

## Hebrews 2:14-18 (Part 2)

### “Liberty or Death”

Turn in your Bibles to **Hebrews 2**. This morning we are going to continue unpacking **verses 14-18** as we consider two more reasons why Christ’s incarnation was necessary.

Last week, we looked at the first two reasons that focused on believers having been set free from enslavement to Satan, sin and death. But this passage is not merely about what we’ve freed from. It is also about what we have been freed unto. Just as with the American Revolution, the colonists were not freed from British tyranny to live in chaos and anarchy. No, they were freed unto a new form of government. One that secured the blessings of liberty for them. So, too, believers have not only been freed from the tyranny of Satan and death. We have also been freed unto the safekeeping of our Savior who works for our good and for His glory.

Today, as we continue our study looking at **verses 17 & 18**, we’ll see 2 more reasons why the incarnation was necessary for securing the freedom we have in Christ Jesus for eternity. And as with last time, we’ll also see one way in which the incarnation benefits us in the here and now.

Follow along as I read **Hebrews 2:14-18**...

***<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He [that is Christ... He] Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. <sup>16</sup> For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.***

***<sup>17</sup> Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.***

Before we get into the details of the text this morning, I want us step back and see the bigger picture of how these 5 verses are structured. Because there is a pattern in **verses 14-16** that is repeated in **verses 17 & 18**. **Verse 14** starts out with the word “*therefore*” and a statement that Christ partook of flesh and blood in order to become like us. And notice the same is true of **verse 17**. It, too, starts with “*therefore*” followed by a statement that Christ *had to be* made like us in all things. So, both sections, **14-16** and **17 & 18** begin the same way.

They also end in similar ways. Both sections conclude with a statement about help or aid being given to us by Christ. **Verse 16** says He does *not* give help to the angels, but gives help to God's people. And **verse 18** says He gives aid to those who are tempted.

So, the two halves of our passage begin and end in a similar manner. And then, what we saw last time was that in between the opening and closing of the first section there are two reasons given for the incarnation of Christ. Those were:

1. **To Subdue the Devil** (verse 14).
2. **To Set Captives Free** (verse 15).

And we spent most of our time last week looking at what those statements mean and how they apply to us, how they benefit us. Well, similarly in **verse 17**, we find two more reasons why the incarnation was necessary. And we'll be studying those this morning.

Now, understanding the structure of this passage can help us better grasp how the various components fit together and support one another. For instance, **verse 17** doesn't simply repeat **verse 14**. Rather, it broadens it, expands it.

You see, **verse 14** focuses on Christ becoming like us in a very specific way. It zeros in on the fact that Christ took on a physical body. And the reason for that focus on Christ's physical body is because the two explanations for the incarnation that follow are about Christ's physical death. If Christ didn't come in a genuine physical body of flesh and blood, then He could not have really died. And if He didn't really die, then He really didn't conquer the grave, and you and I are not truly free from Satan or the curse of death. But Christ DID come in the flesh. And so, the author established that fact from the outset, laying that as the foundation upon which the first two reasons given for the incarnation rest.

Now, in **verse 17**, the author is laying a similar foundation of Christ identifying with His people through the incarnation. But in **verse 17** the scope of that solidarity is expanded to include more than just Christ's physical state – more than just His taking on flesh and blood. It says there He was ***made like us in all things... all things!***

You and I may be tempted at times to think of Christ as not really being like us, but as God in the semblance of a man. Sure, He had a physical body, but come on... He's *Jesus!* He's the Son of God! And so, we can tend to think that Christ's experience of life as a human being couldn't have been like our own. There's no way His familiarity with pain or suffering could have been like mine. No way His experience of temptation could have been like mine. No way His sense of grief, sorrow, frustration or disappointment could have been like mine.

In short, we tend to believe in a limited incarnation. One in which Christ's experience of humanity was truncated by His deity.

But that's not the Jesus that Scripture reveals to us. While Christ remained fully God, He also became fully human. Just as **verse 17** tells us, Christ was *made like us in all things*. Not *some* things... not *most* things... but *all* things.

