

Hebrews 2:14-18

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Donald. If you could turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 2, the passage that Jonathan read for us.

And while you're turning there to Hebrews chapter 2, I'm going to ask you a question, a small question. What's the purpose of life?

Very small question, I'm sure. What is your purpose in your life? What are you supposed to be doing? Generally, as you live.

But also, think especially or specifically about your role that you've been given. Right now, in this stage of life. So whether you're a child and you're in school, or whether you're a student, maybe recently arrived, beginning studies.

Are you working? Maybe you've retired. Whatever your stage of life is right now, what is your purpose in this moment? What is the race marked out for you?

[1 : 15] That's a phrase that the author of Hebrews uses. And in Hebrews 9, a verse that we'll look at a bit more tonight, in Hebrews 9, 14, he says that we need to set aside works that lead to death and serve the living God.

And really, that last phrase, serve the living God, is an overarching purpose of life. In whatever stage you're at, it can be done in different ways.

But serving the living God. So if you could keep that in your minds, as we think more, think through Hebrews chapter 2. Though even if you know the purpose, it's not always easy to do it, is it?

It's not always easy to serve the living God. In the various scenarios you find yourself, and one of the main reasons, certainly one that I've found to be the case, most of you would probably agree, is that sin that so easily entangles us, as again Hebrews puts it.

The sin that so easily entangles us, those things that hinder us from running full on in our purpose. What's the remedy for this?

[2 : 33] Well, Hebrews chapter 12 says, which we looked at a few weeks ago. Hebrews says, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

So think for a moment about those sins that do hinder you. Not the sins that hinder other people. Your particular ones that are perhaps peculiar to you.

I guarantee they're not peculiar to you. But think about yours. Those things that easily trip you up. Your pet struggles, if you will. Think about those.

And let me give you an example of somebody else thinking about his own struggle, who was also contemplating that verse in Hebrews. Casting off these things that entangle us, fixing my eyes on Jesus.

Let me read you something he wrote. It's a lyrical poem that's on Hebrews chapter 12. He says this, But at the last stretch, the porn monster returns to tempt me to be a whoremonger.

[3 : 48] So with my sword, it's the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. So with my sword, I hacked it to pieces, because I'm way more attracted to Jesus. That's his own personal struggle.

He's way more attracted to Jesus than he is to that sin at this stage in his life. That wasn't always the case, and he was honest about that. But that's an example of throwing off these things that entangle us, fixing your eyes on Jesus, and serving the living God in whatever situation you're in. Now, as we've seen before, or some of us anyway, Hebrews, this letter, Hebrews paints a big picture. One big picture, and that is the beauty of Christ.

The surpassing greatness of Jesus. That's its main theme. And it does that by giving a number of different smaller pictures. So for example, the supremacy of Jesus over prophets.

The supremacy of Jesus over angels. The supremacy of Jesus over Moses. And it goes on. A lot of different pictures of Christ's beauty. The main picture, the chief picture that Hebrews uses, is Jesus as the high priest.

[5 : 06] He's greater than all the high priests in the Old Testament. The high priest. So today, this morning and then this evening, we're going to contemplate Jesus as the high priest.

And we're going to contemplate that from two angles, I guess you could say. This morning, we're going to focus on Jesus' heart for helping.

That might not be a way that most of us think about Jesus. His heart for helping. And this evening, we're going to look slightly broader at God's plan for his presence.

So both of these two things. Jesus' desire to help people. And God's plan throughout history.

The Old Testament, the New Testament. God's plan to bring sinners into his holy presence. Those two things are both accomplished by Jesus coming as high priest.

[6 : 03] The heart of Jesus being the high priest. The center of it. What it's all about is this. God is radically for us.

That's at the heart of Jesus' work as high priest. God is radically for us. And that should shock us.

That the creator of the universe, the Holy One, should be radically for us.

God is radically for us. So Hebrews chapter 2. We're going to look at verses 14 to 18. The second half of what Jonathan read us. Hebrews 2, 14 to 18.

Since the children have flesh and blood, Jesus too shared in their humanity. So that by his death, he might destroy him who holds the power of death.

That is the devil. And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For it's surely not the angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.

[7 : 11] For this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way. In order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God.

And that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Within that passage, there are two parallel statements. Two statements that say very similar things. One is in verse 14. Jesus shared their humanity.

