
The Perfected Leader of Glorified Sons

Hebrews 2:9-18

Introduction In the early frontier when the West was being settled, the difficulty of the journey and the dangers along the way made it necessary for most to travel west by wagon train. The settlers would arrive at certain frontier towns which were jumping off places and form up the convoys there. To guide these wagon trains, men who knew the trails and had experienced the dangers were hired as scouts and wagon masters. Because they had gone over the trails over and over again, they were trusted to bring the settlers safely to their destinations. Their experience on the trails qualified them to lead the wagon trains. That they had dealt with the difficulties and dangers brought a sense of help and hope on the long and wearying way.

There is a sense that this is what these paragraphs are all about. They are all about someone pioneering the way ahead and dealing with the dangers and difficulties all along the way so that he might be able to better run to their rescue and to bring them safely home.

Now I must say this. We are not given as a people to think much about death. It was probably not foremost on your minds when you arose from your sleep his morning. And probably not one of you thought that today you would hear a message on death. But then again, on days and at times and in seasons when we least expect it, death intrudes on our lives. So it is only appropriate then, that we take up this text. For how we face death is a part of the greatness of our salvation and sadly, an often neglected part.

Verse 9 puts us on our track. "We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death..." So Jesus has come to glory through experiencing the suffering of death. His becoming human enabled Him to do that. And in doing that we see what God has wrought through Christ for his children.

A Leader Who Is Perfect**(v.10-13)**

Now verses 9 and 10 are connected by a little word, “for.” So verse 10 is the *because of* verse 9 or it is the *explanation of* verse 9. Now notice something carefully. Jesus comes to His glory (v.9). And God is bringing many sons to glory (v.10) How is this going to happen? For Jesus it was experiencing the suffering of death. Loved ones, it is how we come home to glory as well.

Its Statement**(v.10)**

“It was fitting to perfect the author [pioneer, leader] of their salvation through suffering.” We must not neglect the greatness of our salvation because Jesus’ suffering in death made Him the perfect leader of the sons going to glory.

Now, this verse raises two questions we need to answer.

- What does it mean, “It was fitting?” It simply means that it is appropriate; it fits in with the way God is; there is a sense of balance and symmetry that is congruent with God’s character.
- How can Jesus be “perfected?” Does this imply that Jesus was in some way imperfect or sinful? No, both the witness of the rest of Hebrews and the greater witness of the Scriptures make that impossible. It means that Jesus came through an experience He had never had as either God or man—he died. So there is a completeness brought to His experience. Jesus can remember what it was like to die.

So what is the Apostle saying to us? It is just like God to complete Jesus’ résumé as the trailblazer to glory by suffering death. So Christ experiences as well what every human experiences—death.

But that is not all. That He has pioneered the way to glory by blazing a trail through death *is all a part of our salvation*. Further, the greatness of this salvation shines forth in the glory of the One from whom and to whom are all things.

Think of it this way. Why is it fitting or symmetrical or beautiful for Jesus to suffer death?

- Because He is bringing many sons to glory in the same way;
- Because it completes in His experience (and we will have more to say about this in a moment) what we experience;
- Because it glorifies God.

But how can this possibly be so?

Its Reasons

(v.11)

There are three reasons imbedded in this verse. Let me mine them out and put them to you. The reason that it is exactly right and congruent and yes, even beautiful is that:

- We have one purpose – holiness. God is sanctifying and we are being sanctified. Now Jesus is sinless; we are not. God, in bringing sons to glory must do so along the trail of sanctification.
- We have one Father – Jesus addressed God as Father; and so do we. Jesus is declared the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead; we are born the sons of God by regeneration from the dead.
- We are one family – Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren.

So our union with God in His sanctifying purpose as our Father makes it possible for Jesus to unashamedly call us His own family. Since we are a family and Jesus is our brother, then it is fitting that all of us, His human children and His divine Son come home to glory along the same trail.

The Apostle cites to two texts that illustrate his point.

Its Illustration

(v.12-13)

The first text is from Psalm 22:22. This Psalm speaks about the death of Christ. Not only because the language is specifically fulfilled, but also because Jesus quoted it on the cross (Matt. 27:45-46). For three long, agonizing hours the opening words of this Psalm were ripped from the heart of Jesus. For the first time in all eternity, God the Father separated Himself from Jesus, pouring out His wrath on Him. The sight was so awful that even creation turned away its light and the sun hid its face and the earth trembled. Can you hear it? *My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?* This loved ones, is the suffering of death that Jesus experienced. O, the thorns and stripes and the nails and the nakedness and thirst and wracking torment of ragged breathing while hanging on a tree and a criminal's execution were suffering. But nothing, *nothing* compares to those hours of utter spiritual aloneness and abandonment and horrendous burning as the consuming fire of the holiness and wrath of God fell like brimstone on Jesus' soul.

