

Hebrews 2:14-18 “Why the Son Became a Man” **

Main Idea: In Hebrews 2:14-18 we discover three wonderful benefits of the incarnation. Because God the Son became a man, the following is true for us.

I. We have a liberator (14-15).

A. Christ provided freedom from the devil.

1. He did it by coming to enemy turf.
2. He did it by becoming what we are.
3. He did it by means of His death.

B. Christ provided freedom from death.

1. Fear enslaves.
2. Christ takes the fear out of death.

II. We have a high priest (16-17).

A. Christ did not come to help angels (16).

B. Christ came to help human beings (17).

1. He is merciful.
2. He is faithful.
3. He brings people to God.
4. He took away the barriers that separated man from God.
 - a. He took our sin.
 - b. He took God's wrath.

III. We have a helper (18).

A. Christ was tempted.

B. Christ can help us when we are tempted.

1. He gives us an example.
2. He understands what we feel.
3. He enables us to say no to sin.
4. He gives us grace.
5. He intercedes for us.

Make It Personal: Because the Son became a man...

1. We can experience hope today.

2. We should glorify Him always.

Suppose you received the following phone call on January 1. Just suppose the voice on the other end said, “This is the Internal Revenue Service. We’ve been reviewing your tax records for the past ten years and discovered something quite significant. You’ve been a model citizen. No late payments. No indication of fraudulent reporting on your tax returns. Consequently, you have been selected as citizen of the year. Your reward? You will not be charged any taxes this year. None. No federal tax. No state tax. No local taxes. It’s all yours to keep.”

Would that news affect the way you would approach 2008? Probably so.

Well...I don’t have the authority to give you that message, the promise of no taxes in 2008. But I do have the authority to give you even greater news. My authority is the Word of God, and the even greater news is found in Hebrews 2. The fact is, if you have Christ as your Savior you possess three benefits that are indeed *out of this world!* And this morning, we’re going to discover what those benefits are so that we might enjoy them in 2008 and beyond!

Two weeks ago we celebrated Christmas, the holiday that affirms that God sent His Son into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Many in our country know the basic facts about Christmas. But fewer know the significance of those facts, for they don’t know why the God-man was born in Bethlehem. And fewer still know the real implications of Christmas, specifically, the amazing benefits that are available to us because of the incarnation of God’s Son. That’s the gold that we’re going to mine in this message.

In Hebrews 2:14-18 we discover three wonderful benefits of the incarnation. Because God the Son became a man, the following is true for us. First of all, in the person of Jesus Christ...

I. We have a liberator (14-15).

Notice that verse 14 begins with a connective word, “Since.” The book of Hebrews is full of transition words: *therefore* (verse 1)...*for* (verse 2)...*so* (verse 11)...and *since* (in verse 14). That’s because the book of Hebrews was written to persuade people. The author (who is anonymous to us) wrote this epistle to convince people, predominantly Jewish by nationality, to follow Jesus to the end. And the reason he offered this exhortation is because those reading this letter were experiencing intense persecution for the sake of Christ, persecution they could escape if only they would go back to their old beliefs and practices.

The writer of Hebrews sounds like a brilliant attorney. To convince his readers, he uses an authority he knew his readers would respect, the Old Testament Scriptures, to show the superiority of Christ. And so we read quote after quote from the Hebrew Scriptures making it clear that all of the Old Testament points to Jesus. The ceremonies, the covenants, the laws, it all points to Jesus, like a shadow points to the person who made the shadow. The point, of course, is that if you’ve got the person, namely Christ, why would you settle for the shadow?

Verse 14 continues, “*Since the children have flesh and blood.*” Which raises the question, “What children is he talking about?” He’s talking about the children he just mentioned in the previous verse, “Here am I, and the *children* God has given me (13),” a quotation of Isaiah 8:18. In Isaiah 8, the “I” referred to Isaiah, and “the children” referred to the children God gave Isaiah which served as “signs” in his ministry. In Hebrews 2, however, the writer indicates that the “I” ultimately refers to Jesus (see verse 11), God’s Son who entered the world. And the “children,” verse 13 indicates, are individuals that God has given to His Son, individuals that Jesus calls “brothers” according to verse 11.

That takes us back to our last study. In verses 10-13 we learned that through the person of Jesus sons of Adam can become sons of God. Simply put, because God’s Son became a man, we who were once cut off from God can now belong to God’s family. How does that happen? Verse 10 indicates that the Son brings God’s sons to glory. How did He do it? Verse 10 says He did it *through suffering*. Verse 11 indicates that the Son is “the one who makes men holy.” And those He has made holy He calls His brothers.

