

# Hebrews 2:5-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] And if you'll turn to Hebrews chapter 2. And let me just say again, we'd love you to come to the carol service tonight.

! It's the easiest invite to invite other people.! So do pop around to neighbours or send messages to different people this afternoon. Drag them along. And if you're a regular, when you come in, sit down straight away.

And if the stewards tell you to move, do it. Alright? Okay. I'm speaking from an iPad for the first time.

So this, yeah, we'll see how this goes. Alright? I suppose verse 16 is my text. Verse 16. Hebrews chapter 2. Where the writer of the Hebrews says, For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

That's quite weak really. It should be. For surely it's not angels that he takes hold of, but he takes hold of the offspring of Abraham. When I was first thinking about becoming a minister, my minister back in Cardiff, I'm an animal, Andrew Bowden, he used to take me on visits with him to visit old people.

[ 1 : 11 ] And we used to go and visit a man called John Lawley Thomas. He was a real character. The house was a tip. And he lived in this little cottage in the middle of nowhere.

And he had an open fire on. And there was a kettle continuously on top. And tea stewed in that kettle for days on end.

As I think about it, you're reminded of that kind of verse at the end of Mark 16, that you'll pick up snakes and you will drink deadly poison, and it will not harm them. It was tea that had been there. Each day, just more tea bags were put in it. And his wife would pour out this fowl liquid that had been stewing for days. And she'd pour it into a cup, which you were not sure was clean.

And then she'd hand it to you and she'd say, catch hold, Levy, catch hold. And it's an amazing memory, really. You're in this kind of strange little cottage.

[ 2 : 11 ] Catch hold, Levy, catch hold. She was telling you, hold on to it. It's going to be boiling hot. It had been stewing for days. And this verse is really, that's what it's saying.

It's saying, catch hold of it. It's not actually help, it's catching hold. It's telling us that God doesn't catch hold of angels.

He catches hold of the descendants of Abraham. And Abraham is the father of all who believe. So if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you're a believer in God, you're a descendant of Abraham. And what this verse is telling us wonderfully is that in Jesus, God has got hold of you. The whole message, in many ways of Christmas, is wrapped up in that word.

You see, God is not an arm's length God. He's actually caught hold of us in Christ. He's laid hold of our humanity to rescue us.

[ 3 : 14 ] Think about that for a moment. What would it be like for God to grab hold of you today? What would that be like? Most people prefer God, don't they, at arm's length?

So that famous poem, 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, most people's, what they feel when it comes to God. Half the time we want God to be there, but the other half we wish he'd just go away.

Like John Paul Sartre, the French philosopher and atheist, he said that God does not exist, I cannot deny, but that my whole being cries out for him, I cannot forget.

He's saying, oh, I wish he'd go away. Most people, aren't they, are ambivalent about God. Still, most people would believe in God, but they certainly want to keep him at arm's length.

[ 4 : 18 ] And Christmas means that God wants to get up close and personal with you. How does that make you feel? He wants not just to draw near, God wants to grab hold of you, lay hold of you.

Human beings, the descendants of Abraham, that he reaches out to help, but it's stronger than help, the message of Christmas is that God has laid hold of us.

There's the word help, isn't there, in verse 16 and in verse 18. They're two very different words. In verse 18, the word for help is to lend a helping hand as a merciful high priest who suffered and has been tempted.

And because he's been tempted, he's able to give us a helping hand. He's able to help you in temptation. But in verse 16, it's a very different word. Let me give you an illustration. If you're a cat lover, you will know if you've got a cat at home, you can't command a cat, can you?

You can command a dog. You can tell a dog to sit, to heal, and the dog will do it. But you don't command a cat, but you don't command a cat, do you? Cats have got a minor will of their own.

[ 5 : 40 ] When you want to get your cat out of the house, out of the flat, what do you do? You don't just say to the cat, off you go, get out. You take hold of the cat, don't you?

You've got to manhandle the cat. You've got to gather him up in your arms and grab hold of him and throw him out the door. That's the only way to get the cat out of the house.