That is, Jesus, the eternal son of God, became a human. He shared their humanity so that, and then it gives a reason. Why did he share their humanity? Why did Jesus come to earth?

And it gives a reason. Another similar statement is verse 17. He had to be made like his brothers in every way. Again, he took on flesh, became a human.

[8 : 10] In order that, he might, and it gives another thing that Jesus came to do. Why did Jesus come? The eternal son of God.

He's in heaven, eternally. In perfect love, perfect comfort, perfect glory, health, power, joy.

It's all perfect. And he decides to come here and enmesh himself in earth. In earth's hate, discomfort, shame, pain, weakness, sadness.

Why did he do that? What motivated Jesus to come? To take on our humanity? To become a human? Well, it's right in the middle of those two parallel statements.

Look right in the middle at verse 16. For surely it is not the angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. Now, the word I want you to focus in on is the word helps.

[9 : 14] That's the author's summary of why Jesus came. He wanted to help. And he says it again at the very conclusion. Look at verse 18. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

In this passage, this author draws our attention to Jesus' heart. Why did he want to come? He wanted to help. That's what we're going to focus on for a little bit this morning.

We're going to focus on those two types of things that he came to do, both of them, because he wanted to help us. So let's think a little bit more about that. Jesus saw a bad situation here on earth. Not just Jesus, the one true God, the Father, the Son, the Spirit. The one God that saw a very bad situation on earth, and he wanted to help remedy that.

What was this bad situation? Now, I know a lot of you will be able to think off the top of your head at various bad things that you know about personally that happen on this earth.

[10 : 20] The author here draws our attention to a few very large ones. The satanic power of death. The devil held the power of death.

And Jesus saw that and wanted to come and help. He saw people enslaved to the fear of death. And he wanted to come and help. He saw people like us, people who were hurting, abusing, twisting.

God's good creation. Hurting other people. Dishonoring his name. Twisting his creation. He saw people doing that, and he said, I want to come and help.

But notice the amazing thing there. He doesn't simply come to help the victims. He does that. But this specifically says he comes to help those who are doing the hurting.

Who are doing the twisting. He saw people sinning and wanted to come and help them. So we're going to now zoom in on these two main things.

[11 : 26] Under the category of Jesus wanting to help. So second, we're going to look at how he was made like his brothers in order that he might help us by becoming a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God.

Helping us by making atonement for sins of his people. So that's the second thing we'll look at. That type of help. The first thing we'll look at right now. Jesus shared our humanity.

So that through death. His death. He might help. By destroying him who holds the power of death. The devil. And by freeing all those who have been enslaved to a lifelong fear of death.

So let's look at that for a little bit. And I could simply ask, are you afraid of death? Who do you trust to help settle a fear of death that you might have?

Now not all of you at this point in life might be afraid of death. And that's wonderful. Perhaps at some point you all were. Some of you might be there right now. But who do you turn to to help you assuage this fear of death?

[12 : 50] To free you from this slavery? Do we turn to scientists? They're often the ones that we turn to as the authorities. Even things that they're not authorities on.

Well scientists can explain to us very well what happens to the body in death. So do we turn to them? How about counselors? Now again, counselors can help with a variety of ways to lessen our fear.

To lessen our anxiety over scary situations. But do either of those groups or any other group, do they actually know about death?

Do they know what's going to happen after death? Because that's really what most of us would be afraid of. Do they know? And can they do anything about that? Let me tell you a parable.

A parable of the bully. Suppose that you are scared of a bully. Maybe cast your mind back to school. And there's a very large bully who is coming for you.

[13 : 54] And he wants to simply beat you up badly. And you know that you can't stop him. This bully is coming. Do you turn to a scientist to help in that situation?

I mean the scientist might be able to explain the bully's selfish gene. But he's never fought the bully. He's never beaten him. And if he did fight them, the bully would whip the scientist.

So can he help in this situation? Do you turn to a counselor for help in this situation? Again, he might be able to help you have less fear of the bully's fists.

But again, he hasn't fought the bully himself. And if he did, he would lose. And really, what ultimate good is it if you have less anxiety, but the bully still beats you?

So what do they really know that is helpful in this situation where fear of death, and here, fear of this bully, is upon us?

[14 : 55] So picture the bully approaching you. Blood in his eyes. Your blood. He wants to hurt you. And a young man steps up. Steps in between. And he says, I'll help.