But how can that be? How can people who once were *not holy* become holy, and how can those who were once alienated from God be reconciled to God to the point that God calls them His “children” and His Son calls them His “brothers”? The answer is because the One who came to earth is *a liberator*.

To liberate is, by definition, “to set free what was in bondage.” That’s what God’s Son did. He liberated Adam’s helpless children. And what precisely did the Son do to liberate Adam’s helpless children? Verses 14-15 tell us...

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

When Christ came to earth He came to secure freedom, namely to liberate us from two cruel oppressors, the first mentioned in verse 14 and the other in verse 15.

A. Christ provided freedom from the devil. Who is the devil? Verse 14 identifies him as “the one who holds the power of death.” The devil is a killer. That’s what Jesus called him in John 8:44, saying, “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.” The devil, or “Satan” as he is also identified (Matt. 4:10), is a killer, a lying killer. He made a promise to Eve in the garden, but he can’t be trusted. Consequently, his promise (“Eat and you will be like God”) and Adam and Eve’s sinful choice to act on that promise brought bondage and death to the world.

The apostle John made the same point in 1 John 3:8, “He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

John says that the Son appeared to destroy the devil’s work. The question is, *how*? How did the Son defeat the evil one and provide freedom for all who would believe in Him? Hebrews 2:14 tells us. Take a closer look at verse 14 and notice three things about Christ’s work to free us from the devil.

1. *He did it by coming to enemy turf.* To earth, that is, to the realm under the dominion of “the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:22 KJV).” The Son of God invaded enemy territory.

What war tactic did the Son utilize in this invasion? Did He mobilize all the forces of heaven in His counter-attack? No. Did He enter the world with His sword swinging? No. To the contrary, He went undercover on this rescue mission. Specifically...

2. *He did it by becoming what we are.* Verse 14 states that He became (literally) “blood and flesh.” And why would He do that? Because blood and flesh is what we are. The Son’s tactic to rescue humans necessitated that He Himself become a human and “share in” (Greek *meteschen* ‘to partake of’) our “humanity” (that’s the term the NIV uses although the Greek text simply says “He did take part of the same”).

That was unthinkable to Roman ears in the first century. To the Greek-thinking, polytheistic Romans, the flesh was bad and only the spirit was good. But God’s Son took on human flesh and became what we are, doing so to provide freedom from the devil.

3. *He did it by means of His death.* “He shared in their humanity *so that* [note the purpose clause] by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.” Ponder that carefully. The Son came to die *as a man for man*. And by His death He destroyed the devil. [\[1\]](#)

You say, “It sure doesn’t look like He did a very good job, then. By the looks of things in the world, the devil doesn’t look destroyed to me.” But wait. The verb “destroy” in verse 14 doesn’t mean to annihilate. In fact, 1 Peter 5:8 actually states that the devil is like a roaring lion who is seeking to devour God’s people. The word “destroy” means “render inoperative, make of none effect.” As Wiersbe puts it, “Satan is not destroyed, but he is disarmed.” [\[2\]](#)

And his fate is sealed and settled. Revelation 20:10 reveals what will happen to the killer, “And the devil, who

deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

But there’s another foe our Liberator came to earth to defeat. First, the devil...

B. Christ provided freedom from death. Verse 15 begins with the word “and” which indicates there’s another reason why the Son shared our humanity and died. Notice what it is, “...and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

Notice two things from this...

1. Fear enslaves. Specifically, the fear of death is what enslaved humanity. “Eat and you’ll be like God,” said Satan. But he was lying. “Eat and you will surely die,” said God. And He meant it.

From the moment we’re born, we’re heading down a winding path that always leads to the same destination. It matters not if you are born in a palace or a shack. It matters not if your path starts in Boston or Beijing . The path ends at the same place. To borrow from a phrase we’ll see later in Hebrews (9:27), “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment (KJV).”

That’s why there’s fear in death. The judgment is coming. Granted, there is fear of the unknown, for we we’ve never seen what’s beyond the grave. But it’s what we do know that evokes the greatest fear, for we do know what’s coming beyond the grave, because God told us. We have an appointment. We will die, and then face the judgment.

“I’m not afraid,” you say. “I’ve lived a pretty good life. I think I’ll fare alright at the judgment.” You might be interested in knowing that God doesn’t grade on a curve. His standard is perfection (Matt. 5:48). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 3:23). So if you’re perfect, if you’ve never transgressed God’s law, then you have nothing to fear, for God is just. But...if you have sinned, then it matters not how many good deeds you have done, your sin must be punished, for God is just.

