

“Jesus: Our Older Brother”

HEBREWS 2:9-18

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This morning I would invite you to turn with me to the book of Hebrews 2 as we think for just a few moments about a rather deep and very interesting question from one of the children of this congregation (p. 1871) – Hebrews 2:9-18. This is a passage that I have wanted to preach on for some time, but every time I looked at it and tried to get started, I quickly discovered that I was getting in way over my head, so I gave up and moved on to something else. And I am admitting to all of you that this has happened several times over the past 13 years. It is a deep and complex passage, and I really had a hard time trying to digest this passage and getting it into sermon form. However, several weeks ago, one of the children of this congregation turned in a question, and when I read the question, I realized: The answer is in the last half of Hebrews 2! And for a moment, my mind was filled with dread concerning how I could go back to that passage, and yet I said to myself: I have to do it! The question is this: If the Bible tells us that Jesus is God’s only Son, then why does it refer to us as God’s children? I hope you will admit that that is a deep question! If the Bible tells us that Jesus is God’s only Son, then why does it refer to us as God’s children? I suppose that it would be hard to find one passage that answers that question on its own, but the last half of Hebrews 2 obviously has something to say about it, so I would like for that passage to be our focus this morning. And by the way, despite the fact that my brain has nearly exploded this week, I am very thankful for the good questions that keep on coming in – especially those from the children of this congregation.

One of the challenges of this passage, like many in the book of Hebrews, is that each verse is full of words, and in the book of Hebrews especially, it seems that each word could lead to a sermon of its own! So, we look at a passage like Hebrews 2:9-18, and we are almost overwhelmed. There is so much in there! In a sense, we could take lessons from this paragraph for the rest of this year. Of course, if we did that, we would be overlooking a lot of other passages in the Bible, so this morning I would like for us to do a kind of overview, and in the process I’m hoping that we can make some attempt to answer the question from one of the children here this morning concerning Jesus being God’s only Son and us being God’s children.

As you might know, the book of Hebrews was most likely written during the late 60’s AD. Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, which puts it at some point earlier than 70 AD, but the persecution of Christians was getting more intense, which puts it in the late 60’s. As is obvious from the name of the book, it was written to the “Hebrews,” to those who had become Christians who had come out of a Jewish background. At the time the book was written, the Roman Empire had outlawed Christianity and were starting to clamp down, but the

Jewish faith was still recognized as being a legal religion. So, as you can imagine, a lot of Christians who came from a Jewish background were starting to seriously reconsider their decision to convert to Christianity. They were tempted to go back. So, the author of this book very forcefully and methodically makes the argument that Jesus is better. That is the theme of the entire book: Jesus is better!

After his introductory remarks in Chapter 1, after introducing the idea that Jesus is better than the angels (who were highly respected by the Jewish people), and after a warning about the danger of drifting (at the beginning of Chapter 2), we come to Hebrews 2:9 – Hebrews 2:9-18,

⁹ But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹² saying, “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, 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 whom God has given Me.” ¹⁴ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. ¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Looking back at this passage, it seems that the author has already emphasized the Lord’s deity, but now he is emphasizing the Lord’s humanity. The emphasis here is on the Lord coming to earth and the benefits of that sacrifice. As we look at these verses, then, I would like for us to notice the benefits of Jesus coming to this earth. And in the process, we will see Jesus pictured as our older brother, and that’s where we start to answer the question: If Jesus is God’s only Son, then how are we also God’s children? But let us please notice the benefits of the Lord coming to this earth in human form.

I. **One of the first real benefits is that Jesus is able to empathize with us because HE CAME TO THIS EARTH AS A PIONEER, AS A TRAILBLAZER (verses 9-10).**

