

One of Us
Hebrews 2:14-18
2/11/18
John Song

Good Morning. My name is John Song. I am the Pastor of Youth Ministries here at Columbia Pres. At this time I'd like to dismiss children age four through first grade for your time of children's worship. And for the rest of you, you are stuck with me.

Now I must confess to you all here that this morning I feel greatly indebted to P.D., Pastor P.D., for the groundwork that he laid last week as we're going through our series in Hebrews. Hebrews 2, verses 10 through 13, and the way that those verses lead into the very practical and real application points that the writer of Hebrews brings us here today. I kind of feel like in many ways P.D. has given the alley-oop, and all I have to do is slam dunk the point home. So credit the assist to P.D. Or maybe, perhaps to use a more relevant analogy, although I was supposed to be the quarterback this week, P.D. passed the ball to me, and all I have to do is to make sure that I not drop it. Where's Jason Morrissey? Is he here? Too soon? Too soon. Okay.

So today's passage builds upon the framework of last week, that Jesus is our champion and our brother, made perfect our salvation through his very suffering on the cross. These verses which we're about to read in Hebrews 2:14-18—you can turn your Bibles there now—deals with the question of how we turn theology, what we believe about God, into doxology, what we do with that. The task of living as a Christian seems insurmountably difficult, which is why for many of us we dare not even try. But what these next verses will show us is that we can. We can live the Christian life, because Christ is one of us. We can, because Christ, our brother and champion, has done this for us already. So let's turn our Bibles now to Hebrews 2:14-18.

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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore 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. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

Father, as we explore your Word and see that Christ is truly our brother, and one of us in every way imaginable, let us also see Christ as the God who makes this all possible, makes the Christian life possible, that he would lead us to a place where we pursue you with all that we have within us, not because we can do it, but because you have done it for us. In Jesus Christ's name we pray all these things. Amen.

Let me start off by reading to you words that are still read weekly in churches across the world, 450 years after they had been written. Here's the quote:

"[Judgement] is very pleasant and a great comfort to the righteous and elect, since their total redemption will then be accomplished. They will then receive the fruits of their labor and of the trouble they have suffered; their innocence will be openly recognized by all; the Son of God will profess their names before God his Father and the holy and elect angels; all tears will be

wiped from their eyes; and their cause— at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil officers— will be acknowledged as the cause of the Son of God.

This quote may sound familiar to some of you in here, especially if you are of the Dutch persuasion. These are the words of the Belgic Confession, written for the Netherlands and Belgium during the time of the Reformation, the Protestant Reformation. These words were written by a man who, during the time that he was writing them, was a man on the run. He finding comfort in his suffering for the sake of the Gospel by remembering what Christ had promised him. His name was Guido De Bres. He was a student of John Calvin and Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza. But whereas Calvin's ministry was mostly local in the city of Geneva, Guido's ministry was a very different kind of ministry that could only be described as something like an Indiana Jones adventure. You see, Guido was an itinerant preacher in an area of the world in the Netherlands and Belgium that, at the time, what he believed about God was criminally illegal, punishable by death in the Spanish Inquisition. Guido spent a life on the run.

He would often travel underground, and he was being hunted, and as his name and popularity grew, he had to travel even more underground. But he was never shy to face his opponents. Just in case that his opponents didn't know who he was or what he believed, he actually took a copy of the Belgic Confession, and threw it over the castle wall of the governess of the Netherlands as though to say, "Here, find me. Your move, Spanish Inquisition. Catch me if you can." The congregations that he preached to would have actually spotters in the open fields so that they could worship in plain sight. And on Sunday evenings they met in gatherings at people's houses which they called Holy Parties—which, as an aside, is an awesome name for a party. And these Holy Parties, Guido would actually serve communion in secret. They even, like all secret societies do, gave themselves a secret name. They called themselves the Churches under the Cross. Because these churches were facing the same kinds of suffering at the time, the reformed Protestant churches, the same kind of suffering that Christ himself endured, as 12,000 reformers were executed by the Spanish Inquisition during this period of time.