Beloved, here’s the good news, the greatest of news...

2. Christ takes the fear out of death. He came to earth “to free those who were held in slavery by their fear of death.” And how did He do it? The Son, says Hebrews 2, defeated death *by dying*.

To borrow from S. W. Gandy...

*He hell in hell laid low,
Made sin, He sin ‘o’erthrew,
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death, by dying, slew.[\[3\]](#)*

Yes, by means of His perfect life, His substitutionary death, and His triumphant defeat of death three days later, Christ took the fear out of death. For everyone? No. He took the fear out of death for those who know Him as Savior and Lord.

Meditate on that statement. Christ takes the fear out of death. Do you believe that...really? Does it show? There ought to be a difference in the way we who are Christians face and respond to death and the way those who don’t know Christ do. We know that death is not the end. We know that beyond the grave is life more amazing than anything we’ve ever tasted.

Yet sadly, some who profess Christ seem still to live in the fear of death. What can be said to such folks? I’ll borrow from history to answer that question with three quotes.

Martin Luther had this to say, “He who fears death or is not willing to die is not sufficiently Christian. As yet such people lack faith in the resurrection, and love this life more than the life to come.”^[4]

John Calvin echoed the same thought, “Although we must still meet death, let us nonetheless be calm and serene in living and dying, when we have Christ going before us. If anyone cannot set his mind at rest by disregarding death, that man should know that he has not yet gone far enough in the faith of Christ.”^[5]

John Chrysostom, a pastor in the fourth century, noticed that in his day some who professed to believe in Christ and His resurrection were contradicting that belief by the way they behaved at funerals. He said, “When I behold the wailings in public places, the groanings over those who have departed this life, the howlings and all the other unseemly behaviour, I am ashamed before the heathen and Jews and heretics who see it, and indeed before all who for this reason laugh us to scorn.” In other words, if we really believe that death isn’t the end it should affect the way we grieve. Chrysostom added, “Those who are really worthy of being lamented are the ones who are still in fear and trembling at the prospect of death and have no faith at all in the resurrection.” In other words, if you *don’t* believe in Christ and in the resurrection to come, then you ought *not* go back to the church after the funeral and eat potato salad, but indeed you *ought* to mourn. Those without Christ are the ones who ought to go to pieces in the face of death, yet for those in Christ death becomes an occasion to exhibit peace, His peace. With that in mind Chrysostom concludes, “May God grant that you all depart this life unwailed!”^[6]

What about you, my friend? Has Christ removed the fear of death from your life? Are you living like it? Here’s an assignment, a discussion question for the dinner table today. What practical difference should knowing this truth make in our lives, this truth that Christ is our Liberator who has secured for us freedom over the devil and death?

But there’s more good news. Not only do we have a Liberator, but also...

II. We have a high priest (16-17).

The good news continues in verse 16, “For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants.” The writer has been talking about angels a lot in chapters one and two, apparently because his readers held to some inflated notions about angels. In 1:14 he reminded them that angels are servants, “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.” And here the writer makes it clear that...

A. Christ did not come to help angels (16). Verse 16 is actually difficult to translate because the verb (*epilambano*) can be taken in different ways depending on the context. The NIV translates it “help.” The KJV renders it “took” as in, “He *took* not on him the nature of angels, but he *took* on him the seed of Abraham.” In either case, however, the ultimate sense is the same.

The Son of God didn’t *take* upon Himself the nature of an angel, but stooped lower and became a man. And why? Because God didn’t purpose to *help* fallen angels. He did purpose to *help* fallen human beings.

And that’s why God became a man. But not just any ‘man’ in general, for verse 16 states He *took upon* Himself the nature of Abraham’s seed (as the KJV puts it), in order to *help* Abraham’s descendants (as the NIV renders it). Warren Wiersbe reminds us, “He became a Jew, a part of the ‘seed of Abraham’. The Jews were a despised and hated race, and yet our Lord became a Jew.”^[7]

No, Christ did not come to help angels. Instead...

B. Christ came to help human beings (17). “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

Here’s the first mention of Christ’s high priesthood in the book of Hebrews, and it won’t be the last. What a hope-giving reality! In the person of Jesus Christ we have a high priest! Here we gain four insights concerning our high

priest.

