

**Series: What God Was Thinking. . . The heart of God at Christmas**  
**Family**

*Hebrews 2:14-18*

In a healthy family, the members of that family are “for” each other in a very comprehensive way. And it brings a sense of security and peace just knowing that you are in a permanent relationship with other people in this world who would do anything humanly possible to help you in times of need.

For example, some of you have an older brother who fits this bill. Not all older brothers are like this (e.g., the older brother in the parable of the prodigal). But when you do have an older brother who protects and and who is committed to your good, it’s pretty great. I actually have two older brothers (and one younger). We’re all in our 60s and my older brothers still sometimes refer to me as “little brother.” My brothers and I Zoom every Monday night with our mom. In those conversations my brothers ask me how I’m doing healthy-wise, how Brenda is doing. When something’s going on with one of my kids, they remember to ask. I have constant reminders that they are “for” me; and that knowledge means the world to me. In a healthy family you receive the affection of your older brothers. You let them help you when they can. In a healthy family, you let them sacrifice for you. You let them do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

Today we are looking at a passage of Scripture which tells us that Jesus is the older brother to all who believe in him. At the first Christmas Jesus became one of us so that he could do for us what we could never do for ourselves. The question on the table for us today is whether or not we will believe in him and then receive the affection and receive the help that only he wants to give us as our older brother.

In this year’s Advent series we’re exploring passages that describe what was on the heart of God at that first Christmas. Last week we saw from Philippians 2 that **humility** was on the heart of God the Son: Out of humility he took the plunge from the highest of highs (equality with God in heaven) to the lowest of lows (death on a cross). This morning we are going to see that **family** (God’s family) was also on the heart of Jesus when he took on flesh and blood. Hebrews 2:14-18 emphasizes that the incarnation was an expression of Jesus’ commitment to us as **family**.

Again, if we lock in on the reality that Jesus became one of us so that he could be our older brother, we will be more inclined to receive the help he offers us both for eternity and in everyday life.

As always, understanding the larger context is important. The author is writing primarily to Jewish believers in Jesus. They had acknowledged Jesus as their Savior and Messiah, but due to persecution they were tempted to abandon Christ and go back to Judaism. That would have been safer and more socially acceptable. They would once again fit in with family and friends.

The author argues throughout Hebrews that abandoning Jesus would be going back to something that was inferior in every respect. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, the

temple, the priesthood, the sacrificial system. . . everything. It may be hard but it's worth it to stay devoted to Jesus.

The argument of Hebrews 1 and 2 is fascinating. It is based on the hierarchy revealed throughout Scripture: God, then angels, then humans. God existed from eternity past. At some point God created angels who are intelligent, powerful, beautiful spiritual beings (meaning that they do not have bodies). They can take human form, but they are spiritual beings. As Michael Heiser likes to say, "God had a family in heaven before he had a family on earth."

Then God created humans in his image. In contrast with angels, humans are created with bodies. And humans, not angels, were given dominion over all of creation now AND over "the world to come" (Hebrews 2:5-8). In the world to come, humans will be elevated above the angels in God's hierarchy; Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6 offhandedly, "Do you not know that we are to judge angels?"

But there's a problem: sin entered the human race. We all sin by nature and by choice. If we are going to be rightly related to God as his sons and daughters in this life and if we are going to reign with him in the next, sin and death have to be defeated in our lives.

That is exactly why Jesus became one of us. Hebrews 2:9 tells us that for a little while (about 33 years) Jesus was made "lower than the angels" so that he "might taste death for everyone" (i.e., humanity). Listen to Hebrews 2:10–13 and notice how the author employs "family language" - sons, brothers, children. These terms inform how we hear verses 14 through 18.

10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many **sons** to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.  
11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them **brothers**, 12 saying, "I will tell of your name to my **brothers**; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the **children** God has given me."

Verses 14 through 18 emphasize that ***The incarnation was an expression of Jesus' commitment to us as family.*** Becoming one of us wasn't some sterile obligation; it was a commitment to us as family.

In verses 14 through 16 we see that ***Jesus took on flesh and blood: To deliver God's family from death (and the fear of death).*** (Hebrews 2:14-16)  
Notice the logic in verses 14 through 16:

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.