And as he wrote to Kings pleading for understanding, running for his life, and while trying to console his wife and his kids, one might even ask, why in the world would he take the time to write a confession of faith? Why even publish it? What would compel a person to endure a life on the run, leaving everything and abandoning everyone and the comforts of an easy life—why wouldn't he just spend his life in the Netherlands as an academic, under the radar? All he would have to do is just simply live unremarkably, just stop writing, and just be a pleasant Dutchman all the days of his life.

For Guido, verses like the ones found in Hebrews 2:14-18 reminded him of the calling that he had received and what exactly the Lord Jesus Christ had accomplished for Him. He could not envision a normal, complacent life, filled with earthly security, without experiencing the kind of things that Jesus did in his. What he believed about Jesus would change everything, because Jesus has given him the template to see Christ as his brother—Christ as one of us.

Today's passage is a wake-up call to those who are finding your Christianity going stale and an encouragement to those here who are stumbling and walking through life with great difficulty and trying to endure. These verses are the conclusion of a thought of what we have been studying in our time in Hebrews, as Pastor Randy and Pastor P.D. have gone through. Jesus is better than all of the angels, because Jesus is both fully God and fully man, fully our brother and fully our champion. The dignity and superiority of the Son is a message that we ignore and we drift away from. And that drifting has real and serious consequences. And so the conclusion of his thought here—the writer of Hebrews points us to this mini Gospel—it's sort of a recap of the encouragement to protect us from falling away from the Lord.

And what's his first exhortation here in verses 14 and 15? That they would be reminded of where they came from, prisoned by the prince of death. Verses 14 and 15 give us the answer to the question that unbelieving people ask us to this very day. Why did Jesus have to become man? Why did Jesus

partake in the perfection of salvation through suffering? Well, it is because that we were once prisoned by this prince of death.

Now we have to remember that for the time of the people reading Hebrews, the conception of a god dying is not a favorable one, or one that would exude any kind of positive picture that this was a god to be worshipped. After all, who wants to worship a dead god? What would that say about ourselves, us as a community, if we submitted ourselves to a god that would have the same physical potential to die like the rest of us? This would seem like a strange thing that the writer of Hebrews would be suggesting to his congregation. I mean, after all, we want our God to be victorious. We want to win. We want to see our vision championed, our flag raised, our anthem sung, and losers never to receive the glory.

I mean, this is why we love watching the Olympics, because it feeds our desire to see people who have been waiting for years, dedicating themselves to hard work, living on their dreams, giving their greatest effort for three to five minutes of ice dancing, and watching them obtain the glory that they so had longed to grasp. Now, no one here—at least, I hope no one here—with a good conscience looks at an Olympic spectacle and delights to see peoples' dreams shattered and crushed, or cheer for a team that we know will live in defeat forever. Apologies to Cleveland Brown fans. So why then would Jesus, the Son of God, God himself, the second person of the Trinity—why would he have to be a man to die in our stead? Well, because unlike an athletics competition, Jesus isn't trying to win a medal or a sporting event. Jesus is sacrificially choosing the path of suffering and death, so he could free us from the slavery of Satan. Because this sin has enslaved us. It has imprisoned us completely.

Now, I know for some of you in this room, the very mention of the name of Satan is going to make you roll your eyes. "Oh, here we go, conservative preacher talking about Satan. So lame. So cliché." Right? Maybe some of you are saying to your friends, "Why did you bring me here? I thought this wasn't a typical church. Why is he talking about Satan?" Listen. I can sympathize with you. I know that Satan is often used as a bad Christian cliché, used to scare people into believing into God, rather than believing in God out of a loving response. And I truly detest any kind of witnessing and evangelism that would use that method. It's a horrible thing to use worldly fear to make someone love something else. But let's be clear here. As the French poet Baudelaire writes, "The devil's best trick is to persuade you that he doesn't exist." This leads us to the very delusion of self-empowerment that drives us to believe that we can live a sufficient life without God.

