

Does Jesus Really Care?

Hebrews 2:14-18

When you were a child, did you ever think to yourself, about your parents, "They just don't understand"? Go ahead, raise your hands if you ever felt something like that about your parents. I would guess that most, if not all, people have thought that at some point in their life. We tended to think that our circumstances were so unique that our parents couldn't possibly have understood us. They couldn't relate to us because we are different. But, for those of us who are adults now look back on those years and, in most scenarios unless our parents were pursuing sin, we begin to realize how foolish we were in thinking that. Our parents were kids and teenagers with temptations similar than ours. Yes, circumstances could have been different, but as Solomon said, "There's nothing new under the sun." As we got older, we began to embrace wisdom: our parents went through some circumstances harder than ours and some circumstances easier than ours; but either way, they can sympathize with us. They do "get it" and "understand." And, ultimately, they really did (and do) care about us.

You know, just like children can act towards their parents, I believe we can act towards Jesus. Imagine the scenario of the Hebrews. They're going through difficulties, increased persecution, and people leaving the church. Then they open up this letter and the author highlights the superiority of Jesus. They're encouraged as they read it. They get to the text we studied last week and they even discover that Jesus had to trust the Father, too. And then they think, "Hold on a second. But Jesus was God. How could he *really* understand me? Can he *really* sympathize with us in our difficulties?"

Years ago, at another church, I preached through a series on the nature and character of Jesus. One of the sermons focused entirely on Jesus' humanity. Jesus really was a real human being. In that sermon, I talked about how Jesus experienced temptation and how his temptations were real temptations. After I got done preaching the message, I was pretty encouraged. I thought I had explained the Scriptures quite well. And then after the sermon, I got into a conversation with a couple of people and one of the first comments that was made from someone was, "But Jesus' temptation was different. He had nothing inside of himself drawing him to sin, like we have." And with that "But Jesus" statement, I felt like the conversation went downhill.

By the way, when someone tells you that you just don't understand, how do you feel? Maybe helpless? Maybe defensive? Maybe offended? Now, I'm not saying that God's up in Heaven saying, "You really hurt my feelings when you said that," but I do believe our response is sadly ironic. We say that God doesn't understand, but God's response is, "No, child, you aren't understanding the depths I went to that prove I understand."

Yet, even when the Scriptures confront us, we still refute. You can see that Jesus is the continuous answer that's given in the Scriptures for hope and endurance, and you will take all the encouragement except when it comes to Jesus truly sympathizing with you. You say, "Yeah, but Jesus was God!" When you're tempted to give in to sin, you think, "Yeah, but Jesus couldn't have sinned; so how can I be encouraged with Jesus being tempted?" When you're struggling in your faith, you think, "Yeah, but Jesus was God, so he couldn't deny the Father." When you're feeling alone, you think, "Yeah, but Jesus is one of the persons of the Trinity. How alone could he have felt?" When you feel betrayed, you think, "Yeah, but Jesus knew what was going to happen. I don't."

Just like teenagers with their parents, we can be with Jesus. I believe the author of Hebrews writes so powerfully on Jesus' humanity to, at least in some ways, confront this mentality. He works hard to keep us from thinking Jesus doesn't understand, and today, I hope that we would lay down our reservations, our hesitations, our doubts about Jesus' humanness. I pray that we would run into Christ's loving embrace – knowing that Jesus really does care. Last week, we highlighted two reasons, with multiple sub-points, that we can know that Jesus cares. We discovered that Jesus himself was made perfect through suffering, and we also discovered that Jesus had to trust the Father, too. But now we move into three more reasons. Before I state them, open your Bibles to Hebrews 2, and we'll read verses 14-18 together:

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. ¹

Does Jesus understand? Does he *really* care? Absolutely. In these few verses, the author of Hebrews forces us to deal with our doubts about Jesus' empathy and shows us three things Jesus came to do: He came to destroy the devil, to deliver the enslaved and to become a merciful and faithful high priest. By studying each of these points the author makes, we can say that **Jesus is superior in being able to empathize with us. He cares.** So, let's look at the first one given in verse 14.

1. Jesus, in the flesh, died and faced the devil (v. 14).

Verse 14 says, "¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. . ."²

Jesus partook of flesh and blood so that he would destroy the devil. Jesus faced the devil in human flesh. Right here we see the cosmic plan of God. In the beginning days of the Adam's existence, he rebelled against God by believing the lie of the serpent. All creation fell into chaos, and yet at that point, God

¹ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:14–18.

