

Introduction

Hebrews 1:5-2:4 emphasized the greatness of Christ when compared with the angelic hosts. The Son's greatness may initially seem to be contradicted by his appearance of weakness—He came as a weak human, a little lower than the angels, and He also suffered like a common criminal. But all that the Son did factors into, rather than taking away from, His superiority to the angels. He took *humanity* to become the ideal man who could fulfill the dominion mandate that man lost. He took *suffering* in order (1) to become completely identified with humanity, (2) to destroy the works of the devil, (3) to release believers from the fear of death, and finally, (4) to become a merciful and faithful high priest to believers. We will look at the high priest idea in just a minute, but let me make some more application from the points we studied earlier.

(1) What does it mean that Christ identified with humanity? For one thing, He knows what you are going through as a human. His omniscience coupled with His human experience allows Him to “know how you feel” and empathize with what you are going through, not just to “see what you are going through.” He has experienced humanity and the feelings of humanity.

(2) What does it mean that Christ defeated the devil? For one thing, it means that the devil is not ultimately in charge of life or death. The devil is not in charge of the world in such a way that life or ministry is hopeless. Christ has nullified the power of the devil, so we can minister *life* to the spiritually dead. Satan cannot impose his blinders on anyone to whom God wishes to show the light of eternal life.

(3) What does it mean that Christ released believers from the fear of death? It means that we do not need to fear dying. We often say that we do not fear what comes AFTER death, but we do fear death itself, mainly the process of it. Such a distinction is not made in our text. The Bible says that Christ came as a suffering human to release those who through fear of death were subject to bondage. The fear of death seems to refer to the whole package—process and outcome. The process and outcome enslaved people. We are no longer enslaved to death. The hope of eternal life so overcomes the enmity of death that we do not need to be terrorized by death.

Now let us direct our attention back to verses 16-18 and its notion of Christ as high priest.

16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Think on this truth: Christ's Suffering Allows Him to be Qualified as Our Priest Before God.

1. Our High Priest Helps People, Not Angels, v. 16

The meaning of the term **give aid** is slightly debated, as the KJV has "take on the nature of" and the rest of the translations say something like "give aid to." The word is used in Matt. 14:31 when Jesus reached out his hand to grab Peter from sinking after he briefly walked on the water. Mark 8:23 uses the same term to tell about Jesus taking a blind man by the hand to go outside a village to heal him. Similarly with Luke 14:4. Other times the term just means "take hold of" or "take" or "catch" (as in Luke 20:20, 26, Acts 9:27, 1 Timothy 6:12, 19, Heb. 8:9), or to seize someone (as in Luke 23:26, 16:19, 18:17, 21:30). The word certainly does not mean that he "took on the nature of" angels.

The point is that Jesus clearly came in order to help mankind, not fallen angels. Angels are stuck in their sinful and fallen state. They are not punished with physical death, as they do not have a body. For them, once their decision was made to follow God or follow Satan, there was no possibility to go back and redo that decision. Mankind is not ultimately in that kind of "stuck" state. Isn't that a "fortunate" thing for us? God has provided a way of salvation when He did not at all have to do so. He could have left us in the same boat with the fallen angels but He chose not to do so.

The other question about verse 16 is the whole issue of the **seed of Abraham**. The Son gives aid to the seed of Abraham. Commentator Kent takes this to refer to Jews. If that is true, it would make sense because this letter is called *Hebrews*, written as it is to Hebrew Christians or professing Hebrew Christians. However, the reference appears to me to be wider than just to Jews. I believe it applies to believers in general, not just Jews. Gentiles are helped by the Lord's work too, as is abundantly clear from the Bible (Romans 15:9-12 quote some OT passages of this sort). Without diminishing God's plan for the future of the nation of Israel and the distinct existence of the church, there is a place for Gentiles in Abraham as indicated in Gen 12:3. Note Gal. 3:7-9 which teaches us that those "who are of faith are sons of Abraham... in you all the nations shall be blessed... those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham." The singular seed in that passage is Christ (Gal 3:16), and all those who are in Him are thus connected to this seed spiritually through faith, if they are not also physically connected to Abraham through procreation.

