

Hebrews 2:16

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[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 2. Hebrews chapter 2. It's on page 1002. Verse 16. I suppose it's our text. It's about this morning. I've got no points. I don't think I've got any points this morning or any points this evening. I think that's the first time it's ever happened. But I'm hoping that it'll be pretty easy to follow. Hebrews 2 verse 16.

Well surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of David. It's not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of David.

When I was first thinking of going into Christian ministry, my minister at the time had a guy called Andrew Bowden. He's a great character. He used to take me on visits with him. He used to visit people in the congregation, particularly the older people.

And we used to go and visit a man called John Lawley Thomas. Some of you might know him. He used to be at Westminster, Chapel, years ago. His wife was a ballerina. So he was a real character. And we would go there. He had a little cottage in the middle of nowhere. He'd have an open fire, a stove with a kettle on the top. And there was tea stirring continuously on the top of that stove for days on end.

And I went in. As he went in, he said, as you go in and you drink the tea, he said, remember that verse from Mark 16, they will pick up snakes and drink deadly poison. And it went hard now.

[1 : 34] Anyway, I went in for the first time. There's cats absolutely everywhere. His wife would pour out this foul liquid, which had been stirring for days, pour it into the cup, and she'd hand it to me.

And she would say, catch hold, Levy, catch hold. And my revulsion for that cup of tea, I suppose, was nothing compared to the revulsion of God towards my sin.

And yet he catches hold. Catch hold, Levy, catch hold. And in verse 16, that is literally what the verse should read. For surely it is not angels that he catches hold of. But he catches hold of the offspring, Abraham.

Abraham, the father of all those who believe. And what this text is saying to us is that this. God has actually caught hold of us in the Lord Jesus. It's a very, very strong word.

And the whole message of Christmas is really captured in that word. God is not an arm's length God. He's actually caught hold of us in Jesus Christ.

[2 : 41] He's laid hold of our humanity to rescue us. Now just think about that for a moment. Think about that for the next few days. In fact, think about it for the rest of your life. What would it be like for God to actually grab hold of me?

What would that be like? How do you feel about that this morning? Most people prefer, don't they, God at arm's length. You know that little poem that gets trotted out by preachers. When I was going up the stairs, I met a man who wasn't there.

He wasn't there again today. Oh, how I wish he'd go away. And that sums up, doesn't it, what most people feel about God. Half the time they want him to be there, but the other half they wish he'd go away.

The French philosopher John Paul Sartre and the atheists said this, That God does not exist, I cannot deny. But that my whole being cries out for him, I cannot forget.

Oh, how I wish he'd go away. Most people are ambivalent, aren't they, about God. Most people in the UK, they believe in God, it's still about 80%, isn't it? But they want him to be at arm's length.

[3 : 50] And to stay at arm's length. But Christmas means God gets up close and personal with you. He gets up close and personal. Now how do you feel about that?

He wants to actually, not just to draw near, but actually to grab hold of you. To lay hold of you. Literally, that is what it is. It is not angels that he lays hold of.

I don't know how you would lay hold of an angel. How you'd grab them, I don't know. But it's the offspring of Abraham which lays hold. The ESV says help, it's weak.

The Holman's translation which I sometimes use says, he's reaching out to help. He's reaching out to help. It's not angels that he reaches out to help, it's human beings. It's the descendants of Abraham.

It is the spiritual descendants of Abraham that he reaches out to help. It's a weak translation. So compare verse 16 with verse 18. And you'll find that there's the two words help there.

[4 : 48] But they're two different words. The translators have chosen to translate them differently. In verse 18, the word help is a lending hand. He is a merciful high priest who has suffered.

He's been tempted and he is able to help. He's able to lend you a helping hand. He's able to hold your hand. But in verse 16, the word there is different. It's stronger.

Let me illustrate this. If you're a cat lover. I don't like cats very much. But there's a difference, isn't there, between cats and dogs. There's many differences. One is, you can command a dog. Say to a dog, sit.

And it sits. Say to a dog, get out. And it gets out. But you cannot command a cat. You've never tried that. If you say to a cat, sit.