Scripture challenges us to embrace that truth because, as we will see this morning, every experience of Christ *in* His incarnation was necessary to fulfill the reasons *for* His incarnation. He *had to be* made like us in all things. If we don't embrace that truth, if we minimize the reality of it in any way, we will be detracting from the significance of His coming.

So, we don't want to breeze past that statement. What does it mean that Christ was "made like us in all things"? Well, to begin with, He was "made" like us. He wasn't like us naturally. From eternity past, Christ was deity. His humanity was something He had to take on.

The first few verses of **John chapter 1** tell us...

*He was in the beginning with God, and He was God.* (v. 1)

*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.* (v.3)

*And yet He became flesh and dwelt among us.* (v. 14)

So, the One who made us in *His* image, humbled Himself to take on *our* image. (Phil. 2:6-7)

And in doing so, **1 Corinthians 15** tells us He became the second Adam. Where the first Adam failed, casting mankind into sin and death, the second Adam became a man in order to defeat sin and death and bring redemption to His people. Doing that would require *more* than taking on flesh and blood only. In order to be a genuine representative of His people, Christ had to be made like us in all things.

And so, our Lord Jesus was born like us (Mt 2:1). He grew like us (Lk 2:40). He experienced exhaustion like us (Jn 4:6). He needed sleep like us (Mk 4:38). He got hungry (Mt 4:2) and thirsty (Jn 19:28). He felt anger (Mk 3:5), sorrow (Mt 26:37) grief (Jn 11:35) and joy (Lk 10:21). He underwent temptation (Mt 4:1), suffering (1Pe 2:21), and death (Php 2:8). While Christ never stopped being deity, He took on *full* humanity.

So, what was it about God's plan for our redemption that required Christ to become "like us in all things"? Well, this is where **verse 17** gives us two more reasons why the incarnation was necessary.

Verse 17:

***<sup>17</sup> Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things... Why? ...so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.***

The 3<sup>rd</sup> reason Christ had to take on flesh was...

### **3. To become a Sympathetic High Priest (v. 17)**

And that's important to know, because there are many unbelievers in this world who believe Jesus to have been a wise teacher. Now, of course, we wouldn't disagree that He was a wise teacher. In fact, Christ was the wisest of teachers. He is the source of all true knowledge. Every single word He spoke was the very perfection of wisdom. So, He isn't less than a wise teacher, but He is so much more.

Which is good, because our need is much more than educational. Much more than intellectual. Our deepest need is spiritual. And so, Christ came to be the perfect High Priest.

So, what's a "High Priest", anyway? What was his role? Well, we should start by pointing out that there were many priests in Israel at any given time. **1 Chronicles** outlines 24 different divisions of priests and the various duties of the priesthood that were rotated among them (1 Chron. 24). Each division of priests took their turn in serving at their appointed time.

Now see, you thought the nursery rotation was our idea, didn't you? Nope! It's biblical. The priesthood rotated the responsibilities of service among them, and so do we.

In **Luke chapter 1** we're told about John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, taking his appointed turn in serving at the temple. It says there in **verses 8 & 9...**

***<sup>8</sup> Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.***

So, Zacharias, along with the other priests in his division were serving their turn in the rotation of priestly duties. And all the other priests did the same with their division.

Now, not only were there many priests and many divisions of priests, but they also had many leaders. They were known as the "chief priests" and they are mentioned no less than 64 times the New Testament. **Mark 14:53** for example, says that, "**All the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together**" for Jesus's trial before the council. Those "chief priests" were likely the leaders of each of the divisions of the priesthood.

So, at any given time, there were many priests, many divisions of priests, and many chief priests. But, there was only *one* High Priest. The High Priest was head over all the priesthood. And his greatest responsibility was presiding over the Day of Atonement – *Yom Kippur*.

We're going to talk more about the Day of Atonement in little bit, but for now, it's enough to know that the High Priest's role was to intercede between man and God in making atonement for the sins of the people.