Last week, we looked at Isaiah 59 and the idea that our sins have created a barrier between us and God. God, then, wanted to breach that barrier, so he needed someone to serve as a mediator, as a go-between. In the ancient world, many people thought of angels as the go-betweens, but the problem is that angels have never really experienced what it is truly like to be human. So, to span that gap, God sent Jesus to this earth in human form. But think about this: What if God sent Jesus for only a few hours? What if God sent Jesus for just a week or so? What if God sent Jesus on Monday, and then Jesus preached for a week, and then got snatched into heaven on Friday? Well, that wouldn’t quite do it! So, notice the end of verse 10, God decided to **“perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.”** There is so much in that little phrase. The idea of Jesus being perfected isn’t that he was flawed beforehand and that Jesus had to come to this earth to get corrected on something, but it is the idea of being completed, the idea of learning through personal experience. Imagine going to battle: Would we want to be led by someone with a PhD in going to war or would we want to be led

by someone who has actually gone to war? Most of us would choose experience. The Lord God came to this earth for this reason: So that he could lead with experience. Yes, in terms of being perfect, coming to this earth for a week or so would have met the minimum requirement of living a perfect life, that would have given him the book knowledge, but the Lord knew that we needed someone to empathize with us, someone who could truly understand what we go through.

As human beings who have sinned, we are lost, we need to find our way back to God, and so the Lord God sent Jesus as a leader with experience. Please notice the word **“author”** in verse 10. Jesus is referred to as being the **“author”** of our salvation. Some translations might use the word **“captain.”** That word refers to someone being a leader, a pioneer, a trailblazer. Various scholars have described the word as referring to someone who leads others through the jungle – the guy at the front of the line who has a machete – he is hacking his way through the brush and weeds – he is literally making a path for the others to follow. That is the idea of this word. Jesus is our trailblazer. Nobody has ever been this way before, but Jesus has provided a way for us to follow, and he has gained this position through experience. In that sense, Jesus lived a perfect life from birth all the way through to his crucifixion, to show us that it can be done, to show us how to deal with temptation, to show us which way to go, to blaze the trail back to God, to bridge the gap, to personally lead us on the narrow path.

Some of you know that I have some good friends in Peru right now. It would be one thing for me to learn some basic facts about Peru. It would be another for me to go visit for a few weeks to kind of get a taste for the way they live down there. But it would something else entirely for me to move down there and live the next thirty years of my life there, to live with them and to experience everything they experience. That is what Jesus has done for us. He was born here, and lived here, and he died here. He came here to be one of us. And through his perfect life, Jesus demonstrated how to handle every possible challenge. We will get to the “older brother” idea in just a moment, but he truly showed us the way, just as an older brother might guide a younger sibling. The older brother has been through it. Have we ever been betrayed or hurt by someone we love? Through his perfect example, the Lord Jesus has demonstrated how to deal with that. Have we ever been betrayed by a close friend? The Lord Jesus has shown us how to react. Have we ever been tempted to the point where it seems as if we won’t be able to stand up to it? The Lord Jesus has been there and has shown us how to dominate Satan and come through on the other side. Have we ever suffered physically? He’s been there. Have we ever suffered emotionally? He’s been there. Have we ever wept over the death of a close friend? He’s been there. Have we ever been embarrassed or publicly humiliated? He’s been there. Have we ever been dead tired after a long day at work? He has been there as well. As our older brother, the Lord Jesus has led the way. According to verse 10, he is the **“author”** of our salvation. Literally, he has blazed the trail for us.

II. There is a second benefit to the Lord coming to this earth, and that is: HE CAME TO ESTABLISH A RELATIONSHIP WITH US (verses 11-13).

And again, there is so much in these verses, but please notice at the end of verse 11 – the Bible says that Jesus is not ashamed to call us **“brethren.”** Yes, there are times when we might be ashamed of our own families. We might be embarrassed by the way they live, or by their appearance, or maybe by their political views. But we find here that in spite of our imperfections, the Lord is not ashamed of us. In fact, it seems that he is honored to call us his brothers. I am very thankful to have a good relationship with my own earthly sister. I know that if I get into some kind of trouble I can go to her for advice and encouragement. If there is anything she can do to help me, I know that she would do it. In the same way, if there is something I can do to help her, I would do everything in my power to do it. If some stranger off the street asks me to help him move into a new apartment, I might have to think twice about that, but if my sister asks, there is no discussion. I don’t even

need to think about it – of course I'll help. And I think that's the kind of relationship that the Lord has with us (according to this passage). He is not ashamed to call us "**brethren.**" He identifies with us. He is ready to help us. We are special to the Lord, just as we are hopefully close with our own siblings.

