

HEBREWS 2:14-18

PASTOR DAVID SAYLOR

# JESUS AND THE FEAR OF DEATH



## Hebrews 2:14-18

[Prayer]

As we complete the exposition of the first two chapters, let me very quickly remind you of the flow.

Last week I told you that the book of Hebrews is one extended, God-given help not to neglect our great salvation. Hebrews is a long meditation on the magnificence of Jesus Christ and greatness of our salvation.

**Chapter 1** – the Greatness of the Son – Lord, Jesus Christ.

**Chapter 2** – the Greatness of the Salvation He won.

Last week (vv. 10-13) - WHY it was fitting for God to use the suffering of Christ as the means to bring his children salvation and glory.

This week – HOW Christ's death does it, and how it frees us from the power and the fear of death.

Today's passage is a wonderful encouragement to every person, but it begins (vv. 14-15) facing a very real, harsh human reality. Death.

### "The Fear of Death"

Death is sad and it's terrifying, if there is a holy, just God who is going to call everyone into account.

If there was no God. Then death is just sad, but it's not terrifying.

Sad...

but, if there is a God, a holy just God of truth, and we will one day give an account to that God, then death is terrifying, if we're not right with God.

The existence of God in relation to death is a terrifying thing.

This text says that it's a slave master. It says everyone is held in bondage all their lifelong to the fear of death.

I thought about that realized that a lot of people would disagree with that.

Many would say "what in the world do you mean that everyone is helping slave bondage to the fear of death? I'm not. I'm free. What in the world does this verse talking about?"

Here's what I think it is implying. I believe that everyone, even those who don't believe there is a God, and who was the surface are not feeling terrified, are subconsciously ruled by the fear of death. One way or the other. It's a silent slave master.

One of its main forms of slavery is by putting you in the dream world of denial. The way you can tell you're in it or not is by what you are not willing to think about much.

Denial of the death that terrifies us manifests itself in all kinds of ways of escaping from having to think long or hard about your mortality.

Americans refuse to let themselves think about such things. Therefore we surrounded ourselves by all kinds of distractions and narcotics (literal and symbolic) to escape from what we know we would be afraid of if we thought about it. .

How many times have you heard or thought, "I don't want to talk about it."

How many people have I met who will visit someone in the hospital, or a nursing home. Why? Because they don't want to be around death and dying. Someone that they knew and loved died at a hospital.

One person and our congregation had a relative who although knew they had some illness, they went into a dream world of denial. Refused to go to a doctor. Refused to enter treatment. This person tried to "deny" his sickness until it eventually he died from it.

Don't tell me people aren't afraid of death. I see it all the time. I think the Bible is right on this point.

People are driven, consciously or unconsciously, to shut their eyes and close their ears and blank their minds to every thought that they are going to die and give an account to God. They would *say* they are not afraid. But the fact is, the fear has gone underground and enslaves from the subconscious.

Everyone who does not deal with the reality of death and God and the devil and sin *as they really are* enslaved in the dream world of distraction or denial of.

Now that is what this text is about. It's about how Christ came to make it possible for you not to be

enslaved, either consciously or subconsciously to the fear of death. My hope is that when you leave here this morning that will be true for you, today and for the rest of your life.

### Deliverance from the Fear of Death

Here's how we're going to tackle this passage this morning.

- First, I want us to see the flow of thought in verses 14 and 15 about Christ coming to deliver you from the fear of death and make you free, by rendering the devil powerless in his destructive use of death.
- Then I want to compare that flow of thought with verse 17 to see *how* the death of Christ defeats the devil who has the power of death?
- And then finally to close by focusing on a great promise in **v.18** regarding all the threats to our faith in the things leading up to death. (“Will there be excruciating pain? Will I lose my mind? Will I lose all my friends?” And all those things that we naturally fear about the process of dying.)

### Flow of verses 14-15

Look with me at verses 14 and 15 and walk with me through the five steps that are here in your deliverance from bondage to the fear of death.

#### Step One (Verse 14a)

**You are Human.** *"Since the children have flesh and blood . . ."* The "children" is a reference back to verse 13 where it refers to the people that God calls to himself and gives to his Son, Jesus. So he says in verse 14 that these "*children*" share in flesh and blood, that is, they are simply human. They have a human nature. They are not angels or gods.

