

Sermon 7: Hebrews 2:14-18: 'He had to be Made Like His Brothers.'

OUTLINE

One with us to deliver from the devil and death
One with us to propitiate God's wrath towards our sin
One with us to help us when we are tempted

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of inconvenient truths, that people stumble at, that are absolutely necessary to our salvation. We do not believe them because we are gullible people prone to fancy and being taken in by wild ideas. No we believe them because they are clearly revealed in God's word, and we can see how they are necessary to the work of our salvation. We believe in the virgin birth, not because we think all good savior stories need a miracle birth story. No, it is revealed, even prophesied in the Bible in Is. 7:14; and Jesus must necessarily be free from Adam's sin, though related to Adam in nature, in order to represent us but as a sinless Saviour. We believe in Jesus Christ being resurrected on the third day, not because every hero narrative needs a surprise twist and some ironic justice to make for a good and more compelling story. No, we believe in the resurrection because the Bible reveals, even prophesied it in Ps. 16:10-11, and because it is necessary for our own justification and resurrection one day. This brings us to the doctrine presented in the verses before us. You will remember that Hebrews 2:10-18 is dealing with a number of hard doctrines that act as stumbling blocks to the ancient mind, God having a Son who is equally God; God becoming a man; God suffering and dying. Where v10-13 emphasize *that* Jesus had to be one with us and suffer and die as well as the tremendous privilege that we should become His brothers, v14-18 focus more on the benefits that accrue to us as a result of his sharing our nature and suffering.

Our portion has three clear benefits that are ours because Jesus became human and suffered for us, in v14-15 we can see that because He became one with us in nature and died, He is able to deliver us from satan and death; in v16-17 we can see that because He took upon Himself a human nature He is able to be an effective Highpriest who can propitiate God's wrath against our sins; and in v18 we see that because He suffered as a human being He is able to help us when we are tempted. These are not ideas stolen from other religions because they failed to think originally; these are not strategically gathered plot ingredients to make for a compelling story; these are not a string of ridiculous and unrelated truths with no grounding and no coherent reason for being true, but they are the revealed, prophesied, logically coherent and necessary truths by which we are saved. Remember these Jewish Christians who were being persecuted were tempted to avoid persecution by returning to Judaism. You can imagine the slurs against Christian truth and how it would be perceived, 'O you are a Christian, don't you believe in a dead God?' 'You worship a man.' 'If He was the Jewish Messiah then why did He die and not reign?' The truths before us show that Jesus is God, and man, and that by being man and dying He delivers us from our greatest enemies and fulfills our greatest needs.

One with us to deliver us from the devil and death

V14-15, '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, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.’ The author here connects what he is about to write with what he has just written. He stated that we and Jesus both have one source, we both share one human nature. Jesus did this in order that we might be one with Him, the words brothers and children were used to speak of this unity. Here the writer tells us in even more explicit terms that Jesus who was fully God also became fully human, sharing in our ‘flesh and blood’. He had the same nature as us. Christ was supernaturally conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. However, His human nature was not brought down from heaven with Him; nor was it made from nothing, ex nihilo. His human nature was taken from Mary, in order that Jesus would be related through Mary to Adam and David and Abraham. He was like us in every way, apart from sin. He was not pretending to be human, the error of Docetism. He was not half human having a human body and soul, but a Divine mind, the error of Apollinarianism. Nor were His human and divine natures mixed to make a third thing, the error of Eutychianism. Nor did He cease to be God in any way when He added a full human nature to His divine person, the error of Kenoticism. He was fully human and so experienced life as we do, though not as a sinner. He experienced the weakness and limitations of being a creature in a fallen world, He experienced pain like us. By virtue of two natures in one person, He experienced more than us but not less.

Now in particular He is explained to be human so that He can experience death, but not just undergo it like any sinful human being would, but as the sinless God-man to die in order to overcome the devil and the hold of death over us. Notice that first outcome, ‘that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.’ In what way does the devil hold the power of death? How do the death and resurrection of Christ destroy the devil? We must be clear, God holds the power of life and death, any power that the devil has is in a secondary sense not the primary sense. All of the descriptions of the devil where he is described as the ‘god of this age,’ ‘the prince of the power of the air,’ or as having ‘the power of death,’ are in a secondary not primary sense. God is the god of this age, who rules the principalities and the powers and who has the real power over death. The devil has a part to play and any power is a granted power. As a result of Adam’s fall, a new state of affairs was brought into being where man was under condemnation, was worthy of punishment, and God used the devil as a type of ‘prison warden’ for His own purposes while He worked out His plan to finally overcome him and save humanity. Man chose to obey the word of satan over the word of God, sin always receives a fitting punishment, so man was handed over to the god they chose. All of the suffering of human history is a testimony to what happens when the devil is voted in as boss. God’s restraining grace is active despite this situation where there is some reality of justice present. The devil would fully wipe us off the face of the map but is not allowed, so whatever ‘authority’ he has is severely curtailed; likewise we should have died, but are mercifully granted this existence where we are under the boss we choose, his powers are limited and we have the opportunity to repent and gain eternal life.

