

First Sunday after Christmas; December 29, 2024

Hebrews 2:10-18

“Jesus is Born to Be Your Saving Brother”

Certainly it was fitting for God (the one for whom and through whom everything exists), in leading many sons to glory, to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings. For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says:

I will declare your name to my brothers.

Within the congregation I will sing your praise.

And again:

I will trust in him.

And again:

Here I am and the children God has given me.

Therefore, since the children share flesh and blood, he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil), and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. For surely he was not concerned with helping angels but with helping Abraham’s offspring. For this reason, he had to become like his brothers in every way, in order that he would be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, so that he could pay for the sins of the people. Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

You don’t get it! You don’t understand! You aren’t listening to me! You don’t get me!

If you’ve ever raised a teenager (or lived with one...or been one yourself), you have heard words like that. Then doors slam and voices rise higher. Frustration builds and explodes because someone feels they are not understood. It happens in homes. But it also happens in workplaces and churches and HOA meetings. And sometimes it happens in hearts that are speaking to God.

I liked interpersonal communication class. It was great for daydreaming and completing homework for real classes. I wish now I had paid better attention. But I listened enough to retain this: it’s a bad idea, when someone is struggling, to say, “I know just what you’re going through. I completely understand.” You shouldn’t say that because you can’t know the exact combination of experiences and emotions contributing to that individual situation. The best you can say is, “I’ve been through something like that. I can relate some to how you feel.”

Do you think Jesus knows your troubles and struggles? Do you think he knows them well enough to say, “I completely understand. I know exactly what you’re going through?” Does it seem sometimes, especially when we struggle, that Jesus is aloof and cold? Isn’t it mostly at the good times, or when we sit here and worship, that he seems close? But when we need him most, it feels like he’s not there?

If you – like me – can find any reason to nod along with those views, we need to go back to Bethlehem together. We need to take what we see on Christmas Day and apply it to our Christian day-to-day lives. Why was Jesus born? Why is he lying in that manger?

We know the “what” from Catechism class. We know the “what” from the Creeds. He comes to wash us clean of every sin. But why come as a human being to do that? Why be born of a virgin, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and placed in a manger? Put another way: why not just split open the heavens and walk down to earth on Jacob’s ladder?

Because: **since the children share flesh and blood, he also shared the same flesh and blood.** You and I, of course, are flesh and blood. And part of being flesh and blood humans is being placed, by God himself, under the demands of his law, his Commandments. Jesus summarizes God’s law, all of his Commandments by telling us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and soul; we are also expected and required to love our neighbor as ourselves.

But gossip has been so juicy and sweet to pass around – especially when it’s someone who deserves it! Personal grudges have been too hard to set aside, until we feel the score has been settled. Putting God first by worshipping him every chance we have gets smothered by sports and sleep and work. We have not kept God’s law perfectly, as he requires. Even now, as his children, we cannot do it, as much as we want to, as hard as we try, because of the sin that lurks in our human flesh and blood.

This is why Jesus comes in flesh and blood, as one of us. He dresses himself in the same flesh and blood, with one key difference: when he is born, his flesh and blood is pure from sin because he is conceived by the Holy Spirit. He comes as flesh and blood, like us, so that he too can be expected and required to keep every one of God’s commands. When you see Jesus lying in the manger, flesh and blood, you know the Father expects him, too, to love the Lord his God with all his heart, mind and soul, and to love his neighbor as himself.

We know how tempting and easy it is to disobey God’s commands. And Jesus knows that exact same feeling. The devil tried to persuade him that life apart from his Father and his Father’s will is better. He told Jesus, too, that he should leave God’s will to provide for himself, because God couldn’t be trusted to do it. He urged Jesus, too, to twist God’s Word to a meaning that suited him. He also offered Jesus riches not to worship the Father. And Jesus remained perfect.

Jesus comes flesh and blood, obeying every command **so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil), and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.** The Devil does not determine when we will die; he cannot take your life. God’s Word clearly says your time is in God’s hands.

