

Hebrews 2:14-18

Christ the Destroyer of Death

...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage – vv. 14,15

I hope you've noticed in this portion of Hebrews the emphasis that is placed on the incarnation of Christ. I was thinking while reading this section again that during the holiday season when we celebrate Christ's birth we usually hear the gospel accounts of the incarnation found in Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel but we don't really hear much from this portion of Hebrews. And yet when it comes to emphasizing the truth and explaining the purpose behind Christ, the Son of God, becoming a man I don't know if you'll find any portion in Scripture that states it so plainly and explains it so clearly.

Look at how v. 14 begins – *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.* Since they are men, he became a man. There was a fitness or propriety that he should partake of the nature of those He would redeem. Or as Adam Clark puts it in his commentary:

Since those children of God, who have fallen and are to be redeemed, are human beings; in order to be qualified to redeem them by suffering and dying in their stead, He himself likewise took part of the same—he became incarnate; and thus he who was God with God, became man with men.

In v. 16 we find another reference to His incarnation. *For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.* This is another reference to His incarnation which would have had particular bearing to the Jews that Paul was addressing. Matthew Poole notes that *he assumed into union with his person the seed of Abraham; which seed is not to be understood here collectively, for either his carnal or believing seed; but it is the one singular, eminent Seed of Abraham, in and by whom, himself, his seed, and all nations were to be blessed.* The mention of the seed of Abraham would have certainly served as a reminder to the Jews addressed in this epistle that Christ was of their race.

In v. 17 we find another reference to His incarnation *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.*

So we find within the space of these few verses a strong emphasis on the truth of His incarnation. And it's worth pausing in order to simply affirm the truth of it that Christ became a man – that the Son of God became the Son of man – that our Savior exists as one person with two natures – human and divine. This is what makes Him a perfect Savior. This is what enables Him to represent men and not just represent them but represent them specifically in things pertaining to God.

Would you notice also in these verses that so clearly state the fact of His incarnation that they also teach us the purposes behind the incarnation. He must be made like unto His brethren, v. 17 tells us. And why? *that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.* He cannot be a merciful and faithful high priest, you see, apart from being a man. And He cannot be a high priest in things pertaining to God without also being God. He cannot make reconciliation which in the original could read *propitiation* – i.e. He could not endure the wrath of God for us without being powerful enough as God to endure that wrath and prevail over it thus accomplishing our redemption.

So we have the mention of His incarnation and the purpose of His incarnation in vv. 17,18. We have the same type thing in vv. 14,15 – i.e. we have the statement of His incarnation and the purpose of His incarnation in those verses as well. Look at vv. 14,15 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same;* there's the plain statement. Notice the purpose statement that follows: *that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

We've looked at these verses in a previous study but I want to return to them today and analyze them in a little more detail paying particular attention to what I'll call:

Christ the Destroyer of Death

In order to understand and appreciate this designation of Christ or this accomplishment of Christ, it's necessary first of all that:

I. We Know the Meaning of Death

Note the emphasis on death in vv. 14,15 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

The first thing we must see from these verses is the connection between death and the devil. The devil is said in this statement to have the power of death. It's important to understand the meaning of such a statement so we avoid ascribing more to the devil than we should. One commentator notes: *I understand this as meaning that the devil was the cause of death in this world, he was the means of its introduction, and of its long and melancholy reign. This does not affirm anything of his power of inflicting death in particular instances—whatever may be true on that point—but that death was a part of his dominion; that he introduced it; that he seduced man from God, and led on the train of woes which result in death. He also made it terrible. Instead of being regarded as falling asleep, or being looked on without alarm, it becomes, under him, the means of terror and distress.*

Our text tells us that Christ destroyed him that had the power of death. In other words Christ has snatched death from the devil's dominion and has made death subservient to His own cause. Rather than function as an instrument of the devil's terror it now functions instead under Christ's rule as the gateway to life. The force of what Christ has accomplished is brought out even more by the statement that Paul writes to Timothy in 2Tim. 1:9,10 referring to Christ: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

At first glance the text may seem absurd. Christ hath abolished death? How can such a thing be said when all men die — Christians and non-Christians alike. In order to understand the truth of it you need to know something about the realm of death. I would have you understand that *death is not the norm*. And by that I mean it's not the norm in terms of God's original intention. The biologist, the naturalist, the evolutionist would all unite to view death as the ultimate course of nature, a part of the circle of life as it were. The Word of God, however, reveals otherwise. Man was created in the image of God as an immortal soul. He was not created to die, but to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Death bears testimony to the fact that God's perfect creation has been marred and disrupted. We have the account of the origin of death given to us in the Scriptures. God directs the attention of Adam and Eve to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

The command came as a warning and a test to Adam and Eve — but they did eat and the whole human race was plunged into sin and through sin death gained its awful entrance into the human race. Death was not the norm or the intention of God but rather a penal infliction upon sinful man.