I mean, Hebrews 2 minces no words in this passage. The devil is real—verses 14 and 15—and someone that we must deal with in this life, in his temptations and his schemes and the way that he enslaves us. He has been granted the power of death, the power of that which, apart from Christ, we all fear death. We fear it, because we fear that we haven't lived the life that we were supposed to. We fear that we haven't lived the victorious life. We didn't get to cross everything off of our bucket list. We didn't get to make the money we wanted to make, or travel to the places that we wanted to travel to, or eat the food that we desired to eat.

And these temptations pulls us and enslaves us to a lifestyle of wants and needs, believing that whatever is waiting over that next horizon is the perfect view, only to find shattering disappointment and make us start the cycle all over again and again and again, until suddenly we find ourselves in a place of misery, of shame, of pride, of anger, of lust, of arrogance, of malice, of gossip, of hatred, of violence, of jealousy, of fear, and of slavery. This is what you and I battle each and every single Monday to Saturday when we step outside these church doors. And for some of us here in this room, our addiction to this lifestyle has held us in bondage, and we know it's going to kill us. We know it's going to destroy us. But we're enslaved to it nonetheless.

How many of us today feel exhausted by the very things that the world has told us would make us happy? How many of us here today are hardened, jaded, skeptical, because we were once so naïve to believe the lies that sin really isn't as big of a deal as it is? How many of us still hold out in hope that this

life truly can be the most fulfilling without an ultimate purpose? This is the power of Satan that has been present in every generation, from Adam, to Abraham, to Israel, to De Bres' Netherlands, to colonial America, to Howard County, Maryland. So where are you enslaved into believing that true fulfillment can be found apart from Jesus Christ? Where are you prisoned in believing that true happiness can be found in something that will fade into dust on this side of eternity? What does that look like for you?

This is the problem that all cultures have been trying to solve collectively throughout every age. Tim Keller in his book *Walking With God in Pain and Suffering* notes that the solution to freeing oneself from the pains and sufferings of this slavery is different culturally for all different kinds of communities. The moral culture's response is to simply just do more good as a collective. The way that we avoid the slavery of death is do more good as a collective. The introspective views suffering as an illusion. These cultures say best ways to detach yourself through enlightenment with those around you. The fatalist seeks to say "carpe diem" and accept whatever comes one's way. The dualist will say that this is just simply a battle between good and evil of the cosmos, and that we will eventually triumph as long as we remain vigilant together as a community. The secularist, they say this is all an accident, and if we build the proper structure as a society, then this accident will never happen again. But note the commonality in all of these different cultural responses. All of these say that we need to seek out the people who suffer in the same way that we do for comfort, because it's only in that community of ideas that we will find peace.

And we feel that to some degree, don't we? I mean, to hear somebody say that, "I've been there," and, "Yes, me too," and, "Yes, I feel your pain, because I've had that same thing happen to me." These are words that not only bring us solace, but they also bring us solidarity. This is why we are drawn into affinity-based communities, whether it be, you know, male and female support groups, athletic teams, music festivals, counseling communities, cross-fitters, gaming communities—whatever it is, we are drawn to these communities because we are drawn to these shared experiences that cause us to unite over the struggles and pains that we have seen life throw at us.

And those communities can be very wonderful places to experience that kind of fellowship. But the problem still remains, doesn't it? We still remain enslaved. And these communities, as fulfilling as they are, pale in comparison to what the writer of Hebrews is writing and offering us here. He is offering us the payment by the Priest of Priests. He is offering us a different kind of community. Here, we have God himself joining in every suffering that we have ever experienced. Here we have God embracing himself in community by becoming one of us. We no longer need to be enslaved by the power of the devil. We break that cycle, because Christ has broken it for us. He takes the shame and the penalty and the death of sin so that we no longer stand separated from our God. He breaks the chains of rebellion that we caused against him, and he frees us, and he frees ourselves and this endless cycle. And in his place, he puts his humanity on the line, his fragile body, his bleeding wounds, his hands, his feet. He says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And he calls us. He invites us to come to him.

