

JESUS IS THE PIONEER OF OUR SALVATION

Hebrews 2:1-18

Key Verse: 2:10

“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.”

In chapter 1, the author emphasized that Jesus is fully God, superior to angels. Now in chapter 2, he emphasizes that Jesus became fully human and suffered for us in order to become a merciful and faithful high priest. In 1:14, we find the word **“salvation.”** In the Old Testament it has various meanings: salvation from enemies, poverty, disease, or natural disasters. But here **“salvation”** means from our sins, death and eternal condemnation, which is most serious. In 2:1-4, the author calls this **“great salvation”** and warns us not to drift away from it. Then he explains how Jesus restores man’s dignity and purpose (5-9). After that, he tells how Jesus became the pioneer of our salvation (10), and what blessings he gives (11-18).

First, pay attention to the great salvation (1-4). While living in this world, we have many things to pay attention to. For high school seniors, it is which university to attend and how to obtain financial aid. After graduation, it is obtaining a secure job. Then, the matter of finding the right spouse requires careful attention. After marriage, husbands and wives must pay attention to each other, and then to their children. For older people, it can be their health and Social Security. From birth to death we have many things to pay attention to. All these things are necessary. But what requires our most careful attention always, in every stage of life? It is the message of salvation. Though it is so important, many people do not pay attention to it. Why? It is because they take lightly its wonderful blessings and the dire consequences of rejecting it. When someone has this attitude, something else always seems more important than the gospel. Then they are blinded by the devil through their sinful desires. What we really need is the message of salvation, and this is what we must pay the most careful attention to.

Verse 1 explains why we have to pay careful attention to the message of salvation. It is because if we do not, we will drift away. If a ship is not securely tied to the dock, it can drift away from a safe harbor. Whether the waters are calm or rough, there is an undercurrent that is always moving. It

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causes the ship to drift gradually and aimlessly until it is caught in dangerous waters and wrecked. So the boat should always be securely tied to the dock. In the same way, if we do not pay careful attention to the message of salvation, we can drift away in the tides of worldly ideas or the devil's temptations which always circulate around us (1Pe 5:8). So we must be alert and hold firmly the message of salvation. If we ignore this warning, what are the consequences? In verses 2-3a the author explains that the message spoken through angels—that is the Law—was very serious. Anyone who violated or disobeyed the law would be justly punished. The message of salvation was spoken by the Lord himself. How much more seriously should we take it! This is the great salvation: it is perfect, ultimate and everlasting. If we ignore this great salvation, there is no escape, only judgment.

Verses 3b-4 describe how this message of salvation originated and why it is great. It was first announced, or “declared” (ESV), by the Lord Jesus himself: **“The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”** (Mk 1:15) It was confirmed by those who heard him, that is, the apostles and numerous other witnesses. They testified to it by their transformed lives. Fearful, sorrowful, selfish people became courageous, joyful and sacrificial. It was not just a few people, but numerous people from various ethnic groups and diverse backgrounds. It was not just in one generation, but down through the generations until now. God has also testified to it by supernatural acts, such as signs, wonders and various miracles. And God has distributed gifts of the Holy Spirit to believers according to his will. The message of salvation came from God and is most trustworthy. Let's not ignore it, but pay the most careful attention to it.

Second, Jesus became fully human to restore dignity and purpose to mankind (5-9). In verse 5, the author tells us that God did not put angels in charge of the world to come, but Jesus, and through Jesus, mankind. Then he quotes Psalm 8:4-6, which reveals God's purpose for mankind at creation. God crowned mankind with glory and honor, and intended us to rule the earth (Gen 1:28). God endowed us with great dignity and special favor, making us just a little lower than heavenly beings, and putting everything under our feet (6-8a). Yet at the present we do not see mankind carrying out God's original purpose for us (8b). The world is chaos. It is full of corruption, immorality and violence. Why has this happened? It is because of man's sin of disobedience. Jesus came to solve this problem and restore God's original

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purpose for mankind. How did Jesus do so? Jesus became the “Son of Man,” a title he called himself frequently in the gospels. This means the Messiah, and also a representative of all mankind, like a second Adam. Let’s look at verse 9: **“But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”** Here, **“lower than the angels for a little while”** refers to Jesus’ incarnation. It is really amazing that Jesus, who is fully God, came into the world as a human being. In the show, “Undercover Boss,” high level executives disguise their identity and take low level jobs in their own companies. They experience life on the bottom and find out what their employees really think of them. It is a step toward incarnation. Jesus did much more than that. The Eternal God became a man who was limited to time and space. The Almighty God became subject to the weakness of human flesh. The glorious God came into this world as a poor, ordinary man. This is beyond our imagination.