² The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:14.

promised to send One who would restore all things. There will be one greater than Adam, and God declared that this One was going to win back the hearts of humans and that this creation would once again be a cosmic sanctuary for the Lord's glory and for humanity's good. After centuries, at the perfect time, God the Son took on human flesh and then there was a face-off between the seed of Eve and the serpent. So, the author says that Jesus came to this earth to crush the serpent's head.

While we see this face-off mentioned here in verse 14, the author is more specific in how he words this face-off. You see, while it's good to get the big picture, sometimes we can neglect the specifics. What does it mean that Jesus came in the flesh? Maybe he was like Hercules – half god and half man. Or, maybe he didn't really experience any real weakness. Just because he has flesh doesn't mean that he had *our* kind of flesh, does it?

That's why I'm so grateful for verse 14. It starts off saying "Since therefore," and that means that this verse is connected to verse 13 which was a verse talking about how Jesus encourages the children he's rescued – that they too would be people who trust and worship God in *this* life! But this statement is also emphatic in saying that since the children have flesh and blood, then Jesus must take *their* flesh and blood. Now, the phrase flesh and blood is an emphasis of a shared humanity. Jesus didn't simply appear to have flesh and blood. He *had* flesh and blood. And the flesh and blood was the same as ours. In this verse we see the words "likewise" and "same." This is a double insistence of the author to say that Jesus didn't come and take on super-humanity. He "likewise" partook the "same" things.

Now, go with me somewhere for a moment. For him to "likewise" take the "same" flesh and blood, automatically limits him. Flesh is limiting. I imagine we're grateful for our flesh that helps keep everything else in. We don't want to *not* have flesh. That would be creepy. But my point is that my presence is limited to my flesh and what is contained within it. How can omnipresence take on limited presence? In addition, think on blood. I'm grateful for blood, but we also must admit that having blood is necessary for our existence. Without it, we'd die. Now, take flesh and blood and apply it to Jesus. How could God, the infinite, take on these finite characteristics? How can Jesus be both God and man? Infinitude can't also be finite, can it? Right here we have a mind-blowing reality. God is more powerful than we can imagine. Somehow God the Son could come and take on flesh and blood.

Yet, while there are some who doubt this truth because it seems anti-logical, most Christians simply accept Jesus' incarnation. They say, "He's both God and man." No "Yeah, buts." My point in highlighting this is that this reality is phenomenal, and if you can believe that Jesus can do this, you ought to believe Jesus can do anything.

But, even in saying this, that's not the bigger point of the author here. The author highlights why Jesus took on blood and flesh. He did it to associate with us completely. In this verse, we see two more related words "share" and "partook." The word "share" communicates a "constant human situation" (P.E. Hughes, p. 111). The second word "partook" is in a Greek tense that, I believe, refers to a historical event in the past where, as one commentator put it, Jesus "assumed this same human nature and thus himself became truly man and accordingly truly one with mankind" (P.E. Hughes, p. 111). So, Jesus took on the shared humanity. He really was a real human being. Does he understand what being a human being is like? Yes!

This point is further stressed when we see "that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. . .." Jesus took on flesh to destroy the devil! Why did he do this? For the children of God, Ventura! Look at the endless love of God for you and for me. Jesus not only took on the limits of flesh and blood. He took death. And this is another confusing reality. How can God die? Well, God cannot cease to be. He always is. But, as I stated a couple of weeks ago, death is not annihilation. Death physically refers to the stopping of all things physical, leading to deterioration. Death spiritually refers to experiencing the eternal just punishment of God – being apart from the Lord's grace.

How can God the Son allow himself to die? This is a truth that has led to many Jewish people rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. Cursed is the one who hangs on a tree! Muslims also deny that Jesus physically died on the cross because they do not believe God would treat a blessed prophet that way. Yet, here's the "foolishness of the cross." What the world denies is phenomenally true. Jesus in the flesh died. Or, as Peter stated in a sermon recorded in Acts 3:15, "you killed the Author of life. . .." Mind-boggling. The Author of life was killed by his creation, yet because he was really in flesh, he was able to die!

Do you see how Jesus' incarnation should blow our minds and cause us to trust the Lord. Jesus, God the Son, really took on real flesh and really died! And he did this for us, to be like us, in order to destroy the devil. Now, here we have an interesting phrase. The author says that the devil has the power of death. This doesn't contradict that God ultimately is in control of when people die. But I think this phrase is talking about the destructive allowance God has given to the devil. Think of Job. Who was in control of every event? God! Yet God allowed Satan to enter into Job's life, and what did Satan do? He brought death and destruction. That is Satan's intention always: to destroy. First Peter 5:8 says, "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." His very name means he's an accuser and his goal is to separate man from God.