It doesn't listen. Cats have got a mind of their own, don't they? When you want a cat to do something. You say, get out, cat. What does it do? It just stares back at you. You can't just say to a cat, go home. It won't.

[5 : 48] It doesn't work. What have you got to do? Well, I hate doing it. I don't do it. You've got to physically manhandle the cat. You know how it is. They grab hold. And you physically manhandle the cat.

You gather it up into your arms. You grab hold. You open the door. You throw it out the door like that. That's the only way, isn't it? It's the only way you can do to get the cat out of the house.

Now that is the word in verse 16. It's a very, very strong word. It's what Jesus has done for us. He's laid hold on us in that kind of way. It's like manhandling. It's not actually giving us some help from a distance.

It's not even a helping hand. As good as that is, He's actually come to grab hold of you. To gather you up. Whether we like it or not, He's come to grab hold of you.

And to deliver you into a new realm altogether. That is what He's come to do. That is the meaning of the word. It's a very strong word. Now let's look at how He does that. And it's beautiful in the context. He does it in verse 11.

[6 : 45] That's our older brother. Verse 11 says this. For he who sanctifies, For he who sets apart, And those who are sanctified, All have one source. That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers.

It's one of the themes in the Bible. It's a big theme in the Bible that we don't often look at. That Jesus is our older brother. I have two older brothers. I have one brother who is 8 years older than me, And another one who is 12 years older than me.

I don't know if you've ever thought of the Lord Jesus as an older brother. And there was a film, wasn't it? A River Runs Through It. I watched it on one of those long haul flights. It's about two brothers, Two sons of the Presbyterian man.

And their father was a minister in Montana. But it's a sad film in lots of ways. Two brothers growing up in the Montana country. So it goes on forever. It's one of those slow films. And the older one is a kind of hard working, studious kind of guy.

He's got a good job. He becomes a respected man in the community. But his tear away younger brother was great fun. And he's always getting himself into trouble. Always getting into scraps.

[7 : 53] Always pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable. And the younger brother ends up associating with people Who lead him deeper and deeper into trouble. And he was finally killed in a pub brawl.

And his older brother couldn't help him. They grow far apart. It is a moving story. And yet what is tragic about it is this.

That the older brother Saw what was happening to his young brother. He saw it. He could see what was happening in his brother's life. He could sense the direction that he was going in. But there was nothing he could do about it.

And the story of the film is that he tried and tried. The whole film is about this. But he couldn't reach out. He couldn't reach him. He couldn't come to where he was and rescue him.

But what this verse is telling us. Is that Jesus has come to where we are. That our life has been made a misery by the bully. And he comes right to where we are in order to rescue us.

[8 : 52] Not in a patronising way. My brothers occasionally can be very patronising. And you can become, can't you, a little bit resentful of the older brother. Because he's always done the right thing.

And it's like the story of the two brothers that Jesus tells us. The stay-at-home son who always does the right thing. And the other one who ruins his life. It's that sort of story. And we're told there in verse 11 That Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers.

Our older brother is not a standoffish kind of man. Our older brother is coming to the playground as it was to rescue us from the bully. And he lays hold of us in our sin and in our misery.

But how does he rescue us? We're going to sing. To close our service. Who is he on yonder storm? There's ten verses. Thankfully we're only singing five of them.

But it's a wonderful, wonderful carol. But I love the way that that carol connects The story of the cradle to the cross. That it takes us right the way throughout the life of Jesus.

[9 : 55] That our older brother has come. He has entered the womb of the Virgin Mary. He has become flesh and blood. He's become flesh and blood in order to bleed and die. And that is why he became flesh and blood.

So this Christmas, do not coo over the little baby and say, Isn't he lovely? The reason he became a little baby was so that he could go to a cross and die for us.

You see how Hebrews 2 connects Christmas through to Easter. Look at verse 14. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He himself likewise partake of the same thing as incarnation. Christmas.

That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death. That is the devil. Easter. The big brother has come to beat the bully who has made the misery of our life as human beings. So how is he going to do that? Look at verse 17. Just by his death. Therefore he has to be made like his brothers in every respect. There is the big brother. He took our human condition in its lowest age.

