

Are Things Right With God?

Hebrews 2:14-17

For years as I was growing up, I would often lie awake in bed with the thoughts like: “Have I been good enough today?” or “What will happen to me if I die tonight?” running through my mind. I believed in God. I attended church regularly AND I feared death. I feared death because I feared God’s judgment.

John Piper once said this about fear and death:

If there were no God, then death would be sad for most people, but it wouldn't be terrifying. It would be sad because life is the basis of all our pleasures—family, friends, work, leisure, food, sex, music—if we lose life, we lose everything that makes us happy—if there is not God. So death would be sad. But not terrifying. Falling asleep and going unconscious and never waking up into consciousness again is a sad farewell to contemplate. The ending of a long, beautiful summer is sad.

But if there is God, if we are created in the image of God, as the Bible teaches, . . . and if he is just and holy and worthy of our love and devotion and worship and obedience, and justly angry at our indifference and distrust and our preference for other things, and if we are going to give an account to this infinite, holy God and be sentenced to heaven or to hell, then death is terrifying if things are not right with God.

Death is terrifying if things are not right with God. That was my concern when I wondered if I had been good enough. Were things right with God? I was trying my hardest. I was going to church. I read my Bible. I prayed. But were things right with God? That was the question that I was living with; and in the quietness of night, that question shouted at me.

Do you ever hear that question? Are things right with God? Do you ever have a sense that death is a terrifying thing because you are not sure if things are right with God?

As we come to this Easter season, we want to be reminded that the message of Easter is that things can be made right with God BECAUSE of Jesus Christ. Today and next week we are taking a break from our 1 Corinthians series to take a look at the humanity of Jesus. This morning, we are going to look at Hebrews 2:14-17 and see the significance of Christ’s humanity for our being right with God.

The first thing we see in the passage is that . . .

I. Jesus took on a Human Nature (2:14a)

¹⁴ Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵ and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

The term, *children*, connects back to the previous verse, where the writer quotes from an Old Testament passage that uses the term, *children*, to refer to believers. These *children*, the writer says, *share in flesh and blood*. It is a statement that affirms that all of the children share the same nature; they are human.

And so since the children are human, Christ *Himself likewise also partook of the same*. *Likewise* means, “In the very same way.” And so, in the very same way that all the children share in flesh and blood, Jesus *also partook of the same* – of the same human nature.

The theological term for this is incarnation. “Carn” means “flesh” in Latin and so incarnation literally means “in flesh.” Theologically, the incarnation is the act whereby the Second person of the Trinity, took on a human nature, while continuing to be fully God. Obviously, this is a mysterious thing that cannot be fully understood. But the Scriptures affirm that is it true. Jesus, who eternally existed as the Second Person of the Trinity, took on human nature to become fully God and fully man.

The writer of Hebrews goes on then to give the purpose for why Jesus took on human nature and that purpose was that he might die.

II. Jesus took on a Human Nature that He Might Die (2:14b-17)

Look again at verse 14. Jesus *partook of the same, that through death* he might accomplish several things. *That* introduces a statement of purpose. And the purpose is death. In the rest of our passage, the writer goes on to describe three things that Jesus’ death accomplished.

First, he says:

A. Jesus’ Death Rendered the Devil Powerless (2:14b)

He says that Jesus took on human flesh *that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death*. The devil is said to be the one who has the *power of death*. This is true only in a secondary sense for God alone holds the power of life and death.

But the devil has the power of death in the sense that he was the one who initially induced mankind to rebel against God. Adam did and he died. And Satan is the one who continues to tempt man to live in rebellion against God. And all of us have and so all of us have died spiritually. And Satan is the one who seeks to keep people bound in this state of spiritual death and alienation from God. This is where his power lies.

And so Jesus took on human flesh and died that through his death he might render the devil powerless. The NIV says that “by his death he might destroy him.” Satan himself was not destroyed at the crucifixion of Christ, but certainly the power of the devil was.

Through death, Jesus destroyed the power of death. How did Jesus’ death accomplish this? Here’s how. Eternal death is the judgment that God pronounces on all who sinfully rebel against him. Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.” Death is our just reward for our sin. And Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned” so therefore all owe this penalty of death. This is true of me. This is true of you. The penalty of death must be paid.