2. Our High Priest Dealt with Our Sins For Us, 2:17

In order to best "give aid" to mankind, Jesus had to be made like mankind. Here again we see the solidarity concept. But why is it that he

“had to be made” like His brethren? The rest of the verse gives the answer, namely, so that he could be a merciful and faithful high priest. The high priest idea is introduced here for the first time in Hebrews, and will be mentioned many times in the next sections of the book, particularly chapters 5 through 9, but also chapters 3, 4, and 10.

If he were not like us, he could not be a good high priest and could not give help to people. The priest is taken from among men, and so can understand their infirmities (Heb. 5:1-2). In other words, in order to accomplish giving aid to the seed of Abraham, he had to become like that seed. He did so “in all things,” so that in every respect, sin excepted, even including death, Jesus became like His brothers.

This allowed him to fulfill the office of priest in two ways. **First** is the step of the priest making propitiation for the sins of the people. **Second**, then the priest, via that same suffering, is able to help those who are tempted.

The most important job of the Old Testament high priest was to make atonement for the sins of the people. Among other things, He led the people in the animal sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32, and all of chapter 16). This elaborate ritual was how God instructed that propitiation was to be made for the sins of the people. The notion of “propitiation” is an important idea. It derives from God’s holy demand that sin be punished. Without such punishment being carried out, God is not “propitiated” or “satisfied.” So, in making propitiation for the sins of the people (Jews, and also Gentiles), Jesus satisfied God’s holy demand against sin. In other words, Jesus satisfied the wrath of God against sin, wrath that is aimed at sin and each and every sinner who does not repent and believe the gospel. Jesus is the ultimate Jewish high priest who removes sin from His people, and removes the need for an ongoing, animal-sacrifice ritual.

Think about the concepts merciful and faithful for a minute. Jesus is merciful toward us, isn’t He? See an example like Matt 15:22 (and v. 28). Even moreso, He is merciful in extending us an offer of forgiveness for our sins. And He is faithful toward God in doing God’s will (Heb 3:6, 10:7), and He is faithful to us keeping his promises (Heb 13:5, for instance, says that the Lord will never desert us).

3. Our High Priest Can Help Us in Every Temptation, 2:18

Since the Son of God experientially knows our frame, that we are dust, He can be merciful and faithful to us. He knows what it is like to be a *human*. Further, he knows what it means to *suffer*. He has the perfect knowledge of omniscience augmented by personal firsthand experience of the human condition and so can help us when we are tempted to sin.

The word for “aid” refers to help, as in help in time of desperation (Matt 15:25, Mark 9:22-24 (twice), Acts 16:9, 2 Cor. 6:2). Jesus can help us!

Suffering often comes along with temptation—suffering provides a test which can become a temptation—to doubt God or be angry at God, to deny God or charge Him with unfairness, to think selfishly like “I do not deserve this...” or to be frustrated, or any other sinful response you can imagine in time of testing. The Son knows all about that. He took it on the chin in the worst possible ways, suffering at the hands of his own creation, to save his people from their sins. He knows how to help in our circumstances. Pray and ask Him for help. Look into His Word for help. Learn from other godly men and women how to deal with tests.

Conclusion

The Son of God is superior to angels even though He became a man and suffered. His purpose in doing so was to release you from the penalty of sin and to satisfy God’s demands against sin. He—the Son of God—offered His life in place of your life to make “propitiation” for sin. And now He asks you to entrust the keeping of your life and soul to Him. When you do, you enter into the family of God.

After you come into the family of God as children/brethren, He can further help you face and defeat temptation, of whatever sort it may be. Maybe you have an addictive habit like smoking. He can help you with that. Maybe it is a pattern of thinking; lust; depression; selfishness; anger and temper; bad language? The faithful high priest knows your infirmities and can help. He wants to help.

His dealing with sin in propitiation is the bedrock foundation of his dealing with suffering and temptation. His help comes first in the form of releasing you from the tyranny of sin; then gradually from the practice of sin. God does not leave us helpless when it comes to suffering and temptation.

How could we be anything but thankful for such a High Priest?

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