

Everyone loves a hero story. From the ancient Gilgamesh, Hercules, Odysseus to King Arthur, Frodo, Harry Potter, Rocky Balboa, Indiana Jones, Bond, Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Wonderwoman, The Incredibles, Katniss Everdeen, George Washington, Harriett Tubman, the Avengers. Something happens in our chest in that climactic moment when a hero defeats evil. We love them. Always have, always will. Because a hero story is stitched into the fabric of the universe. They are all echoes of the true story. We know that evil is real and must be dealt with, we know we need redemption and we can't do it ourselves, we know that victory will require sacrifice, we long for it all to be made right. History is a hero story.

Advent is about the coming of the hero. At Advent, we reflect on why Jesus came. What is the point of the incarnation – God becoming man? But we are also in a series on the cross so we can ask what did the cross achieve? They are the same question, for he came to die. You see, the focus in the biblical narrative is not Bethlehem, but Calvary. Christmas is pointless without Good Friday and Easter Sunday and Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday. / Meet me: **Heb 2:5-18 [942]** Why did Jesus come? What's the point of Christmas? 6 real reasons for the season in this glorious passage.

I. To Restore Our Humanity (5-9) 5-8 – God did not subject the world to angels, but to humans.

Humans were the ones given the vocation of ruling the world on God's behalf. He's just reflecting on reality from Gen 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'."

Verse 5 speaks of "the world to come" which he is speaking about in this letter. That means the new covenant and new creation. What he will call in Ch. 12:28 a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Jesus is the new Adam who brings new creation. The hope of the world to come has burst into the world already with the advent of the King.

But the author points to Psalm 8, which is actually a reflection on Gen 1. He says, "somewhere it says this," which is kind of strange from a writer who likely knew his Hebrew Scriptures better than any other living preacher, but at the end of the day it doesn't matter who said it. It is from God's Word and that's all that matters. God is the author.

Humanity was created to rule the world on God's behalf. Our purpose is to govern God's good world. But at present, we don't see that happening. Hebrews 2:8 reads Gen 1 in light of Gen 3. It is not the way it's supposed to be. Those made to cultivate the earth now fertilize it. We are meant to subdue the earth but now 6' of earth subdues us. We're east of Eden. The dominion of death prevents humanity from fulfilling its proper vocation. We need a victor, a hero who can overcome the problem of death. Now, we don't see humanity fulfilling her God-given vocation. But:

9 Currently, we do not see human dominion. There is no peace, no order, no harmony. *But* we do see Jesus! We see the true human, the true image of God. He tells us four things about this truly human One. He was made lower than the angels just for a little while. Here, he is speaking of Christmas. Of incarnation. The Son of God took on human form. Phil 2: he took on the form of a slave being born in the likeness of men. Only for a little while though because he was then exalted to the right hand of God after his resurrection.

Second, he was crowned with glory and honor. This is the language of Psalm 8. In other words, he fulfilled the human vocation.¹ Gen 1 calls humanity to have dominion over the created order. Ps 8 reflects on that creation mandate. **Ps 8.** Gen 1 and Ps 8 are faithfully fulfilled by Jesus, because sin and death have no claim on him. Jesus is the truly human One. Eph 1:22: God put all things under the feet of Jesus. 1 Cor 15:27 “For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” That is why he is called the son of man, he is the true representative human who fulfills God’s original intention for us.

Third, he suffered. He was crowned because he suffered death. He obeyed. Phil 2:8: he became obedient to death, even death on a cross. He prayed that this cup would pass from him but if not – he said thy will be done, not mine. He fully obeyed. This is what we were supposed to do but did not. Could not. We need a substitutionary Savior, a vicarious Victor, a holy Hero.