The devil’s main power in death is of course the death he brought upon the human race through tempting Adam and Eve. He got the ball rolling. He did not kill us directly but tempted us to sin and bring God’s judgement upon us. Satan which means accuser captures this role of bringing up our sin before God that God Himself would judge us. Satan is not a supreme power who decides who lives and who dies, he has to manipulate the situation to make us sin so that we

die by God's judgement. Now what you need to appreciate is that the devil sought to use our sin to bring death upon ourselves, death was his weapon to work his will. Please appreciate the irony that Jesus used death, the very tool of the devil, to overcome the devil. This was of course prophesied. In Gen. 3:15 just after Adam and Eve sinned, where the devil expected God to rush into the garden and put those sinners to death God first speaks a word of judgement against the devil promising that a son born of a woman, from the race he just tried to kill, would come a male child who would crush his head while he was bruising his heel. A picture of victory as you think of someone smashing a snake's head underfoot while the snake is trying to bite him. The deadly bite with which he tries to kill Jesus is the very act that puts him under Jesus' foot and he is crushed. Now those who have come to see their sins and turn to God in faith and repentance, who put their trust in Christ's work in the cross for them, their sins are forgiven. All of the devil's ability to accuse is removed, and even if he is given permission to put our bodies to death, because our sins are forgiven death is not a defeat but is called in Revelation our first resurrection.

The author hints at this freedom from the fear of death in v15, 'and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.' There are various reasons why people fear death. Some are scared of the process of dying, the pain, the indignity, the helplessness. Others fear death because they don't want to leave their loved ones behind. Some who don't believe in anything after this life might fear the idea of non-existence. The wise man knows that after death we go to meet our Maker to give an account for all we have done in this life the wise man knows that he is a sinner and if God were to judge Him fairly he would be lost. With these basic facts, the wise fear death. Who wants to stand before a holy God when they have sinned? Today there are those who do not fear death. Some don't think about it, some have no real idea about what is real and feel content knowing that most people are not really thinking about it or worried. Those on their death beds, or who have experienced the loss of a loved one are in a prime position to think about it. Sadly in many retirement villages where we have the opportunity to think about what comes after this life, there are large screen TVs going all day so that you can sit around numb to spiritual realities being bored and distracted while not thinking about the most important things. I think our culture could do with a little more fear of death. We are numb to it from the news, the movies that normalize it. Our culture sanitizes death and talks about dying with dignity. Death is not dignifying, the wages of sin is death, it is not a crowning achievement of a life well lived, but a final nail of justice in our coffins because of sin. It is the ultimate act of humiliation as all your will to go on amounts to nothing, you cannot stop it. And then after death you must go to stand before God to give an account for your sins. And after the judgement if you do not have a sinbearer, you will have to bear the punishment of your own sins, and you cannot bear that. There is a second death, and eternal conscious torment, a lake of fire for the devil and those who entered into his rebellion against God. We do not fear death enough. I can work with someone who fears death because he knows he is a sinner, how terrible it is to not fear death, and not care about sin. I read one of the most terrifying verses in the bible this week in my quiet times, Lamentations 3:65, 'You will give them dullness of heart; your curse will be on them.' To feel nothing is the punishment God gives while preparing you for final judgement. I pray there would be more fear of death for it cannot but be feared if we properly understand.

Now we are ready for the good news that Jesus brings in delivering us from death and the devil's part in it. There is a great agony of soul as we have a clear sight

of our sin and our worthiness for judgement. One biographer reflecting on Spurgeon's spiritual agonies writes, 'Throughout his ministry, he referred to the horrors he had felt for five years while under deep conviction of sin, intellectually aware of the gospel, yet blind to its personal application. "The justice of God, like a ploughshare, tore my spirit," he recalled. "I was condemned, undone, destroyed—lost, helpless, hopeless—I thought hell was before me. . . . I prayed, but found no answer of peace. It was long with me thus." Because of the Son becoming flesh, and dying my death to pay for my sins, taking any accusing historical power the devil had over me, any jurisdictional power that devil had over me, and any accusing power the devil had over me, I can now face death with confidence. Some of the greatest verses that describe our victory over satan and death are rev. 12:10-11, 'And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.' We overcome the devil by preaching the word of God, by this means other sinners hear the truth are set free and are saved from the house of the strongman who has been bound. But we also defeat satan by the blood of the lamb. How does blood rescue us from his power? Jesus Christ shed His blood in payment of my sin debt. I deserved to die, He died, and removed the guilt of my sins. This took all the power of the devil away. and as a result believers do not fear to die, martyrdom is not a tragedy of a life full of potential cut short, it is our triumph as we go far from where anything evil can touch us, to die is gain. This stress on not fearing death I think is a deliberate one by the author, these believers were facing persecution and maybe death, but death is nothing to fear. There are so many martyr stories that testify to our ability to die well due to what Christ has done. Think of John Bradford, he was a Marian martyr in 1555. He was arrested for His Protestant convictions and preaching under the Roman Catholic Queen. He was offered a pardon if he would recant of his Protestant beliefs and confess the supremacy of the Pope and a real sacrifice of Jesus in the transubstantiation of the Mass. He refused. When he received the news that he was to be burned the next day, 'Bradford looked to heaven and said, 'I thank God for it. I have waited for this for a long time. Lord, make me worthy of this.' He did not fear death but to die well to the glory of God. He was taken along with another protestant to the stake, both fell to the ground and prayed for an hour. 'Bradford got up, kissed a piece of firewood and then kissed the stake itself. In a loud voice he spoke to the crowd: 'England repent of your sins! Beware of idolatry. Beware of false teachers. See they don't deceive you.' He forgave his persecutors, asked the crowd to pray for him and turned to John Leaf who too was to be burned and said, 'Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord tonight.' No fear of death, not controlled by the fear of death but able to look into its eyes with joy because of what Jesus has done. We think of the words to John, Rev. 1:17-18, "'Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'

