

Let's keep our Bibles open right there at Hebrews chapter 2. This morning, we are beginning an Advent series that will take us right up to Christmas, as we enjoy this most wonderful time of the year. I was listening to that song recently, and I realized I had never actually considered the words. So, I looked them up and noticed a couple of things that surprised me. What is it—according to that song—that makes this the most wonderful time of the year? Well, it's the parties for hosting, marshmallows for roasting, and caroling out in the snow.

All good. But then, the next line says it's the scary ghost stories. I don't know about you, but scary ghost stories aren't a part of our Christmas traditions. Our kids have enough trouble sleeping with all their excitement. We don't need them to have nightmares as well! Apparently, this was a common holiday tradition in the Victorian era. Let's just say—apart from the ghosts in *A Christmas Carol*—I'm glad we've moved past this.

The next line of the song is much better. What makes this the most wonderful time of the year? The tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago. Now, I don't know exactly what Andy Williams was thinking of when he sang that line, but surely, as Christians, it's the glories of that first Christmas long, long ago, that makes this such a happy season. We look back and remember with wonder and joy that our Lord stepped into this world to save us. We sing of his glory, his goodness, and his grace. And we've got some great songs that help us fill our hearts with this kind of praise. One of my favorites is *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*. Charles Wesley wrote the original verses in 1745. Much more recently, Kristen Getty added an excellent third verse. And over the next three weeks, I want to pull a phrase from each verse and consider what it means. Then, at the end of the message, we'll stand and sing the carol together.

This week, we begin with a line from the first verse. The song begins,
*Come, though long expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free.*

Jesus was born to set his people free. And we should ask, free from what? Well, the next line says, *from our fears and sins*. That's what I want us to reflect on together today. Jesus came into the world to set us free from fear and sin. It's wonderful news. And Hebrews 2:9-18 is a perfect passage to help us see how he has done this. In these verses, we see that Jesus was born to release us from fear and sin by: Tasting our death, destroying our enemy, and becoming our priest.

Let's unpack those statements one at a time and try and take in what they mean for us. First, Hebrews 2 declares that Jesus was...

1. Born to taste our death

Look at Hebrews 12, verse 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.*

Here is the story of Jesus in miniature. For a little while, in his earthly life, he was made lower than the angels. In the most remarkable act of humility this world has ever known, the Son of

God became a human being—a baby named Jesus born in Bethlehem. But now, with eyes of faith, we see him high and lifted up, reigning over all creation at the right hand of his heavenly Father. And why has he received such glory and honor? Because he accomplished his mission. He fulfilled the purpose for which he was sent into the world. He suffered and he died.

This was the Father's plan. Acts 2:23 says he died according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. And Jesus engaged in this sacrificial mission willingly. In John 10:18 Jesus says, *No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.* Jesus was born to taste our death. Now, lest we misunderstand, the word taste doesn't mean he just got a little sample of our death.

Our kids love the samples at Costco. It's their favorite part. They get a little taste of something. That's not the image here. The word "taste" here means to partake of, to come to know, to experience. And there's only one way to truly experience death. That is to die. But why would Jesus die? Look at verse 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.*

Notice, God's purpose in planning the death of his Son was to bring many sons to glory. To lift many children up from the mess of this fallen world into the glories of his own kingdom. And in order to bring about this great salvation, God sent a founder, a pioneer, a champion. Someone to stand among us, represent us, and win the victory for us. A David, to take on the Goliath who threatened to destroy us. Only, unlike David who defeated the giant and came out of the battle unscathed, this founder, this champion, would fulfill his purpose through suffering. That's what the verse means when it says God would make Jesus perfect through suffering. Hebrews is not saying that Jesus was imperfect in any moral sense. Hebrews 4:15 says very directly that Jesus was without sin. So, in what sense is he made perfect? The word used here can refer to moral perfection, but it can also refer to someone who attains their purpose, who reaches their goal.

