

Jesus Is Able to Help Those Who Are Tempted

by John Piper

This sermon delves into Hebrews chapter 2, exploring the significance of Christ becoming human to defeat the devil's power over death by propitiating sins. It emphasizes how the fear of death holds people in bondage, but through Christ's sacrifice, believers are freed from this fear. The sermon also touches on the comfort of Jesus understanding and aiding those who struggle with anger, resentment, and fear in the face of suffering and death.

Scripture: Hebrews 2:14, Galatians 3:13, Romans 8:1, Lamentations 3:22, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Victory over Death", "Comfort in Suffering"

Description

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Transcript

If you'd like to follow my train of thought, which I hope is biblical, you can turn to Hebrews chapter 2. Let's do that together. There's a Bible on the rack under the pew in front of you, or perhaps you brought your own, or if you'd rather just listen, that's okay, too. Hebrews chapter 2, we're going to read verses 14 through 18 and complete our exposition of the first two chapters of Hebrews.

While I have a moment while you're turning, I would ask for your prayer. I'm flying to Australia tomorrow afternoon to speak half-dozen times to a group called the Evangelicals of the Anglican Fellowship of Evangelical Anglicans, or something like that, in Melbourne. And I would very much appreciate your prayers, that the Lord would give strength, that the Lord would help with the jet lag.

You know, it's a day and a half or something like that difference. And you get off the plane, you go straight to speak and come up for air five days later and come home and you wonder, was that real? And if you pray, if you pray, it will be real and hearts will be helped. So please pray for me.

Hebrews chapter 2, verses 14 through 18. Since then the children share in flesh and blood. He himself, likewise, this is Christ, Christ himself likewise also partook of the same nature, that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

For assuredly he does not give help to angels, but he gives help to the descendant or the descendants children of Abraham. Therefore, he had to be made like his brethren in all things, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since he himself was tempted in that which he suffered, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted or tested.

Let's pray before we open this text. Father, would you draw near now as our teacher and by your Holy Spirit open my mouth to speak boldly and clearly and faithfully and humbly, lovingly, as I ought to speak and open hearts to receive what you have appointed from this text for us this morning. I pray for unbelievers to be wooed and won and drawn powerfully into the greatness of our salvation, and I pray for the Saints to be mightily strengthened and encouraged and for a thousand needs across this room that I don't know about to be met by the wonder, a living and active Word of God.

In Jesus name I ask it. Amen. I heard David from downstairs by the loudspeaker talking about Billy Graham.

I'm going to talk about him again. I was there on Wednesday night and it didn't surprise me that he took as his first text John 3 16 and that the first phrase he took from John 3 16 was for God. And he said, did you ever stop to think about that God? Yes, Billy, that's the place to start.

But you know what impressed me most was how frequently that night he spoke about death. Did you pick up that? Did it strike you the way it struck me? Three, four, five times he came back. He looked us right in the eye as much as you can look 45,000 people Wednesday night right in the eye and he said in 50, then he kind of corrected it, or 70 years, we'll all be dead.

Or maybe he said you'll all be dead. I don't know, but I felt that's right. Down over that huge crowd.

Dead. All of them. Like a Holocaust.

Only just takes 70 years to do it. You'll all be dead. And at another point he said when you were born you were born never to die.

You will always be alive. And then he paused and said either in hell or in heaven. Very forthright about hell on Wednesday night.

This text is about death. Verse 14 in particular. It seems to me that's exactly the right way to start an evangelistic crusade.

To talk about God and to talk about death. Death is sad and death is terrifying. If there's a holy, just God who's going to call everybody to account.

If you don't believe in God, if there is no God and death is simply the end of a long summer, it's just sad. It's sad. The reason it's sad is because life as we know it in this world is the basis of everything that makes us happy.

Family, friends, leisure, food, sex, job, work, meaning. If you don't have life, you got none of that. And to lose that feels sad, but it doesn't feel terrifying.

It's not terrifying to fall asleep thinking you never wake up. It's over. No consciousness ever again.

That's not terrifying. It's sad to lose things that you know, but it's not terrifying to go to sleep and never wake up again. Zero consciousness.

But if Billy Graham is right, that for God is the place to start and the place to end and there's a holy, just God of truth who has a law, who has a glory, and we will one day give an account to that God and we will render good or evil for everything good or evil we've ever done or he will render that to us. Then death is terrifying if we're not right with God. The existence of God in relationship to death is a terrifying thing.

This text says that it's a slave master if you're afraid of death. And it says in verse 14 that everybody has been held in bondage all their life long by the fear of death. I thought about that.