Humans need rescue! We daily experience temptations and trials and sins that take us down and discourage us. We have situations that try us to the core. In all of these, Satan's design is to destroy. Sometimes we might think the sins are going to give relief, but even if sin is sugar-coated, it's still sugar-coated poison. Oh how we need rescue from the destructive plan of Satan. Verse 14 says, "Here's the rescuer: Jesus!" Since therefore God's children have flesh and blood, Jesus likewise took the same nature so that he might destroy the devil, along with his destructive influences. Since we have faced the onslaught of the devil and his minions, we're told here that Jesus has as well. Does he understand? Yes!

But there's more. Jesus doesn't simply say that he's faced the devil and that's it. He destroyed the devil! This word for "destroy" actually means to "render ineffective." Jesus, through his death rendered the devil's works ineffective. In the end, all of Satan's worst attacks towards Jesus and God's children cannot do what he intends. He wants you dead and he wants you in Hell with him. That's his plan. So, he may do his worse, but his worse was rendered ineffective at the cross!

Oh how encouraging this would be to the Hebrew Christians! How much destruction have they seen? They feel like giving up and giving in and turning back. That's Satan's design for temptations and trials. Yet the author says that Satan will not get what God has purchased and rescued!

³ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:14.

⁴ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ac 3:15.

⁵ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Pe 5:8.

What about you? Jesus conquered the devil at his death! Jesus actually rendered the devil ineffective by his death. The greatest act of injustice on creation's part actually led to the redemption of creation. You may feel like circumstances, temptations and trials will overwhelm you and take you out. NO! Jesus died in real flesh and blood. He faced the devil and he crushed his head. He's the Superior Savior, the Superior Adam! Behold your God. Behold your older brother who's not ashamed to call you brother and sister. Behold your older brother who is singing over you and saying, "I really did have to trust the Father, and I have made the devil ineffective." Ventura, have you faced the onslaught of the devil like Jesus did? No. And Jesus faced it in human flesh and he did so faithfully, to the praise of God. Instead of saying Jesus can't understand us, I think we should say that we can't understand him!

Because the real Jesus really took on real flesh and blood, he rendered the devil ineffective in his work against you! Praise Jesus that he came in the flesh! Let these truths be like refreshing waves of grace over us! But there's more.

2. Jesus, in the flesh, died and freed slaves (vv. 15-16).

Look at verses 15-16 again with me: ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ⁶

If the master (the devil) is destroyed, then his slaves are set free. But this point needs to be emphasized because we recognize that it's not Satan's fault that we sin or even experience God's judgment. If Satan were taken out of this world, humans would still sin. And, as a result, humans would still deserve and receive God's judgment.

So, here the author says that Jesus didn't partake of flesh just to put on a good show to reveal to people that he's superior to Satan. He took on Satan to deliver those who are enslaved in sin! But what's interesting here is that the writer of Hebrews states that we humans are subjected to slavery through the awareness that we're going to die. The knowledge that we're going to die raises the awareness of our shame. Why are we going to die? Why do we experience it? What's the point of life if we're all going to die? These questions, and more, come to our minds when we think about death. In addition, thoughts like "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" comes to our minds. As a result, our sinfulness is expressed in our lives because death looms over us. Without Jesus' victory over death, we don't know how to handle life.

Humans have a fear of death. Maybe it's because we don't know what's to come. Maybe it's because it makes this life pointless or our existence meaningless in the big scheme of things. Maybe it's because we know that there's a judgment awaiting. Whatever the reasons we fear, there is legitimate reason to be afraid of death if you do not have Christ. Yet, if you are Christ's, bondage of the fear of death is taken away! We are no longer slaves to Satan. We are God's children.

So, for the persecuted church in Rome, they could say "What's the worst Nero can do? Kill me? The thought of death doesn't cause me fear! As a result, they could live for Christ in the moment. The same is true for us. This truth of Jesus setting captives free is to cause us to live as the free people we are *right now, today*. When tempted, you remind yourself, you're not a slave. When you're going through trials, remind yourself that these trials are not to bind you, but will be used by God to grow you in humility and faith. If the fear of death is out of the way, then the hope of glory is in view and you will begin to live this

⁶ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:15–16.

life today in light of eternity. Instead of trying to grab all you can for right now, you'll bask in the wonder of your freedom!