As a man, Jesus entered into the reality of our suffering. From birth to death, life is suffering. When a baby is born, he or she is not laughing, but crying loudly. This crying continues until they go to the grave in sorrow. So Psalm 90:10 says, **“Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.”** When Jesus assumed our humanity he became like us, exposed to all hazardous perils of life. Jesus became a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering (Isa 53:3b). When we find ourselves immersed in the harsh realities of human experience, he knows exactly how we feel. Jesus took upon himself all our sufferings, and even experienced the anguish of death. Human beings live under the threat of death throughout their lifetimes. This terrifies us more than anything else. In order to help us, Jesus himself tasted death. John Chrysostom compared Christ tasting death to a physician tasting a sick man’s medicine to demonstrate that it will not harm, but help the patient. John Calvin commented that Christ was not just an example, but rather, by dying for us, he took on himself what was due to us and so he redeemed us from the curse of death. Jesus’ death was not for his own sins, as is that of all other human beings. Jesus fully experienced death in every person’s place. Jesus took our death and gave us life. Jesus restores our dignity as human beings. Jesus restores God’s original purpose for us as stewards of his world. This is really God’s amazing grace to us.

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Third, Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation (10). Now the author explains how God made Jesus perfect as the pioneer of our salvation. Let's read verse 10: **“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.”** Here we learn God's way of salvation. God's purpose for mankind is to bring many sons and daughters to glory. In order to bring them to glory, suffering was inevitable. Through suffering, Jesus became the pioneer of our salvation. A pioneer is one who goes first into unknown territory and makes a way for others to follow. The legendary team of Lewis and Clark opened the way from St. Louis, Missouri to the Oregon Territory. It took more than two years to blaze the trail, record their findings, and return so that others could follow their footsteps. In the same way, Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation. But Jesus did not merely open an overland route; he opened the way to God for mankind. He goes in front of us and clearly marks out the way that leads to salvation. Jesus endured the bitter experience of death for us in order to lead us to the glory of God. He calls us to follow him in the way of suffering and glory. God made this Jesus perfect through suffering. Why? God, the Creator, for whom and through whom everything exists, can do as he pleases. Why did he choose the way of suffering to make Jesus perfect? God is righteous, just and holy. God does not tolerate or overlook man's sin which came from disobedience. It must be punished to death according to God's justice. But God also loves mankind. Out of his great love, he punished his one and only Son with a death penalty in our places. God would not bestow glory on mankind without solving the sin problem. To solve our sin problem, Jesus had to be made perfect through suffering and die. What does it mean that Jesus was made perfect? As the Son of God, was he not already perfect? Yes. Here the word “perfect” signifies the perfection or completion of a process. Jesus had to go through a process of suffering as a man to become a perfect pioneer. Through suffering, Jesus became perfect in obedience. 5:8-9 says, **“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and, once made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”** It was through disobedience that man lost his dignity and failed to fulfill God's purpose. Jesus obeyed God perfectly, restoring mankind from Adam's failure, and then offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice. In this way he became our pioneer, founder and champion. Now those who trust him and obey him can receive eternal salvation.

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Fourth, Jesus makes us children of God and sets us free from the devil (11-18). What blessings does Jesus give us? First of all, we have a new identity as members of God's family with Jesus (11-13). Verse 11 says, **“Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.”** The words **“of the same family”** are better translated “have one Father as their origin.” Jesus makes his people holy through his blood and imparts God's life to us. So both Jesus and his people have a common origin in the Father God. We are children of God and members of Jesus' family. This is our new identity. Many people suffer without a clear identity and feel isolated. They do not know who they are or where they belong. But we are children of God. We belong to God's family; Jesus is our big brother. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. In a family, the older brother's role is very important. Siblings follow his example in a special way because he understands from his experience how to navigate life under parental authority. Jesus became our big brother, and we follow his footsteps (Ro 8:29). In order to support this idea, the author quotes three Old Testament verses. The first citation explains that Jesus makes God known to his brothers and sisters by declaring God's name and singing his praises publicly (12). The second citation reveals Jesus' complete trust in the Father as an example for brothers and sisters (13a). In the third citation, Jesus identifies himself with God's children (13b). What a blessing it is that we become God's children, with Jesus our big brother. All we need to do is follow Jesus and grow in his image.