A lot of people would deny that. A lot of people who don't believe in God or believe in another kind of God than Billy Graham preaches would say, We're not afraid. We are not living a life of bondage.

I mean, look at us. Do we look like we're in bondage? We're the freest of all people doing what we want to do. What in the world do you mean that everybody is held in slavery and bondage by the fear of death? I don't even... What are you talking about? Where's this verse coming from? Here's what I think it is implying.

I think even people who don't believe in God and who on the surface are not feeling terrified are subconsciously ruled by the fear of death. One way or the other. It's a silent slave master.

One of its main forms of slavery is by putting you in the dream world of denial. Now, you don't experience it this way, but the way you can tell if you're in it or not is by what you are willing to think about much. Denial of the death that terrifies manifests itself in all kinds of ways of escaping from having to think long or much about your mortality and about your death.

It's one thing that Americans will not let themselves think long about and therefore we surround ourselves with all kinds of distractions and narcotics to escape from what we know we'd be afraid of if we thought about it and therefore it is ruling us from underneath. I thought of this analogy it's like the cruise control on our station wagon doesn't work, but I know what cruise controls are for. The fear of death is like a cruise control in the soul and it is set roughly at 55 miles an hour of contentment and ease.

Now, if something begins to happen in your life where your life begins to slow down to a pace of pensiveness and reflection and thoughtfulness and big reality start to come into your consciousness and you start to ask some big significant questions, that cruise control is gonna bump that baby back up to 55 in a big hurry so that you don't have to get into thinking about and dealing with those big thoughts that you can have when your life slows down to a restful pace. It's late at night, it's quiet, the stars are out, the kids are asleep, and you start to ask the big questions. The fear of death, not even consciously, said quick turn it on, turn it on, get the volume up, get moving, start doing something.

Can't deal with that. That's what, then it works the other way. Sometimes God in his common graces, and we've all experienced this, moves into your heart and begins to rev up your inquisitive motor and you start to inquire and think and it's a kind of a new day and you buy books and you pursue and you want to know how to solve mysteries and it's not the same reflective atmosphere that I was talking about a minute ago, it's energy, it's inquiry, it's pursuit, because there's something vital out there, you know, and at that 65, 75 mile an hour you might in fact find it.

And so the cruise control takes the foot off the accelerator, brings you back down to the ease and comfort of 55, the TV's just right, the leisure is just right, the family's just right, the work is just right, and you don't need to ask any of those questions or make any of that pursuit. This is what I think the writer here means when he says we are being held in bondage all our life long by the fear of death. There's a slavery.

Everybody who does not come to terms in reality with God, with sin, with guilt, with punishment, with death and with hell, if you don't come to terms with those realities, you must be in denial. You must be living a life governed subconsciously or perhaps consciously. Some of you know what it's like to live in horrible anxieties consciously all the time.

So whether subconsciously or consciously, this Romans 2.13 2.15 says that the law of God is written on every human heart, your conscious conscience bearing witness with that law, either condemning or affirming. So that I, on the authority of the Bible that Billy Graham holds up, and he seems to get a lot of approval, that same Bible says everybody in this room, everybody that will go to the dome tonight or has been there, has the law of God written across your heart and it is damning you or affirming you according to whether you are right with God. And if you're not right with God, that law written there is going to make you a slave to the fear of death.

Now this text here deals with this gloriously, and I want you to feel the good news of this text before we're done. I really want you to feel incredibly free from that fear when you go out of here this morning. Okay? That's what this text is about, how not to be enslaved either consciously or subconsciously to the fear of death when you leave here this morning, nor the rest of your life, right on into eternity.

So here's my plan to deal with this text in the next few minutes. Three things. We're going to look at the flow of thought in verses 14 and 15.

There are five steps in this flow, very simple, and you'll see them easily followed. Then we're going to compare the flow of thought, secondly, to the flow of thought in verse 17 in order to ask the question how does the death of Christ defeat the devil who has the power of death? How does that happen? And then thirdly, we're going to close with this practical question. I heard a man say, and I'll tell you who it was in 15 minutes or so, I'm not afraid of death.

I'm just afraid of dying. And we know what that means. The moving toward the moment, and what will that be? Will there be excruciating pain? Will I lose my mind? Will my friends be there? Will I be all alone? All those questions, not about the the entrance into glory, if you're a Christian, which he was, is, but the process.

I think verse 18 has something wonderful to say about that. So that's my plan. Let's do it.

First, the flow of thought in verses 14 and 15. Five steps. Watch them.

