**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (7): The Book Of Better Things**

**“Jesus, Our Savior And High Priest”**

**Hebrews 2:14-18**

**February 18, 2024**

A number of years ago a group of scholars in the United Kingdom wrote a book called, The Myth of God Incarnate. They argued that the incarnation of God the Son was simply a mythological way of expressing the significance of Jesus in our lives. It didn’t really happen, but we speak of it as if it did in order to give Jesus Christ some degree of relevance to our existence.

The authors of the New Testament would beg to differ. John writes, “*And the Word* (a reference to God the Son) *became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14). Paul says, “*For in him* (that is, in Jesus Christ) *the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (Colossians 2:9). John also writes, “*Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God*” (1 John 4:3).

The author of Hebrews also stresses the importance of the Incarnation. In fact, he explains why it was necessary for God the Son to become the man Christ Jesus (2:5-13). In verses 5-9, we saw how the humanity of Christ enabled Him to regain man’s lost dominion over all the earth. Had He not become man, He could not have suffered and died for man’s sin, and thus restore the dominion that was lost because of sin. As we have seen, it was precisely *because* of His humiliation, suffering, and death that He was crowned with heavenly glory (v. 9). And since we as believers are united to Him by faith, the destiny of the Redeemer is the destiny of the redeemed. We too will share in His glory and will reign with Him “*for ever and ever*” (Rev. 22:5).

In verses 10-13, we also saw how the humanity of Christ enabled him *to bring many sons to glory*. Christ is not only the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) who restored what the first Adam had lost. He is the “pioneer” of our salvation, the only One who has blazed a trail to saving glory through His death and resurrection. The reason we will eventually get to that glory is because Jesus has already gone there before us. That’s an *amazing* thought to consider: Had not Christ come *to* earth and become man, He could not take us *from* earth to share in His glory!

In the verses before us today, our author presents two additional reasons for the Incarnation of God the Son (vv. 14-18). First, His humanity enabled Him to disarm the power of Satan and deliver us from death (vv. 14-16). Unlike ours, His death was the reason for His existence as a human being. The second reason then follows (vv. 17-18). His humanity enables Him to be a merciful and faithful High Priest to His people. He not only became a man so that He would die the death we deserved to die. He also became a man so that He could come to our aid whenever we suffer and endure the trials and temptations of this life.

**A. His Humanity Enabled Him to Disarm the Power of Satan and Deliver Us from Death (vv. 14-16):** “*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. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abrahams’s descendants*.” Here are the questions begging to be asked:

**1 Q.** Who are these flesh and blood “children?” **A.** They are the ones for whom Christ “tasted death” (v. 9); the “many sons” whom He brings to glory (v. 10); and “the children” whom the Father has given to Him (v. 13). If, by His grace, we are all members of “the same family” (v. 11), then we are these children!

**2 Q.** Why, then, was it necessary for God the Son to become incarnate? **A.** If Jesus came to save us and reconcile us to God, then He had to become like us, and “share in our humanity.” Only a human being can live the sinless life that all other humans failed to live; and only a human being can die in the place of all those who justly deserve to die. Only a sinless, flesh and blood substitute could discharge the debt that we deserved to pay.

**3 Q.** What exactly happened when the incarnate Son of God died for those whom Godhad given Him? **A.** He destroyed the one who holds the power of death. The word translated “*destroy*” (NIV 2008) does not mean to annihilate, or to cause someone or something to cease to exist. Rather, it means to “*render powerless*” (NASB) or to “*break the power*” of him who holds the power over death (NIV 2015, 2020). That means that when Christ died on the cross, He broke the grip which Satan held on all those who have now trusted in Him for eternal life. As a result, He frees those who were held in slavery “*by their fear of death.*” (How He has done this will become clear in verse 17.)

**4 Q.** What, then, does it mean for Satan to hold “*the power of death*”? **A.** The power that Satan has over death lies in his ability to instill “*the fear of death*” in the hearts of men and women. “He terrorizes humans with the prospect of dying, and in so doing, poisons their lives, turning joy and peace into misery and despair” (Sam Storms). But because of Christ’s death and resurrection, Satan has been defeated and we are now set free to live in joy and peace. We can look death right in the eye and know that it’s only a transition from this world to the world to come, when we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ forever and ever. Death does not have the last word!

**5 Q.** But can we be sure of this? **A.** Yes! “*For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s seed*” (v. 16). This is a summary of the preceding verses, which also resumes the author’s contrast between men and angels (begun in vv. 5-9). Here’s his point: “The sort of creatures whom God wills to save determines the sort of incarnation described in verse 14. These creatures are human beings, and Christ is therefore incarnate as a man” (Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible notes). Therefore, it is not angels He “*helps*,” but man.

The word translated “helps” literally means “*takes hold of*” (NASB footnote). It’s the same verb that is used later in Hebrews 8:9, where God recalls how He “*took hold*” of the Israelites by the hand to bring them out of Egypt. Our author’s thought is that God has graciously *laid hold of* “Abraham’s descendants” (meaning, all who like Abraham have faith in Him) *in order to lead them from death to glory*. Hence our author is in hearty agreement with Paul: “*. . . those who believe are the sons of Abraham*” (Gal. 3:7). They are the “many sons” whom God is bringing to glory through His only begotten Son.

**B. His Humanity Enables Him to be a Sympathetic High Priest to His People (vv. 17-18):** “*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. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted*.”

Any priest must be one with those he represents before God. This is also true with Christ, as His people’s High Priest. In order to serve them (and us) He had to become like them (and us), apart from sin, of course (Cf. 4:15). He is *merciful*, because through His own sufferings and trials, He can sympathize with ours. He is *faithful*, because of His steadfast loyalty to God *and* to us, as His people. That simply means that He can never fail in His “*service to God*” (NIV), or “*in things pertaining to God*” (v. 17b, NASB).