Can you live this way? I came across a couple quotes from Christians of old and I want you to hear how they talk about death. I want to simply reference one named Chrysostom. He was bothered by how Christian funerals in his day has so much lamentation about them and he thought that did not declare the hope that the believer had in the life to come. He wrote, "Those who are really worthy of being lamented are the ones who are still in fear and trembling at the prospect of death and have no faith at all in the resurrection. . . . May God grant that you all depart this life unwailed" (as quot. in P.E. Hughes, p. 115). I don't believe his point is that we can't miss and that we don't have sorrow when someone dies, but his point is that we have superior hope because we have a superior Savior who has set us free from death. Death has been swallowed up in victory, Paul writes to the Corinthian church. Therefore, because we're set free from death's sting, live for Jesus today!

Then the writer puts in verse 16 and says, "For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham." Honestly, verse 16 popped out to me as a little confusing. It didn't seem to fit the flow. I did some more investigating on this verse, and actually found that Christians diverge on how this should be translated. I need to say that I believe all modern translations translate this verse with something of the idea of Jesus helping. However, translations going back to the King James and Geneva, and then Christians in the centuries before, did not take this to mean "help." Elsewhere in the Bible, this Greek word is used to refer to taking a hold of something. The idea could be negative or positive in connotation, but the idea is taking something as your own. Jesus talks about the violent taking by force the Kingdom. That's the same Greek word used here. So, the Geneva Bible says that Jesus did not take the angels, he took the seed of Abraham. The King James says that he did not take on the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham.

Based on my study this past week, I'm more convinced that we should stick to the old translations and also agree with the Christians of old. If they're correct, there's immense depth here. There's a word-picture going on in this phrase. Jesus did not take on angels. He didn't take on the nature of angels in order to rescue angels. He took on the seed of Abraham. What does that mean? Well, "seed of Abraham" is a covenantal term. God promised that through Abraham's seed all the nations of the world would be blessed. In the Scriptures, this idea of "seed of Abraham" has two ideas. There's a reference to Abraham's seed referring to a remnant that are rescued. And then we also know that this "seed" is singular, referring to *one particular* seed. So, God promised to rescue real people – Abraham's seed. But how is God going to keep his promise? Through One seed in particular – the Messiah, who is Jesus.

Think of it this way: while humanity was running away from God, turning into their sin, embracing the destructive enslavement of Satan, Jesus took the role of the seed of Abraham on himself and became human. In entering into the world as the seed of Abraham, he also *took* a hold of and seized the seed of Abraham. At the cross he paid for every last one of their sins, rescuing them from their bondage, giving them life. Jesus, the seed of Abraham, has purchased the seed of Abraham for the Father! This is precisely the logic of Paul in Galatians 3, when he writes that the Abrahamic seed is Christ's, but then he goes on and says in Galatians 3:29 that "...if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

⁷ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:16.

⁸ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ga 3:29.

Now, what does this have to do with what the author of Hebrews is stating? In some ways, I wonder if we can read Hebrews 2 and think "This is all too good to be true." Or, we can think it's far-fetched. Somewhere in here we say "Yeah, but what about. . ." And to that response, the author says, "But hold on a second! Who did Jesus set out to rescue?" Answer: human beings. Do you believe God made promises to rescue humans? Did he make a covenant to Abraham? And he kept his promise. Even while we were sinners, Christ died for us. And in that death, even when we were running away from him, he seized us and made us children of God, brothers to our Savior, redeemed, set free humans who will someday rule in a world to come! Does Jesus *really* care? Absolutely. Does Jesus *understand*? Yes. But then again, you may still doubt. So, let's move into the final point.

3. Jesus, in the flesh, faced incomparable suffering and is now the merciful and faithful high priest (vv. 17-18).

Look at verses 17-18 again: ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. ⁹

The "Therefore" in verse 17 means "as a result of what we've read." It brings across a concluding thought. And the concluding thought was that Jesus *had to* be made like his brothers and sisters in every single way. He had to be human in every respect. No "yeah, but." Like other humans, he faced the devil. Like other humans, he faced death. Like other humans, he experienced limitations.

That said, I know you could still say, "Yeah, but what about my trials and temptations? Jesus is God!" That's usually the most difficult practical struggle we have with regards to Jesus' humanity. And it's here the author says that he was made fully human so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God. There's going to be a lot of expounding on this thought in the months to come as we study the book of Hebrews; so, if you feel like I'm moving quickly right now just know we'll sayor more in the future.