And all of this that He might sing in the congregation with those whose names He calls out as brothers and sons in glory.

The second text is from Isaiah 8:17-18. Imagine. Because Jesus has suffered death and when we having passed through death enter the glory of heaven, Jesus presents Himself before the Father and announces, "Here I am, and the children You have given me."

So, do not neglect the greatness of your salvation, for it was just like God to bring Jesus as our perfect leader to glory through death because we will also.

So Jesus is greater than angels in His humanity because He is our perfect leader in bringing us home to glory.

An Enemy Who Is Defeated

(v.14-16)

The great reality is that all along the way, we face terrible difficulties brought by dangerous enemies. Jesus became human so that by dying He might defeat Satan and deliver us from the fear of death.

The Danger that Enslaves

We have an enemy who seeks to enslave us. In fact, He has enslaved us to sin and to its wages. We are depraved and we are dying. And most of you are enslaved to the fear of dying. You do not think about it, are surprised when it touches your life, insulate yourself from its cold touch under layers of passing pleasures and frown at preachers who disturb your comfort and security by confronting you with its inevitability.

These verses clearly say that when we fear death we are enslaved to Satan's power. How is this so? Is it not sin that is the visible chain shackling us to the power of Satan? Bear with me for a few minutes. Because the next paragraph shows how sin enslaves us to the fear of death.

The Deliverance that Frees

But Jesus has died. He has experienced death. And He is no longer dead. He is raised from the dead. He has broken the bindings of sin that enslaved us to Satan. He has done so by taking Satan's own weapon and turned it against him to defeat Him. Satan has been disarmed and defeated. So Jesus has freed us from the fear of death.

Notice carefully the language of verse 15. Fearing death is a lifelong slavery from which Jesus has freed you. Now I must ask you a plain and simple question. *Is this true of you?* Do you fear dying?

Why do we? What is it that causes death to become an enslaving fear?

- Because this present world and its passing pleasures are too important to us. We believe that dying will take us away from all that we want and have worked so hard to amass and maybe have not yet fully enjoyed.
- Because death is suffering. Quite simply, we have no theology of suffering that will sustain us even in the midst of suffering. Most of us can barely hold up under a headache. So the immense suffering of death frightens us into unbelief that Jesus' suffering in death brought good for us and glory for Him and it will bring us to glory.
- Because we know that we will face God. The Scripture tells us that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven to every living creature. Every man knows whether he has a Bible or Christian knowledge or not, that he will one day die and will one day face God. Now man goes to immense lengths to suppress this knowledge. But it is still a fact. Since death is the gateway into the hall of God's judgment, we fear it.
- Because we will face God with our sins. If we fear death, this is really the bottom line. We will face God with our sins and God will deal with us. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

So Jesus becomes human and dies to defeat Satan and deliver us because it is humans Jesus is helping and not angels. The angels who sinned are still enslaved to Satan's power and will one day face the awful judgment of God. Jesus has made no effort to save them. His chosen angels were kept from falling and preserved in innocence and have no fear of death.

But, Satan uses the power of sin to enslave us to death and to the fear of death. But Jesus has died and therefore freed us. How then does Jesus' death disarm and defeat Satan? That is why we are brought in our text to the next point. We are not to neglect the greatness of our salvation for in bringing us to glory we have a leader who is perfect, an enemy who is defeated and a priest who is merciful and faithful.

A Priest Who Is Merciful and Faithful (v.17-18)

The greatness of our salvation is in bringing sons to glory. The sons He is bringing are human. And because they are human, Jesus must be like these brothers in every way.

The Purposes of Jesus' Humanity (v.17)

Do you see the *that's* in this paragraph? Jesus became human so as to be:

A Sufficient Priest

Jesus is our high priest. We are to think of Him as a priest just as the Old Testament saints would have thought of theirs. The point of the Old Testament is to give us Biblical categories in which to think of Christ. He is our priest. He is our only priest. And we must think of no one else as our priest. These great truths will be unfolded like some great flower petal by petal in the chapters to come. But for now, Jesus has become human so that He might become a priest.

He has not just become any sort of priest. He is one who is merciful and faithful in His service to God. Now what does this mean? Again, we have here in just a few words what a great deal of Hebrews is all about. Briefly, Jesus is merciful and faithful as a priest who offers up *himself* to God. So He is not only the priest, but He is the sacrifice. In Jesus the sacrificer and the sacrifice merge into one.

A Satisfying Propitiation

It is unfortunate that the translators chose in the NIV to render it "make atonement" The word here is *propitiation*. And that is most important to both understanding why Jesus is our High Priest, how He has disarmed Satan and when He comes to our aid.

