

Hebrews 2:10-18

¹⁰Certainly 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. ¹¹For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹²He says:

I will declare your name to my brothers.

Within the congregation I will sing your praise.

¹³And again:

I will trust in him.

And again:

Here I am and the children God has given me.

¹⁴Therefore, 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) ¹⁵and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. ¹⁶For surely he was not concerned with helping angels but with helping Abraham's offspring. ¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Salvation Is Here

I.

Is it just a minor irritation, or is it important? Sometimes it's difficult to determine. When someone in the neighborhood seems to constantly be pushing the panic button for their car, you begin to ignore the sound. You wish they would notice more quickly and silence the silly thing, but it gets to be such a normal occurrence that you don't even turn your head any more.

Those who live next to railroad tracks get become so conditioned to the passing of a train that they don't even notice the house shaking and the squeal of the wheels. Even the sound of the train's horn as it approaches a crossing no longer registers.

The thing has become something similar to the train horn or the car alarm. It's easy to become conditioned to ignore the warnings. There is no train shaking the ground. It isn't outside the livingroom window. It seems like a far-away primordial, visceral scream. The scream comes from inside. No, not inside the *house*, inside your own head.

Perhaps you ignore it because you don't want to acknowledge the thing. You don't want to admit to the truth. You feel free. You feel unencumbered.

You have become conditioned. Almost everyone agrees—there is no problem here. The far-away sound gets pushed even further back.

II.

The problem is, you are ignoring the scream at your own peril. The thing you have been ignoring is trying to warn you. The thing is trying to give you a healthy fear of death. The thing is your conscience. You are one of those the writer to the Hebrews calls "...those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death" (Hebrews 2:15, EHV).

Many suppress their fears. Many suppress their consciences.

Just like the warning of the horn and the gates at the railroad crossing, the conscience tries to tell every human being there is a God and every human being is accountable to that

God. A version of God's Moral Law has been written on the heart of every human being. Some call it instinct. It's different than that, but the conscience is there inside everyone, telling each individual that stealing is wrong, lying is wrong, hurting people is wrong, illicit sexual behavior is wrong, and so on.

Fear of death comes because of all the wrong thoughts and words and actions that seem to make up a person's being. The conscience warns that any and all of these wrong behaviors come with consequences. Some of those consequences are relatively immediate. Stealing runs afoul of the legal system; there are immediate penalties associated with robbery and theft. Lying is a problem not only in a courtroom, but it affects your relationships with people who are close to you. Sexual misconduct can have legal consequences, but there are also diseases associated with loose sexual living.

There is another consequence. Our reading indicates that the fear of death is like slavery. Slavery is the opposite of freedom. Those who ignore that little voice inside *think* they are free. All the time they ignore the consequences of all those misdeeds, slavery is still there. Uninterrupted, the march proceeds toward death.

Death is a real thing. You can *try* to ignore it, but it's coming. All while a person is living, the conscience tries to warn of impending death and the ultimate consequence for every single one of those sins. Once a person dies, you face God in judgment. If those sins have not been dealt with, you will be separated from God—forever.

What can a person do? How can anyone be free from slavery to the fear of death? There has to be something. There has to be some way to appease the God to whom all are accountable. What is the way?

III.

“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” (Hebrews 2:10, EHV). The same God whom the conscience says you are accountable to had a plan. God promised salvation to Adam and Eve. He promised that the Savior would take care of the sins of them and all their offspring. He is called here “the author of their salvation.”

Remember that slavery to the fear of death? *All* people have that, because all people sin and fall short of the glory of God. All people have a conscience that shrieks at them when disobey God's will. After repeatedly ignoring the warnings, the conscience gets dulled and a person doesn't hear the warning so clearly anymore, but it's still there.

Something had to be done. “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)” (Hebrews 2:14, EHV).

This is what the Christmas story is all about. The author of salvation we spoke about just moments ago had to be flesh and blood, just as you are. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. We celebrate his birth every year. The whole world pauses for a moment—even those who don't acknowledge him.

Jesus was born with a conscience, just like every other human being. His conscience did not have to shriek and wail at him, because he was in tune with his Father's will. He heard and obeyed continually. He came with the purpose. Through death he would destroy death and the slavery to death that every one of us is born to fear.

The Gospel for today was interesting, wasn't it? It's the only childhood event we know of Jesus. Mary and Joseph thought only about going to celebrate the Passover Festival. That was all that was on their minds. It wasn't all that was on the mind of Jesus, however.

When they realized he was missing from the group of people traveling back home together, Mary and Joseph went back to Jerusalem in a panic. When they found Jesus, Mary said: “Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you” (Luke 2:48, EHV). Any parent would fear the worst when they realize their child is missing. You wonder what might have happened. Even if it’s your own fault for not checking to make sure he was there, the first instinct is to blame the child. “Why have you treated us this way?”

Jesus answered: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49, EHV). Jesus was surprised Mary didn’t know where he might be. How could she not know? His whole life was the work of salvation. He is the author of salvation. Every minute of his life he was preparing for what he had come to do.

“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” (Hebrews 2:17, EHV). To be the author of salvation, Jesus had to be just like every one of us. He had to be able to serve the way the high priest did in the Old Testament; he had to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people.

As we learned from last week’s reading from Hebrews, the sacrifices the high priest offered were never good enough. They didn’t actually *pay* for the sins of the people, they merely pointed ahead to the sacrifice that would pay. Here the reading says Jesus *could* pay for the sins of the people. That means he had to prepare a perfect sacrifice for sin. The sacrifice was his own death.

Christmas always looks ahead to Good Friday. There, Jesus completed the sacrifice that actually *paid* for all sins. There the Heavenly Father abandoned his only-begotten Son to suffer the ultimate consequence of hell for the sins of all. Jesus announced from the cross “It is finished” when the sacrifice was complete. Then he died.

IV.

But he didn’t stay dead. He rose again from the grave. He has returned to heaven to prepare a place so that we might join him there.

“Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18, EHV). Jesus didn’t just suffer for sins on the cross, he suffered every day of his life. He did it for you and me.

He suffered as a baby when he was tempted to become angry when people didn’t realize it was time to feed him or change his diapers. He suffered as a child when other children would taunt him or call him names—the exact things we face. He suffered the temptation to take things that didn’t belong to him and the temptation to hurt others with his words or physically. He suffered temptation to engage in sexual sins, just like every human being faces.

In fact, he was tempted in all these things even more than any of us are, because he never gave in. The devil knew it was all or nothing with Jesus, so he took every temptation to the extreme. Yet Jesus never gave in.

Because he never gave in, Jesus is able to help you through your temptations. Lean on the great High Priest who made the ultimate sacrifice so that you might be free from your slavery to the fear of death.

Give thanks that *your* life is not one of slavery, but of freedom. You are free from sin, free from eternal death, and free from fear because of the little Baby who came to give his life as a ransom for many—for you. Salvation is here. Amen.