1. *He is merciful.* If the recent sex scandals involving priests in the Roman Catholic church reveal anything, it's this. Human priests can be selfish, and it's certainly not restricted to the Catholic faith. Men of the cloth can abuse their positions of spiritual authority to gratify the wicked cravings of their depraved hearts. Remember Annas and Caiaphas, those wicked high priests of Israel? They condemned Jesus in order to maintain their powerful positions.

Human priests can let you down. But not Christ! He is a *merciful* high priest who always thinks of the good of those under His care. Related to that is a second insight...

2. *He is faithful.* You can depend on Him. He's reliable. He's never out to lunch. He keeps His promises. He's true to His Word. He's true to His people and holds them in His hands (John 10:28-29).

3. *He brings people to God.* Verse 17 begins, "For this reason he *had to be* made like his brothers in every way." "It *behoved* him to be made like his brethren," says the KJV.

Throughout history some have said that God really didn't become a man. He just *looked* like He was a man (that's what docetism taught, for instance, towards the end of the first century). The docetics said that if Christ suffered he was not divine, and if He was God he could not suffer.^[8] In the second century, a group known as the Gnostics took this thinking a step further. The Gnostics viewed Jesus as "an alien messenger from outside the present evil world" and said that "this alien Jesus came to awaken Gnostics to their destiny outside the realm of creation."^[9]

Even in our day there are all kinds of false notions about the person of Christ. Ask a Mormon if he believes in Jesus Christ and he'll affirm he does, but according to Mormon beliefs Jesus is the brother of Lucifer and is simply one god in a pantheon of gods, for Mormon theology says there are millions of gods. Islam teaches that Jesus was a messenger of God, not the Son of God. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was merely a created being, that He was not resurrected bodily but only as a spirit being, and that in 1914 He returned invisibly to earth.^[10]

You say, "I don't understand why all this matters. As long as a person believes in Jesus, that's all that matters. What's the big deal?" Here's the big deal. In order to accomplish what Jesus Christ accomplished He had to be the person the Bible says He was and is. Hebrews 2:17 says He *had to be made like his brothers in every way*, which makes it clear that Christ was fully man. And as we saw back in 1:3, *the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being*, making it clear that Christ was fully God. Fully man *and* fully God.

And here's why it matters. Verse 17 says He had to be made like his brothers...*in order that* [here comes the reason why the identity of Christ is so critical] "he might become a merciful and faithful high priest *in service to God*." There's the reason. The Son became a man so that as a man He might take the mantle of a high priest and perform a service to God.

That's what priests do. A priest is a go-between. A priest brings people to God. A priest does a work as prescribed by God for the benefit of human beings. That's what Christ did. And what specific work did He accomplish as a high priest? The end of verse 17 tells us, "And [here's what Christ accomplished as a high priest] that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." Simply put...

4. *He took away the barriers that separated man from God.* The Greek word is *hilaskomai*. The NIV translates it as "make atonement for the sins," with an alternate reading in the footnote, "and that he might turn aside God's wrath, taking away" the sins of the people. The word actually contains two thoughts, and Christ accomplished both.

a. He took our sin. In so doing...

b. He took God's wrath. That is, while on the cross Christ took upon Himself the sins you committed and I committed and the sins committed by a sea of humanity, and with those sins upon Himself He then took the wrath of God which must be demonstrated as a result of those sins.

The NKJV says that He made “propitiation for the sins of the people.” That’s a good word, *propitiation*. The term “propitiation” is related to the place in the Jewish temple called “the mercy seat” (see 9:5). On the Day of Atonement once a year the high priest would enter the Holy Place and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal upon the mercy seat which sat on the ark of the covenant. On the basis of that sacrifice God would withhold His wrath and extend mercy to His people, pardoning their sin.

That’s what Jesus accomplished. His cross became the final *mercy seat*. He had to become a man so that as the final priest, the High Priest, He might offer the final sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice would not be a lamb (for other priests had offered thousands of lambs). No, He would offer Himself. He would offer His perfect life to God on the altar of His cross, and in so doing, while bearing the sins of His people He would take the wrath of God in their place.

Do you know what’s tragic? What’s tragic is that there are millions, even billions of people in the world who are ignoring this great high priest. Some are trying to reach God through other priests. Others naively ignore the fact that they even need a priest. Oh beloved, don’t be in their number! There is a high priest and His name is Jesus. Believe in Him. Come to Him. Bring your sin to Him. Affirm that the sacrifice He offered two thousand years ago is sufficient to remove your sin and bring you right into the family of God!