In fact, the Lord had something to say about this when he was here with us. There is a sense in which the Lord should be closer to us even than our own physical siblings. And the Lord knows what that is like. The Bible tells us that he was rejected by his own family (at least at first). In John 1:11-13, for example, the Bible says, "**He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**" This is a thought repeated in 1 John 3:1, where John also wrote, "**See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.**"

The Lord himself addressed this concern in Matthew 12:46-50,

⁴⁶ While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. ⁴⁷ Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." ⁴⁸ But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

We find, then, that as the Lord's followers, we are his family – we are children of God, we are the Lord's brothers and sisters. And I hope this helps in some way to answer the question from one of the children here this morning. Yes, Jesus is God's only Son, but in a spiritual sense, anyone who follows Jesus and does the will of God is also a child of God, which, by the way, would make us the Lord's brothers and sisters. So, in that sense, the Lord is our older brother. And to me, that is encouraging! It is amazing to think that the Lord Jesus is my older brother. Not only that, but he is not ashamed to be called my brother. He is not embarrassed of me! And what an encouragement this must have been to those early Christians who were starting to be persecuted for their Christian faith. They might have had to worship in secret, but they were the Lord's brothers and sisters – children of God. What an honor that was then, and what an honor it continues to be today!

III. There is another benefit to the Lord coming to this earth: Not only did he blaze the trail and show us how to live, not only did he come to establish a relationship with us, but we find in verses 14-15 that HE ALSO CAME TO SET US FREE FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH.

Christians, of course, continue to die. This isn't saying that Christ came to take away death. But he came to set us free from the fear of it. And here we are not talking about the kind of fear where we are nervous about the unknown – most of us have at least some level of fear of dying – but we are talking about the kind of fear that the author describes here as "**slavery**" (verse 15), the kind of fear that Satan uses to knock us off track, the kind of fear that Satan uses as a weapon. Notice: That kind of fear is the fear that the Lord Jesus came to this earth to take away, and by taking it away, the author (in verse 14) says that Satan has now been "**rendered powerless.**" Satan is now impotent. Paul referred to this in 1 Corinthians 15, with reference to the resurrection. With reference to his own body, Paul said, "**But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written,**

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice: The sting of death is sin. The sting of death is what happens to those who die in sin. The sting of death is the idea of jumping from the frying pan into the fire, the idea of dying and then waking up in eternal torment. The Lord, though, removed that fear. He removed the sting of death.

Before Christ, though, Satan had the power to intimidate people with the fear of judgment, the fear of what happens after we die. That kind of fear can make us slaves. That’s the kind of fear that has a way of keeping us up at night. What if we are not ready to die? What if after this next heartbeat I wake up in eternal torment? That is the kind of fear that the Lord cannot tolerate. The Lord doesn’t want his people to be losing sleep over what comes next, and so he came to this earth to liberate us from the fear of death. And by taking away that fear, the Lord has disarmed the Devil. Satan may roar as he tries to scare us, but when it comes to death, Satan is a lion with no teeth. Satan’s only real power, then, is in temptation. If he can tempt us to sin, if he can cause us to walk away from God, then he’s got us. However, because of what Jesus did on the cross, being lost is no longer a necessary part of death for those who die in Christ. The Lord, then, came to free us from the fear of death. He came to free us from the consequences of unforgiven sin.

IV. There is something else we need to notice in this paragraph, and that is: Because he came to earth and lived as our older brother, JESUS IS NOW ABLE TO SERVE AS THE PERFECT HIGH PRIEST.

