

## HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part nine

Sunday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - 10 a.m. - Teaching #1953

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### CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER THE DEVIL AND THE MEANING OF OUR LIVES

**Hebrews 2:14-16** - "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, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. [16] For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham."

The quotation we studied last week from **verse 13** of the prophet Isaiah - "**Behold, I and the children God has given me....**" - forms the bridge into **verse 14**. The reference to Isaiah's **children** is immediately picked up in our writer's description of mankind as "**the children**" - "**Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood....**" (14).

The writer is going to link up the **weakness of the human condition** - that's the meaning of the fact that the children all "**share in flesh and blood**" (14) - that's the frailty we all share - our writer links that with the fact that Jesus "**partook of the same things**" (14). And those "**same things**" are the flesh and blood we humans all are born into.

But even here the writer is extremely careful to make a distinction. We frail human beings all "**share in flesh and blood**" by our **natural condition**. The Son, in distinction, "**partook of the same things**" (14). Take special note of that verb, "**partook**." Here is the mystery of the **pre-existent Son taking on** a humanity - flesh and blood - at a **specific time**. You and I don't **partake** of flesh and blood. Flesh and blood are what we **are by nature**.

Not so with our Messiah. God the Son "**partook of**" - **took on** - **became** - **assumed** - flesh and blood when He entered this world as the "**firstborn**" of His many redeemed brother and sisters - 1:6 - "**And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world....**" So He is **born into this world** - that's the **taking on of flesh and blood** - so he can become the **firstborn** of many others into redemption and an eventual new creation.

From this point the passage unpacks **four accomplishments** of the flesh and blood incarnation of the Christ. **First, He "destroyed the one who had the power of death"** (14). **Second, He delivered those "who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage"** (15). **Third, He became a "merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God...."** (17). And **fourth, He became effectively "able to help those who are being tempted"** (18). We'll look at the richness of the first two of these today and the last two next Sunday.

#### 1) GOD THE SON TOOK ON FLESH AND BLOOD TO DESTROY THE POWER OF THE DEVIL

The full details are neatly written in **verse 14** - "**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....**"

There are several strange edges to this verse that make it hard to fully digest. One of the difficulties comes from our own Bible reading and the other comes from what we observe of life all around us. And both of these make it hard to see what our writer means when he says the death of God the Son **destroys the devil**.

**First**, from our Bible reading we all know it wasn't the **devil** who decreed death upon mankind in Genesis 3. It was **God**. So how is it our writer gives the power of death to the devil? And **second**, even apart from our Bible reading, death looks anything but powerless in our world. It has chalked up nothing but wins and has no recorded losses or ties. So our text seems a stretch on both accounts.

Let's look at these two issues. First, how is the power of death ascribed to the devil when it was decreed by God? And the important distinction here is our writer isn't talking about the **origin** of death, but the **power** of death. The devil isn't the one who **decreed** the punishment of death. But somehow he **is** said to hold the **power** of it.

And here's how that works. The devil is an **interloper** - an intruder - who, knowing full well the impossibility of a holy God ignoring sin, **seduces mankind into its own destruction**. He is the original and persistent **feeder** of death by enticing rebellion against what he knows is the uncompromising justice of our Creator.

This is the devil's horrific power. His sway over mankind hasn't changed since his inaugural **four word destruction**

**of the original creation in Genesis 3:1 - "Did God actually say.....?"**

Absolutely nothing has changed in his universally successful approach. He spreads the same virus to this day. He still sows the same questions with unending success. How much sway should divine decree hold? Is something really forbidden simply by divine say-so? What if that decree - that **"what God has said"** - what if it makes no sense to us? What if our culture can explain it away? What if it seems intolerant? Does God have the right to **arbitrarily** put anything He says off limits?

Be careful how you answer those questions. Because some things are non-negotiable with God. If you even **tilt** in the direction of saying **"No"** to any of them you are lining up with the Serpent rather than the Messiah.

And there you have it. This **"Did God actually say?"** argument has constantly yielded satanic fruit. The devil has the power of death to this day.

Now we're just on the edge of answering some of our questions - **"How did the death of Jesus destroy the one who has the power of death?"** And what makes our Lord's victory strange indeed is Jesus **died**. On the surface He succumbed to the same end. He died just as surely as your great grandparents or everyone else in the cold march of history before Him. What kind of victory over the devil is this?

Here's the vital difference. We must all understand this. Remember, death is **penal**. It should never be seen as **natural**, even though everyone dies. Death is punishment. But there an important **distinction** with the death of our Lord. Everyone but our Lord experiences death - the result of the Fall - as a result of **rebellious against the will of God**. Jesus experienced death - just as real as ours - as a result of **perfectly fulfilling the will of God**. We die because of our **sin**. Jesus dies because of His **perfect obedience**. There is no connection between personal guilt and death in the person of God the Son. There's another **reason** for His death.

Our text has a veiled way of expressing this idea, but you have to look carefully to see it. The clue is in **verse 16** - **"For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham."**

We're meant to see a distinction between **angels** and the **offspring of Abraham**. Not all the angels rebelled against God. Their fall wasn't systemic or universal. But **all** the offspring of Abraham fell from the original divine image.

