Christ Serves His People

Hebrews 2:16-18

May 24, 2026

I want to welcome you back this evening and invite you to open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 2. We're looking at Hebrews 2:14 to 18, on the fullness of Christ's work to save and serve and sanctify. And let me read these verses to you as we begin this evening. Hebrews 2:14 through 18.

"Therefore, since 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, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, He gives help to the seed of Abraham.

"Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in all things so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that

which He has suffered, He is able to come to the help of those who are tempted."

We learned last time that there is more to salvation than the forgiveness of our sins. God certainly starts there and he starts with the most fundamental obstacle to reconciliation with him. He deals fully and finally with our sins. But then he draws us into communion with Christ who is our savior, our brother, our friend, our great high priest.

And the first point that we made last time, just to remind you of that, looking at verses 14 to 15, was this, that number one, Jesus shared in death to save us fully. It says there in verse 14, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same."

And the pastor cites there the dual purpose in Christ's incarnation: Two purposes. Number one, that "through death, He might render powerless him who had the power of the death, that is, the devil." And then number two, that "He might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

Considering how complete is Christ's victory over death, I wanna ask you this question. What does death mean for you as a

Christian? Now, what does it mean for you as a Christian? Sometimes when I preach at funerals, and especially so at the funeral of a Christian, I like to provide a mini exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:54 and 55. "Death is swallowed up in victory."

If you think about that imagery, that word picture, what a great word picture that is. "Death swallowed up in victory." Life wins and not by fighting with death toe to toe, but by consuming it. Isn't that a great picture? So complete is Christ's victory over death that Paul takes in verse 55, after saying "death is swallowed up in victory." In verse 55, Paul takes an image from Hosea 13:14 about the victory of death and about the sting of death.

And he takes that imagery from Hosea 13:14, and he subverts that imagery and turns it on its head. It's a really, a fascinating little study if you compare the passages. Through the prophet Hosea, God indicts Israel for its many sins as he sent the prophets to do.

As we have become used to reading that in the prophets. He warns of this coming judgment with using these very frightening images about fierce animals tearing apart people. It's really disturbing. Hosea 13:7 says, "I will be like a lion to them; and like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside."

Now we live here in Colorado in the city. Many of us don't really run into lions and leopards on a daily basis, but some have run into this. “I will encounter them like a bear robbed of her cubs.” I know one of our elders who has encountered a bear, maybe not robbed of her cubs, but a bear who knocked him over a hillside. It was an experience he doesn't want to repeat.

Then this, “I will encounter them like a bear robbed of her cubs and I will tear open their chests.” Sounds like a horror movie. “There, I will also devour them like a lioness, As a wild beast would tear them.” That's Hosea 13 imagery, where God is sending his prophet to warn his people, giving them these terrifying, vivid, very graphic imagery of danger, warning of coming judgment.

He, God, pouncing on sinners like a predator, like a lion or a leopard, an angry she-bear who's enraged of the robbery of her little cubs, ready to rip apart the prey. At the end of the section, God asks rhetorically in Hosea 13:14, "'Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight.'" He's basically calling forth death to do his bidding, to serve as a judgment tool.

Another translation puts that verse this way, and it really kind of draws out the sense. "Death, bring on your plagues. O Sheol, bring on your destruction. My eyes will not show any compassion." It's pretty clear, death, Sheol, the grave is like a scorpion. It injects poison into our veins by a deadly stinger, and God is calling for death to come and do its killing work as a tool of his judgment.

But then you go into verse 55 of 1 Corinthians 15, and Paul takes that very same imagery. He uses Hosea's really vivid word pictures, and he subverts them to say the exact opposite of their original use. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" It's like he says, death is swallowed up in victory, so bring it on, death.

He's taunting death. Sounds like he's taunting death, and he is doing exactly that, since in Christ, death is swallowed up in victory. Victory over death means victory over the devil, means victory over the one who held us captive in the fear of death. Jesus has set us free. And so he has triumphed.

Jesus has triumphed over the principalities and the powers and the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. We're no longer afraid of death. We're no longer anxious, worried about death, or really anything in the future.

Nothing but good lies ahead for every Christian. Nothing but divine blessing is in our future. So there is no longer any slavery for those who are in Christ, for if the son has set you free, you're fully free. You're free indeed. So that's just a recap of some of what we covered last time.

Now a second point in verses 14 to 16. Number two, Jesus shared in suffering to serve us eternally. So he said the verse point is, Jesus shared in death to save us fully. Now Jesus shared in suffering to serve us eternally.

