

THE SON SPEAKS TO OUR DIFFICULTIES

Hebrews 2:9-18

Last week we talked about how life in a fallen, sin cursed world can be extremely difficult. And it's not if, but when you're going through one of those difficult times, perhaps there's nothing more comforting than knowing that there is someone who can relate to what you're going through. Someone who can meet you in your pain or suffering, sympathize with you and extend relief saying, *"I know exactly how you feel and I'm here for you."* That's what we want to look at today.

In our Christmas series this year, we've been in Hebrews studying to how **God has spoken to us in the person and work of the incarnated Son, Jesus Christ**, and today we'll see how **the Son can speak to our difficulties** in this fallen world: He can sympathize with us and give actual aid. The **incarnation** (God becoming man; taking on flesh) is a major Christian doctrine that affects our knowledge of God, our salvation, our daily living, our pressing needs, and our future.¹ Today, the emphasis is on how the God-Man ministers to our pain and suffering, trial and hardship.

Remember that the Jewish Christians (Hebrews) this letter is written too were going through a difficult time. Some of their Jewish brethren who did not believe in Christ, were trying to get the Jewish Christians to revert back to Judaism (Law of Moses, temple, priesthood, etc.) and using threats and persecution to do it. They were being under tremendous social pressure and heavy religious persuasions. They were ostracized and mistreated if they didn't revert. So Hebrews is a **word of exhortation to stand firm in faith** because **Christ is superior** to Judaism. In fact, Hebrews demonstrates that Judaism with the priesthood and sacrifices et cetera were all designed by God to point them to Jesus Christ who would one day come and fulfill it all. Judaism was meant to be like an elementary tutor that pointed them to maturity in Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). Christ is also described as the substance and Judaism is the shadow that He cast. We don't love the shadow, but the Person who casts it. To revert or attempt to pacify their antagonists with one foot in Christianity and one foot in Judaism, would be to go back to something inferior and neglect God's will for them. They would miss out on Christ's ministering to them in that trial.

As we come to our text this morning, let me ask you, *"What difficult or undesirable circumstance are you going through? And is Christ enough for you in that?"* Let's see what the writer of Hebrews has to say. Remember that the writer of Hebrews wants us to understand that **God is speaking directly to us through His Word**. None of the many Scriptural references cite a human author and there is no formal greeting telling us who wrote the letter. We don't know who wrote it because that was the author's intention. He wants us to sense that God is speaking to us today: *"Today, if you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts. Today listen to His voice."*

We'll be in **verses 14-18** today, but let's get more context by starting in **verse 9**: *"But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste*

death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through suffering. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For clearly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham."

Right off the bat in **verse 14** we see a great **reference to the incarnation** – the reality that God took on flesh. Jesus is the eternal God who pre-existed His birth but left the glory of heaven to become a man, being conceived of the Holy Spirit in the virgin, Mary. The incarnation reference is simply, *"He **shared** in flesh and blood... He **partook** of the same."* **Shared** is that Greek word **koinonia** that we've become familiar with in Acts. It means to have in common and reminds us of a close relationship or relatability; going through something together, like husband and wife share life together. **Partook** indicates something that was previously unnatural to Christ – a literal, physical human body made of muscle and bones and nerves and blood. He didn't have that in eternity past, but at a moment in time – at just the right time Galatians 4:4 says – **He partook of flesh and blood to share in a common human experience with us.**

This is something that the Jews would have really struggled with. They longed for the heavenly, cloud riding, Rome-conquering Messiah of Daniel 7, not the earthly, suffering Messiah of Isaiah 53. They wrestled with the question, *"How could the anointed Messiah of God be a man? And then die? And especially on a cross? And why?"* God said in Deuteronomy 21:23 that to die on a "tree" was a sign of being cursed. But that's the whole point: Jesus came and died as a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). The purpose of the Christmas was Easter. There is no Easter without Christmas. No man bring born again or resurrected or future restoration to our function on the earth (theocratic administrator as we talked about last week). His mission was to come and die to be Savior before He comes as King. So the Hebrews author is explaining that even descendants of Abraham (Jews) **needed a perfect, God-Man Savior**. They also needed to know this stuff was taught & predicted throughout the Old Testament. That the Old Covenant was temporary.

But Messiah's tangible human life tells us He knows what it's like to walk the face of this planet in a physical body like yours and mine. He's been in our shoes. He has experienced hunger, thirst, loneliness, fatigue, anger, love and loss of loves ones. I'm sure He knew blisters, callouses, sunburns, headaches, backaches and lack of sleep just like we do. And you know, that's unique. Our God is the only God of any religion who can truly relate to what we go through in this world like that because historically He entered into our world as one of us. And there are many OT predictions about that and NT eyewitnesses to testify they were fulfilled.