Abraham is mentioned because he is the dominant Biblical example of a **covenant** partner with God. There were others - Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. And they all have one thing in common. They are all covenant **breakers**. They all left this earthly scene - **died** - as failed covenant keepers with God. The whole Old Testament is a record of **covenant breakers**, including Israel herself.

So how shall we escape the curse of death? How shall the devil's stronghold be broken? What we need is a **fully human covenant keeper**. We don't need a **religious** righteousness. We don't need a **pretend** righteousness. We need more than stained glass windows and incense. We need an actual, legal, justifiable righteousness from a fully human person before a holy God. We need actual righteousness from **our** side on **our** behalf.

Enter Jesus. Enter the Incarnate, fully human, just like Don Horban in every way, minus the sin, Jesus - born in human flesh in Bethlehem. He lived a historically verifiable sinless, covenant keeping life. Every communion Sunday we celebrate what Jesus Himself called the **"new covenant in my blood"**(1 Cor. 11:25), meaning He **died** keeping this covenant, not breaking it.

This is the seismic event we participate in at the Lord's Table. We are finally well represented from our own human side before the justice of God. This is the undoing of the devil's covenant breaking, death producing work. This is what happens when a sinless yet fully human covenant keeper dies in our place - **John 12:31** - **"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out."**

Notice there are **two things** stated here. **First**, there is the judgment on the world because the world must finally decide its response to this covenant keeping Redeemer. Everything will be **measured - judged** - by the response to Christ alone. And **second**, the **ruler of this world** is finally cast out. He still **exists**. But he has nothing to make his case stick for those in Christ Jesus. The faithful are safe in the perfect righteousness of Christ from all condemnation of the devil.

And it takes verse after verse of strained sentences - sentences struggling under the weight of trying to describe

something too powerful and wonderful to be captured by mere words - to tell us how precious it is to have a **covenant keeping Redeemer**:

**Romans 5:15-19** - "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. [16] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. [17] For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. [18] Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. [19] For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

We place our trust nowhere else. There is no other religion with a **covenant keeping Redeemer**. Stunningly, we are **affected** by Christ's perfect righteousness as fully as we are affected by Adam's sin - **verse 19** - "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

## 2 GOD THE SON TOOK ON HUMAN FLESH TO DELIVER THOSE IN BONDAGE TO THE FEAR OF DEATH

**Hebrews 2:15** - "...and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

I don't think this verse means we no longer have any apprehensions about dying. Not many healthy Christians are just longing to die. I think there is something deeper in these words.

A key to understanding them is tied up with what our writer means about the fear of death subjecting us to "**lifelong slavery.**" What kind of slavery is this? Is it just going to bed at night thinking, "Oh no! I'm going to die one day!"? Or is it something else? I think it's something else.

First, I think it's the fear of **accountability and judgment**. It's not death. It's what's just the other side of death. And it is placed in all mankind to at least consider eternity. What if the atheist is wrong? What if the agnostic didn't ponder properly? What if I wasn't a good enough person? We are created incapable of never considering such questions. But there's another dimension to our "**lifelong slavery**" to the fear of death.

Second, the haunting threat of death means all the other pursuits to find meaning and fulfillment in life will end in vanity and emptiness. Every accomplishment amounts to nothing. Every possession rots away. Every relationship ends in cold hard death. The Bible bluntly reminds us of those whose names are remembered no more. Nothing can be kept. Nothing can be kept safe.

Here is bondage. Here is futility. It's like planning the greatest road trip on earth - in a new Porsche - only to discover you have only one tank of gas and it can never be refilled. The penalty of human sin stands against even our brief, happiest moments and distractions.

This is precisely the slavery from which Christ has liberated us. I wish there was time to unpack the sure testimony of the Scriptures about the deliverance we have received by Christ's death for us:

**Romans 6:5 and 9** - "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his....[9] We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him."

Incredible words these. Jesus died on the cross. He **had** to die to accomplish the Father's will in being the **incarnate man** chosen to fulfill the terms of divine covenant for sin. But death has no **dominion** over Him because He was sinless. The devil has no claim on our Lord. The is the Redeemer Paul says we are "**united with**" both in His death and resurrection.

**2 Timothy 1:8-10** - "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, [9] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, [10] and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...."

There is no real *"light"* about life and immortality apart from the Christ. He has *"abolished death"* in His own sinless death. He has uniquely and fully revealed the gospel hope of *"immortality."*

**1 Corinthians 15:21-26** - "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. [23] But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. [24] Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. [25] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

We have been freed to risk everything for Christ. The energies of our lives can now be re-aimed in their only truly fulfilling direction. We have been freed to pour our lives into His kingdom. There is an eternal, brand new creation coming. All our works done for Christ stand eternally. Meaning is found in Christ that can't be emptied or undone by death. That enemy will be forever crushed under our Lord's reigning feet.

**Romans 8:38-39** - "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."