The word "merciful" seems to focus on how he relates to humanity. In other words, we were sinners. We deserved condemnation and yet Jesus came and didn't give us what we deserved! Oh praise God. Have you ever been scared of a punishment before? Imagine being in front of God who has ever single thought and deed and intention recorded. Then, if you've trusted Jesus, hear the Judge say "not guilty!" That's mercy! But then we're told he's a faithful high priest in the service of God. Jesus didn't give mercy in an unjust way. He gave it justly and in the way God required!

The word picture calls us back to the temple and tabernacle where the High Priest would go once a year to the Holy of Holies and he would take the blood from the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the mercy seat. In doing so, he signified that God's wrath has been appeased by the blood. This is the idea of "propitiation." To propitiate means to satisfy wrath and make one favorable to you. By the blood of the sacrifice, God then did not require the blood of the High Priest or the people of Israel. Therefore, the High Priest, through this action, revealed God's requirement that a human serve as a mediator of sorts for the people. He too had sins. He was human. And yet, in this act, God reveals his mercy and faithfulness to the people of Israel and even God's faithfulness and mercy to the High Priest.

⁹ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:17–18.

But here in Hebrews, you should notice a contrast between Jesus and the High Priests of old. At the end of verse 17, we see that Jesus didn't make an offering for his sins. He only made an offering for the sins of the people, not his own. That's how Jesus is truly *the* faithful High Priest and how he can be merciful to others! He's the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! Real salvation comes to us because the real human Savior came to us and took our sins on himself, and in his death, he appeased the wrath of God, making God favorable towards us — even calling us children!

Now, let me ask you a question, have you ever experienced the full weight of God's wrath on you? Sometimes our circumstances might feel like God's wrath is on us and we are experience torments of Hell. But please hear this, you have not drank the cup of God's wrath for myriads upon myriads of sinners. The Bible says that Jesus became sin and that the Father poured out his wrath on the Son! None of us have ever experienced the weight of that suffering. It's so immense that we can't even dream of its horrors.

And I don't say this to then say, "Stop whining." But instead, the preacher of Hebrews says this in order to say that this ensures that Jesus will be compassionate with you. His circumstances were exponentially worse. Therefore, he will be compassionate with you. Verse 18 says, "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." I'm amazed by this because in my sinfulness, I can look at my children who feel like they're suffering and I can think, "You're not suffering. Just wait until you're older!" I say that because they haven't experienced as much as I have. Have you ever thought that way with others? You're impatient because they just need to grow up or get thicker-skin?

Let me just say right now, praise Jesus he doesn't treat us with that type of unsympathetic response! Instead, he helps us who are tempted! Why? Because his suffering in temptation was greater. Yes, he was sinless, but that doesn't mean he wasn't tempted. At this point, we try to figure out how this temptation could be temptation if he was perfect. And, you know what I'm going to say right now? Stop trying to figure it out. I've heard helpful illustrations to encourage us to believe that Jesus' temptations were real and even more significant than ours. But you know what? I believe there's comforting mystery here. And, even if I can't understand how it all works, I can trust the One who seized the seed of Abraham and made me his brother! I can trust what the Bible says then: Jesus suffered while he was tempted. And, by the way, I don't think this is purely talking about the suffering of the cross, but also situations like when he was tempted in the wilderness or the temptation in the Garden of Gethsemanae. Was he tested and tempted? Did he experience suffering in temptation? Absolutely. And yet he remained perfect in this!

And his temptations were greater than ours! But some of you might not like to hear that. You're still struggling with your "yeah, but" statement, and I need to respond to that here. Why do you want your suffering to be greater than Jesus'? Do you want a Savior who cannot touch your wounds and your pains? Do you want a Savior who cannot understand the horrors of Hell? Listen, on the cross, Jesus experienced every nook and cranny of the torments of God's wrath. In his life, he experienced the pains of the fallen world through relationships and temptations! He can sympathize! Believe that Jesus is the superior Savior because he really was human and experienced the trials and temptations of humanity to the fullest, without sin!

¹⁰ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 2:18.

So now, the author of Hebrews tells this struggling church that Jesus, who became man, is their only hope. Only he can give the help necessary for those who are being tried and tempted! Only Jesus can give endurance and joy in the midst of pain. Only Jesus can give all we need. And, before you think that Jesus just wants to make your life more painful, remember that in the midst of it all, Jesus sympathizes, cares, sings over you.

Don't drift. Grow in the knowledge of Christ and in your love for him. No more "He doesn't understand" statements. He really does care for you, Christian – like no other can care for you. He's proved it over and over again. He is your merciful and faithful high priest.

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