The problem was that the High Priest himself was a man. So, not only was he also guilty of sin and therefore, in need of atonement himself, but in mediating between God and man, he was only able to fully represent one party – that of mankind – because that is all he was... a man.

But in giving Christ a human nature in addition to His divine nature, God provided for Himself the perfect High Priest. One who was fully God, fully man, and fully righteous – untainted by sin.

Even more than that, **verse 17** tells us...

***[Christ was made like us] in all things so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest.***

Mercy and faithfulness are the two qualities the author of Hebrews uses in describing Christ's High Priesthood. To be merciful implies more than just feeling a certain way. It involves taking action to alleviate the suffering of another. That's what it means to be "merciful". If you don't actually *do* anything to show mercy, then it doesn't really matter how you feel. You aren't merciful unless you act upon those inclinations.

I don't know about you, but I am so thankful that we have a merciful High Priest! One who took action to help us in our need.

Of course, mercy is one of God's Attributes (Ps. 86:15; Jas 5:11). So, being fully God, Christ was already perfectly merciful in his deity. And yet, **verse 17** tells us...

***[Christ] had to be made like us in all things so that He might become a merciful [...] high priest.***

So, there was something about Christ taking on a human nature that would make Him the perfect intercessor one who could identify with the suffering of His people.

**Hebrews 5:2** tells us that a High Priest taken from among men, "***can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness.***" By the way, when that

passage refers to the *ignorant*, the *misguided* and the *weak*... that's you and me it's talking about. Which is why we need a merciful High Priest.

Through the incarnation, Christ experienced suffering and temptation *as a man* in ways He *could not have* experienced had He remained deity alone, because as God, He was impervious to such things (Ps. 2:1-4; Jas. 1:13). But because Christ became like us in *all* things, **Hebrews 4:15** tells us...

***<sup>15</sup> ...we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.***

That's the one caveat to Christ being like us in all things. Jesus never sinned no matter what circumstances He was facing. And He faced some pretty challenging circumstances. Which is why He can sympathize with us.

When we suffer, Christ knows what that's like. When we are troubled, Christ gets it. When we are tempted, Christ can identify. When we are grieved, Christ understands. He knows what it is like to experience all those things. We have an advocate who is sympathetic – a High Priest who is full of mercy.

But, you know, a high priest who is merciful *only* would not be a good High Priest. In order to be effective in his role, a High Priest had to also be faithful – faithful in representing God's holiness and righteousness to His people.

Now, if you have ever been a parent, then you understand the tension that can exist between mercy and faithfulness. When we discipline our children, it can be hard to keep from compromising the one in favor of the other. Sometimes, we feel like we have to choose between them – as if I can *either* be faithful in disciplining my child, *or* I can be merciful to my child, but I can't be both at the same time. Now, of course, that's never really the case – not if we understand mercy and faithfulness biblically. But that's exactly the problem – we often don't think biblically about such things.

But for Christ, being merciful and being faithful are never in conflict with one another, never at odds with one another. His mercy towards men never clouds or hinders His faithfulness to God. Nor does His faithfulness to God ever get in the way of His mercy towards His people. The two always complement one another perfectly in Christ.

And because our Lord is faithful in His role as our High Priest, we can trust that His intercession on our behalf is always effectual, always acceptable and pleasing to God. Therefore, Paul asks in **Romans 8:34**...

*<sup>34</sup> Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*

Paul's point is, if Christ is for us, who can be against us? Isn't it wonderful to know that Satan's accusations are no match for Christ's intercessions? And *not* because Satan's accusations are baseless. Satan doesn't have to twist or stretch the truth about us. He doesn't need to come up with false accusations. No, there isn't a day we live that we don't supply the devil with ample evidence to condemn us to hell for all eternity.

The reason Christ's intercessions are effective is not because we are innocent, not because we are sinless, but because Christ has made a way for us to be forgiven despite our indisputable guilt. As **verse 17** says, our merciful and faithful High Priest *"[made] propitiation for the sins of the people."*

How can sinners approach a holy God? They can only come into His presence if the penalty of their sin has been paid and God's wrath against their sin has been satisfied. For Old Testament Israel, God had established Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement – as the way in which the people's debt of sin could be paid and His wrath against them satisfied.