#### Step Two (Verse 14b)

**Christ Therefore Became Human.** *"Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity"* The Son of God, we saw back in Hebrews 1:2, did not come into being when Jesus was born. He existed before creation, indeed, from eternity as the very image of God (1:3) and was himself God (1:8).

But since the children whom he loved and wanted to save were human, he took on the same human nature. So Jesus was actual God and actual man. It is a great mystery, but this is what God tells us about his Son.

#### Step Three (Verse 14c)

**Christ did this so that he could die.** <sup>14</sup> *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death...*

In his divine nature alone Christ's life was indestructible, immortal (Hebrews 7:16). He could not die. But a death was necessary to deal with guilt and the punishment of sin. So Christ became human precisely so that he could die.

This is what love does. It embraces suffering and death for the life of others.

#### Step Four (Verse 14d)

**In dying, Christ destroyed the one who holds the power of death, the devil.** *"that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil."* In dying, Christ defeated, in some profound way, the power of the devil and took away his ability to destroy by death.

**BIG QUESTION.** How did Christ do that? **HOW DOES DYING DEFEAT SATAN?** It doesn't look like a defeat. That's what we will see when we look at verse 17. But for right now it just says that's what Christ willingly died to do. The apparent defeat of death was a knockout blow to Satan. How? Hold on, and we will see.

#### Step Five (Verse 15)

The effect of defeating the devil in this way is that **you and I are delivered from slavery to the fear of death.** <sup>15</sup> *and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

That's what we're looking for. If I was right in what I said at the beginning, that's what we all need. I need that. You need that.

*If I don't get right with God somehow and get my sin problem solve and my guilt problem solved and my destiny solved, I'm going to be scared to death all my life, either consciously or subconsciously.*

And this text says that when Jesus died Satan was defeated so that we might be delivered from a lifetime of slavery. I want that to be true for you this morning. We need to see how it works and then embrace it this morning for our own.

That's the flow of thought in verses 14–15. Five steps:

1. you are human;
2. therefore Christ became human;

3. so that he might die for you;
4. to nullify the deadly power of the devil;
5. so that you might be freed from slavery to fear and live in freedom the rest of eternity.

That's Part One of the exposition. And it raises a huge question that I posed in step four and that is "How is it that the dying of the son of God defeats Satan and the fear of death?" And verse 17 I believe answers that question for us.

### Flow of verse 17

**Hebrews 2:17** (NIV) -<sup>17</sup> *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.*

Compare, like on a piece of paper, the flow of thought of verse 14-15 and the flow of thought verse 17.

Now what stands out immediately when you compare the flow of thought in verses 14 and 15 is that *both of them speak of Christ having to become like us.* Verse 17 says, "*He had to be made like His brothers in every way.*" Verse 14 says, "*Since the children have flesh and blood he too shared in their humanity.*" So we know we are dealing here in verse 17 with the same basic flow of thought: in order to accomplish something Christ had to become one of us.

### Propitiation

But the rest of verse 17 is different from verses 14-15, and it's difference that sheds light back on verse 14-15. Verse 14 says that Christ became like us so that he *could die and render powerless the one who has the power of death, the devil.* Verse 17 says that Christ became like us "*in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement (propitiation) for the sins of the people.*"

Now what would you do here if you have two parallel sequences of thought, the first part of identical, and the second part is different. What would you say?

I would say that Christ rendered the devil powerless in death (v.15) by his high priestly work of making a propitiation for our sins (v.17).

The devil goes down when my sins get propitiated. Now half of you don't know what that word means

and that's okay... it's good to see biblical word that it's good to know.

### Jesus the High Priest

First, why did Jesus have to become a human—like us—in order to be a High Priest for us? Why couldn't he just be the Divine Son of God and do it?

(You remember what a high Priest does in the Old Testament.....?)

Because the offering he had to give was the offering of himself. He needed to be a "human" high priest, so that he could lay down his life not only as the priest who makes the offering, but also as the offering that he makes. (See 7:27; 9:14, 25f.)

The writer says this at least four times. For example, in Hebrews 9:26 he says, "*But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.*" So Christ became human like us in his work as high priest so that the offering he made could be himself. It's the same as verse 14: he needed to be human in order to die.

### To make Propitiation

But now notice that in verse 17 the aim of the death of Christ—the work of the high priest—was "*to make atonement (propitiation) for the sins of the people,*" while in verse 14 the aim of the death of Christ is "*to render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.*" Seeing this is the key to how the death of Christ strips the devil of his power in death.

