

Hebrews 2:5-18

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[0 : 00] Great if you could open up your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 2, page 1002 if you're using one of those black church Bibles. I wonder what Christmas means to you.

I mean for many of us it means a time of busyness, a time of spending money, a time of remembering the last things we haven't done, a time of wishing we could get some rest when we can't.

And yet actually underneath all that there is something very very big going on isn't there? We're not celebrating as the world celebrates, we're celebrating something deeper, something bigger than we could ever imagine.

There's a great line in the last battle, the last of the Narnia Chronicles, where Lisi the Valiant says that once on our earth a stable held something bigger than the whole world. That's true isn't it? And yet we can be so occupied with children's nativities and stables and donkeys and all that stuff, not to mind presents and turkeys, that we actually forget what the incarnation is all about, what the Son of God taking on human flesh, what God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man, means for us.

[1 : 09] That's why these two weeks we've been looking at Hebrews chapter 2, last week, and picking up again in verse 10 this week. And these verses we get three pictures of what the Lord Jesus was able to do for us, what the Son of God incarnate in flesh was able to do for us.

Three pictures of his work on our behalf. We're going to look at them briefly this morning. He is the champion who rescues us, verse 10 and verses 14 to 16.

He is the brother who identifies with us, verses 11 to 13. And he's the priest who represents us, verses 17 to 18. So we can look at those briefly.

We see the idea of Jesus being our champion there in verse 10. The word used actually is founder. We'll see that in a second. Verse 10. It was fitting that he, that is God, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

That word founder is translated in many different ways in English versions of the Bible. It can mean author. It can mean founder, like the one who establishes a city or a school. Leader.

[2 : 25] Let's use that way in Acts chapter 5, 31. Or pioneer. Or captain. But as we read through what Jesus does as our founder, we see he's really our champion. The one who fights for us.

The one who swings into action to rescue us. He does it in two ways. He leads us to glory. And he liberates us from slavery. He leads us to glory.

That's actually what the writer has been talking about in the previous verses. He talks about Jesus as the one who the father uses to bring many sons to glory. First 10.

So Jesus is the one who leads us there. Like the pioneer who establishes a way. He goes first so that others can join him. And where's he leading us to? It's to the restored humanity.

It's been described in verses 5 to 9. To the glory God originally intended. But from which Adam and Eve fell by rebelling against God. Jesus is already there.

[3 : 24] He's now crowned with glory and honour. He has risen again. He is the beginning of the new creation. And he's leading us there. He's the one who leads us. But as we look at verse 10, aren't there a couple of questions that come to our minds straight away?

How is it fitting that Jesus should be made perfect through suffering? And hang on. How can Jesus be made perfect? Isn't that what the author is saying there? It's fitting that he, God, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation, Jesus, perfect through suffering.

Now does that bring a question to you? How can the eternal Son of God be made perfect? There is no sin in him. In fact, the writer will say later on over the page there, chapter 4, verse 15, that Jesus, as a man, had no sin.

Tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. He was perfect. So what does this mean? That Jesus was made perfect. It cannot mean moral perfection. So what does it mean? I'm sure many of us have been to job interviews in our lives where, in a sense, we had perfect qualifications, and yet didn't get the job.

Why? Oh, you don't have the experience, they say. Well, think of a young person applying to go to veterinary school for university. They've got straight A's all the way through their school life, straight A's predicted for their A-levels, really good report on the UCAS form from their teachers, and yet they don't get the offer.

[4 : 59] Why not? They haven't got the experience, they haven't spent their holidays going lambing in the Easter holidays, working in a vet practice during the summers, looking after animals wherever they could.

They don't have the experience to be the complete candidate. And that's the sense of the word perfect here, the sense of being complete. That Jesus, through the physical experience of being a human being, of obeying his Father in every situation, becomes the complete saviour, the one who is equipped in every way, who has the experience to come alongside us, to rescue us, to liberate us.

If you look over to, just across the page there, chapter 5, verses 8 and 9, the writer says a similar thing there that helps us to understand, I think. Although he was a son, chapter 5, verse 8, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation, to all who obey him. So Jesus had to learn obedience, not just as a theory, but in practice, as a human being.

Of course, as the eternal son of God, he always obeyed his Father. The very incarnation shows that. His coming into the world was in obedience to the Father's plan.