And that's the word that's used in verse 16. It's a very strong word. And that's what Jesus has done for you. He's laid hold of you.

Jesus is not actually giving you some help from a distance, some kind of advice. He's come to deliver you.

He's come to grab hold of you. He's come to put you into a new realm altogether, to move you from one place to another. And look how he does that. It's beautiful in the context. He does that, if you look at verse 11, as our older brother.

[ 6 : 41 ] I think it's one of the themes that we don't often explore. That we don't often think about Jesus as our older brother. I've got two older brothers.

One's eight years older than me. The other one's 12 years older than me. I don't know if you've ever thought of Jesus as an older brother. There's a film, wasn't there? A River Runs Through It. Two brothers.

Both sons of the manse. Both sons of a minister in Montana. It's a sad film in lots of ways. Two brothers growing up in the Montana countryside. And the older one is hardworking, studious fella.

He's got a good job. He's a respected man in the community. But the younger brother's a tearaway. He's great fun, but always getting himself into trouble. Always getting himself into scraps.

Pushing the boundaries of what's acceptable. And he ends up associating with people who lead him deeper and deeper into trouble. And finally, the younger brother is killed in a pub brawl. And his older brother couldn't get to him.

[ 7 : 44 ] They'd grown too far apart. It's a moving and quite tragic story. And the tragedy is the older brother saw it happening to his younger brother. He could see what was happening in his younger brother's life, but there was nothing he could do about it.

He tried and he tried, and the whole film is about this. He could see what was going on, but he couldn't reach him. He couldn't get through to him. He couldn't come to where the younger brother was and rescue him.

But this verse is telling us that Jesus has seen our plight from heaven, and he's come down to earth in order to grab hold of us, in order to rescue us.

He is the elder brother who protects us in the playground from the bully. He's the one who comes to where we are when our life has been made a misery by the bully, and he comes right to where we are in order to rescue us.

Not in a patronizing way. Older brothers can be very, very patronizing, can't they? You can be maybe a little bit resentful of your older brother. Maybe he's always done the right thing.

[ 8 : 53 ] It's a bit like the story of two brothers that Jesus tells, isn't it? The stay-at-home son who does the right thing, and the one who ruins his life. It's that sort of story, and we're told here in verse 11, can you see it, of Hebrews chapter 2, that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers.

That our older brother has come into the playground as if it were to rescue us from the bully. He lays hold of us in our sin and misery. So how does he do that? How does he rescue us?

Our older brother has come because we are flesh and blood. He has become flesh and blood. In order to bleed and die, that's why he became flesh and blood.

And so don't coo over the little baby and say, well, isn't he lovely? The reason that he became a little baby was so that he could go to the cross and die for us.

Do you see how the passage runs from Christmas through to Easter? Look at verse 14. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself, likewise partook in the same things, he became like us, that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

[10:13] That is the devil. The big brother has come to beat the bully who has made life a misery. And how is he going to do that?

Verse 17. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest.

That is how big brother took our human condition. He came into a broken, fallen world. He became like us, but was without sin. For this reason, he had to become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Do you see? It's Christmas, therefore Easter. He came in order to become a priest, a sacrifice in the temple. And by the eternal spirit, we're told that he offered himself to God.

We're told in chapter 9, in verse 14 of Hebrews, that he is the priest and the sacrifice. He comes and he offers himself to God as an atonement for sins so that, what?

[11:26] We might come into the presence of God. So that we might meet with God in his temple. One writer has said that from the road from Bethlehem leads to Golgotha.

The crib and the cross are cut from the same wood. Just think about that. Here's a little poem. God in a manger, defenseless, enfleshed, Emmanuel crying and fighting for breath.

God in a manger, wriggling and raw, laid out on the wood, enthroned on the straw. God at Golgotha, pierced in his flesh, Emmanuel crying and fighting for breath.

God at Golgotha, forsaken and lost, stretched out on the wood, enthroned on the cross. He took flesh in order to bleed and die for us.