So with the breaking of God's command fellowship was broken between man and God. God would no longer be close to man. When this fellowship was broken man died spiritually thus fulfilling God's Word - *in the day that thou eatest thou shalt surely die*. Adam did not die physically in that day in the way the natural man sees death but he did die spiritually that very day. And this is death in its essence – *to be separated from God*.

And this separation from God is something we have to understand regarding death. This is the worst aspect of death. This amounts to much more than the body of a man lying still because the soul has departed from it. Those that are outside of Christ are dead men. And I'm not using the phrase the way we sometimes hear it as if to say *you're as good as dead*. No I mean sinners are dead now in the sense that they're separated from God! And that's what death is.

Why do you suppose it is that men and women can come into this world and live and breathe and see and feel and yet question the existence of God? Is it because they're just open-minded, scientific and logical? Is it because they insist on empirical evidence for the

existence of God and because they don't perceive that empirical evidence they question the existence of God? That's not the case at all. The reason they question the existence of God is because they're spiritually dead. They're described in Ephesians as *dead in trespasses and sins*. So in their death they are sinfully biased against God. But this is not all there is to death.

The decaying of your physical frame, the mind and body wasting away — the pain, the sickness, the agony — all leading to the time when the soul and body will be severed. This can be described as a part of the penalty of death. This is a matter that is beyond controversy. No man, whether he is religious or atheistic or a member of some false cult can deny this part of death. The cemeteries we pass bear witness to it. The fact that our life spans are limited bears witness to it. Whatever else men in this world disagree on – there is no disagreement on this aspect of death. It's too plainly set before us to miss. But even this is not all there is to death. Indeed, this is but a limited aspect of death. And if we're to understand the words of our text that Christ has abolished death or that Christ has destroyed him that had the power of death then we have to have a fuller view of all that death encompasses.

And so following physical death we must also take into account death's consummation on the judgment day when sinners will be judged according to their works and ultimately cast into the lake of fire. Here is the place where the venom of man's depraved heart is unstopped and man attains the full potential of his awful, vile, and wicked nature. Here is the place where separation from God becomes the sinner's eternal state.

It's a frightful condition - this condition of death. It's no wonder that our text makes reference to the bondage that arises from the fear of death. This is not something Christ-rejecting sinners like to contemplate. Such is the bondage and fear in a man's heart that he prefers to suppress the truth of death just like he prefers to suppress the truth of God. Death, you see, testifies that we're hopeless and helpless unless God intervenes. But thank God — He has intervened. And this leads to my next point which is:

II. Christ's Conquest of Death

Heb 2:14,15 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

Let's consider 1st how Christ abolished death:

1. He took upon Him flesh and blood. We've seen this emphasized in our analysis of this portion of Heb. 2. I hope you begin to see the importance of it. The eternal Son of God became a man — not a mere man but the God man – two natures in one person. He did this in order to represent us and the text makes it plain that if He would represent us He must become like us *For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same*. This point is made with even greater force in

v.17 where it says *it behooved him to be made like unto His brethren*. That term *behooved* is a word that expresses the idea of a binding obligation. It points us to the covenant between the Father and the Son through which Christ obligated Himself to become like us.

He would become one of us that He might qualify to be our Representative before God or as the text puts it *a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God*. It is for this reason that we read of Him earlier in this epistle that *He can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities*.

There's not a person in the world that can know the deep waters you're in the way Christ knows. He's been there. Are you dejected, despised and lonely? — So was Christ. Are you misunderstood, misrepresented and slandered? — So was Christ. Yet in all His trials and afflictions He was without sin. He was and is the *pure and holy, spotless Lamb of God*. Every step He took - Every deed He performed - Every word He spoke had the stamp of perfection and Divine approval.

2. Our text tells us that He became one of us with a two-fold aim in view — to destroy, and to deliver. Again from Heb. 2:14,15. *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*. The text also points out that the means through which Christ must accomplish this two-fold aim was *through death*.

In other words - through Christ's atoning death He dealt the devil - who had the power of death, the crushing blow that had been foretold in the garden of Eden when God Himself had promised that there would be one *of the seed of the woman who would take a bruise to the heel, but who in turn would bruise the head of the devil*. So now death is no longer under the devil's dominion but Christ's dominion as He says in Rev. 1:18 *I have the keys of hell and of death*. Christ has extended His sovereign rule to include the realm of death also.