[10 : 58] He came into this broken, fallen world. He has to be made like us, but without sin. So that in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.

To make propitiation the sins of the people. Christmas, therefore Easter. He came in order to become a priest. To become the sacrifice.

He is the temple of the Lord. By the eternal spirit. He offered himself to God. We are told in chapter 9 verse 14. He is the priest. And the sacrifice.

And he comes and he offers himself to God. For our sins. As an atonement for sins. That we might what? That we might come freely into the presence of God.

So that we might meet with God in his temple. One writer said this. The road from Bethlehem leads to Golgotha. The crib and the cross were kept from the same wood.

[12 : 03] Just think about that. Meditate on that this Christmas. Here's a little poem. God in a manger. Defenseless and fleshed. Emmanuel crying and fighting for breath.

God in a manger wriggling and roar. Laid out on the wood. Enthroned on the straw. God at Golgotha. Peter pierced in his flesh. Emmanuel crying and fighting for breath.

God of Golgotha forsaken and lost. Stretched out on the wood. Enthroned on the cross. Taking flesh. To bleed and die.

Now why does he have to do that? Why does he have to do that? Well because of what we're told in these verses. There is a bully and he's made our life of misery. Isn't he? Do you remember a few years ago.

There was that 10 year old girl. Walking along the street in Vienna. Who was snatched. From a street in the suburb of Vienna. Natalie can push her.

[13 : 01] I think something like that. For 8 years. She was kept. Wasn't she? Beneath. A man's house. Behind a steel door. In a windowless cell.

Mercifully. A few years later. She seems to have the opportunity to escape. Do you remember that? Just imagine it. A 10 year old girl. Snatched off the street. Kidnapped.

Locked in a windowless cell. Behind a closed door. A steel door. That is the human condition. And that is why the big brother has come. Because that is what has happened to us.

Let me verse 14. Since therefore the children are sharing flesh and blood. He himself likewise. 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. That is the human condition.

[13:56] That is why big brother Jesus. Needed to come and rescue us. We are enslaved. We have been kidnapped by Satan. He has a hold over us. And his hold over us.

Well Satan has what? The power of death. And he holds us in slavery. All our lifetimes. To the fear of death. It is Satan's trump card.

The fear of death. Tolstoy wrote this. In his confessions. He said. Something strange began to happen to me. At the age of 50.

I had a wife who loved me. And whom I loved. I had a large estate. Without much effort on my part. Which increased. My name was respected. I enjoyed physical strength.

And yet I could not live. Because I was afraid to die. The question which brought me. To the verge of suicide. Sought an answer. Without which one cannot live. Is there any meaning in my life.

[14:52] That my inevitable death. Does not destroy. Today or tomorrow. Death will come to those. I love. And then to me. Soon will not only. I not exist. But eventually.

No one will exist. Who will remember. Anything I've written. Or done. Why then. Go on with the effort. What is it all for. Where does it all lead to. What difference does it make.

Whether I do this thing. Or that thing. Or nothing at all. So he says. I could give no rational meaning.

To any single action. Or even to my whole life. But what was so surprising. Was how can we fail.

To see this. For a time it's possible. To live intoxicated with life. But as soon as one is sober. It is impossible not to see. That life in the face of death. Is a fraud.

And a stupid fraud. How often I've been told. You cannot understand. The meaning of life. So don't think about it. Just live. I can no longer do that. And that is the start reality.

[15:50] That is universal. What's the point of it all? Is we live. For a moment. And then we die. And there's nothing else. Or worse than that.

Worse than that. It is appointed for man. Once to die. And then the judgment. Paul talks about this. In 1 Corinthians 15. Come with me there. It's a famous verse.

1 Corinthians chapter 15. There's famous words. You hear this at the gravesite. A Christian. Verse 54. It says this.

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 death. Is the law.

But thanks be to God. Who gives us the victory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. I read the story. Of a family. Driving along in the car.

[16:47] The window was down. And a bee flies into the car. Now that is annoying isn't it? And scary. But if you have a child. Who in the case of this family. Was allergic to bee stings. It is not only painful.

It is life threatening. So dad pulls over to the side of the road. The little child. Is in the back of the car. Panicking. What the father did. Was simply pull the car. Over to the side of the road.

