



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The God of Christmas

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Hebrews 2:14-18

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¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

(Pastor prays)

J. C. Ryle was the first archbishop of Liverpool England and most famous for his book “Holiness”. Though it’s for young men, He didn’t start out as a man pursuing a life in ministry. His father was a well-born and successful banker and Ryle’s intent was to graduate college and join the family business. But right after he graduated university, his father went bankrupt and the family was utterly destitute.

So J.C. Ryle entered the ministry as a reforming voice in the Church of England, and if you read his story you learn of a man who stood out against the deluging tide of theological liberalism and, at the age of 65, when most men retire, he took on the task of being the first Bishop of Liverpool, a position he held until his death in 1900 at the age of 84.

J.C. Ryle was a great preacher and when he thought about Christmas, he thought about this passage. Ryle said that the profoundest statement in holy writ is that which speaks of the incarnation – God becoming man. He was amazed at the wonder of it, struck by the need of it, astonished at the nature of it and absolutely humbled by the purpose of it. The truth is, if ever

we were made like Him, He first had to be made like us. Here we are at the beginning. As Gospel people, we love the Gospel story: God reconciling man through the cross of Jesus. The Gospel. But before we can go to the cross, we must come to the cradle. We must come to the story of Christmas according to the book of Hebrews. The first and foundational truth of the Gospel story is that God became man. Christianity stands and falls on the incarnation. You see, to save those who are flesh and blood, Christ Himself had to become flesh and blood. To save the race of the *first* Adam, Jesus became the *last* Adam. And Hebrews Chapter 2 gives us a clear and beautiful picture of Christmas.

Let's do what we always do. Let's put this passage into context. Hebrews Chapter 1 opens up with the majestic picture of Jesus and it contains some of the strongest language about the deity of Christ found in the whole Bible. Then in Chapter 2, the author turns our attention to the humanity of Christ. Chapter 2 contains some of the strongest language about the humanity of Christ found in the whole Bible. You put those two together and you realize that there is no basis for your fear or anxiety about the future. If you will think with me a little bit on the deity and humanity of Christ, you will see that there is no basis for the thought that God doesn't understand what you are going through or that He doesn't love you or that He isn't truly good. And if you have been thinking that, I hope today you will gladly repent of it. I want you to see grace and mercy and hope and forgiveness and joy going into Christmas.

In Christ, Christmas Tells Us that God is Good

This passage gives us four things Christmas reminds us of about Jesus:

Jesus destroys the work of the Devil

Packed into verse 14 you have the incarnation, the cross and Christ's victory. Let's read it.

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, Christ has overcome the curse for us by undergoing the curse in our place. Let's break this verse down and then talk about Jesus destroying the work of the devil.

In verse 14, "children" is a reference to verse 13 where the Son of God calls the people of God "children." And He says that these children have been given to God the Son by God the Father, and since they are flesh and blood, Jesus partook of the same thing, flesh and blood. He knows we are dust and loves us. He purchased us in Christ and holds us secure. Verse 14 also tells us

why. THAT. So that through death. Jesus did that so he could die. Death on the cross was necessary to deal with the guilt and punishment we deserve. Listen, if you are a Christian, any guilt that doesn't take you to the cross of Jesus is false guilt. If you are not a Christian, any guilt you feel is real and all your own. Christmas reminds us that Jesus came to die on the cross and deal with the guilt and punishment we deserve.

But there is something else; that He might destroy the one who has the power of death, the Devil. In Christ dying on the cross, He, in some profound way has defeated the power of the Devil. What does the Bible say about the Devil? 1 Peter 5:8 says the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. John 8:44 says he is a liar. In Ephesians 6:11, Paul says he is a deceiver. John 10:10 is where Jesus calls him a destroyer. 1 Corinthians 7:5 calls him the tempter. And Revelation 12 says that he hates Christmas. Put those together, Satan roams the earth hunting, lying to people about what is true and good and right. He is deceiving people into thinking right is wrong and wrong is right and that you will get away with your sin. He is bent on destroying homes and happiness and marriages and churches. He wants to destroy your trust in God and confidence in Christ and joy in the Lord. And he does it because he hates the thought of God's infinite love for you in Christ. And this passage tells us that the coming of the perfect one, Jesus, who lived perfectly then died on the cross to save people, this passage says that Jesus destroyed your worst enemy so that Christ could be your best friend. In the words of Martin Luther, there is a Devil, God's Devil. He's an angry dog on a short chain, and at the other end of that leash is the God who loves you in Christ. For Christians, Jesus destroys the work of the Devil.

