

Jesus is Better:

The Better Brother (Hebrews 2:10-18)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on December 10, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ I think most of us are well familiar with the Christmas story. We know about the angel appearing to a virgin, proclaiming that she will conceive a son. We know about her journey to Bethlehem with her fiancé Joseph and how there was no room for them in the inn.
 - We know about the angels who appeared to certain shepherds out in the field. About how the heavenly host proclaimed that a Savior was born this day in the city of David. And we know about the wise men from the east who arrived (most likely months later) bearing gifts fit for a king.
 - This is the Christmas story that we're all familiar with. **And at the heart is this miracle we call the Incarnation.** The word literally means to put on meat. You go out for TexMex and order some chili. You can get it plain or ask for chili *con carne*. Chili with meat. So when we speak of the Incarnation, we're talking about **God putting on meat**. Taking on flesh. God became man.

- ❖ It's a bold claim. Modern-day people are quick to chalk it up as a nice but fanciful story. It's great for kids, TV specials, Christmas plays, and holiday decorations. But it's considered as real and as historical as Santa with all his elves living in the North Pole. **The typical assumption is that premodern people were just primed to believe these kinds of stories.** Which explains why it's pervasive in so many cultures and has such a lasting influence over the centuries. But now, us modern people, know better.
 - But that's a false assumption. Take the ancient Greeks for example. The very Gentiles to whom the apostles were sent to proclaim this Christmas story. The Greeks certainly had a conception of gods appearing in human form. There are plenty of stories about Zeus slipping into a human body like you would an outfit or costume. But they were never said to have taken on flesh. To have actually become human.

- ❖ **To Greeks, such a concept was absurd.** Greeks held to a dualistic worldview where the material world – where matter itself (including the human body) – was considered defiled and undesirable. Salvation, in their conception, involved an escape from the body, from this shell imprisoning the real me, my soul. So they couldn't fathom why God would become a material being. Why would he take on a human body. That's absurd!
 - **And for the Jews, it would've been just as difficult to convince them that God became man.** Of course they were expecting God to send the Messiah. But they weren't expecting an Incarnation. The Jewish worldview stressed the transcendence of the LORD God. There was a sharp line drawn between the Creator and creation. So to speak of a union of the two would've been considered blasphemous.

- ❖ **My point is this: If you, as a 21st-century person, have a hard time believing in the Incarnation, you're not alone.** First-century Jews and Gentiles were in the same boat. So if Christmas is simply a fanciful legend, if it's just a story concocted by the early church to convince people that Jesus was more than a man, then the first Christians did a poor job. **They don't know how to sell a convincing story. That's if they were just selling a story.**

- ❖ But what if they were telling the truth? What if they were just recounting what they personally witnessed? **I think the fact that the Christmas story has so many unbelievable elements in it supports the claim that it's true.** No one in their right mind, ancient or modern, would include the Incarnation in a story they're trying to convince others to believe as true – unless it actually happened.
- ❖ The early Christians were consistent in affirming the historical truthfulness of the Christmas story. **One biblical author, the writer of Hebrews, claims that it only makes sense that God would become man.** He feels no need to apologize for the strangeness of the Incarnation. He says in chapter 2:10, that it was only fitting that the Son of God would become a man like us. **It was only fitting that he would become a brother, from the same line, sharing in the same ancestry as the rest of the human race.**
 - So while I believe the mystery and absurdity of the Incarnation strengthens our belief that it's true, at the same time our passage says that there are good fitting reasons for why the Incarnation had to happen. Why it make perfect sense. **I see three reasons, from our text, as to why it was fitting for God to become a man.** 1) To suffer as our brother. 2) To die as our deliverer. 3) To serve as our high priest.

He Became a Man to Suffer as Our Brother

- ❖ The first reason the Son of God became a man was to suffer as our brother. We have all sorts of names and titles that we assign to Jesus. And if I were to ask you how you see Jesus, it would be fitting for you to think Lord, Master, Savior, Redeemer, Friend. But what about Brother? That's not as common. I doubt many of you immediately thought "Brother". But our passage says that's a fitting description.
 - **In chapter 1, the author of Hebrews made a strong case for why Jesus is much more superior than the angels of God.** He quoted numerous OT texts supporting his case. Proving that the Son of God is better, much better, than any messenger from God before or after him. Because he's the heir of all things, the radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of his nature. He sits at the right hand of God, on a throne, holding the scepter of his kingdom, reigning forever and ever.
- ❖ **But in case you're picturing the Son of God as some otherworldly, transcendent being (even more unlike us than angels), chapter 2 quickly reminds us that the Son of God became man and became our brother.**
 - Look at v10, *"¹⁰For 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. ¹¹For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers"*.
- ❖ It says that Jesus is not ashamed to call his followers his brothers. **Ladies, please don't be put off by the gender-specific language.** I know it may feel awkward to see yourself as Jesus's brother. About as awkward as it is for me to see myself as Jesus's bride.