Step number one, the beginning of the verse, you all in this room are human since the children share in flesh and blood. Now the children is a reference back to verse 13, those whom God is giving to his son as his children. So anyone who is a Christian, and of course I could throw it out and say everybody here, is human.

All of you are flesh and blood. That's stage one. You are not angels.

Verse 16 says he's not here to deal with angel salvation. He's here to deal with human salvation. I'm not going to say much else about verse 16, but that's the point.

Step two. Next phrase in verse 14. Christ therefore became human.

Since the children share in flesh and blood, he himself, Christ, likewise partook of the same. The Son of God, we know from earlier in chapter 1, did not come into being when Jesus was born. He is the creator of the world.

Verse 3 of chapter 1. He is in the image of God. Verse 3. He is to be worshipped by angels and verse 8 of chapter 1. He is God. What he did to redeem us was take on, mystery is a great mystery, he took on humanity and became real God, real man, in one person.

That's the point. Two, or the second step. Step number three.

Christ did this precisely so that he could die. See that phrase? Since then the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise also partook of the same. That through death.

There it is. Just stop right there. He had to become human to die.

God can't die. Says in chapter 7 verse 16 that by virtue of his divinity, he has an indestructible life. But in taking on a human nature, he therefore enabled himself to die.

And that's precisely why he became human. That's what love does, folks. That's the nature of the Christian life.

You choose death for others' life. Some of our deaths are just little deaths, late night perhaps with somebody in need, or long distance to travel, or some money given. Others, the whole life is laid down in martyrdom.

Love takes on death. That's what Jesus became human to do. Step number four.

In doing that, that dying, he rendered powerless the one who has the power of death, the devil. That through death he might render powerless him who has the power of death, that is the devil. Now my question here, and I'm not going to answer it here, I'm going to wait till we get to verse 17.

My question is, how did that happen? How does dying defeat Satan? I mean, that doesn't look like a defeat. It looks like Jesus' defeat, not Satan's defeat. So how does that work? What's the dynamic here that when Jesus, the Son of God, gives himself up to die for us, Satan goes down.

How's that work? We'll answer it when we get to verse 17, but here's step number five in verse 15. The effect of defeating the devil in this way is that you and I are delivered from slavery to the fear of death. Now, that's what we're after this morning.

If I was right in my analysis at the beginning, everybody in this room needs that. I need that. If I don't get right with God somehow and get my sin problem solved and get my guilt problem solved and get the punishment owing to my sin solved and get my hell-bent destiny solved, I'm going to be scared to death all my life, either subconsciously or consciously.

And this text says that when Jesus died, Satan was defeated so that we might be delivered from a lifetime of slavery. So I want that to be true for you when you leave this morning, and we need to see it how it works and then embrace it this morning for our own. So let me summarize those five steps.

Number one, they're very simple, and I encourage you to memorize verse 14 because this is a wonderful way to share Christianity with people. This is a great summary of big doctrines stated very simply. Number one, you and I are human.

Number two, therefore Jesus, the indestructible divine Son of God, became human. Why? So that he could die. What did he accomplish in his death? Fourthly, he defeated Satan, the one who has the power of death.

So what? So that you might be free of the fear of death all your life. Those are the five steps. We got that now? All right, that's step one in the exposition of this passage, and it opens a huge question, which I think verse 17 answers.

And the question which I posed on step four was, how is it that the dying of the Son of God defeats death and the one who has the power of death, the devil? How does that work? Verse 17 says, therefore he had to be made like his brethren in all things, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Now what I want you to do with me, watch carefully, compare, like on a piece of paper, but put the flow of thought in verses 14 to 15 here and the flow of thought of verse 17 beside it and compare them across the page. And what you see right off the bat is that both of them say Christ became like us for some reason.

See that? In verse 17 it says, he had to be made like his brethren in all things, and in verse 14 it said, since we share in flesh and blood, he became like that. He took on the same nature. So these two verses, 14 and 17, are beginning to have the same flow of thought.

Something is about to happen, and in order for it to happen, the Son of God must take on humanity. That's so, so far they're the same in verses 14 and 17, but the rest of verse 17 is different, and it's the difference in the sameness that sheds light back on verse 14 and 15. Verse 14 says that Christ became like us to render powerless the one who has the power of death, the devil.

Verse 17 says he became like us, and then it says something different, namely, so that he could become a faithful, merciful high priest and make propitiation for sins. Now, what would you do? See this? I'm just exposing the way I think about the Bible here. What would you do if you had two parallel sequences of thought, the first were identical, he has to become human in order to do this, and this is the defeat of the devil in death, and this is the high priestly work of propitiating sins.