Now, Jesus went to the cross during Passover. And we often think of Him in terms of the Passover sacrifice – as the perfect Lamb of God. And we should, because He was. But He was more than that as well. Christ fulfilled all of the Old Testament sacrifices for sin.

And here, in the book of Hebrews, the sacrifice that the author has in view is not the Passover, but the Day of Atonement. We know that by the repeated references to the High Priest as the one offering sacrifices of bulls and goats for the propitiation of the sins of the people. None of that happen at Passover. What Hebrews describes only fits with the Day of Atonement, which was the highest of the holy days for the Jewish people.

**Leviticus 16** offers a detailed account of how the Day of Atonement was to be observed. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month the High Priest would cleanse himself with water and adorn himself with his priestly robes. A bull and two goats would be selected, and the High Priest would first sacrifice the bull as a sin offering to make atonement for himself and his own household. And then he would take the first goat and sacrifice it for the atonement of the people.

And only after he had made atonement for himself could he enter into the Holy of Holies – that portion of the Tabernacle that contained the Arc of the Covenant. There, he would sprinkle the blood of the bull and the goat on the mercy seat.

When that was done, he would lay both his hands on the head of the second goat, also called the scapegoat. And as he did that, he would confess the sins of the people. This pictured the transference of the sins of God's people to the scapegoat. The goat would then be led off into the wilderness to carry the sins of the people far away, and be left to die alone outside the camp of Israel. Together, the bull and two goats of the Day of Atonement provided a means of substitutional sacrifice to make propitiation for the sins of the High Priest and the people.

The problem with this sacrificial system was that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4). They could not provide lasting redemption. And so, they had to be offered year... after year... after year.

Our passage in **Hebrews 2 verse 17** tells us Christ became a merciful and faithful High Priest ***“to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*** But He didn't do so through the offering of bulls and goats. Instead, our perfect High Priest offered a perfect sacrifice. He offered Himself.

**Hebrews 9:11 & 12** explain...

***<sup>11</sup> When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; <sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.***

**The final reason why it was necessary for Christ to put on flesh was...**

**REASON #4: To be the Supreme Sacrifice (v. 17)**

Christ came to be both a Sympathetic High Priest and the Supreme Sacrifice that would deal with the problem of sin once and for all.

Just as Christ is the only one who could be the perfect High Priest, He is also the only one who could be the perfect Sacrifice for sin. Being deity, the value of His sacrifice is infinite – sufficient to pay for all the sins of all God's people for all time. But as deity, He could not die. The only way He could offer Himself as an everlasting sacrifice was to take on flesh so that He could die an atoning death. He had to be both God and man to accomplish that.

And because He was, **1 John 2:1 & 2** promise us...

***<sup>1</sup> If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.***

Now, I've been using those terms “atonement” and “propitiation” quite a bit, and I want to make sure you understand what those words mean. Especially for you kids, those probably



aren't words you are used to hearing. Atonement refers to the restoring of our relationship with God. Because sin separates us from God, the only way our relationship with God can be restored is for our debt of sin to be paid. By offering up Himself as a sacrifice, Christ paid the debt of sin for His people.

But atonement required more than the debt of sin to be satisfied. It also required the wrath that God righteously feels towards sin to be satisfied as well. That is what propitiation refers to. Scripture tells us that Christ completely satisfied the wrath of God... through His suffering.

**Isaiah 53:10** prophesied about the Messiah that, *"the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief."* And it goes on to say in **verse 11**, *"As a result of the anguish of His soul, [God] will see it and be satisfied."* As God the Father looked down upon the suffering of His own Son on the cross, His wrath – His white-hot righteous anger towards the sins of His people – was completely and eternally satisfied.

Believers do not need to fear God's wrath despite all the sins we have committed because of the propitiation made by our merciful and faithful High Priest. As, **Hebrews 10:10 & 14** tell us...