[6 : 17] But then as a man, he had to learn obedience too. As a human being like you and I, he had to learn obedience from the inside. He had to learn it from the weakness of being human.

He had to learn to obey when it was costly, even when it meant going to the cross. He had to learn to obey when it required faith, trusting that his Father would do what he had promised.

He had to learn to obey the same way you and I have to learn to obey. In all the weakness of our flesh, in tiredness, in hunger, with pressure on us.

He had to learn to obey when it was costly, when it meant trusting. And so he's the complete saviour, the perfect saviour for us. Because he's been a man like us.

So that's what it means when he was made perfect through suffering. Of course, his obedience cost him his life. So how is it fitting, going back to chapter 2, verse 10 for a moment, how is it fitting for God to make Jesus perfect, complete through suffering?

[7 : 23] See, some people will say it's not fitting, is it? Some people will say, I don't like the idea of a God, who has to require someone else to die, to forgive other people. That's not very loving.

That's just cruel. And even those who call themselves evangelical Christians, will say that the idea of the Son of God suffering in our place, is nothing more than cosmic child abuse.

There's not a fitting way to talk of a God of love. Well, that is not what the scriptures say. The scriptures say it is fitting that God our Father in heaven should make his Son obedient to death, even death on a cross.

That was fitting to achieve our salvation. Why? Because it's fitting, in keeping with the very character of God himself. The God who revealed himself on Sinai as being the one who keeps steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and yet, in Exodus 34, verse 5, will by no means clear the guilty.

It is fitting for a God who is loving and will forgive, and yet holy, and will not just overlook sin. The only fitting way to resolve that tension was for the Son of God to take on human flesh and die to become the perfect rescuer for his people, so that God's justice could be satisfied and God's love gratified.

[8 : 56] It was fitting for only death could bring forgiveness. It's entirely in keeping with God's character. So here is Jesus, the champion of our salvation, who leads us to glory, because he has suffered for us, because he was a human and tasted death for us, as verse 9 put it.

Yeah, that carol we sing every Christmas, once in Royal David's City, has it absolutely right, doesn't he? And he leads his children on to the place where he has gone.

Yes, that's right. Jesus is our champion. He leads us. Not just to the place he's gone, but to the state he has attained, to the glory of restored humanity. He's in glory kneels to fix what is torn, as we just sung in that last song.

So as our champion, he leads us to glory. But also as our champion, he liberates us from slavery. Look down to verse 14, will you? Since then, the children share in flesh and blood.

He, Jesus himself, partook of the same things, the same flesh and blood, like you and I have, that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

[10:08] That is the devil. Jesus took on flesh, became a human being like us, to die, to destroy the one who has the power of death. Now, does that strike you as a funny name for the devil, a funny title for the devil?

The one who has the power of death. Seems strange, doesn't it? We need to understand that the devil does not naturally have the power of death. It's not his by right.

It's not his inherent right. Why does death come to the world? Death comes as a result of our sin. Death is God's judgment on human sin.

So the devil does not naturally have the power of death, but the basis for his power over us is not his natural authority, but our sin, our guilt. It's like his weapon in blackmail.

How do people, he gets gangs who extort money from folk, don't they? Blackmailing them. How do they do it? It's because they entice them into some sort of misdemeanor, or misdoing, or get some photograph, evidence of a politician or a celebrity doing something they shouldn't be doing.

[11:18] And then they exploit that and blackmail them. And so they have this power over the person they're exploiting, not because it's naturally held power, but because of the guilt of the other person.

Because they've enticed them to do something they shouldn't do. And that's exactly how the devil works, doesn't it? He seduces humanity into revolt against God. So death enters the world as God's punishment on our sin.

And the devil uses that, he exploits it to hold us as slaves. Just as a criminal gang will blackmail people. So the devil exploits us, but it's not his own natural power.

He uses that fear then to enslave us. Look at verse 15. Jesus comes to deliver all those who through fear of death are subject to lifelong slavery.

Now for the people who read this letter first, they really did live in fear of death for following Jesus. In chapter 10 we discover that many of them had been arrested, been thrown into prison, had had their property confiscated, all for following Jesus Christ.

[12:24] And of course they have brothers and sisters around the world for whom that is a reality today. So the fear of death was a reason for them, for thinking about giving up on the Christian faith and just going back to Judaism which was so much simpler as far as they were concerned.

Now very few of us in this room experience the fear of death like that, do we? And yet the devil does use the fear of death to get us to do things we shouldn't be doing.