This is why in verse 17 he says that Jesus is made like us in every respect, so that he could take that place of the high priest, the priest of priests, who—just to give you context—in the Old Testament, this priest of priest, the high priest, would go and make a sacrifice for all the people as a representative. He would demonstrate solidarity and communion in his sacrifice so that the sins could be wiped away. And this is what Jesus does for us. But not just simply for a year, in the Old Testament tradition, but once and for all, as the perfect sacrifice. This signifies that the power of death no longer has any grip or hold or power over us. The wrath of God which we deserve, which faces Satan and those enslaved to sin, would be overcome by the radical nature of Jesus making what's called propitiation—appeasing the wrath of God in his perfect sacrifice for us.

Our brother Jesus, our champion, as P.D. talked about last week, one of us, goes to the Father on our behalf and says, "Place all of that punishment, all of that wrath on me, so that they be a part of this community. They don't need to keep the pattern of slavery just to belong. They don't need to fulfill the list of to-dos. They don't need to sign the promissory notes that they would live the perfect life. They just

need to place their faith and trust in this Christ. I am the Lord their God, who has paid the penalty of the wrath they deserved.” This is what Jesus says to us. “I am the Lord their God, who is compassionate to forgive them, but faithful as a high priest to still make sacrifice. I am the ultimate community to be in union with. So God, please bring these people to myself.” Do you hear that cry of Christ calling to you here today? What would it be like to truly know that you could be free of that slavery of pain and suffering by keeping in mind that you have an eternity with the Lord in bliss to enjoy in His kingdom forever? What perspective would it give you in your life to take risks for the sake of the Gospel? How would knowing that the payment is delivered to you free you from the obligation of trying to please the world, and join a community that simply just says, “Believe, and you will be saved.”

This is the beauty of what the Gospel does for us in releasing us from the sting of death. It is the perseverance by the passion of Christ that gives us perseverance to face the challenges of sin and death today. It’s beautiful to see how this releases us in the people that we see around us here today. Look around you. People who have all been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. People who, yes, indeed, face the difficulties and the struggles of this life, but to know that even death itself cannot stop them from what the Lord will do in their life. Because for them, to live is Christ and to die is gain. People here who will reach others by bringing the life-giving, slavery-freeing news of the Gospel of grace. That is the encouragement we can find here, to those who confess Christ. That is what gives us and fuels our perseverance.

I’m reminded of people like this in my life. And maybe you have people like this in yours as well. There is one former partner in ministry that I had who is just the embodiment of this. His name was Soo, S-O-O. A boy named Soo. Soo was one of the nicest guys that you’ll ever meet in this life. He’s beloved by everyone. He’s one of those guys where, if you don’t like Soo, then chances are there’s probably just something wrong with you. You probably know these people, right? Soo was the first one to clean the toilets at the church. He was the last one that was there to make sure all the trash was taken out. He was the first one to greet a newcomer, to make them feel welcome. He was the friend that laughed at every single one of your jokes, you know. no matter how terrible or punny it was. You know? It was—sorry, I had to do that. Soo was one of these guys.

Soo came from a non-Christian family. He was the first one in his family to become a Christian. And, in fact, he sort of came to church because a friend just had invited him. And he heard the Gospel for the first time, and it just changed his world. Soo used to be enslaved to the thoughts and opinions of others, but upon realizing the good news and the message that we read about here in 14 to 18 of Hebrews, he spent the next ten years of his life serving the church, serving Christ, while having to be the head of his household with his mom and sister, living in a tiny two bedroom condo, while paying the bills, working full time and a half, while serving the church. His life was difficult. It was hard. And so I had to ask him sometime, “Soo, why has the Christian life made your life any better? I mean, here you have all these demands from the church. You have all these demands from your family. You have all this pressure on you. Has it really—it almost seems like being a Christian has brought more responsibility, more burden, more conflict in your life with your family. What could you possibly rejoice in? What could you possibly be thankful for?” Soo replied this one time to me, and it stuck with me always to this day, and I impart it to you. It’s something along the lines of this, and it’s just beautiful. He says this:

“You know. John, I’m thankful for the fact and the reality that the cycle of death ends with me and my future family. My family, my mom and my sister, might not be Christians. But I take great comfort and I’m thankful to know that the cycle of death ends here. I’m thankful for the fact that I have the opportunity to tell my family about the message that saved me from the slavery to sin. I’m thankful that the Gospel is my comfort in a world that offers me none. I’m thankful as I seek to follow Christ in my own life. Christ is showing me an example in the life that he lived.” Friends, this is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying when he writes, “For because he himself has suffered when tempted,” in verse 18, “he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Our Lord knows what you’ve been through. He knows your

pain, your misery, your worries, your anxieties, your fears. He has already taken them upon himself perfectly, so that you would no longer live in the torment of your own personal hell. It's that kind of freedom that changes everything.

Our friend from the 16th century, Guido De Bres, understood this. In 1567, he was prisoned for a second time by the Spanish Inquisition and was convicted to be hanged. But he wanted to assure his wife that he was leaving, as he was facing death, of why he chose to face the penalty of death. He could have chosen to avoid it, actually. The French Huguenots wanted to rescue him, but he denied their request. But he knew that he had to give an answer to his wife and bring consolation to her. So in 1567, he writes a letter to his wife, Catherine Ramon, and it can only be described as the most theologically romantic love letter that I'm aware of. Maybe the only one. Now, I wish I could read it to you in full, but you'll have to do that in your own time. Maybe read it on Valentine's Day? Who knows. But here's what he has to say about persevering to the end. Here's what he has to say about how the Gospel reminds him of this reality. It's beautiful. It's gorgeous.

Catherine Ramon, my dear and beloved wife, in our Lord Jesus Christ: your anguish and sadness disturbs somewhat the joy and the happiness of my heart, so I am writing this for the consolation of both of us, and especially for your consolation, since you have always loved me with an ardent affection, and because it pleases the Lord to separate us from each other.

I am practicing now what I have preached to others. And I must confess that when I preached, I would speak about the things I am actually experiencing as a blind man speaks of colour. Since I was taken prisoner, I have profited more and learned more than during all the rest of my life. I am in a very good school: the Holy Spirit inspires me continually and teaches me how to use the weapons in this combat. On the other side is Satan, the adversary of all children of God. He is like a boisterous, roaring lion. He constantly surrounds me and seeks to wound me. But he who has said, "Fear not, for I have overcome the world," makes me victorious. And already I see that the Lord puts Satan under my feet and I feel the power of God perfected in my weakness.

Our Lord permits me on the one hand to feel my weakness and my smallness, that I am but a small vessel on the earth, very fragile, to the end that he would humble me, so that all the glory of the victory may be given to him. On the other hand, he fortifies me and consoles me in an unbelievable way. I have more comfort than the enemies of the gospel.

Since such things have happened, my dear sister and faithful wife, I implore you to find comfort from the Lord in your afflictions and to place your troubles with him. He is the husband of believing widows and the father of poor orphans. He will never leave you – of that I can assure you. Greet our good friends in my name, and let them pray to God for me, that he may give me strength, speech, and the wisdom and ability to uphold the truth of the Son of God to the end and to the last breath of my life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ here at Columbia Pres, my prayer is that we see Jesus in such a way that it would move us to see Christ as our brother who suffers for us and suffers with us, trusting that he will sustain us every which way until our last breath. Trusting that on that day, as the words of the Belgic Confession, the words of this man who gave his breath to the very last, says, "The Son of God will profess their names before God his Father and the holy and elect angels; all tears will be wiped from their eyes." Can we pray together?

Father, what more can we say? Lord, you have rescued us from the prison of our own making, and you have freed us from the power of death. You have purchased it for us by taking the wrath of God onto yourself. And you give us perseverance to face each and every new morning, and the challenges and the misery it causes. And in the face of all of that, somehow you give us peace and joy. Father, what can we do but to fall in worship and in love more and more every single day with this Jesus Christ? And Lord, as we're about to sing to him, I pray that the worship in this place would remind us again that we are not alone. We are stumbling together, rejoicing together, praising the Lord together, and united to this Jesus, our friend and our brother. And it's in his name we pray these things. Amen.