But there’s more! In the person of Christ, we have a liberator and a high priest and...

III. We have a helper (18).

Verse 18 “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” We’re told two things about Christ here...

A. Christ was tempted. In fact, He *suffered* when He was tempted. Some say that temptation was no big deal for Jesus Christ. “After all, He’s God!” they say. But His temptation was real, so much so that He *suffered* as He faced it.

And notice the implication. Because Christ was tempted...

B. Christ can help us when we are tempted. The verb “help” is the Greek term *boesthai*, a compound word comprised of the words “cry” (*boe*) and “run” (*theo*). Gromacki explains, “The descriptive analogy, thus, is to run to the assistance of a person who is crying out for help. Christ did just that.”[\[11\]](#)

Allow me to mention five ways that Christ helps us when we’re tempted.

1. *He gives us an example.* Jesus showed us how to respond to temptation. Remember when He was into the desert? Matthew 4:1 says the Spirit led Him there “to be tempted by the devil.” How did Jesus respond to temptation? He quoted Scripture (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). He resisted the evil one. He denied Himself with an absolute resolve to please His Heavenly Father. In so doing, He helped us by giving us an example.

2. *He understands what we feel.* Verse 17 makes it clear that as the God-man, Jesus Christ was “made like his brothers in every way.” Verse 18 shows the significance of verse 17. We have a Savior who understands. To borrow the modern vernacular, He’s been there, done that.

We have a Savior who knows what it’s like to be a helpless infant, an energetic toddler, a forgotten child, even a maturing adolescent. And as an adult He experienced the frustrating realities of prejudice (being hated simply because of His ethnicity), of being misunderstood, misrepresented, ultimately of being hated, hunted down, and killed. He knows from experience what it’s like to be hungry, thirsty, and weary. He’s felt the challenge of trying to pray when the body is tired, of wanting some privacy but not getting it because of people in need, of being forsaken in a crowd. Yes, He’s truly *been there, done that*.

And when it comes to physical suffering He’s felt that too. For us, it might be migraines, joint pain, and high

blood pressure. But for Him, it was a beard pulled out from its roots, a back torn to shreds, wrists nailed to a cross, blood loss, suffocation... And of course, He felt what we will *never* feel, the fury of divine wrath being poured out in payment for divine lawbreaking, not His law-breaking, for sure, but ours.

Someone might say, “But the fact that Jesus never sinned means He doesn’t understand how bad temptation can become.” That’s not true. It’s the other way around. We’re the ones who don’t know how bad temptation can become because we give in before it reaches its greatest intensity which He didn’t. Westcott explains, “Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of his sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain.”^[12]

To illustrate, think of two men trying to lift a heavy object. Who better understands how heavy the object is, the man who tries to lift but can’t budge the object, or the man who heaves it over his head, holds it there for the count, and then returns it to the ground?

Are you hurting today? He understands. Here are some other ways He helps us...

3. *He enables us to say no to sin.* How? As we’ll see in chapter four...

4. *He gives us grace.* And...

5. *He intercedes for us.* Hebrews 4:14-16 states, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

I can’t tell you that you don’t need to pay your taxes this year. I lack the authority to say that. But I can give you even better news, infinitely better news that can radically affect the way we live this year. We have a *Liberator*. We have a *High Priest*. And we have a *Helper*.

Make It Personal: Because the Son became a man...

1. *We can experience hope today.* Real hope, eternal hope. The Son of God identified with us, so much so that He left heaven, came to earth, and became what we are so that we might become what God intended us to be. The question is, are we willing to identify with Him? In light of who He is and what He did for us...

2. *We should glorify Him always.* He is worthy.

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] P. Hughes, p. 112. Hughes reminds us, “The power of death is held by the devil only in a secondary and not in an ultimate sense. Death is indeed the dark reality of his tyranny. But God is still supreme in his sovereignty.”

^[2] Wiersbe, p. 284.

^[3] S. W. Gandy, in F. F. Bruce, p. 50.

^[4] Quote taken from Hughes, p. 114.

^[5] Quote taken from Hughes, p. 114.

[\[6\]](#) Quotes taken from Hughes, pp. 114-5.

[\[7\]](#) Wiersbe, p. 284.

[\[8\]](#) Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 326.

[\[9\]](#) Ibid.

[\[10\]](#) See Ron Carlson & Ed Decker, *Fast Facts on False Teachings*, p. 122.

[\[11\]](#) Gromacki, p. 52.

[\[12\]](#) Westcott, taken from P. Hughes, p. 124.