the Spirit to you, he will lead you into these things; he will take from what is mine and he will show these things to you."

And so it shouldn't surprise us that quite a number of the New Testament letters reflect in different ways on the incarnation and some of them have these great texts with which we are familiar. 2 Corinthians 8, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor that through his poverty we might become rich." Galatians 4:4 how, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." And Philippians 2, the mind of Christ who did not count equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, took our human form, was found among us as a servant, and died in our flesh the cruel death of the cross of Calvary. But we tend not to think in this context of the letter to the Hebrews for a very obvious reason and that is I think to most Christians, Hebrews is a very strange and alien letter. It brings us into the world of angels and people like Melchizedek and high priests and sacrifices with which we are far less familiar, and yet here in this second chapter of Hebrews and actually in many other places, one might say that the whole of this letter is a wonderful exposition to us of the insider's understanding of the Christmas message, not just what happened, not just what happened to others who were involved in the nativity event, but how the coming of Jesus Christ is so significant for the lives of Christian believers, and in this instance, Christian believers under tremendous persecution, undergoing great privation, and the author of this letter, whoever that author was, is somebody who understands in a very profound way the reality of the incarnation, the reality of Jesus taking our human nature and why he took our human nature and what he has done for our human nature, and what as a result he will do in our human nature to, as the author says here, bring, verse 10, many sons to glory.

And so I think it's appropriate as we come to the end of our Christmas celebrations this evening, that we might take this insider's view of Christmas that we might at least begin to see how in this passage the author is saying that Christmas gives you everything that you need. And he discusses many things in this passage. I should resist the temptation at

the end of the Christmas season when we're all banjaxed and exhausted, to point out everything that's in this passage but there are three things that I think are vital for us to notice. The first is how the author of Hebrews tells us that the Lord Jesus has come as King in order to deliver us from our enemies. Those of you who know the Shorter Catechism, remember that marvelous question in it: how is it that the Lord Jesus executes the office of a King? And the answer is that he does so in subduing as to himself, in marvelously ruling over us and defending us and in restraining and subduing all of our enemies.

And here you'll see particularly in verses 5 through 10, that the author speaks about the kingship of Jesus. He was, verse 9, made for a little while lower than the angels, but now he is crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death. And it was fitting that he should die because it was in dying that he broke the power of the last enemy, death; that he broke the power of the evil one who has ensnared us in verses 14 and 15, and brought us into lifelong fear of death. And so our Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world so marvelously to reign over our enemies as the great King and in order to do so and this, of course, is the whole point, in order to defeat our enemies, he needs to be a champion who is actually one of us. He can only do it for us as our representative and our substitute if he becomes one of us, and so the King of Glory, as it were, steps down from the effulgence that surrounds his throne and comes into our world and in the language of Hebrews, is made for a little while lower than the angels.

Isn't that something? Why is that so marvelous for the author of Hebrews? Because the author of Hebrews in the first chapter has just said that the Lord Jesus Christ is highly exalted above all angels. He is not only the King of kings and the Lord of lords, but he is the King, the Master, the Lord of all angels, and the sheer marvel of this, that he who is the King of angels should for a little while become lower than the angels in order not to take on an angelic nature as you see he goes on to say in verse 16, it's not angels that he comes to help but to take on our frail flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary, and there from the very beginning of his life reestablish in this world the kingdom of God that had been lost by Adam.

That's why he refers to the 8th Psalm. The 8th Psalm is a meditation in the Old Testament Scriptures on some verses in the very first chapter of the Old Testament Scriptures, how God made man as his image in this world and gave him dominion, but man lost that dominion by his sin and defaced that image by his rebellion, and now in the wonder of the incarnation God is beginning again right there in the darkness of the womb of the virgin Mary, in that embryonic form, the kingdom of God is being reestablished in this world. That's why in the Gospels so much of the narrative is taken up with Jesus facing down and beating back the kingdom of darkness and reversing all that that kingdom has brought into men's lives in the way of misery and sinfulness and guilt and shame. "If you will, you can make me clean. I will be clean." "Rise, take up your bed and walk. Your sins are forgiven you." And so the author of Hebrews is intensely conscious of the fact that the Lord Jesus has taken our flesh, worn our nature to reestablish for our sakes. God did not need this in himself, no member of the eternal Trinity ever had need of this, but we have such desperate need of this. This is our S-O-S, "Come, Lord Jesus, and be our

mighty Deliverer!" And then as our noble and royal King, says the author of Hebrews, what does he do? He fulfills God's eternal purpose for us. You remember how Romans puts it, we were predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers, and the author says this King leads his people eventually to triumph in glory.

So Jesus has come in lowliness, in our flesh in all its weakness. Somebody said to me earlier on today who has played a fairly major part in our Christmas season, that by the end of Christmas night they thought they wouldn't be able to stand, they were so exhausted, and Jesus knew exactly that. The King exhausted. The King humiliated. The King coming right into the derelict kingdom that we have left, and on his shoulders bearing all the responsibility to defeat all the dark powers that have caused it over our lives and in our hearts, coming to reign as King to restrain and conquer all of our enemies. You and I have no enemy but the Lord Jesus Christ is able both to restrain and to conquer and he has done it in our human flesh.