Now you look at this man, this young man, and he doesn't look much like much. He doesn't really look much different than you. He's an ordinary kind of guy. But he steps up, and he takes on the bully, saying he wants to help.

And the bully whips him badly, just beats the young man down. Now strangely, it didn't really look like that young man was fighting. It looked more like he was simply taking the beating.

That's strange. The bully's holding him down in the dust. He has beaten him until this young man is not moving. And then the bully looks up at you and begins to come toward you.

Are you scared? Who do you turn to? Then you notice the lifeless hand move. And that young man on the ground grabs the bully's arm, stops him from coming to you.

[15 : 59] The bully turns and begins to try to beat him down again. And the young man simply gets up and breaks the bully. And then the young man turns to you and says, follow me. That's the kind

of person I would want to turn to in that kind of situation.

Jesus wanted to help. He saw the situation. And he came to help.

He shared our humanity so that by his death, he might destroy him who holds the power of death.

That is, the devil. And free those who, all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.

Jesus rose from the dead. Death and Satan have absolutely no control over him any longer. He's the one you want to trust. He's the one you want to cling to.

Jesus says it himself in Revelation chapter 1 verse 18. Listen to Jesus' words. I am the living one. I was dead.

[17:07] But look, I'm alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Now, I hope that that parable of the bully was helpful.

Did any of you notice a problem with it, though? We must not think of ourselves as simply innocent victims. Like we were in that parable.

Where this bully was just a jerk and he wanted to hurt us, our innocent selves. That's not a proper presentation of who we are. So let's think about that parable in a slightly different way.

I won't tell the whole thing again. But the bully is coming to beat us up because we have done something horrible. And we deserve to be beaten down. And the bully is coming.

That's more like reality. We're enslaved to fear. Yes, that's true. But that's not inappropriate. We should be because of what awaits us after death.

[18:11] Because of what we've done. So the young man in that parable, he does not say to us, when he steps up to take on the bully, he does not simply say to us, oh, poor you.

You don't deserve such bullying. Don't worry, I'll help. The young man is more honest than that. The young man would say, you're afraid of the bully's beating.

I admit you should be. I know what you've done. I've got to say that that bully is fully justified in beating you. What were you thinking?

Doing what you did. What were you thinking? You knew that those who do such things deserve to die. But I still want to help you. And the young man steps in and takes the beating and then dishes it out worse to the bully.

That's more of the situation that we find ourselves in. And that brings us on to the second part of Jesus' helping that the passage mentions. He didn't only come to conquer Satan and death to help us, as if that were not enough.

[19:18] But he came, as the passage says, to make atonement for our sins. Let's think about that for a few moments. The passage says in verse 17, that because he wanted to help, for this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God.

That he might make atonement for the sins of the people. What does that mean? Atonement. A lot of you, I'm sure, are very familiar with that word.

But what does it actually mean? What is the author saying that Jesus came to do? He wanted to help, so he came to offer atonement. NIV, the Pew Bibles, they say atonement.

You might have a different translation. The ESV says propitiation. He came to offer propitiation for our sins. The RSV says expiation.

The King James says reconciliation. What exactly did Jesus come to do to help? The basic idea of what the author says here, this word atonement, both in the Old Testament, and it's all over the place in the Old Testament, mainly in the temple.

[20:40] This is what happens in the temple. It's exchange. That's really the root to the heart of the word.

To make an exchange. It's like a business transaction in a way. You know, if I'm interacting with you, and I say, here, here's this thing, and you say, okay, here's this, and we exchange.

That's the basic idea. But that's not quite enough, because where this word is used, in the Old Testament and here, it's in the context of an offended relationship.

Not just a business relationship. It's where we have offended somebody, and you offer something to them in exchange for peace. That's the idea of atonement here.

Exchange. Exchange. So, for example, I have wronged you. What can I offer to you in exchange for peace between us?

[21:43] We have sinned, and our life is what is demanded. Our blood is demanded. For justice's sake. So, how can we have peace with God?

How can we make an exchange so that our life remains? What can we give to God who is offended? Now, a lot of religions in this world have something of this idea.

When bad things happen, they think, I must have offended the gods, or I must have offended my ancestors, who are dead, and I need to offer something to assuage their anger at me.

And so, they think of something to bring. They bring fruit, some sort of food that their ancestors used to like. Or maybe they'll kill an animal and bring the blood. Sometimes they kill their children and bring the blood in exchange for them being free, free from the gods' anger.