Why does he have to do that? Well, because of what we're told in these verses, that there is a bully who has made life a misery, hasn't there? You might remember, it's not a completely unfamiliar story, isn't it?

[12:38] A 10-year-old girl who is snatched from the street in the suburbs of Vienna. For eight years, she's kept beneath this man's house behind a steel door in a tiny windowless cell until mercifully and wonderfully she seizes the opportunity to escape.

You might remember the story. Just imagine that. A 10-year-old girl snatched off the street, kidnapped, locked in a windowless cell behind a steel door. The Bible says that's the human condition.

That is why the big brother has got to come. That's what's happened to us. Look at verses 14 and 15. Since therefore the children share in the flesh and blood, he himself likewise partake 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 why big brother Jesus needed to come and rescue us.

Because we've been enslaved, we've been kidnapped, the devil has a hold of us. The devil has the power of death. And he holds us in slavery to it.

[13:56] That's why people are so afraid of death. They're so fearful of it. It's the devil's trump card, the fear of death. Tolstoy wrote about it in his confessions.

He says this, he said, something strange began to happen to me at the age of 50. At the age of 50, I had a wife who loved me and whom I loved. I had a large estate which without much effort on my part 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 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 short effort? What is it all for? What does it all lead to? What difference does it make whether I do this thing or that thing or nothing at all?

[15:03] So Tolstoy says, I could give no rational meaning to any single action or even to my whole life, but what was so surprising was how we can fail to see this. For a time, it's possible to live

intoxicated with life, but as soon as when it's 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. That's a stark reality, isn't it?

That's universal. What is the point of it all? If we live for a moment and then we die and there's nothing else or worse than that, worse than that, the Bible says, it is appointed for man to die and then to face the judgment.

And so Paul talks about this, the Bible talks about this, the apostle in 1 Corinthians 15 in those really famous words that you hear at the graveside of a Christian. And this is what Paul says, he says, death is swallowed up in victory.

Oh death, where is your sting? Oh death, where is your victory? Oh 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.

[16:33] Paul is saying there is hope. There is hope. I think I've told you the story before, there's a family driving along in a car and the window is down and there's a bee that flies into the car and that is annoying, isn't it?

And scary. But there was a child in this car who was allergic to bee stings. And so it's not only scary and annoying, it's life threatening.

The dad swerves the car to the side of the road, the little child in the back is panicking and what the dad does is he manages to grab hold of the bee and he presses it against the windscreen and he holds it there in his hand.

And then eventually the dad shouts out in pain and he releases his grip and the bee flies out again.

And the little child is panicking. But the dad is able to say, isn't it, look here, look at my hand.

Look at my hand, see the sting. Its sting is in my hand, it can't harm you. I have taken the sting. The bee can still buzz around but it can't sting you anymore and that's what our big brother has done.

[17:51] He's taken the sting out of death and that is the hold that the devil has and so you and I, the truth is, isn't it, you and I are going to die and you and I are sinners and so in death we will encounter God in judgment.

We will meet him and the sting of death is sin and the strength of that sting is the power of the law and we deserve God's judgment and we deserve God's anger against us forever because we are sinners and that is the devil's trump card.

And that's why you and I are afraid of death when we're willing to think about it. That is why death haunts us as a culture every waking hour. But Jesus comes to us as our big brother and he says, look at my hands.

Look at my hands, they've been nailed to the cross. See, there's the sting. The sting is gone. He has absorbed it. Look at what it says in Hebrews 2 in verse 9.

Can you see what it says at the end of verse 9? It says, he has tasted death. The Lord Jesus, the baby in the manger, experienced death with the sting in it.

[19:13] He was made sin who knew no sin that you and I can be made right with God. And so that's why the Christian would say, oh death, where is your sting?

Oh grave, where is your victory? Because thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord, and our big brother. There's a lovely story of a man going into an art gallery.

It's the famous painting of Faust playing chess with the devil. And the devil is leering across the table at a despairing Faust whom he's checkmated.

Apparently the story goes, a famous chess player used to come into that gallery and he used to come in time and time again and he would sit and he would stare at that picture.