It's just a bit more subtle, isn't it? He makes us think, he tempts us to believe that actually we need to live for now. That actually all there is is now.

So why hold on to our money and not invest in kingdom work? Well it's because the devil is tempting us to think that actually this life is all there is. Why are we tempted not to stand for Christ now in our schools or in our workplaces?

It's because we're tempted to think our reputation now, our friendships now are the most important thing. But actually that's the fear of death, the fear that there is nothing beyond this life.

[13:31] So the devil uses it to enslave us. Well why give in to sexual temptation or seeking pleasure through material gain or just going travelling for the buzz it gives us?

It's because we think that this life now is all there is. That's just the other side of the coin from the fear of death, isn't it? The fear there's nothing beyond life now. So the devil uses these things to enslave us.

So what do we need? When people are enslaved, what do they need? Those people held hostage in the cafe Lint last Monday in Sydney, what do they need?

They need someone to come in to disarm the terrorists holding them captive and to lead them out into liberty again. And that's exactly what Jesus does. Look at verses 14 to 16 describe.

Verse 14 In his death Jesus defeats the devil. Verse 14 He himself likewise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

[14 : 36] Through Jesus' death and resurrection Satan is defeated. He no longer has the power of death over us. And Jesus delivers us from slavery.

Delivers us from the disarms of the devil. Takes away that fear of death through his resurrection. We cannot be enslaved to that fear anymore. And then he leads us to safety. Verse 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps but he helps literally takes hold of to help the offspring of Abraham. For that word is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament in Isaiah 41. It's for God taking hold of his people who are in exile around the nations taking hold of them to bring them back into liberty and salvation.

And that's what Jesus does. He takes hold of us to lead us to liberty. Like a superhero sweeping in to get the damsel in distress. Defeating the baddie leading her out taking hold of her.

Superman swinging him taking hold of her to fly her away to safety. It's what Jesus does as our champion come to liberate us. He leads us to safety. And who are these offspring of Abraham?

[15 : 48] That's not the Israelites not those genetically descended from Abraham. But it's those who share the same faith as Abraham. That's what Paul tells us in Galatians 3 verse 7.

It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. If we trust these great promises we're the ones who know Jesus is our champion. The one who leads us to glory and who liberates us from slavery. And that's why he became a man. So he could do that. And isn't glory what everybody really wants? We don't use those words. But isn't it the ache of every human heart to get rid of the pain?

To live in a world where our teenage sons don't suffer sickle cell and end up in hospital so suddenly? To live in a world where there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain?

Isn't that the glory we all want? It will not come through politics. It will not come through our hard work as we accumulate enough money to comfort us and to soften the blows of life.

[16 : 54] It will only come through the saviour who leads us to glory. Isn't freedom what we all want? Isn't freedom what we all want? You may not have a six-year-old daughter so you may not have watched the film Frozen.

Some of us have done many times. But it's actually a great film in many ways. And yet the big song, the song that is so popular in that film, Let It Go, sings the heroine Elsa.

And it is this great line, no right, no right, no wrong, no more rules for me, I'm free. And that's what people want, they want to be free. And people think that the way to freedom is no more rules, no more responsibilities, no more right or wrong.

And yet that's not true. In fact another song in the film, Elsa then sings, I'm such a fool, I cannot be free. And it's true, the only one who liberates us is Jesus, who liberates us from the ultimate slavery, which is not the rules that help us to find him, but the sin and the devil and death which ensnare us all.

So Jesus is the champion, becomes a man to lead us and to liberate us. So that's the first picture we get of what he does. But there's another surprising picture, I think, down in verses 11 to 13.

[18 : 15] What words do we normally use to describe Jesus? We think of him as our saviour, don't we? Perhaps we think of him as our priest, our shepherd, our king, our Lord.

He is all those things. How does he speak of us? Look at the end of verse 11 there. He who sanctifies, that is Jesus, who sets us apart.

Those who are sanctified, that's us, who have been set apart for God's purposes, all have one source, God the Father, whose plan of salvation, all this is, that the Son executes, and that is why he, Jesus, is not ashamed to call them brothers.

He calls us brothers. Isn't that amazing? I give Jesus countless reasons every day to be ashamed of me. Don't you?

And yet he is not ashamed to call us brothers to his heavenly Father and to one another. Did you ever have an elder brother at school? I don't know if you did. I didn't. My brothers are so much older, they both left school by the time I got there.