Second, if that's wonderful, I think this is even more wonderful: he came to become the King who delivers us from our enemies, he came to become the brother who brings us into God's family. This is what the author is saying here in verse 11. I know this language seems a bit strange and complex but it's basically simple, "he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified," that is, the Savior who sets us apart to belong to God and we who are set apart in order that we might belong to God, he says, you notice in these words, "all have one origin." Now what the author of Hebrews literally wrote was, "he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified, are all of one," and so that's one of those statements that you ask, "'All of one' what?" And the translators of the English Standard Version have suggested that the idea is that if he is going to sanctify us, he needs to be one of us. He needs to do it from the inside, or as the New International Version translates it, as some of you will have, "the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are of the same family." And whether that's the right translation, that's certainly the right idea, isn't it, because the language here is the language of the Lord Jesus coming not only as King but as the one who's come to be our elder brother, and you see that language. It's here obviously in verse 11 again, those who are sanctified and those who, the one who sanctifies, all of one origin, "That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers." It is why the New International Version is probably on the right track. They all belong to the same family.

They share the same nature. That's why he's not ashamed to call them brothers. Isn't that something? And when you go home at night, you should look at that little footnote in the English Standard Version that assures you that by "brothers" it means siblings and siblings means brothers and sisters. He came as our great elder brother. He wasn't by nature our elder brother. He is by nature the Son of God. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords but he's come into our humanity to brothers, to become our elder brother in order that he might minister to us.

And so the author of Hebrews in that context quotes, you'll notice, from the 22nd Psalm, right at the end of the 22nd Psalm, "I," he says, "will tell your name to my brothers and

again I will put my trust in him." Isn't that interesting? He's putting into the mouth of the Lord Jesus these words. Have you ever thought about this? The Lord Jesus had to live the whole of his life trusting in his heavenly Father. He didn't live in some other way than you and I are called to live. He didn't use access to divine power in order to live a holy life. He lived that holy life as one of us. He died that death as one of us. He felt that pain as one of us. Otherwise he would be of no use to us whatsoever. It's in Greek mythology that gods appear who employ supernatural powers but in the Christian Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ appears and lives out a life of holy obedience in our place, in our nature, by trusting and obeying his heavenly Father.

That's why we can look up to him not only as our King but as our elder brother. Do you do that? Do you live your life day by day with the Lord Jesus, understanding that he is your elder brother? And again this is a citation from Isaiah 8:13, "Behold," you see, this is the Lord Jesus coming into the presence of his heavenly Father, he's surrounded by those who believe in him and he says, "Father, here am I and the children you've given me." What a privilege. He didn't come into the world as a full-blown 30 year old man. He came into the world in the womb of the virgin Mary so that right from the very beginning he might share our nature because he wanted to be our elder brother.

You know, over the years I've made many friends but I'm not sure any friend has said nothing to me more moving than a minister friend whose ministry I greatly admire. He said to me one day, "Sinclair," he said, "I have decided to adopt you as the older brother I never had." No, I'm not going to tell you who it is ever. Any idea how much that meant to me, that there was somebody who thought of me as his elder brother who wasn't my brother by nature? And to think what I might mean to that brother, and here the author of Hebrews is saying this is the insider's grasp of Christmas. Alas, many people who have come to Christmas services and sung out Christmas hymns and heard our Christmas messages, they have no idea whatsoever at the personal level of what Christmas is all about. This has never crossed their wildest imaginations, that they could know Jesus Christ as their elder brother because he shared our nature, he's walked our way, he's trusted in the heavenly Father, and he's saying to us, "Come on now, I'll be with you. I understand. I feel with you. I've been there. I am your elder brother."

That's why the author of Hebrews keeps saying to us, "Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus." But if you're to do so, you need to understand who Jesus is. He's your King and he's your elder brother and then the third thing, here's this: the Lord was incarnate to be the King who delivers us from our enemies, to be the brother who brings us into God's family, and thirdly, to become the priest who helps us in our need. You notice how he puts it in verse 17, "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect." In order to help us, he needs to become like us. In order "that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people, and to be one who because he has suffered when tempted, is able to help those who are tempted." It's the heart of the incarnation. We've no Savior, no Savior, unless the Lord Jesus was made like us in every, every respect. He came from heaven to earth, he went from womb to tomb to be like us in every respect.

And the author says because that's true, he's able to deal with two things. He's able to deal with our sin and our guilt by his sacrificial offering, what is translated here as his propitiation, his taking upon himself the judgment of God upon our sin. That's why he was made man. He wouldn't be any use to us if he'd been half man, half God. He was fully man as well as fully God, and as fully man, in my place. He couldn't have stood in my place if he wasn't fully man. He couldn't have represented me. He wouldn't have been an appropriate substitute for me if he wasn't like me in every respect. On the cross he bears the judgment of God against our sin in propitiation.