One day he found himself staring at that painting yet again of the devil leering across the chess board at Faust with the devil saying checkmate. This chess player looked at all the different positions of the chess board and one day there's a great cry he rings out apparently in the gallery.

[20:30] As he cries out, no, there's another move. It's not checkmate. There's another move. And so the message of Christmas is this, the devil thinks he's got us.

The devil thinks he's got a hold of us. It is checkmate. He holds us in slavery through fear of death and Jesus comes, our big brother, and he says, no, no, it's not checkmate.

There's another move. And he moves from the cradle to the cross and he makes atonement by his eternal spirit. He offers himself to God.

That's the move. His death frees us. It beats the bully. It beats the hell out of it. It takes the sting out of death.

His death is for us. It is vicarious. It is victorious because in his death he beats the bully who's made our life a misery. It robs him of his hold of us.

[ 21 : 35 ] It takes away the ground from under his feet, doesn't it? He comes and he accuses you and he says, you are a sinner. And we say, well, yeah, I know I'm a sinner.

He says, you deserve God's anger. I know I do. You deserve hell. I know I do, but the Lord Jesus has taken that for me.

He has taken that anger, that justice, that hell. And look at verse 13. I love this. Look at verse 13. And again, I will put my trust in him.

And again, behold, I and the children God has given me. what I'm trying to say to you is this Christmas, if you will put your trust in the Lord Jesus, if Jesus catches hold of you, the devil loses his grip on you.

Look at verse 13. behold, 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 us.

[ 22 : 50 ] Here I am, he says, and the children that you have given me. And so let me ask you as I finish, who has got hold of you this Christmas?

What is it that is driving you? You've got to serve somebody, haven't you? Let me read to you like I've done before the Bob Dylan song.

You may be an ambassador to England or France. You may like to gamble or 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 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 may 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.

[ 24 : 00 ] 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 landlords. 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 bribes on the side. You may be working in a barber shop. 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. Might like to wear cotton. Might like to wear silk. Might like to drink whiskey. Might like to drink milk. You might like to eat caviar. 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. So who's it going to be? Who holds the reins of your life? What's driving you? Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in Philippians chapter 3. One of the things I love about the Apostle Paul is he's always telling his story.

[ 25 : 06 ] He's been a Christian at this point for about 30 years and he writes this. He says, not that I've already obtained all this or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

It's the very same word that's in Hebrews 2. It means to seize or to arrest or to be taken into protective custody.

And Paul says, that's what Jesus did for me. I was walking along the Damascus Road and I was going the wrong way and Jesus took hold of me. I was going the wrong direction and along came the great shepherd who came for his sheep and he took me into his protective custody.

Has he done that for you? Do you know this morning that if he's done that for you, you are safe? That's where our safety is.

It is to lay hold on Jesus. It is to be taken into his custody. Maybe you're here this morning and you think that would be great because my life is out of control and you're carried away by your lust to places you don't want to go.

[ 26 : 26 ] Maybe this morning you're stuck in a rut and you can't get out of it and you long for someone to come and take hold of you and to transform you into a different realm and that's why Jesus came.

And he can do that for you this Christmas. He can do that for you before you leave this room. I press on, Paul says, to take hold of that. This isn't just turning up to church once on a Sunday. This is saying, I'm going to catch hold of Jesus Christ who has caught hold of me. Christmas gives us God in the flesh who catches hold of us.

Let's come back to the verses we close. Verse 16. It's not angels he took hold of. It's the descendants of Abraham. It's believers. Abraham is the father of the faithful for all who will believe. It is not just humanity blankly. It is those who believe in him are safe in his grip. Men will not live forevermore because of Christmas Day despite what Boney M say.

[ 27 : 44 ] You will only live in forevermore if you're in the grip of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ has caught hold of you.

If you're in the grip he has manhandled us in order that we might become sons of God. Tells us he's become a high priest.

What does a high priest do? A high priest brings you into the presence of God and he gets the presence of God into us and Jesus wants you to do that and he wants to do that for you this Christmas.

Let's pray.