And it says in verse 14, "For assuredly he does not give help to angels, but he does give help to the seed of Abraham." The verb that's used there translated, to give help to, *epilambanomai*, really doesn't mean to help. That's how the LSB and the many modern versions translated, but a better translation and I think they're keying off of the very last verse in this chapter, verse 18, where it talks about he's able to come to the aid or the help of those who are being tempted.

So I think they port that into what it says in verse 14, but really a better translation here for *epilambanomai* is to take hold of, to take hold of. And the writer again is referring here to the incarnation. So parallel to verse 14, speaking of

the incarnation, but here in verse 16, he's making a different point.

So really it reads, Assuredly he does not take hold of, and here's kind of the words we insert to help you understand, Assuredly he does not take hold of the nature of angels, but he takes hold of the nature of the seed of Abraham. So when you stop and think about it, seems a little bit peculiar, doesn't it? It doesn't say here he takes hold of human nature, just all humanity, which he does. It doesn't say that he takes hold of Adam's nature, though he does that; or to repeat how it's put in verse 14, that he takes hold of flesh and blood.

He's specific here. He says he takes hold of the nature of the seed of Abraham. So who are they with the nature of the seed of Abraham, whose nature Jesus takes hold of? Didn't we just learn about that a little bit this morning? Isn't it so perfect, how Jesus guides us in our teaching, how the Spirit directs our ministries, the teaching ministries of our church? We covered this this morning.

Jesus takes hold of the nature of the seed or the offspring of Abraham, and it's those who are of Abraham's faith. This is a very particular thing he's saying here. He takes hold, not of

just everyone in humanity, but a particular group in humanity, those who are of the seed of Abraham.

Distinctly, specifically, the pastor is telling his congregation that Jesus takes on a believing nature. Children of Abraham by faith. Okay, so when we go back to the angels, sure, if he took on the nature of an angel, an angel has more power, is of greater alacrity than us, able to serve God more speedily, minus limitations that we face as humanity, but that is not his interest here.

That's not what he's speaking about here. It may be surprising to us, but it is by the comparatively weaker nature of human beings as compared to angels, that Christ took upon himself that nature in order to conquer the dark archangel, the devil, to steal his favorite toy, to snatch death right out of his hands.

Fascinating, isn't it? Christ wins the victory not by avoiding death either. He doesn't win the victory over death by shooting at it like a sniper from a great distance, a safe distance. He wins by enduring death, by passing right through it. So it's by death that he defeated death. It's in dying that he lives. "It's in the death of death and the death of Christ," to borrow the language of John Owen.

Now, this was really for not just Gentiles, but the Jews and for all humanity. This is a thing wholly unexpected. I mean, who does that? Who does that? Who defeats death by dying? Who swallows up death by passing through death? It's like passing through the ocean and swallowing the ocean. The ocean doesn't consume him, he consumes it.

It's a fascinating imagery here. None but Jesus Christ could do it. He accomplished the most amazing, incomparable, seemingly impossible feat. No one ever did what he did, and he did it all with a nature like ours. The pastor makes this personal here. Jesus took your nature, believer.

He took your nature. He's just like you, Christian, in every way. He knows you, he sympathizes with you, and as we will see, he has designs on serving you from a heart of compassion.

So therefore, verse 17, "For this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in all things." The word, had to, is the verb *opheillo*, which has to do with a moral obligation, speaking of what ought to be done, what should be done, what must be done as a matter of moral, ethical obligation. He was under compulsion; it is another way to say it.

And he's under compulsion, not against his will at all. He's under compulsion joyfully, cheerfully, submitting himself to the father's will in doing this, taking up this role. So he's made like his brothers, which means, of a like nature with Adam, which means children of Abraham by faith, which means true believers.

And again, why did he do this? Another dual purpose, "so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." And then number two, "that he might make propitiation for the sins of the people," two purposes. Two purposes in being made like us, what he became and then how he serves.

Number one, what he became. Jesus wanted to serve us by becoming a high priest and not just any kind of high priest, but a merciful and a faithful high priest. Mercy and faithfulness are the stipulations of this role that he wanted to take up as being a high priest.

Incidentally, this pastor who wrote Hebrews has just given us his two outline points for the upcoming section, faithfulness and mercy. The theme in chapter 3, verse 1, all the way through chapter 4, verse 14 is the faithfulness of Jesus. And then the

theme in chapter 4, verse 15, all the way to chapter 5, verse 10, that's on the mercifulness of Jesus.

So the pastor has organized the content and he's given you a hint of what's coming up by giving you these two words. Jesus wanted to serve us by becoming a high priest and not just any high priest, but a merciful high priest, a faithful high priest. It's interesting that in his own life and ministry, Jesus never did know or experience the kind of high priest that he endeavored to become. Never saw one.