What would you say? I would say the way he defeats the devil is by propitiating sins. That's what I would say. Now, I want to try to unpack that and see if that makes sense, see if that works, and how it is that the devil goes down when my sins get propitiated.

Now, half of you don't even know what that word means probably, which is okay. I'm coming back to it. I'm glad the NASB left it there instead of some contemporary effort to explain it because it's a good, juicy, biblical word that we need to know and unpack together.

Why did Jesus, let's go to verse 17 and ask, why did Jesus have to become human in order to be a high priest to make propitiation for sins? Why did he need to be human to be a high priest? Why couldn't he be

a high priest as God the Son? Divine, indestructible, not incarnate. Why could not he be our high priest? Today, he's interceding as a high priest for us in heaven. Here's the reason.

It's given four times in the book of Hebrews. The offering that the high priest Jesus offers for us is himself. Had he brought any other offering, we would not be saved.

The blood of bulls and goats, chapter 9, cannot take away sin. Only one blood-shedding can take away sin, the divine Son of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. So when it says he had to become like us in order to do the high priestly work of propitiating sins, it's because this high priest is going to offer no other sacrifice than the high priest.

He lays himself, all the old high priests, remember what they did in the Old Testament? They had bulls and they had goats and they had doves and they'd go into the Holy of Holies and they'd take blood and spill it on the altar, cover the sins of the people for a year, perhaps on the Day of Atonement. And they had to do it for their own sins, too. Here comes Jesus.

And he has in his mind, I'm gonna do a high priestly work one time and it's over. No more temple sacrifices when I'm done because the blood I'm taking is not the blood of a bull, the blood of a goat, the blood of a lamb, the blood of a dove, it's my blood. Infinitely valuable blood.

And I'm gonna pour it out one time or another image would be, I'm gonna go in there and I'm gonna lie down and I'm gonna die. I'm gonna do that. I'm gonna finish this whole system of sacrificial offerings once for all by laying down my life that I might propitiate sins.

So the aim of his death is to make propitiation for the sins of his people, verse 17, and the aim of his death is to destroy or nullify the power of the devil and his power over death in verse 14. Christ strips the devil of his power in death by propitiating sins. Now we got to deal with that word propitiate.

Okay, it's okay if you don't know that, that's okay. It's not common parlance in American vocabulary. You won't hear it on TV probably, you won't read in the newspaper and even Christians have pretty much dropped it.

But let's get it. Okay, let's just get it. Stick it in so you can use it now and then with people you ought to use it with.

To propitiate in the context of judgment and punishment for broken law, to propitiate is to take away the wrath and the anger of the offended party. You propitiate their wrath. So here's God the lawgiver in justice and holiness who has the expectation that people will love him, honor him, trust him, obey him, delight in him, and the whole world falls short of that expectation.

And therefore the justice of God kicks in and he has a legitimate just anger against sinners. Now the solution to that is not only to deal with the guilt of sin, but the anger of God. We've got to get rid of his anger.

We can't. There's not a thing in the world you can do to do that. Only one person can take away the anger of God.

God. And since he's just, he doesn't just say, well, we'll let bygones be bygones. I'll sweep my anger under the rug and sin is okay.

It's not a big deal. My honor is not worth dying for. Instead what he says is I love you so much and I love my honor so much that I will send my son as the high priest to absorb my anger.

That's what happened at the cross. He put his son forward and son willingly in love to us and in love to his father lays his own life down on the altar of the cross as a high priest and as the offering of the high priest and God pours out on him the curse of the law. Galatians 3 14.

He became a curse for us and in doing that drains every drop of the wrath of God against his elect. Dry. In Jesus Christ there is therefore now no what? Condemnation.

This is a glorious, this is what was meant back in chapter 2 verse 4 when it said, oh don't neglect your great salvation. This is a great salvation. Now we're right on the brink of answering our question.

We're not there yet. We haven't got it solved but we've almost got it solved. The question was how is it that the death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our high priest by propitiating sin defeats the devil? How is it that the devil loses his power to destroy you through death because of that? Now probably most of you could finish the sermon now.

But let me finish it. There is only one lethal weapon in the artillery of Satan. If you've ever thought about this, listen carefully.

There's only one lethal, deadly, final, destructive weapon in the artillery of Satan. You know what it is? Your sin. Nobody goes to hell because of being harassed by the devil.

Nobody goes to hell because of being possessed by the devil. Nobody goes to hell because of being oppressed by the devil. Nobody goes to hell because of seeing green apparitions on their ceiling at night and hearing weird noises under the bed, which are real.