- ❖ **You just have to get used to these corporate metaphors in Scripture.** Otherwise you'll miss out on the rich spiritual truths that these metaphors are trying to communicate. If you are a Christian, a believer in Christ, born again of the Spirit, then you are a member of the Bride of Christ and a member of the Brotherhood of Christ. **The underlying message is that you're part of a family now.** You and Christ are family.
- ❖ Look back at v11 and how it says, "*he who sanctifies* (that's Christ) *and those who are sanctified* (those are Christians) *all have one source.*" That one source could be referring to God, but then again God is the source of angels and all the animals. But this passage is trying to stress our unique bond with Christ, so the one source is likely referring to Adam. **We share a common ancestry with Christ in Adam.** We're all descendants of the same man, of the same family. That's what makes us brothers with Jesus. He's our Elder Brother.
- ❖ **Now the significance of all this will be lost on us if we don't trace out the biblical theme of brothers in the OT.** If you think about it, brothers were horrible to each other in the OT. Especially elder brothers. I just think of Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, or the ten older brothers and Joseph. **In each case, the elder brother was suspicious and jealous of his younger brother.** So he made his brother suffer. He even tried to take his brother's life. Cain actually succeeded. Elder brothers are the worst!
 - And if you go into the NT, the most well known elder brother is the one in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. And there again he's depicted as being jealous and suspicious. **The Bible has this theme running of elder brothers who are always putting themselves first. Who want to see you suffer.**
- ❖ But that's what makes Jesus so much better. **He's the better brother.** Who doesn't get jealous of you. Who puts your interests ahead of his own. **Who willingly suffers so you don't have to.** That's why v10 says it was fitting that God should make Jesus, the founder of our salvation, "*perfect through suffering*".
 - Now that in no way implies that there was a moral imperfection in Jesus that required him to go through some suffering first. No, that word *perfect* could also be translated as *complete*. **That means Jesus's suffering brought about completion (perfection) of his work as the founder (or author) of our salvation.**
- ❖ If Jesus was going to be our Savior, to be a good Elder Brother, who protects and looks out for his little brothers, then he had to become a man. God can't suffer by virtue of his divine nature. He's impassible. **So in order to suffer – to perfect or complete our salvation – he took on a human nature.** He became man in the person of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago.

He Became a Man to Die as Our Deliverer

- ❖ Now figuring out *why* Jesus had to suffer leads us to our next point. This is the second reason why God became a man – to die as our deliverer. That's the shocking nature of Christmas. When you realize that we're celebrating a birth that has everything to do with a death. **Every one is born to live. But Jesus was born to die.**