Jesus delivers his people from fear

Verse 15 is a continuation of a sentence, so let's read verses 14 and 15 together. ¹⁴ *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,* ¹⁵ *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.* Fear. Fear grips us. The language here is "enslaves us, holds us, keeps us captive" and the promise of Christmas is that in Jesus I'm freed from that.

We basically fear two things: the past and the future. Guilt is the fear of the past, and all God's children got a past. When we put our faith in Jesus, we take our past to the cross and nail it there and receive grace and forgiveness and love. You need to do that.

But the fear here is the fear of the future – and death. Why do we fear death? Is it the fear of the pain or separation from the people we love or the fear of the unknown or annihilation? Is it the fear of everlasting punishment or the fear of the world moving on without us? And y'all notice that all of those fears are self-centered and self-motivated.

Jesus came to liberate and destroy those fears in us because each one of those fears finds its root in a strange self-dwelling. And the cross of Jesus gets our eyes off of mortal fears and lifts them to His glory and grace; to His plan in our pain, to His grace in our anxiety, to His joy in our hurt. The splendor of the Gospel and the Love of God came to dry up the river of fear that you are currently floating down so that you can stand on the solid rock that is Christ! The fear of death is sin but it's also real. How do we deal with it? We preach the Gospel to ourselves and we go to the cross of Jesus. That's what Paul is setting up in 1 Corinthians 15:56-58. *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.* Be encouraged brothers and sisters, Jesus destroys the work of the Devil. And Jesus delivers his people from fear.

Jesus guarantees our forgiveness

I want to save verse 16 because I think verse 16 and 18 go together. I want to take you down to verse 17. Look how the incarnation and the crucifixion are tied together. Christmas is the Gospel. Verse 17 says, *¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.* He was made like his brothers in every respect. Christ had to become flesh to save us. The text says there was no other way. Listen, verse 17 is packed. At issue is our sin at the end of verse 17 and that sin is the highest offense to the Holy creator. It's not just judgement, it's also God's anger or wrath that we stand under. I say that because of the word propitiation – to take away the wrath of God by sacrifice. Our sin is the ultimate offense to a holy God and because we are sinners, we are in terrible trouble. And Christmas says in

verse 17, Jesus was made like us in order to be the sacrifice that takes away the wrath of our Holy God. Two things happen at the cross and these two things are not the opposite ends of the spectrum. Those two things are justice and mercy. Justice and mercy seem to be irreconcilable but at the cross, the God/man, Jesus, takes justice in in one hand and mercy in the other and at the cross he satisfies fully the justice of God and pours out lavishly the mercy of God so that when you put your faith in Jesus, you are believing that this holy God is still holy and just and yet pours out mountains of mercy on all that come to him. In fact, he has so much mercy that his mercies are new every single day. This guarantees our forgiveness. Let me give you one more thing that Jesus does to remind us of God's goodness at Christmas.

Jesus helps us

God doesn't help those who help themselves. He helps the helpless. Look with me at verse 16 and then a little further down in verse 18. *16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.* Don't you love verse 18? That when we are being tempted to doubt or worry or lust or give in or lie or hate or be lazy, he doesn't sit back and say, "I told you not to go over there or I told you not to click on that website." Jesus helps us. Like the Canaanite woman in Matthew whose daughter was demon possessed, "Lord help me." Or in Mark 9 where there's a father whose son was sick. "Lord, I do believe." Help my unbelief. This is the Lord that Paul heard in the Macedonia vision, "Come over here and help us!" It means to run to, provide assistance to. And Christmas means that if you are in Christ, you are not fighting your battles alone. Jesus is a faithful and merciful high priest which means you aren't saved based on your faith but because he is faithful and gives mercy. In Christ, Christmas tells us that God is good. He destroys the work of the devil. He delivers his people from fear. He guarantees our forgiveness. And Jesus helps us in our temptation. So, as Adrian Rogers said, "Come to Jesus."

(Pastor prays)