The high priest serving when he was brought to trial was Caiaphas, more a politician than a priest. He was a man who was politically savvy, fiscally ruthless, a businessman, but also corrupt, unjust, and wholly wicked. Caiaphas was son of his father, Annas. And as Annas and many others before him, many other high priests after him, he was anything but faithful, anything but merciful. He turned the house of God into a den of robbers.

And the word robbers there is a term for the most violent of thieves, who use violence and intimidation and brutal tactics to extract, extort money. So rather than facilitate any access to God, these high priests hindered it. Rather than dealing gently with sinners, they rapaciously used the sins of sinners

and the sacrifices that sinners brought to atone for their sins, to take advantage of them and to make money from the suffering of the people.

There are still plenty of people using religion exactly like that today. Nothing's changed. So Jesus knows personally what it must be like to long for justice and mercy, to be underneath the authority of a high priest like that.

He lived through that. He knows with sympathy what we so desperately need and what we so desperately want, what our hearts desperately yearn for. And so he says, I'll do it. I'll be that high priest. And Jesus here is in full sympathy with his father. He agrees from the heart to take up this mediatorial role as prophet and king.

And here is our great high priest, which leads to the second purpose here. Number two, Jesus wanted to serve us by making propitiation to God for our sins. He wanted to serve us by making propitiation to God for our sins.

And as the pastor points out, it's not only about ministering to us, because of the sins, there's more. In this fallen world, facing the daily reality during this time of humiliation for us, our sins are the most glaring issue.

Temptations, a daily battle, wrestling with an indwelling sin nature is an ever-present disappointment for us, isn't it?

So making propitiation before God for sins, that word propitiation means to satisfy divine wrath, Jesus did that. And he did that once for all when he offered himself up before us on the cross. It's not as if Jesus' propitiation is on some constant repeated loop that he needs to go to heaven and then continue making propitiation for the sins of the people. That's not what this is saying.

As if his sacrifice on the cross is replayed over and over in perpetuity throughout time of memoriam as the Roman Catholics keep portraying him, blasphemously so, in the sacrifice of the mass. Jesus finished that propitiatory work and now he lives before God with abiding evidence at the right hand of the father.

The scars of the nails in his hands and feet, wound from the spear that pierced his side and he doesn't show those evidences for the father's sake. The father knows all things perfectly. He has those wounds at his father's right hand for our sake to give an assurance to us.

He's seated at the right hand of the father as our high priest. And this is really what he came to do. What he came to become. This is what he rejoices to do. It's the joy of our Lord, Jesus the Christ, to serve us eternally and faithfully and mercifully and not only pertaining to our sins.

He's a merciful and faithful high priest. Notice, "in things pertaining to God," that's a big category. Things pertaining to God, as in all things. So many things, our tiny little minds can't really take the measure of them.

One of my favorite passages is in Luke 10:22 and it's informed by the surrounding context. So I'll read Luke 10:21 to 24. It says, "At that very time, Jesus rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit." And he said, "'I praise you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight.'"

And then this verse, I love this. "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father. And no one knows who the Son is except the Father and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. And turning to His disciples, He said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see. For I say to you, many prophets and

kings wish to see the things which you see and did not see them and to hear the things which you hear and did not hear them.'"

I can tell you, in their lifetime, they're only getting the start. There's so much more, this interpenetrating knowledge of the father to the son and the son to the father, this interpenetrating love for one another that's shared from eternity and then is revealed in time in the incarnation.

This, he wants to share with all those he wills to reveal the father to them. This is beautiful. I mean, things pertaining to God includes all of those things, includes an infinite knowledge and understanding of God and his ways.

We've only scratched the surface of his high priestly ministry to us. He's got so much to show us, so much to teach, so much to expose us to, so much more than we could ever imagine. And yet here we are on terra firma in a fallen world.

We daily face the reality of our sins, the weakness of our flesh, succumbing at times to the deceitfulness of temptation, falling into sins and fears and anxieties and worries and distractions and dreadful errors. And this is why he had to be made like his brothers in all things, even in their weaknesses, even in suffering and affliction and personal pain and

relational sadness and disappointments and the hurting of the heart. He had to share it all.

We are at the end of verse 17. We are the people that he's referring to here. We have many sins to be propitiated, but as the pastor makes clear, our savior thinks of us not just as the people, not at a kind of a cold distance, we're also, according to the context here, we are also the children, we're also those who were subject to slavery all of our lives.

And so he sees us as victims of slavery that are liberated and emancipated, set free. We're also the seed of Abraham, seed of Abraham by faith, that we're also, and I love that one, his brothers; his brothers and yet we are at the same time in this life, those who are being tempted.