Fourth, he tasted death for everyone. Don’t be like my 5 point Calvinist friends who try to square this circle. As Simeon said, be a Bible Christian, not a system Christian. This suffering wasn’t just for an elite group but for all. He tasted death for everyone. You know what that means? It means its for you! Anyone can get in on this. Immanuel Mantra: “I’m a complete idiot, my future is incredibly bright, and anybody can get in on this!” / It also means that if you deny Jesus, you are spurning his blood and will be held accountable for it. **10:26-31** / G

Jesus came to restore our humanity, to make us truly human again, to restore the image of God in us so that we may get back to the Garden and once again relate rightly to God, others, and ourselves. That we might represent God. As we read in Lewis’ *Prince Caspian*: “And we beasts remember, even if Dwarfs forget, that Narnia was never right except when a son of Adam was King.”² Tom Schreiner writes, “Jesus’ death is the means by which the rule of human beings over the world is restored.”³

II. To Provide a Champion who would Form a Family (10-13) – 10 It was fitting that God make our founder perfect through suffering.⁴ Jesus is the founder. He’s the captain and if he’s the captain he calls the shots. He’s the forerunner, the prince, the ruler, the champion, the source, the trailblazer, the originator. He is the pioneer, like the first explorer cutting through the jungle. He makes a way where there was no way.

The Father brings many sons to glory. What does that mean? In context, glory is used in verse 7, which is quoting Ps 8. Glory is the royal status of being an image-bearer who governs for God. It refers to God’s intention to restore his original intention. Schreiner writes, “The glory destined for human beings includes the rule over all described in the previous verses.”⁵ He brings us to glory, meaning he re-instates us as those called to have dominion. We failed at our vocation. All have sinned and lack the

¹ Peeler writes, “God is leading them into God’s goal for humanity.” Amy Peeler, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024), 84.

² C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (New York: HarperTrophy, 1951), 69.

³ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 110.

⁴ Perfection, here, is vocational. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 97.

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 95.

glory of God but in Christ we are called, justified, and glorified (Rom 8:30). Salvation is re-humanization. Rom 5:17: "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."

11-13 We and Jesus have one source, namely God the Father. Jesus took on our nature and we have the same Father and belong to the same family. Then he quotes more OT and he says that Jesus is speaking through the Psalms and through Isaiah.

Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. Jesus is not ashamed of you. And he is our older brother. Rom 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." / Friends, do you view the church as your family? God our father, Jesus our older brother, we brothers and sisters.

III. To defeat the devil 14 – Since we have flesh and blood, he shared in our humanity. He became like us. God became a man. He took on flesh, which is where we get our theological term "incarnation." The in-fleshing of God. We lived in Louisville for a season of exile when we first got married. Up there, especially Ohio, they have chili with noodles. I'm like – that's spaghetti. What's wrong with you people?! In TX we get this, right. Chile con carne – chili with meat. Christmas is the celebration of God con carne. God taking on flesh. The incarnation teaches that God took on flesh so that Jesus was fully God and fully man. God takes on our humanity. But why? He became a man so that he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. The wonder of Christmas: God became man in order to defeat Satan, who has the power of death.

Our secular world denies Satan, but has no explanation for the evil in this world. He is the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the prince of the powers of darkness. And the miracle of Christmas is that through the cross, Jesus destroyed Satan. Notice those two words: "through death." Those words are front loaded for emphasis: through his death he breaks the power of the devil. I love the title to the puritan John Owen's book on the atonement: *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Death dies through the death of Jesus on our behalf. In the cross, the Gospels tell us that King Jesus invaded the strong man's house and is taking his stuff. John 12:31 says "Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. Rev 20 says that he has been bound and can no longer keep the gospel from going to all nations. Col 2: he has disarmed and humiliated the powers of darkness. 1 John 3:8: "The reason the Son of God appeared (Xmas!) was to destroy the works of the devil." John Calvin says, "The devil himself has been laid so low as to be of no more account, as if he did not exist."⁶ The reason for Christmas is to defeat the devil. *Christus Victor*.