Jesus didn't become an angel to die for the sins of angels who rebelled against God. He humbled himself and became lower than the angels; he became a man so that he might die for the sins of fallen humans so that those who believe in him will be elevated with him far above angels.

Back in verse 14, the author mentions "the children." That is a reference to verse 13 in which Jesus speaks of "the children God has given" him.

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,

Since "the children" were in a desperate condition they couldn't resolve, Jesus became like them to deliver them. He had to become a human in order to die for the sins of humanity once and for all. Specifically, Jesus took on flesh and blood "that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. . ."

In Scripture, the devil/Satan is the leader of the angels who rebelled against God. He first appears in Genesis 3. God had told Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; if they did so, God said, "You will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). The devil came and basically said that God had made an idle threat: "You will surely not die, you will become like him." Because the devil successfully tempted the first humans to sin, they immediately died spiritually; and they eventually died physically. And now the entire human race is under this same sentence of death. Because of his deception, the devil, in a sense, has the power of death.

Jesus took on flesh and blood so "that **through death** he might destroy" the devil who has **the power of death** over the children God had given him. 1 John 3:8 tells us that ". . .The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." By his death and resurrection Satan was defeated. We experience freedom from Satan and death when we trust in Jesus' death and resurrection. In Ephesians 2:5 Paul wrote that "even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved. . ."

But there's more. In verse 15 we're also told that through death Jesus would:

15 . . . deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Everyone will admit that they know they are going to die. But not everyone will admit that they are afraid of dying. I've talked with people who are pure materialists; they have convinced themselves that we are purely material beings. They would say that there's not an immaterial part of us that survives death; when you die you cease to exist. But I suspect that they sometimes wake up in the middle of the night and wonder, "What if I'm wrong? What if I **do** have a soul? What if I **am** going to spend eternity somewhere?"

I think most people instinctively know that we are eternal beings. We instinctively know that there's a life beyond the grave. That knowledge can be terrifying; that fear of death can accurately be described as "lifelong slavery." The author of Hebrews is telling us that Jesus took on flesh and blood so that by his death he might deliver us from this fear of death.

Jesus himself said in John 11, "those who believe in me will live even if they die." Believers down through the centuries in every culture have experienced this freedom from the fear of death. Many of you have experienced this. You know that Jesus will get you home safely. Death is still an enemy because it separates us from our bodies and from those in this life whom we love. But it will not get the final word.

Many of you know the DeWolf family; they've been part of Faith for many years. Erick and Heidi are currently at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota for a couple of months while Erick is getting chemo and radiation for throat cancer. His medical team is optimistic about the outcome of this treatment, but it's still a long, difficult road. This past week Heidi posted an update in which she spoke about Erick's relationship with Jesus and his confidence beyond the grave. She and Erick gave me permission to share a portion of her update with you.

One caregiver of a friend here commented on Erick's demeanor at the clinic: "I thought he was the nurse when I met him talking to my brother. He's so calm and kind. He has the same diagnosis as my brother, but he's not falling apart." I smiled. Calm and kind. These two words couldn't be more accurate. Yes, sometimes his internal storm has a moment, and I see a little lightning, maybe hear a little thunder. But I know where his strength comes from. Who is calm and kind when facing a fight with cancer? Someone who shows up daily ...to get what he doesn't have ...from One who has everything he needs.

We've talked with many people about what they believe about life, especially what happens after death. Death is very real and particularly present here. We share this in common. We will all die. Showing up is not optional. The variety of thoughts on this is fascinating. The word religion comes up a lot, mostly in regards to having it or not. Very few have mentioned relationship as something they cling to for life after death. I know Erick relies on his relationship with Jesus to make it through each day. No matter the outcome of this fight, his relationship with Jesus will bring him home as a son to his Father. Not because Erick is calm and kind, or does enough good to win approval, or tries hard enough to make the world a better place. When death comes, and it will come, Erick will cling to Jesus' willingness to show up for him because Jesus loves him. Jesus loves him enough to be found in human form, live a perfect life on his behalf, willingly die a cruel death also on his behalf, and be raised back to life for Erick's sake. How will Jesus not also give him everything he needs to show up today?