***<sup>10</sup> By this we will have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. [...] <sup>14</sup> For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.***

If you have been born again in Christ, then your salvation has been made secure for all time by His sacrifice. You cannot lose your salvation because you did nothing to earn your salvation. Your Eternity is secure because it rests on the merits of Jesus Christ. His was the supreme sacrifice for all our sin.

And what's truly amazing is that Christ was willing to do all that. The immortal Son of God who was immune to pain and anguish put on flesh and blood becoming like us in all things so that He could undergo suffering and death for the salvation of His people. And because He did, our future in Glory is secure.

But **verse 18** goes even further. Because Christ is not only our hope for tomorrow, He is also our help for today.

Just as we saw with **verse 16** last week, **verse 18** is not so much a reason for Christ's incarnation, as it is an affirmation of the benefit we derive from it. And like **verse 16** that benefit comes to us in the form of help from Christ. It says in **verse 18**...

***<sup>18</sup> For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.***

Although Christ was made like us in all things, **verse 18** focuses in on one way He was like us in particular. Christ experienced temptation just as you and I do. Now, there were many ways in which Christ was tempted. Most notably, he was tempted directly by Satan in the wilderness at the beginning of His earthy ministry. But notice, **verse 18** says Christ was tempted *“in that which He suffered.”* And so, the author of Hebrews moves from Christ’ suffering that made propitiation for our sin in **verse 17** to the way that suffering brought temptation.

Let me ask you, have you ever faced a worse form of temptation, a temptation that is more powerful, harder to ignore, harder to resist than the temptation that comes through suffering? Whether physical, emotional, mental or spiritual, suffering has a way of wearing us down, doesn’t it? It has a way of eroding our resolve to where we would be tempted to do just about anything to take control over what’s happening to us and have relief from our anguish.

If you find yourself in a place of suffering today, whatever form that suffering may take, I want you to know that Christ understands what that’s like because He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered. The suffering Christ endured benefits us not only in His having made propitiation for our sin, but also, because He was tempted in what He suffered, He is able to aid us when we are tempted.

Earlier, I quoted **Hebrews 4:15** by itself. Let me read **verse 15** again together with **verse 16** this time...

***<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***

Because Christ was tempted in what He suffered, because He is a merciful High Priest who can sympathize with our weakness, we can turn to Him for help when we are tempted.

Again, we need to avoid thinking that, because Christ was fully God, He didn’t experience temptation to the degree that we do. Actually, that’s right – He *didn’t* experience temptation to the degree we do. He felt it to a greater degree that you and me. You and I have never faced temptation in its strongest dose because we cave in to temptation well before it has reached its climax. Only Christ withstood temptation in its fullest potency without succumbing to its power in the slightest.

So, when we are tempted by sin, what a blessing it is to know that the one who successfully withstood every temptation to its fullest is ready and able to “come to our aid”!

And by the way, that phrase, “come to the aid” in the **verse 18**, that’s actually one word in the original Greek. It is a compound word comprised of “cry” and “run”. It’s literally, “*run to the cry*”. The idea being that of running to the one who is crying out for help.

So, just soak that in for a moment. When you are tempted and you call out to Jesus for help, your merciful and faithful High Priest will run to your cry! What a precious truth to hold onto!

Our Lord put on flesh and became like us in all things...

1. to Subdue the Devil
2. to Set Captives Free
3. to become a Sympathetic High Priest
4. and the Supreme Sacrifice for sin.

But understand, those things only apply to *you* if you belong to *Him*. And you can only belong to Him if you place your faith in Him as your Lord and Savior. If we can help you to trust in Christ by answering questions you have or by praying with you, we would welcome the opportunity to do that. One of the elders will be available to you up front here after the service this morning.

And if you have put your faith in Christ alone for your salvation, then we invite you to participate with us this morning in celebrating what Christ accomplished for us through His sacrifice on the cross. In a moment, Pastor Mark is going to come and lead us in the observance of Communion.

We invite you now to pray silently where you are. As the elders come to prepare the table, take a moment to reflect on Christ’s sacrifice for you personally and to confess your need for continuing grace from our merciful and faithful High Priest.