And he managed to grab hold of the bee. Against the windscreen. He holds it there in his hand. And eventually. Shouts out in pain. And releases his grip.

The bee flies out again. Of course the little child starts panicking. She says it is still here daddy. It is still here. And he turns around. At the back seat of the car. And he says hey. Look at my hand. Look at my hand.

It is a sting. The sting is in my hand. The bee cannot hum. It can buzz. But it cannot harm you. It can't sting you anymore.

[17:45] And that is why our big brother is done. He has taken the sting out of death. That is the hold that the devil has upon us. You. Are going to die.

And you as a sinner like me. In your death. You will encounter God in judgment. The sting of death is sin.

And the strength of that sin. Is the power of the law. We deserve God's judgment. We deserve God's anger against us. Forever. Because we are sinners. And that is his trump card.

Is it? So as we face death. We are terrified. We are afraid. And that is why it haunts us. It haunts us. Every waking hour. But Jesus comes to us. As our big brother. And he says to us.

Hey. Look at my hands. Look at my hands. Nailed to the cross. He says hey. Look at the sting. He has absorbed the sting of death.

[18:46] Go back to Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 2. And look at verse 9. What has he done? He has tasted death.

He has experienced it. With the sting in it. He was made sin for us. He who knew sin. He who knew. He who knew. No sin.

Was made sin for us. So that we might become the righteousness. Of God. For death.

Where is your sting? Grave. Where is your victory? But thanks. Be to God. Who gives us through. Victory. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord.

And our big brother. There is a lovely story. A true story. I think. About a work of art. In a London gallery. And there is a famous painting. Of Faust.

[19:46] Faust playing chess. With the devil. And the devil. Lears across the table. At a despairing Faust. Whom he is checkmated.

So you can google it. You can see it. There is the devil there. Learing. Across the table. At Faust. Who is checkmated. And apparently. According to the story. A famous chess player. Used to come into the gallery.

And he used to come in. Time and time. And time again. And he would stare at that painting. And one day. As he was staring at that painting. Yet again. And looking at the different positions. Of the pieces on the chessboard.

One day. A great cry. Rang out. In that art gallery. He cried out. No. No. No. There is another move. It's not checkmate.

And that is the message of Christmas. You see the devil. He lears across the table. And he thinks he's got us.

[20:46] And he shouts checkmate. And he thinks he's got hold of us. He holds us in slavery. Through fear of death. And Jesus comes our big brother. And he says. Checkmate. No. No.

No. There has been another move. And he comes from the cradles of the cross. And he makes atonement. By the eternal spirit. And he offers himself to God.

And that is the move. And his death frees us. And he beats the bully. And he beats the hell out of him. And he takes the sting of death.

His death for us. It is vicarious. And in it victorious. Because in it. He beats the bully.

Who's made our life a misery. And it robs him. Of his hold over us. And it takes away the ground from under his feet. Doesn't it? And he'll come to you. And he'll accuse you.

[21:40] And say. Hey you. You sinner. And you say to him. Yeah. I know I'm a sinner. And he'll say. You deserve God's anger. And you'll say.

Yeah. I deserve God's anger. You'll say. You deserve hell. You say. Yeah. I deserve hell. I know I do. But Jesus has taken my sin.

And Jesus has taken God's judgment upon himself. And Jesus has taken hell. Go to verse 13.

I love this. Verse 13. And behold. And again. Behold. I am the children. God has given me.

Do you see? See what I'm trying to say? What I'm trying to say this Christmas is this. If Jesus catches hold of you. Satan will lose his grip on you. And he's not going to lose any of them.

[22:38] Behold. I and the children. God has given me. He's not going to lose any of them. Not after what he's been through to rescue them. Here I am.

He says. And the children. Now let me ask you as I close. What has got hold of you? This Christmas time. What has got hold of you? What is it that's driving you?

I don't quote enough high culture. So let me quote some high culture. Bob Dylan. Alright. I'll quote it all. I think I've got it all up here. You may be an ambassador to England or France.

You may like to gamble. You might like to dance. You may be the heavyweight champion of the world. You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls. But you're going to have to serve somebody.