Under the Law of Moses, the High Priest was the mediator between God and the people, and the priest’s job was to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. There was no end to it. The people would continually sin, and the priest would continually offer up sacrifices so that the people could maintain that access to God. And that is what the author of Hebrews is referring to at the end of verse 17 – the Lord Jesus came to this earth to make ***“propitiation”*** for the sins of the people. The reference there is to an atoning sacrifice – the idea of keeping the wrath of God at bay. Last week, we learned about that barrier between ourselves and God. We have sinned, so there is this uneasiness between us. Under the Old Testament, the priest had to continually offer sacrifices to keep the path open. The picture I have in my mind is of shoveling a sidewalk during a blizzard. You clear it, but it’s still snowing, so it snows, you shovel, it is still snowing, so you shovel again. That’s what the priests were basically doing under the Law of Moses. It was a constant challenge to keep up with the sacrifices as they tried to keep that path to God clear. But when Jesus came to serve as our High Priest, he was not only the priest, but he was also the perfect sacrifice, and when he died on the cross, he died for all of the sins that have ever and will ever be committed. In 1 Peter 3:18, Peter referred to the fact that ***“...Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...,”*** keeping that path permanently cleared.

And with that, we come to verse 18, where we find that because of these things, the Lord Jesus is able to ***“come to the aid of those who are tempted.”*** And that right there is our greatest struggle, the struggle with sin. The greatest challenge we face as Christians is the struggle not to sin. We think it’s hard to keep up with our finances. We think it’s hard to get good grades in school. We think it’s hard to lose weight and stay in shape. Those things might be difficult, but those things do not even come close to our struggle with sin. With sin, we have an adversary who is always trying to pull us away, and that is where the Lord comes to our aid. As our High Priest, he knows exactly what we are going through. We are strengthened with God’s word, and we are also strengthened knowing that Jesus, our older brother, is also our great High Priest and is pleading our case before God.

Conclusion:

As we bring our thoughts together at the end of this passage, and as we ask ourselves the “So what?” question, we get to the end, and we ask ourselves: What does this passage really mean for us? What does the author want us to get out of this? What are we really supposed to DO based on this passage? I know we stopped with verse 18, but we need to remember that the Bible wasn’t written with chapter and verse divisions – those were added hundreds of years later. So, with that in mind, imagine hearing this passage spoken for the very first time. After making all of these arguments about the Lord (that his is our trailblazer, our brother, our liberator, and our High Priest), the preacher continues with Chapter 3:1. With all of this as background, **“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”** Speaking to those who were tempted to give up on the Christian faith, the speaker wanted his audience to slow down for just a moment and think about who Jesus really is, **“Consider Jesus!”**

- Without the Lord Jesus, we would be lost – stranded and blind – out in the middle of nowhere with no one to blaze the trail back to God.
- Without the Lord Jesus, we would be separated from God – we would not be a part of God’s family. In fact, God would have nothing to do with us. Above all, we would certainly not be considered children of God. There would be no relationship.
- Without the Lord Jesus, we would be absolutely terrified of death, and especially, we would be terrified of what comes after death. In fact, we would be slaves to that fear. Knowing that even one sin keeps us away from God for eternity, and knowing that we have sinned, we would have no doubt that after death comes judgment, and that fear would truly be overwhelming.
- And without the Lord Jesus, we would be stuck in our sins with no way of ever making our way back to God. A few years after this book was delivered, the Romans would come in and completely wipe out the temple in Jerusalem. Today, all we have left is a retaining wall, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Once that temple was gone, it would be completely obvious to the people that the Jewish system was no longer a valid way to approach God. Without the Lord Jesus, then, we would be living with no hope of ever being reconciled to God.

Thankfully, though, we have Jesus! Consider Jesus! 1.) He blazes the trail back to God. 2.) He came to establish a relationship. 3.) He came to free us from the fear of death. 4.) And he now serves as the perfect High Priest, pleading our case before God and helping us stay strong as we are tempted. I don’t know about you, but all of this is pretty encouraging to me. And that seems to be the point of this passage. I am so thankful for the awesome kid who requested this morning’s lesson. Yes, Jesus is God’s only Son, and yes (spiritually speaking), we are God’s children, which means that the Lord Jesus is our older brother. We are so thankful for all of the blessings associated with that!

The Lord tells us in the Scriptures that to accept his free offer of salvation, we must repent and be baptized. That is, we must change our minds about sin, and we must allow ourselves to be briefly immersed in water so that our sins will be forgiven. If you have any questions or concerns, please let us know. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, let us know about that as well. Write it down and bring it to the front, and we would be glad to go to God on your behalf. But if you are ready to obey the good news about our older brother, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com