Christ strips the devil of his power in death by making propitiation for our sins. How does this work? That big word "**propitiation**" simply means Christ takes away God's anger at us for our sins. When Christ dies, he is perfectly innocent (Hebrews 4:15). His death is to bear the guilt and punishment of our sins, not his own. And when our punishment falls on him, He drains every drop of his anger from us! That's what propitiation means. God's just anger is satisfied. He loved us enough to put his own Son forward to absorb the punishment and anger we deserved so that he could demonstrate that he is just and faithful in dealing with sin and merciful in dealing with sinners.

This is the great gospel. This is our GREAT SALVATION. Christ dying in our place, and propitiating God's—removing his righteous anger

from us. So in him there is now no condemnation.

### The Only Lethal Weapon the Devil Has

The were right on the brink of answering our question. We're not there yet but were right on the edge.

Now HOW does Christ propitiating sin render powerless the one who had the power of death, the devil?

There is only one lethal weapon in the artillery of Satan. You know what it is? Your Sin.

The only weapon the devil can use to destroy us in death is our sin. Nobody goes to hell because they are oppressed by the devil or even possessed by the devil. Nobody goes to hell because they are harassed by the devil or scared by or given hallucinations by the devil. These are all smoke screens to hide the one deadly power in Satan's artillery, namely, unforgiven sin.

People go to hell for ONE REASON. Unforgiven sin. That it. That's all.

And Satan has only one weapon – to keep you away a Savior and keep you sinning.

So if your sin is forgiven, and the wrath of God Almighty is turned away from you, then the devil is disarmed. The devil is rendered powerless: he cannot destroy you.

It doesn't mean Christians don't die a physical death—sometimes very painful ones. Nor does it mean that Satan can't rough us up. He can. But it means the one who had the power of death, is defeated and he can't destroy us anymore!

**1 Corinthians 15:55–57** (NIV) <sup>-55</sup> *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”* <sup>56</sup> *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* <sup>57</sup> *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So in summary, the reason it says in verse 17 said that Christ had to be made like us to propitiate sin and the reason it says in verse 14 that he had to be made like us to remove defeat the power of Satan and remove the fear of death, it is because in covering sin he takes away the power of Satan against us. Satan has nothing now that he can hold against us. [The accuser has no brief in court. There is no evidence. He can stand there in front of the judge and say "I hate him, he's evil, he lied this week. He looked at evil stuff." And God on the bench says "I know that. I

know all that. But look, in their hand is a document called the New Covenant is signed by my son and in it there is a promise to propitiate all of their sins if they would trust in him. And I will decide whether I'm angry or not, and I'm not angry."]

This is the good news. This is the gospel. This is a Great Salvation! Amen? We have something to stand on, brothers and sisters, that is worth telling this whole city about. This whole world about.

### What About all the Threats to our Faith Leading Up to Death? - v. 18

Which leaves one last very brief observation from verse 18. Granted that the fear of death is taken away and we are freed. But what about the pain and the losses that lead up to death? Have you ever heard the saying, "It's not death I'm afraid of, it's dying." It's the degeneration, the loss of our powers, the humiliation of senility, the pain, the breaking away of loved ones. What about all the trials and temptations to give up and despair in these things?

I think verse 18 is meant to encourage us here. It says, **Hebrews 2:18** (NIV) <sup>-18</sup> *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

It literally says he was *tempted in that which he suffered*—this isn't the temptation of lust or greed.

What is your temptation when you're suffering? It's not lost or lying or greed, it's the temptation to get angry at God and to be resentful. It's self-pity and despairing and unbelieving in the goodness of God.

And they came to Jesus. *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me* is a hair's breadth from blasphemy. (It didn't cross the line)

In other words, Christ took on weak, vulnerable human nature not only so that he could experience death, but also that he could experience dying, *and then sympathize with the temptations that come with suffering and dying*. Sullenness, self-pity, despair, unbelief.

So I want to leave a promise with you. Not only has God covered your sins so you can be free from slavery to the fear of death. But also you also have a word from God this morning that when the trial comes in your dying, when you are tempted to despair or self-pity or resentment or anger or unbelief, Christ will come to help you. And he will come as one who knows, from his own agonizing experience, just what

you are experiencing. When the hour of temptation comes and the pain is excruciating or your loved one is being taken away, he will be there to help you and give you just what you need.

He is merciful and faithful high priest, and he *will* do it.