If you're out playing golf, and you land on the green with your approach shot, your playing partner might say, "That was perfect." And that's not a moral statement. It's a declaration that you hit the mark. You did exactly what you were aiming to do. That captures the sense here: Jesus came into this world to taste our death. His mission was incomplete—imperfect—until he laid down his life. To save us, he had to die. It was fitting. It was necessary. But why was death necessary? Well, to answer that question, you need to understand the power that stands against us. And see that Jesus was...

2. Born to destroy our enemy

Look at verses 14-15: *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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

Death is a terrifying reality. In our culture, we have various strategies for dealing with the fear of death. Many people ignore it, which only works for so long. Others try to minimize it, make light

of it, and pretend they're not afraid of it. Some are even trying to defeat it. Bryan Johnson is a tech millionaire who has made it his life's ambition to ensure that his life never ends. And he's serious. He's launched a movement called "Don't Die," documenting his quest for immortality on social media, sharing all the ways he spends \$2M each year on his health. And people are interested. Johnson has over two million followers on Instagram, where his tagline is, "We may be the first generation who won't die." But we know he's wrong. We know death's power is greater than us. What we may not know is how the devil himself wields this power against us. Do you see that in verse 14? Hebrews mentions *the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil*.

Now, if you know your Bible that might sound odd, because Scripture repeatedly reminds us that God holds life and death in his hands, that we will only depart from this world at the time he determines. So, in what way does the devil have the power of death? For starters, he was instrumental in leading us into death. It was the devil's deception that first lured humanity into sin when he assured Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed God they would not die, which was a bold-faced lie. For according to God's justice, death is the consequence for sin, the penalty for rebellion against him. But Adam and Eve fell for the devil's scheme. They sinned. And death spread its dark shadow over them and all of humanity after them. This is why Jesus refers to the devil as a murderer from the beginning of time.

But he's more than a murderer, he's also an accuser, which is what the word "Satan" means. Revelation 12:10 says he accuses us day and night before God! Declaring our guilt and reveling in the fact that we deserve condemnation. This is the power of death, which the devil delights to hold over our heads, that not only are we going to die physically, but that we also deserve to die eternally as the just punishment for our sin.

But Jesus was born to destroy our enemy by eliminating his power and delivering us forever from slavery to the fear of death! And how did he do this? Verse 14 says he did it *through death!* Jesus defeated our enemy, and the power of death, by dying. How does that work? Well, notice next what this passage says about how Jesus takes on the role of priest. He was born to taste our death. He was born to defeat our enemy. And...

3. Born to become our priest

Hebrews 2:17: *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.*

In the Old Testament, the high priest had at least two key functions:

- To serve as the representative of the people before God, and
- To offer sacrifices on behalf of the people for the forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus was born to become the ultimate high priest. He was made like us in every respect, taking on real flesh and real blood, becoming truly human, so that he could stand before God as our representative. And yet, as we saw just a moment ago, throughout his earthly life he maintained moral purity. He was truly human, as humans were always meant to be, spotless

and blameless and without sin. Therefore, as a high priest possessing the perfections of human nature and the infinite value of divine nature, Jesus was able to offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice. Which is what he did when he gave his life upon the cross. As verse 17 says, Jesus makes propitiation for our sins—he offers a sacrifice that removes our guilt and God’s wrath, freeing us from condemnation. Which means, through his death, Jesus destroyed the power of death which the devil held over us!

Imagine a courtroom. God is seated upon the judgement seat. You are the defendant, accused of rebellion against the judge and his laws. And you know you are guilty, and so does the prosecutor, the accuser who speaks with a twisted delight about what you have done. He lists your sins and he declares with malice what everyone knows, you deserve to die... forever. You tremble at the truth. But then the judge speaks and declares to the accuser,

“Yes, you are correct, he... she... deserves to face an everlasting death. But, a representative has come, paid the penalty in full, and so he... she... is free to go. And you, accuser, have no more power here.”