Death as a necessary payment for sin was seen in the Old Testament sacrificial system. The Old Testament Law instructed that animals should be offered as sacrifices for man’s sin. But these sacrifices were not sufficient. Later in Hebrews 10, the writer says this:

¹For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. ²Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? ³But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The Old Testament sacrificial system made it clear that God’s requirement for sin is death. But the death of bulls and goats was never sufficient. A sufficient sacrifice required the sacrifice of one who actually shared human flesh and blood. It required a man; but not just any man, it required one without sin. This then, the writer of Hebrews says, is why Jesus partook of human flesh that he might die to set us free from power of death that the devil had.

The writer then goes on and says that Jesus became a man and died in order that he might deliver enslaved people.

B. Jesus’ death delivered enslaved people (2:15)

Verse 15 says that, Jesus partook of human flesh that he *might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.*

Certainly there are a lot of things that can enslave. But fear, and particularly fear of death, can be a powerful force that keeps people in bondage. During those years that I wrestled with the question, “Have I been good enough,” “What will happen to me if I die tonight,” I was in bondage to fear.

Now, fear of death is something that I think people experience in different ways. For some, it is a very real thing. It is a fear of the unknown. It is a fear of separation – from loved ones and the things that we know and enjoy. It is the fear of pain. It is the fear of judgment.

For others, fear of death may not be something that is always experienced at a conscious level. For many there is a great capacity to live in denial. They simply won't let themselves think about their own death and what might await them. They are able to shut their minds to such thoughts. But when the cancer comes or a loved one dies these thoughts push to the surface. Fear comes.

Whether fear of death is a fear that resides at the forefront of our thoughts or whether it is a subconscious thing that we seek to keep below the surface, Jesus, by his death and his resurrection, has set us free from this fear. By his death he took the sting of death and paid the penalty of sin.

The story is told of a young boy riding in a truck with his father. This boy was very allergic to insect bites; especially bee stings. A bee was in the cab of the truck flying around. The boy looked at the bee in absolute terror knowing that if it stung him, he would have a terrible reaction. He could die. Before the bee could sting him, the father reaches out and grabs the bee in the midst of driving that truck and let's the bee sting him in the hand. As you know, when a bee stings you, it leaves its stinger in you. The father then released the bee and it was flying around in the cab of the truck. And the young man was still afraid. But the father said, "Son, don't be afraid. I've taken the stinger away and he cannot hurt you."

On the cross Jesus took death's sting away. Jesus took our sins upon himself; he took the sting of death and defeated death once and for all. And so, like the bee that continued to fly in the truck, death cannot be denied. It cannot be avoided. But for the believer in Christ, death does not mean punishment and so it does not have to be feared.

Let me ask you, how do you feel about death; your death? Are you enslaved to a fear of death? If you have trusted in Jesus' payment for your sin, you do not need to fear death. Eternal life awaits you. Death for you is not the final word.

Some of you, however, may have a fear of death even though you have trusted in Christ. It may be that you have this fear because you really don't understand fully what God has done for you in Christ. For most of those years as I struggled with my fears, I had trusted Jesus to be my Savior. My issue was that I didn't understand fully what his death on the cross had accomplished. I was like the boy in the truck, still afraid of the bee not knowing that the sting of death had been removed. If that is true of you, you simply need to understand that if you have trusted in Jesus, the sting of death has been removed. He has paid it all. And because of that you are right with God.

But it is also possible that some of you fear death because you have not yet trusted in Jesus' death to remove your sin. The penalty for sin abides on you. And it is a fearful thing to stand

before a holy God without having trusted Christ to pay for your sin. The only way to remove the fear is to receive what Christ's death accomplished. I want to give you an opportunity to do that in a few moments. But let's look at the rest of the passage first, because it has more to say about what Jesus' incarnation and death accomplished. The writer goes on to say that:

C. Jesus' death satisfied God's Holy Anger (2:16-17)

Verse 16:

¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

The writer is driving home the point that getting right with God comes from the help that Jesus gives. Jesus did not descend to take on an angelic form to help them; rather, he took on human flesh to give *help to the descendant of Abraham*. The expression, *descendant of Abraham*, refers to all who have the faith of Abraham and not to just the literal descendants of Abraham.