[19 : 21] So actually all I got was the, ah, you're John Cashman's brother, and trouble as a result. But I can imagine it could be either really good or really terrible to have a big brother at school.

It could be really good if he's the sort of big brother who helps you out when you're stuck, who helps you understand how the different teachers work, and how you can learn well from them.

The sort of brother who will defend you if others want to bully you, and he's so big they wouldn't dare to do that. It would be great to have a big brother who, when you're confused about things, can say, don't worry, I've been there too, let me show you, let me help you.

That would be a great big brother to have, wouldn't it? On the other hand, your school life could be miserable if you had this sort of big brother who was just too cool, too trendy, to want to have a little brother lower down the school who would damage his credibility and his reputation, and who therefore was ashamed of you.

You see what sort of big brother Jesus is? He's not the latter, but the former. And that's our big brother, what does he do? He sings with us, and he stands with us.

[20 : 30] Look at verse 12, he sings with us. Paul mentioned this a few weeks ago in our series on worship. This is Jesus. He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will tell of your names, my brothers, and in the congregation I will sing your praise.

This is taken from Psalm 22, the psalm Jesus quoted on the cross. The psalm begins, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And that psalm ends in triumph.

So why does Jesus sing this psalm with us? Because that is a pattern of the Christian life. He stands with us, singing this.

Jesus is not only singing to us, he's sharing his experience with us, if you like. The first line of verse 12, I will tell your name to my brothers. What is the Lord's name?

The name in the Bible is the very character of God. God's name to God. It's as if Jesus is coming alongside us saying, I know you don't feel like singing this morning.

[21 : 36] I know you feel like God doesn't care. I know there is sadness in your life, your dreams are broken, there are things you don't even want to share with people around you. You wonder if God still hears and answers prayers.

Let me tell you our Father's name. Let me share with you my experience. I hung on a cross forsaken by the Father bearing your sins but my Father, our Father raised me to life again because that is what he is like.

He is God who is faithful and just and loves his children and he loves you too. Just as he raised me up through suffering, he is merciful and full of steadfast love and will raise you up as well.

Come, sing with me as I sing his praises. And Jesus' perfect praise covers over and encourages our faltering, stumbling praise.

He's a brother who sings with us even when we do not feel like singing. He shares his experience. Not only does he sing with us, he stands with us. Look at verse 13.

[22 : 48] And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, behold I, the children God has given me. These are words quoted from Isaiah chapter 8. In the context there was a time of darkness for the people of Judah.

The king was useless. Jerusalem was surrounded by the Syrian army and the Israelite army come to attack Jerusalem to get rid of the king and put a new king in place.

And God had promised that that attack would not be successful. But most people ignored God's promise. They trusted in human schemes to try and help them instead. They feared the invasion, trusted in human schemes, they looked for comfort in bogus spirituality, consulting necromancers and stuff like this.

But in the midst of that darkness, there was this small band of faithful people, Isaiah and his family and those who believed Isaiah's message. And they clung to God's word, they said, I will trust in him.

Behold, says Isaiah, I and the children God has given me. And we live in similar times, don't we? Days when people will go for any kind of bogus spirituality. Look at the horoscopes, look at the spiritual churches around.

[24 : 00] Or many will just rely on human schemes, look for the government to get to start the economy, look to the NHS to solve all our health issues, and not go to the living God. It can be easy to feel that we're in a very small minority as those who believe God's promises, can't it?

It can be easy to think, is it really worth it? Yet in that, as we struggle to trust the living God, Jesus stands with us, says, look, I trusted him. Behold, Heavenly Father, I and the children you have given me, we will trust you.

He stands with us, he identifies with us as a small minority who still trust in the living God. He is a brother who identifies with us, singing with us in our suffering, standing with us as a faithful few.

This is our Saviour. This is why he took on human flesh, so he can be the champion who rescues us, and the brother who stands with us, and thirdly, and quite briefly, the priest who represents us. Look at verse 17. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a faithful and merciful high priest in the service of God.

[25 : 20] He was made like us in every respect, in every respect, born of a mother. He had to grow and learn.

He had to feed his mother's breast. He had to learn to walk. He had to learn to talk. He had to learn to make tables. The second person of the Trinity made tables for a living. He got tired.

He got cold. He got hungry. He got ill, I presume. Why? So that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.