Brothers and sisters, this is what Jesus has accomplished for us! He was born to become our priest, and taste our death, so that he might destroy our enemy. He was born to set us free. So, in light of these things, let me offer two applications.

Two Applications:

1. Seek his help

I want to speak to anyone here this morning who does not yet believe in Jesus, as well as all of us who do. First, if you have never sought help from Christ, do you see what he offers you today? Though you may try your best to ignore it, or minimize it, or resist it, death looms like a dark shadow on your life. It is inescapable. And death is not an end, but only the beginning of the future reality to come. On your own, you will enter that future and stand before God’s judgment seat, hearing the devil’s accusations with no defense. But with Christ at your side, you can face that day without fear, knowing your sins are covered, and your penalty paid! So, seek his help!

And how can you do that? Well, look at verse 16. It says, *For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.* This verse is stating the simple truth that Jesus did not come into this world to save angels, but human beings. And yet, not all human beings without distinction. He came to help the offspring of Abraham. And what is it that makes someone an offspring of Abraham? Faith.

Abraham is depicted in Hebrews and throughout the whole Bible as an example of how salvation comes by grace through faith. For example, in Romans 4 we read that [Abraham is] the father of all who believe. So, if you believe, you will become an offspring of Abraham, and you will receive Jesus’s help, his mercy, and his grace. This is the beautiful simplicity of the Christian message: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Trust in him, seek his help, and never stop.

This is where I want to speak to the many of us who do believe but sometimes fail to seek his help because we are ashamed. We see the ways our faith is weak, beset by doubts. We stumble and fall into sin. And what do we hear? The voice of the accuser declaring our guilt and all our failures. And we might begin to think, “Well, I know Jesus is gracious, but he must be pretty embarrassed to have me as one of his people.” So, you say, “I can’t go ask him for help. I have to fix this first, get back on track, then he’ll have me.”

Friend, if you’ve ever wrestled with thoughts like that, look at verse 11. This verse declares that *he is not ashamed to call [us] brothers*. You see, Jesus knew what he was getting into! He did not come into the world to save angels, or people who have their act together, he came into the world to save sinners! And he did not do this begrudgingly; he did this willingly, joyfully, and he is not ashamed to call you one of his own. He is a merciful and faithful high priest, and his mercies know no end. In fact, he knows what it is to suffer, he knows what it is to face temptation, so he can sympathize with you and he can strengthen you.

Verse 18: *For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted*. So don’t cower and hide from him, don’t stay at a distance from him, seek his help. Then, last thing today...

2. Anticipate his glory

We’ve focused on death a lot in this message. Jesus was born to taste our death, to defeat our enemy who held the power of death, and to become our priest by offering himself up in death. But don’t miss the hope of glorious life that is found in this passage as well. Remember, verse 9 tells the story of Jesus in miniature. By faith... *we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor...* (v.9).

At that first Christmas, Jesus descended from the heights of heaven to the humility of a manger. And on the cross, Jesus descended into the depths of death itself. But he did not stay there. He rose, and he ascended, and he is now crowned with glory and honor! And one day, though we must pass through the pains of this world and death’s dark shadow too, we will share in his glory ourselves!

Look at verse 10 again: *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*. Jesus suffered, and died, and rose to bring many sons to glory. To bring all who put their faith in him, the offspring of Abraham, his brothers and sisters, into the glories of everlasting life and light! Therefore, though death is still so difficult and dark, we are no longer enslaved to the fear of death. We can look through death and anticipate glory.

On February 26, 1981—just three days before he died—the preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones was surrounded by his family. As they looked on and prayed while he lay in bed, Lloyd-Jones, unable to speak, grabbed a piece of scrap paper and wrote in a shaky hand, “Do not pray for healing. Do not hold me back from the glory.”

Friends, that is the hope Jesus came to bring to this world. That is the hope he came to bring to you and to me. He was born to set his people free from our fears and from our sins.