Second of all, Jesus breaks the devil's power and frees us from the fear of death (14-16). People suffer from all sorts of oppression, due to poverty, social injustice, parents' indifference, bullying, etc. This must be resolved. While Jesus was on earth, he cared for people deeply. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and showed favor to outcasts. The most serious oppression comes from the devil who holds the power of death. This does not mean that the devil can decide when we die; only God is sovereign over life and death. The phrase, “the power of death” expresses the fear of death. Death itself is an inevitable reality for everyone. It happens once and is over. Yet before it happens, it haunts people. It rules their hearts and enslaves them to fear, sorrow, regret, meaninglessness, anxiety, despair, frustration and powerlessness. We cannot get out of this horrible oppression by our own effort. Psychological counseling may soothe our symptoms, but it cannot

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solve the root problem which stems from the fear of death. Fear of death is the devil's powerful weapon. Only Jesus can liberate us from it. How does Jesus do this? Let's read verses 14-15. **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of 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.”** Since we have flesh and blood, Satan can threaten us with the fear of death and enslave us. Angels are not vulnerable to this threat. It is we human beings, Abraham's descendants, who are vulnerable (16). In order to set us free, someone should break the devil's power. Who or what can do this? High tech weapons, money, Google? No. Only Jesus! How did he do so? By his death, he broke the power of death. Jesus shared our humanity and died for our sins. In this way he paid the full price. By his death, Jesus broke the devil's grip on mankind and set us free. The devil has lost his claim on us. Jesus bought us at a price and we belong to him. Now, Jesus is our new owner. He does not rule us with the fear of death, but with life and peace.

Thirdly, Jesus helps us overcome temptation as our merciful and faithful high priest (17-18). Along with the fear of death, temptation is another strong weapon of the devil. We are vulnerable to temptation due to our sinful desires. James says, **“...but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desires and enticed”** (Ja 1:14). These evil desires are described as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:16). Because of these desires, we are easily tempted by the devil's prompting. We are tempted to worship the idols of money, fame, sex and power. We are tempted to be self-centered and complacent, avoiding self-denial and taking our cross and suffering. Because we are weak, and these temptations are so strong, we cannot overcome them by our own effort and will. Each person feels alone in times of temptation. Sometimes we fail and fall into despair. We lose the joy of life and our appetites, and develop insomnia. Who can understand and help us? Let's read verses 17-18. **“For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human 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.”** In order to understand and help us, Jesus became fully human in every way. He was tempted just like us, but he did not sin. He lived a perfect life and offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to make

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atonement for our sins. In this way he became a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. People often say, “You just don’t understand me.” It is true. No one fully understands another person. But Jesus understands us. In his mercy, he is ready to help us in our time of need. He does not despise us in our weaknesses because he understands us. Jesus never rebukes us for our failure when we come to him. He does not say, “After failing again, do you now come to me shamelessly?” Rather, he understands us and helps us. He does not help us just one or two times, but again and again because he is faithful. Jesus welcomes us as we are and gives us victory over the devil. David Brooks, a New York Times writer, said we live in an achievement-oriented culture. People find their worth and value based on their achievements. When they achieve something, they feel valuable. When they fail, they fall into condemnation. In such a culture, Christians can begin to think of their own lives in terms of their achievements. But Jesus does not receive us on the basis of our achievements. He welcomes us as we are, in our weaknesses, and helps us as our merciful and faithful high priest. His help enables us to do what we should do. We can learn from Jesus in raising our children and disciples.

Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation through his humiliation, suffering and obedience to death. Jesus opened the way to eternal glory and bids us to follow him. As we do, he gives us victory over death and temptation and provides our strength. Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus and follow him to glory.