Look **the first purpose statement** today in **verses 14-15**. It's actually a dual-purpose statement but they are tied together and give us our fifth reason for the incarnation. *that through death He might render Satan powerless **and** might free us from the fear of death.*

5th Reason for the Incarnation:
To render Satan powerless and free us from fear of death.
(2:14; 1 John 3:8)

When it says that Satan had power of death, thanks to comic strips and movies we're tempted to think of Satan as a red devil with a pitchfork ruling in hell on a fiery throne. Or maybe the Greek mythological god of Hades, some god of the dead and king of the underworld. Or kind of like a grim reaper who knocks on doors, as if he is actually in charge of death. But that's very unbiblical theology. Jesus holds the power of death and Hades (the grave) (Rev. 1:18). And God is in charge of all of our days from start to finish before there is even one of them (Ps. 129:16). We fear God, not Satan, and are comforted by God's sovereignty over our hour of death.

One of the other misleading theological concepts about Satan's power is the concept where Satan is portrayed as demanding a blood payment for the release of sinners. Renditions have been drawn picturing Jesus coming up to Satan and saying something like, "*What do I have to do to free sinners?*" That's unbiblical. It wasn't Satan that had to be satisfied, but God's own holiness that demanded by law the shedding of innocent blood for forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). It was God's own holiness that man sinned against. All Satan did through his scheming was take advantage of that law, deceiving man into sin. **Satan knew that God required death because of sin** (physical, spiritual and eternal death) and through sin, uses death as a weapon against man and usurped man's position as God's theocratic administrator in the world, becoming very influential over man.

Remember Satan hates us with a passion. He even hates those who worship him. He's a tyrant. As an angel, he was created to serve man but, in his pride, decided he would have man serve him (Is. 14:12-16; Ezek. 28:11-19; Heb. 1:14). He wants us to be ignorant of Christ until we die so that we will spend life and eternity separated from God. He wants nothing but our suffering and destruction. However, Christ came and suffered and died in our place so we could be kept from eternal suffering and destruction in hell and instead, be restored to God. I John 3:8 says, "*The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*" Through faith in Christ we can be born again spiritually by the Holy Spirit, our eternity with God secured, and though Satan can still pester us in this world, we're free from the dominion of darkness. Satan has been judged and when Christ comes again, Satan will be crushed under our feet (Rom. 16:20).

However, **Satan still uses the fear of death to control people, especially those without the hope of eternal life in Christ.** He's using the fear of death to control and manipulate the masses with covid. Fear has paralyzed the world. But as believers in a coronavirus world, Christians should be living in faith, not paralyzed by fear, showing people the hope of eternal life in Christ. We no longer live in fear of death because our Savior lives! Nothing, not even death, not even

Satan, can stop Jesus. In fact, to depart and be with Christ is much better, Paul said! To die is gain (Phil. 1:21). To be absent from the body is to be home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1-6). Death is not the end but a gateway into God's presence.

In the context of Hebrews, Satan is **using the fear of death it to control people who aren't grounded in Christ's superior and sufficient sacrifice. He keeps people busy with religious rituals rather than a genuine, relationship with Christ that rests in the salvation Christ has provided.** That's what the false teaching Judaizers want – the Christians to forget Christ's sufficiency to pay for sin and to return to living under their system and the endless hamster wheel of religious works trying to measure up and appease God with religious rituals. But like the author says in **9:14**, *“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”* When you understand the cross was enough, and that you can't be good enough to enter heaven no matter how hard you try, then you get it, and you can start to serve God properly. If we don't understand Christ's sacrifice was enough, everything we do will have a motive of trying to measure up or be good enough. And that is a rejection of the cross (Gal. 3:1) and to live by works, which God won't accept. Salvation is by grace, through faith, in Christ.

Christ alone can liberate us from the penalty and power of sin in our lives and give us the hope of glory. Only He could pave the way. This is what it means when He says Jesus is the **author** of our salvation in **verse 10**. That word could be rendered **pioneer**, or **trail blazer**.

Christ Identity Truth #1 Christ is our Trail Blazer.

Trail blazers are like heroic captains who do the hard work, cutting the thick brush and clearing a path for others to follow them. They are out front and leading by example, not shouting orders from the back. Jesus blazed a trail for us to enter into glory. He went from glory to earth to glory again so that we could be restored to glory. Remember the argument in the context too: this is something He did not for angels, but for man (2:16). Fallen angels cannot be redeemed and we will one day be a part of judging those fallen angels with Christ when the kingdom comes (1 Cor. 6:3; Rev. 20).

The **second purpose statement** for the incarnation is in **verse 17**. *“He had to be made like His brethren (us) in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”*

6th Reason for the Incarnation To become a sympathetic high priest. (2:16-18; 4:14-16)

The Jewish audience would have been very familiar with the high priestly office but it's a little abstract for us. There was a number of priests who ministered daily but there was **only one high**

priest who was something like the boss priest and it was his responsibility to, once per year only (on the day of atonement), enter behind the veil into the Holy of Holies, where God's presence dwelt, and sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice on the mercy seat that the sins of the people might be atoned for (or covered) for another year. Christ is the ultimate picture of that sacrifice. That word **propitiation** – *propitiation for the sins of the people* – is a word that **means satisfaction of God's wrath**. When we trust in Christ as Savior, God's wrath is satisfied against us. So Christ is like **the Sacrifice and the Sacrificer** that fulfilled Judaism's imagery. ⁱⁱ He was able to offer Himself once-for-all and then sit down (something no priest ever did) at the right hand of God, signifying sins were paid for forever for all who believe and He forever intercedes as our High Priest on our behalf. So understanding all that OT stuff helps us understand Christ better.