Verse 17:

¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things,

In other words, since it was Jesus purpose to help men, he *had to be made like His brethren in all things*. That He was made like us *in all things* rules out any idea that he only appeared to be like us. His identification with us is complete in every sense. He became truly human and he did so because the nature of the work that he sought to accomplish for us demanded this.

He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The only way Jesus could become our *merciful and faithful high priest* was by becoming one of us. The high priest was the one who would represent the people before God on the Day of Atonement; the one day of the year when the high priest would enter the holy of holies with the atoning blood. He would sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat, which was viewed as the place of propitiation. He would first make atonement for his own sin and then for the sin of the people.

Jesus, our *merciful and faithful high priest*, made this sacrifice. He did not offer the blood of animals, but his own blood for the sins of the people. He was not only the one who offered; he was also the offering. And his offering was the once-and-for-all perfect offering for sin.

His offering made *propitiation for the sins of the people*. *Propitiation* means to satisfy God's wrath. If we are going to be right with God, this is necessary because when people sin, they stir up God's holy anger. They become enemies of God. They merit punishment for their sin. But

on the cross, Jesus took all of God's anger and wrath for our sin upon himself. He satisfied the wrath of God in himself, so that God's anger should no longer be directed towards us. Ultimately, this is why there need be no fear in death, because death does not mean judgment. Rather, death means a transition from life here on earth to eternal life in heaven.

My closest experience with this truth that Jesus' death sets us free from fear was through my sister's experience of death. As many of you know, she died of an inoperable brain tumor at the age of 38 leaving behind five children. She fought a ten – eleven month battle with this illness. In August of 2000, about two months before she died, she wrote this in an email:

I'm asking for removal of this tumor [and that] he would use this chemo to help do this but with my eyes on the fact that he is my all . . . its not natural to want to leave this earth and part with those we love and so I pursue the deep desires He's planted in my heart and [I] go before his throne to ask [for] life here on earth though my thoughts are cast heavenward and [I] know that ultimately that is the greatest deliverance by far.

I'm also much more aware of hell again for those I know [who] don't know Jesus as the one who deeply loves them and has died for them. Hell is real and the sickness and pain we believers experience here is the only taste of hell we'll have and even that doesn't compare at all. I'm so glad he is my firm foundation. The storms have come and Jesus remains to give me courage and love and comfort and he is taking away the fears for now.

Kim knew that ultimately, things were right with God. And so, though death was not something she desired, she knew that she had experienced the greatest deliverance. She didn't fear death.

How about you? Do you know that things right with God? They can be because Christ became one of us and he died for us. He paid the price of our sin.

Earlier I mentioned Romans 6:23 which says, "*The wages of sin is death. . . .*" The rest of the verse says, "*. . . but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Jesus' death on the cross as payment for your sin is a free gift. You don't have to earn it by living a good life. You CAN'T earn it by living a good life because no one is good enough, for all have sinned. It is simply a gift that you can receive by faith – a faith that says, "I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sin and that through His death I can be forgiven and be given spiritual life."

The eternal God, the Second person of the Trinity, made an incredible journey for you. He became a man. And he became a man that he might die FOR YOU. Do you want to accept what he did for you on the cross today? If so, I invite you to pray along silently in your heart after me.

Would you please bow your heads. Let's pray:

Dear Jesus, thank you that because of your love for me, you stepped into time and became a man. As a man, you lived a perfect, sinless life so that you could die; not to pay for any sin on your part, but for my sin. I acknowledge that I am sinful and in need of forgiveness. Jesus please forgive me. Wash me clean. Jesus, I yield my life to you now. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal spiritual life. Thank you that because of this, I do not need to fear death.

For those of you who made this decision of faith, Jesus has answered your prayer. You may feel something; you may not. What matters is an act of faith. God will honor his word and Jesus will forgive you and give you spiritual life. You have become a child of God. You've become a friend of God. Things are right with God.

Jesus, for all of us, we give you thanks that you have set us free, that you have defeated the devil and that you have taken all of God's wrath upon yourself for us. Help us, we pray, to live lives of gratitude for what you have done for us. In Jesus name, Amen.