IV. Free us from the slavery of the fear of death 14-15 - People fear all sorts of stuff. We all do. We got all kinds of phobias. Some of yours are weird. Mine are normal. I remember seeing a show called "My Extreme Animal Phobia" (snakes, butterflies, moths, birds, lizards, dogs). There is one where the main guy is a huge Latino man, shaved head, a big gold chain, big gold earrings, tattoo sleeves, neck and face tatted up (I don't mean to judge a book by its cover, but if you have a face tat, I may move to the other

⁶ MacLeod 239.

side of the street. You opt for a face tat you are signing up for life-long min wage. That's why they're usually tears – most of my life gon be sad). This thug looked tough, but deathly afraid of puppies. Avoids parks because they are dog-friendly. They brought a tiny pit bull puppy, and he takes off running, shouting bleeps. "Dogs know fear, they go after fear." Starts balling, saying I'm a coward and the therapist is like "You are not a coward, you are a strong person."

Lots of phobias, but one that is universal. All people have *thanatophobia*. All people fear death. Most of our fears are really just the fear of death. Fear of heights because we might fall and die. Scared of spiders because we might get bit and die. Scared of flying because we may crash and die. Scared of swimming because we may drown and die. Scared of cancer because it may kill us. Scared of puppies because you're irrational. All people fear death. And we should! Remember that death is totally unnatural. God's original intention for the world did not include death! Death entered when Adam and Eve sinned. Gen 1 rule the world, Gen 3 disobedience leads to death, which keeps us from fulfilling our destiny.

We die because we sin. The wages of sin is death. Ezekiel 18:20: "The soul who sins shall die." People fear death and so try to avoid it. We don't talk about. We try to postpone it. We change the language: not death but pass away, not funerals but celebrations of life, not cemeteries but memorial gardens. The Bible says life is a mist. Nothing certain but death and taxes. Spurgeon said every man is walking around with a coffin on his back and grave dust in his mouth. Soon and very soon your life will be over. Some people will come to your funeral, a few may weep, then they'll go eat chips and queso and dump your stuff at Goodwill and toss your plaques in the trash. Death is the great equalizer and people fear it. Schreiner writes, "Death means that human beings do not reign but are ruled over by a foreign power, for they fear their eventual demise that comes inexorably upon them. In every moment of happiness, death is our dark shadow, reminding us that our joy is short-lived."⁷

This verse says all are enslaved to the fear of death. Woody Allen: I am not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens. "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve immortality through not dying. I don't want to live on in the hearts of my countrymen; I want to live on in my apartment." All will die and all are scared of death. All people are enslaved to the fear of death. Happy Holidays! I know you were not expecting to hear about death at Advent, but according to this passage, the defeat of death is the reason for Christmas!

How does the death of Jesus free us from the slavery of the fear of death? Because through the cross our sins are forgiven. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. God so loved the world. Jesus rose from the dead. Death could not hold him. Therefore it cannot hold those of us who trust him. Christmas leads to Good Friday which leads to Easter Sunday. Resurrection is coming. Death is not the last word. Christian, for you, death is dead. It has lost its sting. Oh Death, where is your victory? This should instill rock-solid hope in us! Christ paradoxically defeated death by means of his own death. That's why the NT refers to the death of believers as "sleep" (Acts 7:60, 1 Thess 4:14, 1 Cor 15:55-57). Not a period, just a comma. / In fact – not only are we no longer

⁷ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 106.

afraid of death – we look forward to it. Phil 1:21, 23: to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 2 Cor 5:8: we would *rather* be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

The “death knell” is the ringing of a bell to announce a death. Christmas, the coming of God through King Jesus, is the death knell to death itself. Jesus came to destroy the devil and free his children from being enslaved to the fear of death. Christmas is pointless without Good Friday and Good Friday is pointless without Easter. Calvary was the reason for Bethlehem. The Son of God disarmed the devil and destroyed the death-dealer - with his own weapon.