Nobody goes to hell because of that. People go to hell for one reason. Unforgiven sin.

Period. That's all. Satan has one way to get you to hell.

Keep you from a Savior and get you to sinning. That's all. He can't scare you.

I mean, let's get rid of our fear of this guy. He has one deadly weapon. Sure, he can rough you up.

He can kill you. Revelation 2.10, he has thrown many of you into jail. For ten days you will suffer and you're gonna die.

Satan can kill you today. This text does not mean that Satan's hands are bound and they can't make you sick or they can't make you dead. It means the one who had the power of death to destroy you no longer has that power.

Death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting? It's gone. Why? Because the law is satisfied and sins are forgiven. And all Satan can do is look you in the face and just rage at you.

And if you're covered by the blood of Jesus, if you're clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, you can look him right in the face and say, be gone, Satan. Or if he rages against you such as to put you in jail or to make you sick or to kill you, you can smile back at him and say, I'm free from the fear of this thing. Your power's gone.

That's my answer. The reason verse 17 says that he had to be made like us to propitiate sins by his dying and the reason verse 14 says he had to be made like us to destroy the one who has the power of death. The reason both of those are true is because in covering sin, he takes the power of Satan against us.

He can't destroy us. Only sin destroys and when your sin is covered, Satan has nothing that he can hold against you. The accuser, he's an accuser, right? The accuser has no brief in court.

His hands are empty. There's no evidence. He can stand there in front of the judge and say, I hate them.

They're evil. They committed fornication once upon a time. They lied yesterday.

They masturbated this week. They looked at, they looked at evil stuff. They made fun of Billy Graham.

And his hands are empty. God on the bench says, I know all that. I know all that.

But look, in their hand is a document. It's called the New Covenant. It's been signed by the blood of my son and in it is a commitment to propitiate all their sins if they would trust him.

And I'm the one who decides whether I'm angry or not. And I'm not angry. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

And we have, we have something to stand on, brothers and sisters, that is worth telling everybody in this city about. And I hope one of the effects of Billy Graham is that you just go on doing it. Go on doing it, you counselors, all of you who've been inviting people and talking about Billy Graham at work, go on doing it.

Billy Graham's not the good news. He brought the good news. Good news coming.

It's the gospel, not Billy Graham. He knows that. You know that.

It's this. Now let me close, for those of you who are are struggling with death, and you all are. Some more immediately than others.

The person I referred to at the beginning who said, I'm not afraid of death, I'm afraid of dying, was R.C. Sproul in Memphis a few weeks ago. Verse 18 helps, I think. It really helps.

It says, for since he himself was tempted in that which he suffered, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. Now notice something here. He is tempted in what he suffered.

This is not lust. I believe Jesus was tempted with lust. That's another sermon.

What is your temptation when you're suffering, folks? It's not lust. Lust is gone in the midst of pain. It's anger at God.

It's resentment. It's self-pity. It's withdrawal.

It's, how can you do this to me? Where's your goodness? Those are the tumbling temptations that come, and they came to Jesus. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me is a hair's breadth away from blasphemy. It is.

It didn't cross the line, but it's a hair's breadth away from blasphemy to accuse the all-good God of forsaking an all-good Son. If you didn't have the right understanding of what you were saying, it would be

blasphemy. And many of us are on the brink of blasphemy in shaking our fist in God's face and saying, why? This verse says, He was tempted or tested in his suffering so that he might be able to come to the aid of those who struggle with anger and resentment and sullenness and self-pity and despair and unbelief.

He became a man not only so that he could die, but so that he could enter the process of dying for us. So that when he comes out on the other side and he reigns today and we cry out to him in the midst of this kind of pain and fear and struggle and we wonder, will I lose my senses? Will I be humiliated with senility? Will there be excruciating pain that no pills can fix? Will my family forsake me? Will I outlive all of my contemporaries? All those thoughts that tumble to the mind about the process of dying. He comes and he says, He is able, I am able to come to the aid of those who are thus tempted.

So I just want to leave a promise with you that not only has God covered your sins if you are trusting in Jesus so that you can be free from the fear of dying subconsciously and consciously, but also he has pledged himself to come and help you. I've said this numerous times before and I'll close by saying it again. Right now, today's grace is sufficient for today.

And if you're scared right now that in a year, two or five or ten or fifty, you won't have grace to die well, that's okay. Sufficient under the day is the evil thereof and the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies are what every morning? New.

It's going to be there folks. This promise is going to come true for you in Christ. It's going to come true for you.

That when the hour comes and the pain is excruciating or the loved one is being taken from you, he'll come with a special mercy for that hour.

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