But let's ask, "*Why is a sacrifice necessary?*" Why couldn't God just forgive us without coming and dying? Because **God's holiness** cannot look upon sin with any approval. His righteousness requires that the violated law be satisfied. Psalm 5:4 says, "*For you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; the evil cannot dwell with You.*" If that's true, we're all in trouble. We're all sinners who do and think wicked things. God is perfect and perfect righteousness is required to dwell with God. So only God could satisfy the demands of God, so only the perfect God-Man could provide the perfect sacrifice needed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Allow a fender bender to provide a simple, understandable illustration. Let's pretend that after church, you are backing out of the parking lot to go home and I back into your car, putting a huge dent in it. Now, there is a problem with two options on the table. 1) I can pay to have your car repaired. That would be right and just. Or 2) you can say, "*Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it.*" That would be grace and mercy on your part. But the fact is that even if you offer grace and mercy to me, you are still going to pay for it either in your car's value or by having it fixed yourself. The option not on the table is pretending it didn't happen. Someone has to pay.^{iv}

Well, as sinners, we crashed into the holiness of God, and there is a massive debt to be paid. So, we can either pay for our own debt by reaping the consequences of a Christless eternity in hell, getting what we deserve (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Or we can accept that God, in His mercy and grace, took on human flesh and lived a sinless life, offering Himself as the payment for our sins to satisfy His wrath against sin. **He takes your sin in exchange for His perfect righteousness** (Romans 3:22; Philippians 3:9).

To satisfy God's wrath against sin, Christ had to take on flesh and blood, and be proven perfect. That word translated **tempted** in **verse 18** is a Greek word that, throughout the New Testament is translated **tempted, tested, or tried** depending on the context. In relation to Christ's life, He knew all of that to a greater degree than we could imagine or will ever face. What that means is that **our God is not some distant, cosmic, indifferent God who can't relate. He has been in our shoes**, and remained victorious through it all and because of that He can not only save us but actually render us aid in the here and now.

Christ Identity Truth #2

Jesus is a perfect Savior and Sympathizer.

We're tempted to think that Jesus is good enough for the ticket to heaven but not good enough for what I'm going through today. But this is the way in which He was **perfected** (became perfect, v. 10): it's not saying Jesus wasn't perfect in His nature, or essence, but that **He completed His goal of being our perfect Savior, including being a perfectly relatable, sympathetic High Priest through the things He experienced.** He completed the mission. He can save us and minister to us because He's been there and done that and remained victorious.

So let's ask again, *"What is it that you're going through today that you're tempted to think is just too much for our God? What is it that He just couldn't possibly understand? What is it you're tempted to turn to for comfort, rather than Christ?"* He's been there and He has overcome. That means that in our most difficult moments in life, we don't turn from Him, but turn to Him and anchor down in faith knowing Christ is enough. Hebrews 3:1, *"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession."* Don't you like that? **Therefore**, in light of everything I've said, **consider Jesus.** Look to Jesus.

Apply It: Let the Son speak to your difficulties.

Let the Son speak to your situation. Let the Son speak to your pain. Let the Son speak to your trials. Ask yourself, *"How has God spoken to my situation in the Son? What did it look like for Jesus to go through His trials and temptations?"*

Ask it: "How does the incarnate Son speak to my difficulty?"

When our Trail Blazer was tempted, He said, *"It is written..."* He turned to the Word of God and didn't let His emotions and feelings get the best of Him. That's easy to do in trials. When our divine Trail Blazer was under trial in Gethsemane, He said, *"Not my will, but Yours be done."* He trusted the Father's will in the face of death and suffering. He blazed the trail of trusting God despite the suffering that we face. When we lose a loved one, we look to the resurrected Son and we know He's coming to reunite us with them and Him. When we lack purpose, we remind ourselves of the glorious future. There's endless ways we can look to Christ for whatever we go through.

Practice it: Consider imitating Christ by sympathizing with and aiding someone else in their difficulty.

Consider how you can model His Christlikeness to others so that they may see something different in you and be drawn to Christ themselves. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 which reminds us that God takes us through some difficulties so that we can minister to others in theirs. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."*

All of us know someone going through a rough time this year and to be honest, there's not a lot of optimism going into 2022. So let's take advantage of the times we're in and love our neighbors like Christ. Take 30 seconds to think about who God has placed in your life that you can sympathize with – the people God has placed in our lives to minister too. I'd encourage you to write their names down right now and pray about that.

ⁱ Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, (1986, 1999), 282.

ⁱⁱ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1948, 1976), 358.

ⁱⁱⁱ Steven Ger, *Hebrews: The Director's Cut*, www.sojournerministries.com, p. 112.

^{iv} Bryan Clark.