Propitiation means to satisfy or to appease or to turn away someone's wrath. The Bible is full of the idea that God is angry with our sin and sins and that Jesus has satisfied that wrath by taking it on Himself. So Jesus has dealt with our sins by satisfying His Father in taking our punishment for us.

Let me put this in just a few sentences that I hope will capture it for you.

- Jesus became like us to help us;
- Jesus became a merciful and faithful high priest;
- In mercy, Jesus propitiates the Father's wrath against our sins;
- In faithfulness, Jesus defends us against sins.

This last statement is what verse 18 is all about.

The Provision of Jesus' Help

(v.18)

To help us with this, I want to change the translation a bit. Some translations reverse the clauses and thus shift the meaning. The impression we are left with then is that temptation caused Jesus to suffer. While this may be true, it is not accurate to this text. Listen to this rendering carefully.

For since He Himself {note the emphatic} was tempted in what He suffered, He is able to run to the cry of those who are in danger, aiding those who are tempted [in what they suffer]. (Expanded NASB)

You see right away that this is saying something quite different. In the course of what Jesus suffered, He was tempted. And having experienced that, He runs to our aid when we are tempted in the same kind of suffering.

Two questions emerge: what did Jesus suffer? What is this temptation?

- Jesus suffered death. Verse 9 makes this emphatic statement and therefore colors every reference to Jesus' death in verses 10 and 14. The suffering referred to here is the suffering of death.
- Jesus was tempted in suffering death. In the garden of Gethsemane, that temptation was verbalized. "Let this cup (of suffering death) pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." The contemplation of sin being laid on Him and suffering the agony of physical and spiritual death wrought such a struggle in Jesus as a human being that He sweated blood. But He submitted. He trusted. He did not fear.

So there we have it. When we die, and we are tempted not to trust Jesus in those moments and not to submit to God's will, Jesus will run to our aid as a merciful and faithful High Priest to help us.

But that is not all. We have no need to fear death, to be enslaved to it for Jesus has defeated Satan and delivered us *because He has dealt with our sins*. When I close my eyes in this life and open them as a son coming home to glory, I will not face God with my sins. The frown of His wrath because of Jesus has been turned to the smile of His forgiveness. And because that is true, I will not fear death.

- Conclusion**
- Why does the Apostle say these things to this people?
 - They were facing the possibility and reality of a terrible and painful death for their faith. For them, death was the horrible consequence of saying “Jesus is Lord.”
 - Death was being used as a threat against them. The fear of dying was being used to tempt them to deny their faith. Deny that Jesus is the only God and Lord or you will die. This is only a threat and a temptation *if we fear death*.
 - So death is not a threat—do not fear:
 - Jesus is bringing you to glory;
 - Jesus has defeated Satan;
 - Jesus has dealt with our sins.
 - We can hardly relate to that. We do not face the possibility of facing death if we deny Christ. As a result, we deny Christ in all sorts of subtle ways that show in the long run why we fear death so much. And that is because we are not sons, we are not going to glory, Satan still enslaves and we feel much too often the frown and wrath of God.
 - May I bear my heart before you for just a moment? Loved ones, I want to die well. Yes, I want to live well too. But most important of all, I will not fear death. Jesus has become human, and has experienced the suffering of death. In doing so, I will not fear death because Satan cannot use my sins separate me from God. I will believe and trust that Jesus has covered and cleansed my sins and has satisfied the Father’s anger against my sins. I will believe that Jesus will run to my aid in the temptations that the suffering of death will bring. I will be free in life. I will be free from fear in death. Because, if Jesus is for us, who can be against us?
 - Some this morning need to come to Jesus, to confess that He is their Lord—that they will obey Him and submit to His authority. You need to believe that Jesus has died and was raised so that you may be saved. You need to call out in desperate need because you are sinking in your sins and if you died today you would face, not the smile but the awful frown and horrifying wrath of justly offended God. This may be the day of your salvation. Trust and treasure Christ today.
 - Some this morning know that you fear death. You know that the pleasures of the world, the things you are amassing, the relationships you prize are all chaining you to the fear of death. Some well know that if you died now, you have unconfessed sins either committed or contemplated in your hearts. Let us take these paragraphs as true. Let us forsake the sins that so easily weigh us down. Let us see Jesus. Let us not fear death.
 - You have this word from God this morning. That in the moment of your dying, when you are tempted to question, to despair, to deny, to anger and self-pity, Jesus will run to your aid because He has gone through death and in doing so knows exactly what you are experiencing. He will help you to endure through till you open your eyes in glory.

Do not neglect the greatness of salvation. For how else will you escape?