What does a high priest do? He represents people to God, doesn't he? That was the job of the high priest in the Old Testament. He does it in two particular ways we see here in verses 17 and 18.

Firstly, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Then verse 18, because he himself has suffered when tempted, he's able to help those who have been tempted. So the high priest first, he makes propitiation.

[26 : 23] What does that mean? Well, propitiation is the sacrifice that turns away God's just anger at our sin. It doesn't just cover over our sin, but turns the whole anger away.

So that God will not be angry at your sin or my sin again, because it has already been punished.

That punishment has been taken by the Lord Jesus. This is precisely why he had to become a man, because it is human sin that incurs God's wrath.

But it's also why he had to be divine, he had to be the eternal son of God, because he had to be big enough, infinite, eternal, to pay for all our sin.

But that is what he's done. Nothing less than one who was fully God and fully man could make propitiation for our sin. But Jesus was fully God, but also fully man, fully flesh and blood, so that he could make propitiation, take that sin away from us, take God's just punishment for our sin away from us.

What's the result now? It means that you and I, as we trust in Jesus, are perfectly forgiven, perfectly loved, perfectly adopted as children in God's family.

[27 : 46] Our sin will not be punished again, because it has been punished in Jesus on the cross. So we are safe. Where do you think your sins are this morning?

We all come here aware of our sin, don't we? Yet we confess it and it is done as we have heard gloriously in those words from 1 John earlier. Jesus has offered the perfect sacrifice to pay for them.

Do you think you've done something that is unforgivable? What could you possibly have done that is so big that the eternal Son of God could not have paid for it? He has made propitiation for us.

As our high priest, he helps us in temptation. Look at verse 18. Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he's able to help those who are being tempted. It's worth thinking about, isn't it? Part of temptation is always the false hope of release from suffering, isn't there? it? Why do we get angry? Because we think we'll feel better when we've just let it all go.

[28 : 55] Let's go back to the frozen thief for a moment. Why do we give in to those temptations? We think we'll be happy. Why do we go to the temptation of just spending money on ourselves, buying something ridiculous in the sales?

It's sort of comfort shopping, isn't it? It'll make me feel better. Jesus resisted temptation, he suffered temptation. Temptation is like a kind of bungee rope, isn't it?

The harder you run from it, the more it will pull you back. Yet Jesus resisted to the uttermost, even going to the point of death on a cross. He knows what it is to suffer when tempted, and so he's able to help us in that temptation.

Isn't that amazing? He doesn't sit there and go, you know what, I've done it, you should do the same. Follow my example. Get over your problems. Rather, he sympathises, he helps us.

Years ago, I used to go climbing with a friend of mine, Billy, and I don't have a great head for heights, and I'm a bit of a muppet when it comes to climbing, to be honest. I could never see the hand holds or the footholds.

[29 : 58] Billy was an excellent natural climber, but he was incredibly patient. He'd show me the way up, he'd point out where the footholds were, he'd point out where the hand holds are. As he was waiting on the top with the rope pulling me up, he wouldn't kind of go, come on, can she get a

move on, I'm getting cold up here.

He'd encourage me. And when, on one particular occasion in the Lake District, I was just tired and exhausted, went for a hand hold and missed and slipped and fell, he still had the rope. And so he pulled me up.

He didn't lecture me. He's pulled me up, made sure I was safe, gave me a drink. That's the kind of high priest Jesus is. He knows our weaknesses.

He knows what it is to be tired and yet to remain patient. He knows what it is to be under pressure from work. After all, his work was to be the saviour of the world. None of us do that as a day job, do we?

And yet he doesn't say, get on with it. He is faithful to help us. So when we're tempted, we can lean on him. We can lean on him because he is merciful and understands.

[31 : 10] So what do we celebrate at Christmas? Why is Christmas good? It's because the Son of God took on our flesh to be our champion, to liberate us, to lead us to glory, to be our brother who stands with us, not ashamed of us, sings with us in our suffering.

stands with us as a minority, encouraging us to be faithful to our heavenly father and to be our high priest, to make propitiation for us, to help us when tempted.

As Athanasius put it back in the fourth century, Christ became what we are, that he might make us what he is. That is the good news of Christmas. The Son of God took on flesh to be our complete saviour.

So let us lean on him throughout our lives, knowing that one day we will become what he is, in the glory he is leading us to. Let's pray.