One with us to propitiate God's wrath towards our sin

V16-17, '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.' Jesus did not assume the nature of angels but human beings to save them. The reference to 'the offspring of

Abraham' is not intended to mean salvation is exclusively for the Jews. Why this expression then? Two possibilities, firstly any who believe are called children of Abraham by Paul, Gal. 3:7, 'Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.' Or it may be an underlining of the fact that salvation for Jews is not to be found in going back to Judaism but in Jesus Christ. Notice that again the author reemphasizes that Jesus was made to be like us in every respect. This enables Him to become a high priest on our behalf. Now there is much to say about the highpriesthood of Christ, we will wait for future chapters to unpack all that detail. All we need to see here is that by becoming human He can now act in a representative way on our behalf. He is described as merciful because He has pity, but also because He acts upon His compassion for us. Mercy is more than pity and more than unfeeling action. And He is faithful. In other words all that was needed to serve us well as a Highpriest He did. He was not a corrupt or hypocritical priest, He was sinless, He was obedient, He neglected nothing that was necessary to save us. The key thing highlighted is that he made propitiation for our sins. Now please notice that Jesus ministry on our behalf is described in terms that resemble the work of the Highpriest on the day of atonement. It is only because He is fully human that He can act in this manner.

We want to understand that word propitiate. Some have thought that a good word is expiate. Expiate means to remove guilt; propitiate means to remove wrath. Due to the influence of liberal theology there was a move in the mid 20th century to prefer expiate because notions of God's wrath were thought to be unworthy of a God of love and to resemble pagan religions. But propitiate is the right word and a very important word. The scriptures are clear. God is holy, and God has a just wrath against all sin. He is perfectly holy and just and His wrath is His holy justice in relation to sin. It should not be conceived of as a temper tantrum or an uncontrolled vent but a settled and perfect response to what is sinful. We are sinners who deserve God's justice to be poured out upon us. And lest we misrepresent the Trinity and think that the Father has wrath but the Son has pity, remember that Rev. 6 talks about the wrath of the Lamb. So this is the bad news, we are hell deserving sinners whose greatest problem is God's holy justice which must punish our sins. We are enemies of God, alienated from God, God must judge our sins leaving us in a hopeless situation because we cannot reconcile ourselves to God. We cannot deal with our guilt or sin. This is where Jesus as our propitiation is so important. God does not merely forgive sins, He pays for them by someone, a qualified substitute taking our place and suffering our punishment and paying for our sins in full. Only once our sins have been fully paid can we be reconciled to God. There is no way to God and salvation apart from the propitiation that Jesus provides in His death on the cross in payment for our sins. There is no other way for sin to be paid for. Because He became one of us, He is able to act both as an offerer, a Highpriest, and an offering, a sacrifice. The result is that we are reconciled to God, the word propitiate which means to appease or remove anger describes how God as a holy judge has no more holy justice to pour out upon our sins because He has already poured it out on His Son on the cross.

One with us to help us when we are tempted

V18, 'For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.' And just when you thought that it could not get any better we have a third benefit which is ours because He is human. Jesus suffered temptation and never sinned, He faced the full weight of sin when we gave in. He did not have a sinful nature but He endured more direct satanic assault than

any one of us ever will. This human experience has fitted Him to be compassionate towards us when we are under pressure. But more than a sympathetic ear, because He is resurrected and ascended to the Father and is presently seated at God's right hand having all authority and in a prime position to intercede He is also able to help. Our cries are heard on His account; our needs are seen and not overlooked; His work is finished and all that we need to secure our salvation and the strength we need against sin has been secured by Him and is readily waiting to be handed out in answer to prayer. You need to know that the one who has all the power to save you is not a disinterested deity who does not care but the one who has withstood and same trials we are experiencing and has grace sufficient to help you, and is willing to do so.

Does it matter that Jesus was fully human? Oh yes it does. Because he partook of what is ours we receive what is His, and He is one with us to deliver from the devil and death; one with us to propitiate God's wrath towards our sin; and one with us to help us when we are tempted.