So, in what sense does the writer mean that the Devil **had the power of death**? Well, he knows that sin’s wages is death. And he brings our sins up. He raises them in God’s courtroom and in our hearts. He stresses me about being a fake Christian who doesn’t really believe, because if I did, how could ever have done this and that!? He nudges me and asks me if God could really forgive so many times over. Does he do that to you ever? The Devil exposes our faults and makes us think we’ll still have to spend forever with him. He wants us to stop looking at Jesus and his saving perfection.

Jesus is born – look at him! – look at him, perfect flesh and blood! It is easy to fall into a cliché that Jesus lived a perfect life for us. Stop and pick that truth apart, and delight in it. He faithfully kept his body free from every moral fault – and he did it to save you: flesh, blood, and soul, for eternity. And he mercifully suffered the punishment your sin deserves: **For this reason, he had to become like his brothers in every way, in order that he would be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, so that**

he could pay for the sins of the people. A more precise translation of “pay for” is “atone.” “Atonement” is a word we often hear in our absolution: “God our heavenly Father has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” “Atonement” is a word picture that is easy to remember. Just slice it in half. Jesus made God at one with you. He did it by taking on flesh and blood and loving God and his neighbor with all his heart all the time. He did it by suffering what we deserved. Your sin is off you, and his perfection is over you.

He suffered so you don’t have to. And his resurrection means death failed against him, and will fail against all who believe in him. So do not forget or ignore your sin when Satan raises it against you. He is the Father of Lies, but he’s telling you the truth when he says you deserve to die with him forever. Don’t deny that you deserve it. Admit it. And then say, “Devil, come to the manger with. Come to the cross and empty tomb. Let’s stop dwelling on what I’ve done, and see what Jesus has done to make me right with God.” And your enemy will quickly flee from you.

But now we come to our times when we feel alone, not understood, or misunderstood. And we see this too in the Spirit’s words: not only did Jesus come to be your perfection and your sacrifice, he came to be your brother.

The writer tells you: **For he who sanctifies [makes holy] and those who are being sanctified [being made holy] all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers.** And then the writer proves it with two prophecies about the Savior. **He says: I will declare your name to my brothers. Within the congregation I will sing your praise. And again: I will trust in him. And again: Here I am and the children God has given me.**

Jesus was speaking those words in the Old Testament, before he took on our flesh and blood. Jesus stands beside you and me and the entire family of believers and says, “You are my siblings.” Picture it like this: God sits on the throne of heaven, and Jesus is at his right side. You and every believer stand around the throne. And Jesus – while remaining true God – also steps down among the crowd, looks up to his Father and says, “Here are the children you entrusted to me, my brothers and sisters.” Jesus says this about you.

For surely he was not concerned with helping angels but with helping Abraham’s offspring. This may seem like a strange way to think of it, but Jesus did not come as an angel to save angels. Nor did he come as a dog to save dogs, or a cricket to save crickets. He came as a human to save humans. Look at the virgin’s child and see how he looks like you, how he came to stand in your shoes to save you. And because he did, he also experienced all of life’s hardships, loneliness, and heartaches.

He lived on the same planet you do. He heard insults that stung him. He saw other preachers with larger followings. He watched crowds walk away from him. And he was tempted too, above all to believe that life away from God is better than life with him. **Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.** Jesus understands the troubles and struggles you go through, because he is a human being who went through them himself. Not only that, he’s the only person who understands you perfectly, because he’s God, too. He knows the temptation to drift from God’s Word and will. He knows the pressure of the Devil’s temptation. He knows pain; he knows mourning and weeping.

But he also knows how to put his trust in God’s promises, the promise that says heaven is real and believers go there. He knows and declares that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

He is up there ruling for you, but he is also here, using Word, water, and Supper to set your eyes on the heavenly goal, guiding you in his steps to follow him there. He is your brother who helps you now to keep believing, to resist the temptations he has felt – most of all the one to go your own way and leave God behind. He is your brother who helps you now so that you will see him later.

Whenever you feel like he is absent or cold, go back to Bethlehem. See the baby Jesus in the flesh, your flesh, here to be holy for you and destroy the fear of death for you. And remember he is also your brother who knows perfectly all your struggles – and works to strengthen your faith until you join him and his whole family on high. Amen.