Some people think I quote C. S. Lewis so often I must have studied under him and I want it to be public knowledge that C. S. Lewis died when I was 15 years old and I was not a child prodigy and did not study under C. S. Lewis, and as a matter of fact, he's not by any stretch of the imagination my favorite author. But you know one of his favorite authors who had so much influence on him, G. K. Chesterton, whose poem I quoted the other day, once was asked, "Why did you become a Christian?" And Chesterton's famous answer was, "I became a Christian to get rid of my sins." And in an interview, C. S. Lewis was asked if this was the reason he had become a Christian, to get rid of his sins, and he said, "Well," he said, "if you're going to get rid of your sins, what you actually need is a Savior. Being conscious that you need to get rid of your sins will never save you. Only a Savior will save you." And so the author of this letter is saying, "He has become exactly what I need. I need far more than to feel that I'm a sinner. I need somebody who will bear my sins in his own body on the tree and then not leave me."

Do you notice how he ends this chapter? "Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." He deals with our sins through propitiation. He helps us in our need because he himself was tempted. Actually tempted, as Hebrews says, in all points just as we are. How can that be possible? How can that be possible? Jesus did not experience everything you have experienced. Jesus never experienced divorce and there are some of us perhaps in this room who have experienced divorce. Jesus never experienced his mother dying and many of us in this room have experienced our mother dying. So how is it possible that he is able to help us when he hasn't experienced every detail of the lives that we live? Of course the answer to that is because he has gone down further into the depths of temptation and testing than anyone has ever gone. The man who has climbed Mount Everest may never have climbed Ben Nevis but he's well able to help the man who's halfway up Ben Nevis and says, "I'm not sure I'm going to be able to make it to the top," because he's been up higher.

How could that possibly be true for Jesus? It's like this: when you and I are tempted if we are Christian people, there's a great deal in our souls that wants to resist that temptation and we struggle to be true to what we are in Christ, but when Jesus was tempted in the garden of Gethsemane and cried, "Father, if it's possible take this cup from me," what he was tempted to do was this, he was tempted to fulfill the holiest desires of his holy heart by refusing the cup. Understand that. Jesus could not possibly have wished the implication of drinking the cup that led him to Calvary. Why? Because the implication of it was that he would feel abandoned by the heavenly Father whose presence was his deep

consciousness from all eternity. He could not possibly have desired a moment in which he would cry out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

So he was tempted to give expression to holy desires in disobedience to his Father's will that he would go to the cross, and you and I have never gone that far down because you and I have always got mixed desires. The man, Christ Jesus, who can say, "Father, your will and not my perfectly holy will be done," who can say, "O Father, this is beyond my imagination, it's beyond my mind's ability in all its capacity to understand what it will be like for me to sense that I'm cast out of your presence. O Father!" You feel the intensity of the temptation upon his holy soul. "Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done."

He's able to help you when you're tempted because you will never ever ever ever ever have to go down into that kind of darkness. Where he was given the choice, "Your holy desire for my presence or the salvation of sinners," and he chose those whose nature he had taken in the womb of the virgin Mary in order that he might bring many sons to glory. He did not go from heaven to earth to leave you. He did not go from the cradle to the cross to ignore you. He did not go from the tomb to the throne to forget you. He came to be and he is for the insider who trusts him, King, brother and priest.

A more than usual number of these advent sermons have been three points and a poem. You've probably not noticed that but this is three points and a poem, and the poem is a hymn, an obscure hymn written by probably the greatest Scottish hymn-writer, Horatius Bonar entitled "Where is He that is Born King?" and it reads like this:

"We went to Bethlehem,
But found the Babe was gone,
The manger empty and alone.
'And whither has He fled?'
'To Calvary,' they said,
'To suffer in our stead.'

We went to Calvary,
But found the Sufferer gone,
The place all dark and lone.
'Whither?' we asked.
'Into the heavens,' they said,
'Up to the Throne,
For us to intercede.'

So then to heaven we'll go;
The Babe is no longer below."

Behold, your King. Love your elder brother. Rest on your defender. That's the insider's view of Christmas and that's why Christmas gives the believer everything he or she needs.

Our heavenly Father, we marvel tonight at the mystery of the Gospel, the wonder of the coming of our Savior, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the intensity of the poverty into which he entered for our sakes. We thank you that we have become the inheritors of all the riches of his grace and praise you that he should be all this to us, our King to defend us and to reign over us, our brother to walk beside us and lead us, our priest to hear our confession, to bear our burden, to resist our temptation. And with all our hearts, the end of this advent season, Lord Jesus Christ, how we praise you for your incarnation and that you came down from heaven to earth for us men and women and for our salvation. Hear our praise as we bring it to you this night. In your great name, amen.