“The most crucial among these matters is the matter of sin” (F. F. Bruce). Our author, therefore, assures us that Jesus has dealt decisively with His people’s sins. For here he emphasizes that the purpose of the Incarnation of Christ is “*to make atonement for the sins of the people*” (NIV) or “*to make propitiation for the sins of the people*” (NASB, ESV). This takes us to the very heart of the nature of Christ’s death.

The word “propitiation” means “satisfaction.” Therefore, when Jesus Christ made *propitiation* for our sins, He endured and satisfied in Himself the wrath and judgment of God which we justly deserved. When the just punishment for our sin falls on Christ, it is taken away from us; when the wrath we deserved is absorbed in Him, there is none left for us to endure. This is the glorious, good news of the gospel.

It's also the reason why Satan is disarmed and no longer holds the power of death over any of His blood-bought people. The reason I don’t fear death is because I know there is no wrath awaiting me. That’s why Christians need not die fretfully or fearfully. The only lethal weapon in Satan’s spiritual arsenal is unforgiven sin. But faith in Christ’s atoning work strips him of his power. As Paul has declared in Romans 8:1; “*There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*.”

In verse 18, we are also told that Christ became a human being so that He might be qualified and able to “help” us when we are tempted. *How?* By providing us with the strength and encouragement to resist the enticements of the world, the flesh, and the devil. *Why?* Because He not only shares our nature but also our suffering! He endured real trials and temptations Himself, yet without sin (Cf. 4:15).

No one has explained this as clearly and concisely as J. I. Packer: “Jesus, being divine, was impeccable (could not sin), but this does not mean He could not be tempted. Satan tempted Him to disobey the Father by self-gratification, self-display, and self-aggrandizement (Matt. 4:1-11), and the temptation to retreat from the cross was constant (Luke 22:28, where the Greek word for “trials” can be translated “temptations;” Matt. 16:23; and Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane). Being human, Jesus could not conquer temptation without a struggle . . .” From Gethsemane we may infer that His struggles were sometimes more acute and agonizing than any we ever know. The happy end-result is ‘that because He himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted’ (Heb. 2:18).” (Concise Theology; “Two Natures: Jesus Christ is Fully Human”)

Just think how utterly contrary this is to the popular thinking of why Jesus Christ came into this world. He did not live as a human being to provide us with a good example of how we should live. He was born in order that He might die the death that you and I deserved to die and thereby set us free from Satan’s tyranny. We can now live in joy and peace, knowing that death need not be terrifying. If we believe that others are still held in slavery to the fear of death, now would be the time to let them know how they too can be set free!

**TWO NATURES**

JESUS CHRIST IS FULLY HUMAN

*Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into*

*the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.* (2 John 7)

Jesus was a man who convinced those closest to him that he was also God; his humanness is not therefore in doubt. John’s condemnation of those who denied that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7) was aimed at Docetists, who replaced the Incarnation with the idea that Jesus was a supernatural visitant (not God) who seemed human but was really a kind of phantom, a teacher who did not really die for sins.

The Gospels show Jesus experiencing human limitations (hunger, Matt. 4:2; weariness, John 4:6; ignorance of fact, Luke 8:45-47) and human pain (weeping at Lazarus’ grave, John 11:35, 38; agonizing in Gethsemane, Mark 14:32-42; cf. Luke 12:50; Hebrews 5:7-10; and suffering on the cross). Hebrews stresses that had he not thus experienced human pressures – weakness, temptation, pain – he would not be qualified to help us as we go through these things (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16; 5:2, 7-9). As it is, his human experience is such as to guarantee that in every moment of demand and pressure in our relationship and walk with God we may go to him, confident that in some sense he has been there before us and so is the helper we need.

Christians, focusing on Jesus’ deity, have sometimes thought that it honors Jesus to minimize his humanness. The early heresy of Monophysitism (the idea that Jesus had only one nature) expressed this supposition, as do modern suggestions that he only pretended to be ignorant of facts (on the supposition that he always actualized his omniscience and therefore was aware of everything) and to be hungry and weary (on the supposition that his divinity supernaturally energized his humanity all the time, raising it above the demands of ordinary existence). But Incarnation means, rather, that the Son of God lived his divine-human life in and through his human mind and body at every point, maximizing his identification and empathy with those he had come to save, and drawing on divine resources to transcend human limits of knowledge and energy only when particular requirements of the Father’s will so dictated.

The idea that Jesus’ two natures were like alternating electrical circuits, so that sometimes he acted in his humanity and sometimes in his divinity, is also mistaken. He did and endured everything, including his sufferings on the cross, in the unity of his divine-human person (i.e., as the Son of God who had taken to himself all human powers of acting, reacting, and experiencing, in their unfallen form). Saying this does not contradict divine impassibility, for impassability means not that God never experiences distress but that what he experiences, distress included, is experienced at his own will and by his own foreordaining decision.

Jesus, being divine, was impeccable (could not sin), but this does not mean he could not be tempted. Satan tempted him to disobey the Father by self-gratification, self-display, and self-aggrandizement (Matt. 4:1-11), and the temptation to retreat from the cross was constant (Luke 22:28, where the Greek for “trials” can be translated “temptations;” Matt. 16:23; and Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane. Being human, Jesus could not conquer temptation without a struggle, but being divine it was his nature to do his Father’s will (John 5:19, 20), and therefore to resist and fight temptation until he had overcome it. From Gethsemane we may infer that his struggles were sometimes more acute and agonizing than any we ever know. The happy end-result is that “because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb. 2:18).” Concise Theology, J. I. Packer.