Might be a rock and roll addict. Prancing on the stage. Might have money and drugs at your commands. Women in a cage. You may be a businessman. Or some high degree thief. They may call you doctor.

[23 : 41] Or they may call you chief. But you're going to have to serve somebody. You may be a state trooper. You might be a young Turk. You might be the head of some big TV network.

You may be rich or poor. You may be blind or lame. You may be living in another country. Under another name. But you're going to have to serve somebody. You may be a construction worker. Working on a home.

You may be living in a mansion. Or you might live in a dome. You might own guns. And you might even own tanks. You might be somebody's landlord. You might even own banks. But you're going to have to serve somebody.

You may be a preacher. With your spiritual pride. You may be a city councilman. Taking brides on the side. You may be working in a barbershop. You may know how to cut hair. You may be somebody's mistress.

You may be somebody's heir. But you're going to have to serve somebody. You might like to wear cotton. You might like to wear silk. You might like to drink whiskey. You might like to drink milk. You might like to eat caviar.

[24 : 39] You might like to eat bread. You may be sleeping on the floor. Sleeping in a king sized bed. But you're going to have to serve somebody. Yes indeed. You're going to have to serve somebody.

It may be the devil or it may be the Lord But you're going to have to serve somebody Who's it going to be? Who's it going to be? Who holds the reign To your life?

Who's got a hold of you? What is driving you this morning? You've got to serve somebody Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it In Philippians chapter 3 and verse 12 One of the things I love about the Apostle Paul Is that he's always willing to tell his story Tells it at the drop of a hat He's been a Christian about 30 years When he writes this And he says this Not that I have already obtained all this Or have already arrived at my goal But here it is But I press on to take hold Of that for which Christ Jesus Took hold of me It's exactly the same word as Hebrews 3.16 I press on to take hold Of that for which Christ Jesus Took hold of me It means to seize To arrest It means to be taken into Protective custody And Paul says That is what Jesus did for me On the Damascus road When I met him He caught hold of me I was going the wrong way I was going in the wrong direction Then the great shepherd of the sheep Came And he interposed himself He put himself between the wolf And me And he grabbed hold of me He manhandled me He took me into Protective custody Now has he done that for you?

Do you know that you're safe In Jesus' grip? That is where our safety lies Isn't it? It's being laid hold of By Jesus Jesus has caught hold of me He's taken me into custody Or are you still Handcuffed to Satan?

[26 : 44] It's such Such a huge stuff Isn't it? Do you long for your life To be taken hold of This morning? Maybe Maybe you realise Your life is out of control You're being You're being carried away In your own lust Into places That you just don't want to go Maybe you're stuck in a rut And you can't get out And you long for someone To come and manhandle you And transform you Into a different realm Well Jesus can do that Because that is why he came He can do that for you This Christmas He can do that for you Before you leave this room It's not a bad verse This is actually Philippians 3, 12 The text of 2014 If we did that kind of thing As a church If we had a text of the year It would be a great text to have I press on Paul says To take hold Of that For which Christ took hold of me Paul says I'm taking hold of it

It's commitment isn't it? This isn't just Training up to church This is saying I'm going to grab hold I'm going to catch hold Of that which For which Christ Has laid hold of me And that is the Christian life Christmas gives To you and I God In flesh He catches hold of us Let's just come back To the text That I finish It is not angels Is it?

That he's caught hold of It is the descendants Of Abraham It is believers Abraham is the father Of the faithful He's the father Of all those Who believe In Jesus Christ It's not humanity In general It is those Who believe In him And are safe In his grasp Man will not live Forevermore Because of Christmas day You will only live Forevermore If you are Under the grip Of his grace If Christ Has caught hold of you He has man Handled us In order That he might become A merciful And faithful High priest Do you know What a high priest does?

The job of the high priest Is to get us Into the presence Of God And get the presence Of God Into us To get you Into the presence Of God Is get the presence Of God Into you And that's what Jesus wants to do For you This Christmas So catch hold Let's pray To be ready To be ready To be ready

To be ready To be ready To be ready To be ready To be ready To be ready To be ready To be ready To be ready To be ready