Now we are told in our text in Hebrews that it was through His own death that He accomplished this. You see - death had no power over Him. Being sinless - there could be no penal infliction upon Him for sin. The only way He could die was by voluntarily submitting Himself to death's domain. So Christ tells us in John's gospel 10:17,18:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

And this He did - not for Himself, but for sinners who would believe in Him. And you should understand that He died in the fullest sense of the term:

- Separated from God His Father - He cries *My God, My God why hast thou forsake me?*
- He bore the full force of His Father's wrath against the sin - which is to say He

endured the full fury of hell.

- And He died in the way the eye of the flesh sees death — i.e. His soul was separated from His body.

Had there been any sin in Him - even the tiniest manifestation of iniquity - death would have had a just claim over Him. But because He was and is the sinless Son of God - death could not hold Him and He arose triumphant over death! This is how Christ through death has abolished death.

He has borne its condemning power so that we need not come under death's condemnation. He has opened the way for communion to be re-established between God and man right now so that we need not be separated from Him anymore. We can speak and be heard. He speaks to us through His word. His Spirit abides in our hearts. And because of these things - the sting has been removed from physical death.

The question we come to now is the one that exists in the mind of many - *Why do Christians have to undergo physical death? How can we say death is abolished when it is still easy to behold with the eye of the flesh?* And the answer is that God is pleased to keep this abolishing of death in the realm of faith not sight. But let me emphasize that this in no way takes from the truth of it. *Christ hath abolished Death!* And He is pleased to demonstrate to a lost and dying world that the fear of death has been removed from His people because communion with God has been restored - and condemnation has been eliminated.

It remains for us to consider finally:

III. The Effect of Christ's Accomplishment on Us

In a word the effect of Christ's accomplishment upon us is to liberate us. Note the description of men given in v. 15 – *through fear of death they were all their lifetime subject to bondage*. The fear of death is a source of bondage. And not just a source of bondage but a lifelong source of bondage. The thing that we dread most in this life is the loss of life.

Life is that which a dying man would gladly sacrifice all his riches for. And oh how quickly it passes. Anyone who is even slightly advanced in years can testify to the truth of the Apostle James' words: *For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away* (James 4:14).

How often do you hear it said that it seems that the upcoming generation was in the cradle yesterday. Whenever I see a new-born baby it's easy to say to the parent of that baby – *tomorrow he'll start driving, the day after that he'll get married and a day later you'll be a grandparent*. Life goes by that fast. And so many that were here yesterday - have now gone into eternity. This rapid flow of life reminds us that while life is man's most precious possession — *Death is man's most dreaded enemy*. We would flee from its grasp. We would seek to hide from it. We would avail ourselves of any and every means to evade it for as long as possible.

Men fight against it — gasping for more breath, more time. Indeed the fields of science and medicine are dedicated to warding it off. But the best they can do in spite of all their achievements is to stall it. They cannot control it or subdue it — all they can do is delay it for a little while. Perhaps one of the most dreadful aspects to death is found in the fact that each person has to face it individually. Loved ones may accompany you to the bank of the Jordan but they cannot go through the Jordan with you. That's something you must do alone.

And yet we don't have to go through it alone as believers in Christ. We have the promise of Christ's presence with us when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. On account of Christ's incarnation and suffering and death we have been set free from the bondage that arises from the fear of death.

Our communion with God through Christ has been restored. Our dread of the judgment that follows death has been eliminated because we know that the issue of our judgment has been settled by Christ Himself. What a blessed freedom we enjoy, then, as believers in Christ. What a sigh of relief we've been able to heave. What a burden we've been relieved from by having the dread of death along with the guilt of sin removed from our backs.

Shouldn't such freedom move you to praise and thanksgiving? Shouldn't it move you to reverence and awe when you consider how that freedom was brought to you? And shouldn't that freedom put all the other trials of life in their right perspective? You view your circumstances now as being severe and challenging. The Hebrews addressed in this epistle certainly viewed their lives that way.

And yet — what great blessings were before them that they had lost sight of. They had the prospects of everlasting life and the glory of heaven before them. We'll see when we get to the chapter on faith how those who laid hold of the promises of the gospel were able, like Moses, to choose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. *Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: we read in 11:26 for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*

I trust then this morning that you're glorying in this accomplishment of Christ. He has set you free by delivering you from the bondage of the fear of death. He has done this by conquering death through His own death and destroying him that had the power of death. May we be moved to esteem Him highly for bringing to us such great deliverance and may we find ourselves compelled to live for Him in the freedom we enjoy as we strive to follow Him in the obedience of faith from hearts that are filled with praise and thanksgiving.