- ❖ Look at v14, "*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*". **Just as God can't suffer, he also can't die.** He's eternal, immortal. That's why the Son of God took on mortality. He partook of a body in order that he could die.
- ❖ Now why did he have to die? The text says that through his own death, "*he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil*". So his death is aimed at destroying the devil. Who's described as having the power of death.
 - That needs some clarification. **According to the biblical worldview, the devil doesn't have the power of death as in the power to choose when you die.** He's not sovereign over who lives and who dies. God is. That's God's prerogative. So don't picture the devil as some sort of Grim Reaper-type figure. When it says he has the power of death, read on in v15. It says Jesus died to destroy the devil and "*deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*"
- ❖ So this is saying we're under the devil's power so long as we fear death. The fear of death is a real form of bondage. Think about it. **Because of the fear of death, people have been intimidated and coerced to do all sorts of things they would have never done otherwise.** Threatened a man's life and you can compel him to do just about anything.
 - That's a form of slavery. And it's pervasive. Now some people might disagree and claim they're not afraid of death. They're just afraid of dying. And I get it. The thought of dying *is* scary. How will it happen? Will it be sudden? Or prolonged and dragged out? Will it be painful? Will I suffer much? Will my loved ones be there?
- ❖ But when someone says they're not afraid of being dead, I think it's because they imagine on the other side of death is sheer nothingness. And there's nothing to be afraid of nothingness.
 - But that's a good example of the devil exercising his power related to death. **In this case, it's a power to deceive.** He would love nothing more than to utterly persuade you that there is no such thing as an afterlife. That it's all wishful thinking. That there is no judgment to come. That there is no hell, no consequences of eternal punishment.
- ❖ But we can't sit idly by as the devil deceives our family and friends, our colleagues and classmates. We need to expose his lie and proclaim the truth of Scripture. **To tell those we care about that according to Hebrews 9:27, "it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment."** After we die, we will face a Holy Judge who will hold us accountable for every ill-spoken word, every selfish thought, every hurtful action.
 - And in the context of this heavenly courtroom, the devil wields the power of death over us in another form. In the form of accusation. **He wields an accusatory power against sinners like us** (cf. Rev. 12:10). The devil is an expert in God's law. He's had thousands of years to study it, so he knows how to use it against you. He'll mount up all the evidence of all your sins and disobedience. And he'll have an open and shut case. God's word says the wages of sin is death (Rom. 3:23). You, as a guilty sinner, owe a death. And not just a physical one but a spiritual death of God-forsakenness.

- ❖ But that's exactly why Jesus came to die. He was born a man, so he could suffer and die in our place. By paying the wages of sin for us. By experiencing God-forsakenness for us. **In dying the death we deserve to die, Christ destroyed the devil.** That's what it says in v14.
 - But the Greek there for "*destroy*" is probably better translated as "*render powerless*" (NASB). That makes more sense since Jesus's death didn't annihilate the devil. He's still around. He's still allowed to roam this earth – for now.
 - **But through Jesus's death, the devil was truly rendered powerless – in terms of his power to accuse.** Because our sin debt have been paid, the devil has nothing left to accuse us with.
 - Christ has died for us. And he didn't stay dead. Death couldn't hold him. On the third day, he rose from the grave, and all who hope in him have the same hope of sharing in his resurrection.

- ❖ **Friends, the good news of the gospel is that, even though all of us will one day die, Jesus saves us from staying dead.** Death won't be our final chapter. In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says that Jesus's resurrection has taken the sting out of death (15:55-56). And he identifies the sting as sin. In other words, by dying for our sins and rising in victory, **Jesus enables us to face a stingless death.** A death that no longer has to scare you.

- ❖ **Death itself has been transformed for those who are in Christ. What was once our enemy has become our servant.** In 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul describes death as the last enemy to be subjugated to Christ, to serve as his footstool. Death is now our servant. It serves our best interest. If we die, we gain. Because we get to be with Christ.
 - So do you see how Christ delivers you from slavery to a fear of death? How he makes death into a servant whose job is to usher you to your desired destination? Why would you fear your servant? He works for you. He's acting in your best interest.

- ❖ **Friends, are you scared of death?** It's going to depend on who you believe is waiting for you at the end of life. An enemy? Or a servant? If death is still your enemy, then you rightly should fear it. I'd imagine you would be kicking and screaming on your way out.
 - But if you take Jesus at his word, if you call out to him for deliverance, then you can share in the hope of one day facing a stingless, powerless death. **At the end of this life, you'll meet a servant waiting to usher you to a better world, a better land, a better home.** It's for this very reason that God became man.

He Became a Man to Serve as Our High Priest

- ❖ He became a man to suffer as our brother, to die as our deliverer, and lastly to serve as our high priest. This point relates closely to the one before. There's a parallel between vv14 and 17. V14 says God became man so he could die and thereby render the devil powerless.
 - Then v17 says, "*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.*" So the defeat of the devil is tied up with Jesus's role as the better high priest and the better propitiation he made for sins.