Friend, if you are here and you don’t know the Lord, you need to hear this: because of sin, you are going to die, but if you entrust yourself to Jesus, death is nothing to fear. Accept the true gift of Christmas. Be freed by Jesus by submitting to him in faith and repentance. If you want to sit down and talk more about this, I would be more than glad to. / Through death, Jesus defeats death. The death of death in the death of Christ. We are freed from fear. Now, to die is gain. This life is all the hell we’ll experience. “Hark! the herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn King’ . . . Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.”⁸ Jesus came to free us from the slavery to the fear of death.

V. To Help His people as a Merciful and Faithful High Priest - 16-18 - He had to be made like us. To represent us as high priest, the Son of God had to identify himself with us. What motivated Jesus? Mercy and faithfulness. He is merciful because he knows we are but dust. He doesn’t give us what we deserve. He withholds judgment and gives mercy. And unlike all the priests of the old covenant, he is faithful. Faithful in every way, even though tempted. **4:14-16, 7:23-27**. There is nothing we will face today, tomorrow, or the next day that Jesus cannot sympathize with, and help us.

He doesn’t help angels but the descendants of Abraham, which now includes Jews and Gentiles in Christ. As Gal 3:29 puts it, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:6-9, Rom 4:9-12). If you are a Christian, you are an offspring of Abraham. Those promises are yours!

He *helps* his chosen, the offspring of Abraham. Here, the author of Hebrews is alluding to **Isa 41:8-10**, where God promises to come and free his people: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off’; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Christmas is about the gift of Jesus, who defeats the devil, frees us from the slavery of the fear of death and he helps us as priest.

⁸ “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” https://hymnary.org/text/hark_the_herald_angels_sing_glory_to

Jesus suffered when tempted and is able to help us when we are tempted. He experienced the full range of temptations. You will never find yourself in a place he has not been. What an encouragement, because temptation is real. Temptation is our daily bread. / Temptation is not sin.

Some of you have struggled with certain sins your whole life. And you keep battling temptation. You know what this means? It means you are a Christian. It means you have the Spirit of God. If you do not fight temptation you are not a Christian! The fact that you are having the inner battle shows the Spirit of God dwells in you. For non-Christians, there is no battle! Be encouraged in the battle and keep fighting. Don't expect the struggle to end until the resurrection of the dead. Jesus can help. He is our sympathetic priest. He knows. He understands. You are not alone! He is with you.

VI. To Make Propitiation for Our Sins 17 - There is a lot of debate as to whether this word means expiation – the removal of sins or propitiation – the turning away of God's wrath, but it in Hebrews it is both. The word is the same one for the mercy seat in the most holy place in the old covenant temple where the priest would sprinkle the blood of animal sacrifices.

Christ removes our sin from us. Heb 1:3 says Christ provided purification for sin. **9:26-28**. He takes away our sin but he also absorbs the wrath of God on our behalf. Christ bears the penalty we deserved. He bore the wrath of God in our place so that if we trust Christ, we will be forgiven and free. Christmas is about Jesus making atonement for our sins. JI Packer writes, "Between us sinners and the thunderclouds of divine wrath stands the cross of the Lord Jesus." Christmas is about Christ meeting our greatest need, dealing with our sin problem. Only when sin is dealt with can the power of death be overcome.

Christmas is about God coming to us in the person of Jesus to destroy the power of the evil one, to free us from the fear of death by conquering death, to help us as a sympathetic high priest, and to make atonement for our sins. How should we respond to this great salvation? We don't have to speculate, because the author tells us: **2:1-3a**. Press on. Persevere. Keep paying attention. Jesus is worthy. So, next hero movie you watch, let that ache you feel as the credits roll be a reminder: you have a Victor who has won the battle, defeated your enemy, and will one day make all things right.

Benediction: Now may Jesus, the truly human One, the defeater of the devil by death, the merciful and faithful Priest-King, our ever-present Help be glory and dominion for the ages.