So, this idea is sort of all over the world. Think about it in the Old Testament, which has some similarities with that, but is very different in other ways.

[22 : 57] God was offended by people. And He was angry because of our sin, our rebellion. We've dishonored Him. We've hurt and we've abused other people.

We've abused ourselves. We've twisted His good creation to our own selfish gain. Let me ask you a question again.

Would you rather that God not be offended when somebody selfishly abuses somebody else? Or do you want God to be angry at that? That's a good thing. We want God to be just and angry and offended when somebody hurts and destroys His good creation.

Usually, we want God to be angry at those other people who do that type of stuff because I have a good reason for the things that I do. They murdered somebody. I'm glad God's angry because He's a just God.

I know that I slayed somebody's soul with my harsh words. I know that I destroyed their reputation by gossiping, but I had my reasons and I don't want God to be angry with me for that type of stuff.

[24 : 02] I'm glad that God is angry when somebody betrays His wife by sleeping with another person.

I'm glad He's angry with that. That's destructive. He's a just God. But when I betray my spouse by looking at pornography or by entertaining thoughts about another person, well, I don't want God to be angry with that.

I don't want Him to be that kind of God. What would satisfy God's anger? Our blood is demanded for the things we've done.

Our life is demanded. What could possibly satisfy Him other than justice? Well, this is the paradox of God. This is something that's so rich and hard to grasp.

At the same time, God can be angry and yet offer a way to fix the situation out of mercy. At the same time, don't give up one or the other.

[25 : 08] He's angry and yet He offers a way to fix it. In the Old Testament, which we're thinking about, atonement, exchange. What is the exchange for our life?

God provided high priests and sacrifices. God is the one who said, you've offended me. You've broken people and things.

But here, offer these sacrifices and I'll accept that blood in exchange for yours. I won't demand your blood. God offered that. And He offered high priests to do that.

That's what a high priest does. They would be in the temple in this place where God would come and meet and they would take the blood of the sacrifice for the person who had committed the sin. They would carry that into God's presence on behalf of the person. They would offer blood in this most holy place. The place called, this word that He says, the place of exchange.

[26 : 09] The atonement. They would offer the blood there and God would forgive that person because of that exchange. That's what a high priest would do. Jesus is our high priest, the author says.

Let me read to you Hebrews 7, 27. Again, a passage we're going to look at more tonight, but it fills out what is said here. Here he says, Jesus was a faithful and merciful high priest in service to God to make atonement or exchange for the sins of the people.

In chapter 7, verse 27, we read, unlike the other high priests, Jesus does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people.

He sacrificed for their sins, for our sins, once, for all time, when He offered Himself. You see, Jesus saw the situation.

Not just victims, but even the perpetrators. And He wanted to help. And so He came in full humanity to do the work of a high priest, to make an exchange for our lives before God.

[27 : 30] He offered Himself His own blood so that ours doesn't have to be spilled. Those are the two ways that this passage in chapter 2 describes Jesus as helping.

He became our high priest because He wanted to help destroy the enemy who held the power of death, free people bound in lifelong slavery to the fear of death, and to help people who sin, both victims and us perpetrators.

Jesus being the high priest is fundamentally about God being radically for us. And if Jesus is our high priest, and if God is for us, who can possibly be against us?

Now at the beginning I asked the question, what is your purpose here on earth? Generally, what's your purpose? Think specifically about your situation now in life.

What are you supposed to be doing in this stage of life? The race marked out for you. Again, Hebrews 9 mentions Jesus became our high priest and helped so that we can now serve the living God.

[28 : 56] Like Daniel. Daniel. The king went to the lion's den after Daniel had been thrown in and the king shouted to Daniel, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to rescue you from the lions?

And yes, God had. Daniel was alive. But notice that. Daniel was a politician. That was his work. That was his station in life. He was a politician.

But his boss, the king, recognized that he was a servant of the living God. Continually serving God as a politician. So what about you?

This is where we draw everything to a close and you think particularly about you as I think about me. Are you in politics like Daniel was? Are you in law?

Working or are you starting to study it? How about parenting? Are you a full-time parent? Are you doing sports of some sort?

[29 : 59] Are you in drama? Are you in the oil business? Because Jesus is your great high priest, if you trust him, you can serve the living God in whatever of these things you do.

Now let's turn to this living God in prayer. Prayer.