- ❖ Now we'll need to explain what the word propitiation means in a moment, but first notice how v17 starts by stating that Jesus "*had to*" be made like his brothers. He *had to* become a man. **There was an ought-ness to the Incarnation.** In other words, he had to become man in order to accomplish the work he set out to do. This again is stressing the fitting nature of the Christmas story. It's showing how it all makes perfect sense.
- ❖ If the Son of God did not become like us in every respect, then he could not function as a priest for us. **A priest is someone who represents you before God.** He speaks to God on your behalf. He intercedes for you.
 - If you recall, the Levites were chosen from among the twelve tribes of Israel to serve as priests to represent their brothers before God and intercede for them. They were qualified to do that because they literally shared flesh and blood.
- ❖ That's why Jesus partook of our flesh and blood. **If he never became a man, he couldn't represent you. He couldn't help you.** But that's exactly what he came to do, as it says in v16, to help the human race and not angels. "*For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore 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*".
- ❖ Now the priestly service in view here is his **work of propitiation**. Keep reading v17, "*to make propitiation for the sins of the people*". Now I realize that's not a common word. That's because it's a religious word. **In Greek, it was commonly used in pagan religion for a sacrifice by which a god becomes propitious (favorable) towards you.** That assumes the god is either angry or indifferent towards you and needs to be propitiated.
 - If you're familiar with the *Iliad*, there's this moment where Agamemnon is trying to get to Troy with his massive army but the winds aren't favorable. So the king tries to propitiate the sea god by the sacrifice of his daughter. His sacrifice is accepted. The sea god's wrath is averted, and the winds appear.
- ❖ Now when the Bible says Jesus was made like us, to become our high priest, to make propitiation for our sins, **the underlying assumption is that God is angry.** Angry at our sins. His wrath is real. And it's totally consistent with his love.
 - **But I know many people don't think you harmonize God's love and wrath and assume they're mutually exclusive.** If he's a loving God, then he can't be wrathful (especially towards me). And if he's a wrathful God, then he's no longer loving.
- ❖ But just try to imagine a God who doesn't get wrathful. Just consider all the horrendous evil in this world. Just turn on the news and you're confronted with sexual predators, child abusers, mass murderers and terrorists gunning down or running down innocent victims.
 - **I'm glad God gets angry with evil and sin.** I couldn't respect him if he didn't. And I believe it's love compelling him. Love for the victims, for the weak and helpless. My hope rests in the belief that one day God will bring all sinners to perfect justice and eradicate all traces of evil from this world. For that I give thanks.

- ❖ **But then I can't forget that all of that includes me.** It includes the evil and sin in my own heart. I need propitiation for my own sins. I need to propitiate God and his wrath. And you need to as well. But no amount of remorse or contrition. No amount of self-inflicted punishment or good works can propitiate God. No amount can satisfy his wrath.
 - Only blood will do. **Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins** (Heb. 9:22). So there needs to be a sacrifice. But don't get the God of the Bible confused with the pagan gods of Greek mythology. Our God is so much better.

- ❖ **In pagan versions, the gods never offer the propitiation.** That's the job of the worshipper. The gods just sit back and wait to see what we'll bring to appease their wrath. **But the God of the Bible took the initiative.** And unlike pagan versions, it wasn't an animal or virgin girl or even a brave volunteer that was sacrificed. No, God the Father willingly sacrificed his only Begotten Son. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son*" (Jn. 3:16). He gave him to be the propitiation for our sins.
 - And God the Son willingly did his Father's will. **He willingly took on the role of the priest and the propitiation.** He became the Sacrificer *and* the Sacrifice. He had to because it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:4).
 - It takes human blood to atone for human sin. **To be an effective Savior the Son of God needed human blood coursing through his veins.** Which meant that he needed veins and a beating heart. He needed to come in the flesh. He had to be truly human. Otherwise, we still wouldn't have a Savior, and each of us would still in our sins and still under the just wrath of God.

- ❖ This is the mercy of the Incarnation. This is why we celebrate Christmas. To remind ourselves once again how wonderful a Savior we have in Jesus. One who can sympathize with our weaknesses, who has in every respect been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). And as it says in v18, "*For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*"

- ❖ **This is why I believe Jesus is the Perfect Savior.** A superman type of hero is certainly capable of coming down from the clouds to rescue us, defeating our enemies, and eradicating evil. But a superman can't identify with us. He's not one of us. So he can't substitute his life *for us* as a propitiatory sacrifice. **Only a fellow man can save mankind from the evil that lies within us. From our true enemy – our own sin.**

- ❖ **And even though a superman can pity you, he can't sympathize with you.** He hasn't suffered as you suffer. He doesn't know what it's like to be weak in the knees in the face of great agony and pain. He doesn't know what you're going through. But Jesus does.
 - That's why he became man. That's what makes him the Perfect Savior. Fully God so he can fully rescue you from your sins. Fully man who fully identifies with you and understands what you're going through. He's a fitting Savior. He's the one you need.