Those who are being tempted. I would imagine him as our good shepherd. He's indignant about that point, that we are those who are being tempted. He'd have us be set free from that. But while God does his will with us, he wants to minister to us while we are in the midst of being tempted, during this time of humiliation. His high priestly ministry means so much to us as we are constantly tempted, tried, and sometimes failing.

And yet, since he himself is tempted in what he has suffered, he's able to come to the help of those who are tempted. It was a real suffering on his part, not something faked or feigned or pretended. The verb *pascho*, most basic sense, refers to what happens to a person.

So *pascho*, he was affected, he was acted upon, he experienced something, underwent affliction, suffering. That refers to his human nature because the divine nature cannot be *pascho*. It cannot be affected. It's impassable is the word theologically. So this is in his human nature. He's affected, he experiences, he undergoes affliction, suffering.

But again, looking at that verb *pascho*, it's the past tense of that verb. So that's against any Roman Catholic doctrine and against a disturbing, growing number of evangelicals as well. That is to say Christ is no longer suffering.

Now that he is in resurrection glory and ascended on high, he no longer suffers, he no longer feels this. He is in improved condition. The experience of the suffering that he endured during the time of his humiliation, that he takes with him.

And for our sake, he takes it with him, so that we are assured of his sympathy, so that we know of his mercy. Couldn't

have happened if Christ was not a man with a nature like ours. Couldn't have happened if he was not of the seed of Abraham.

He had to have a real human nature that he might experience the full range of human emotions, from the greatest joys to the deepest hurts, to the most intense of all suffering and even to death itself. And so having been where we've been and having suffered what we've suffered, having been tempted in all points as we are, and yet he remains without sin, and he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

In fact, now in heaven, he's glorified in a resurrected body, he's seated at the father's right hand, and he is in an improved condition to act as our merciful and faithful high priest.

At the end of last year, after finishing our long exposition through Luke's Gospel, some of you may remember that I taught a message on the ascension ministry of Jesus Christ. And I referred to Hebrews in that message. It's part of what stirred my heart to want to go through Hebrews in more detail on these evening services.

But I was rejoicing to see in Hebrews, Christ's high priestly ministry. And during that message, I quoted a few times

from Thomas Goodwin. Thomas Goodwin, one of the Puritans, he writes this in one of his treatises called *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth.*

And here's what he says, "When he is in heaven, he pities and compassionates," turns compassion into a verb, I like that. "When he's in heaven, he pities and compassionates without the least mixture or tang of disquietment and perturbation, which accompanied his affections whilst he was here because of the frailty in which his body and spirits were framed. So, now his affections are no longer like that."

No longer perturbed. No longer disquieted. Now his affections have improved with his situation. There's no more frailty or weakness of the unglorified flesh, because he now has a resurrected body, a spiritual body. Goodwin goes on to say, "there is, instead of that passionate frailty, a greater capaciousness, a vastness, and also a quickness in his affections now in heaven." It's basically saying he's improved in his human nature.

And now when we are being tempted, and even when we fail, Christian, listen to me, even when we commit sin, and I'm speaking to Christians here, I want you to hear how Jesus thinks because I really love the way Goodwin pulls this out. He writes

this, "Christ, he takes part with you and is so far from being provoked against you. As all his anger is turned upon your sin to ruin it, yea, his pity is increased the more towards you. Even as the heart of a father to a child who has some loathsome disease, or as one is to a part of his body that has leprosy, he hates not the member, for it is his flesh, but the disease, and that provokes him to pity the part affected all the more."

That's the heart of Christ in heaven toward you, sinners on earth, and even when you sin. When you struggle, when you're tempted, tried, tested, sometimes failing, that's his heart toward you. So take heart, dear Christian, since he himself was tempted in what he has suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted. That is to say, make it personal, he's here to help you.

Our Father, we just want to thank you for sending us such a savior as this, such a mediator, this great prophet who teaches us your ways, this king who rules us, and rules our affections and our hearts, and rules even heaven and earth, and all created things, especially while we're sojourning in this fallen flesh, and in this fallen nature, and though it is, as we were learning this morning, it is cut off from us, and rendered powerless

against us, and we can stand up and turn away from sin, yet we still are troubled by the temptation.

We still are troubled by the deception and the enticement, and being led astray. And so we thank you for giving us Jesus in his mediatorship, giving him to us as our great high priest. We thank you that he is like no other high priest, he is like no other religious leader, no other pastor, no other teacher, no other theologian.

He is merciful and faithful, faithful without any flaw, merciful without any harshness, but gentle and tender in all of his ways. And knowing him like this, because you have revealed him to us like this, it encourages us to come and to find help in our time of need, knowing that he will not turn us away. We pray that you would impress this truth upon every heart here, and help us to take advantage of the great privileges we have in Christ. It's in his name we pray, amen.