Jesus took on flesh and blood, becoming our older brother so that he might deliver people like Erick and you and me from death and lifelong slavery to the fear of death.

John 1:12 tells us that “as many as received [Jesus] to them he gave the right to become children of God.” If you believe and become a child of God, you are delivered the fear of death and death itself.

In verses 17 and 18 we also see that **Jesus took on flesh and blood:**

**To become a high priest for God’s family.** (Hebrews 2:17-18) Verse 17 again picks up one of the “family terms” (brothers) from earlier in Hebrews 2, stressing again that Jesus thought of us as family at the first Christmas.

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.

The mention of “brothers” takes us back to verses 11 and 12 where the author writes that Jesus “is not ashamed to call [those who believe in him] brothers.” He then quotes from Psalm 22 where the Messiah tells God the Father, “I will tell your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation. . .” The point is that there’s nothing reluctant about Jesus’ commitment to those who would believe in him. We’re family; Jesus is our older brother who wanted to become our high priest. That’s why he **had** to be made like us in **every** respect.

Since Jesus was made like us in every respect, he was able to do two things for us as a high priest. First, as we see here in verse 17, he was able “to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” The term propitiation means to satisfy the wrath of God that we deserve because of our sin. In the old covenant the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies (the innermost chamber in the temple) once a year to offer an animal sacrifice on behalf of the people. But in the old covenant the high priest had to offer such sacrifices year after year because the blood of bulls and goats couldn’t take away sins permanently (Hebrews 10:1-4). By contrast in the new covenant, our older brother Jesus is also our high priest who **offered himself** as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sin. As such he satisfied the wrath of God that his brothers and sisters deserved. He did that for us willingly.

Second, because Jesus was made like us in every respect, we read this in verse 18.

18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Because he “was made like us in every respect,” Jesus has an experiential knowledge of what we go through here on earth. Specifically, he suffered the full brunt of temptation and never gave in. For example, while hanging on the cross bleeding, all sorts of people (Roman soldiers, Jewish authorities, and bystanders) mocked and insulted him. The temptation, as you and I know well, is to return evil for evil, insult for insult. We often think we’re justified in doing so. But Jesus, our older brother and high priest, never did that. He didn’t return insult for insult; he didn’t threaten them. Instead, he suffered and entrusted himself to God.

Because he suffered when tempted without sinning, he is uniquely qualified to help us when we're being tempted. Anybody who sins the way you do can empathize with you and your sin; but they can't really help you. Jesus is our brother who has **successfully** negotiated every temptation we face. And he is willing to help us learn to do the same. This is stressed in Hebrews 4:15-16.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus is willing and able to help us in time of need. Here we are told that we receive this help as we "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" - to the king who exclusively gives away grace. We can't buy anything from him; we can't barter for anything from him. We can only receive his help as grace, as a gift.

And so the question on the table is **whether or not we are going to let Jesus**, our older brother and high priest, give us the help we need. Are we going to go to God through him in prayer asking for grace? And are we going to go to the Scriptures and let his words abide in us? Or are we going to tell him, "Thanks but no thanks. I don't need or want your help"?

The Lord's Table gives us the opportunity to come into the presence of God and remember that **Jesus became one of us as an expression of his commitment to us as family**. He took on flesh and blood because we are flesh and blood people who had no way to get rid of our sin and no way to deliver ourselves from "lifelong slavery" to the fear of death. As our older brother he did that for us. And he is willing to help us with every temptation we face.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, bring to God your biggest need.

- \* Perhaps you've never trusted in Jesus to become a child of God. This would be a fantastic day to allow Jesus to take away your sin and give you new life. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.
- \* Perhaps you have trusted in Christ but you're not allowing him to help you in everyday life. Maybe you're not seeking him. Maybe you're not allowing him to help you with the temptations you face. Your older brother is also your high priest who is willing and able to help you.

Whatever you need, bring it to God as we come to the Lord's table. We invite all who know God through faith in Christ to join us at the Lord's table. If you didn't get the elements when you came in, feel free to slip out and get those in the foyer.

I'm going to give you a couple of minutes to pray. Come boldly to the throne of grace and bring God your needs. Then we will eat the bread and drink the cup together. Let's pray.