

BRINGING MANY SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO GLORY

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Hebrews 2:10-18

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In his book *The Four Loves* C.S. Lewis writes about the four different Greek words for love. Three loves are natural loves: *storgē* is affection between family members; *philia* is love within friendship; and *eros* is the romantic love of passionate desire. The fourth love is unnatural; it is supernatural: *agapē* love is unconditional, selfless, and self-giving. It is distinctive of the Christian life. Indeed, it is mentioned many times in the NT.

Storgē family love is the empathy and affection within a family: between parents and children, and between the siblings. It is a natural love, and usually very strong and lasting. We will do anything for family, as the saying goes. Blood is thicker than water, says the proverb. But sometimes family love breaks down. As kids, siblings often squabble and engage in rivalry, but then they make up. But adult children may become estranged from one another, or from one or both parents. Children of divorce, young or adult, often find it difficult to navigate loyalty to both parents. In healthy families, family solidarity is extremely strong. But there are lots of reasons why family solidarity can break down.

Then there are the skeletons in the family closet. Most families have these; there are certainly a few in my family. We occasionally watch *Finding your Roots* with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on PBS. As he and his team dig deep into family history they inevitably unearth surprises. If there were no surprises, it wouldn't be an interesting program to watch. Some of these surprises are good: hitherto-unknown heroes, whom one is proud to own as an ancestor. They confer glory and honor on the family line. Other surprises are questionable. Villains and shady characters are exposed. They cast a cloud of shame over the family line.

Honor or shame. Children can feel under tremendous pressure to increase the honor of the family, and not bring shame. Parents can seek vicarious honor through their kids.

So, a family can be a healthy environment for flourishing, for resilience. Or a family can become toxic, riven with dysfunction, even if it looks good from the outside. "Happy families" are not always happy families.

We certainly see this in Scripture. Genesis is full of basket-case families. In the early chapters this is understandable as humanity lives east of Eden. But the dysfunction continues after God calls Abraham to begin a new family through whom the Lord will restore blessing to humanity and the world. The behavior of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons is not promising material for a new humanity. They were close kin, all descendants of Abraham and Sarah. But healthy family love was in short supply. The clan of Abraham is not the poster child of a healthy family.

The NT continues the family language into the church. Only three times are Jesus-followers called Christians. The usual term for the people of Jesus is "brothers and sisters." People who had no blood connection to one another considered themselves to be sib-

lings. Why? This is what I want to consider today: why are we brothers and sisters together?

So far in the Book of Hebrews, the preacher has shown the superiority of the Son to angels. The Son was with God in the beginning before the angels were created, indeed through whom the angels were created. But he became lower than the angels for a little while, incarnate as Jesus the man. The Son, still now as the man Jesus, has been exalted above the angels, crowned with glory and honor. He has entered into glory in two respects. He has entered into God's full presence, which is glory. And he has been enthroned with the glory and honor befitting the king. At the end of last week's passage we saw that the turning point between being made lower than the angels and exaltation above the angels was "because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (2:9).

How does this work? How does the work of Christ accrue to us? Why should I gain from his reward? I will try to give an answer. The preacher continues his sermon to show us how in 2:10-18. He develops his argument in four stages.

I. Jesus our Pioneer (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. (Heb 2:10 NIV)

The Son has already entered into God's glory, returning to the mutual love that the persons of the Godhead enjoyed from before the beginning of time. But God has greater ambitions: he wants to bring many more sons and daughters into his glory.

Like last week, we have a question here of gender. ESV has "sons" whereas NIV and most other recent versions have "sons and daughters." I know we sang, "Bring many sons to glory," but Stuart Townend was working within the constraints of the form of his song. In both Hebrew and Greek the word "sons" can be gender-specific or gender-inclusive depending on context. Here it is clearly inclusive, "sons and daughters." I think it should be translated as such. Again, this is one reason I preach out of the NIV: to make it clear to women that you are fully included. God wants you just as much in his family in Christ Jesus. English Bibles should make this clear.

In the ancient world, and up until recently, only male sons were heirs, able to inherit their Father's estate, though Zelophahad's daughters received special permission to inherit their father's estate, given that he had no sons (Num 27:1-11). Inheritance is a major theme in Hebrews. God has appointed his Son *heir* of all things (1:2); the Son has *inherited* a name above all others (1:4). We who follow Jesus are about to *inherit* salvation. This inheritance is for men and women equally when we enter into Christ.

God wants to bring *many* sons and daughters to glory. He doesn't restrict the inheritance to just a few. He doesn't admit just 144,000 then close the door, as some groups believe. No, God wants many sons and daughters in his presence. He is not a God of scarcity, but a God of abundance. His abundant glory can encompass a vast multitude of people.

How do we reach that glory? God has provided a leader to bring us into his glory: the Pioneer of our salvation. A pioneer goes first, and opens up the way for others to follow. Elsewhere Jesus is described as our forerunner (6:20). He has gone ahead and entered into God's presence on our behalf. He has opened up the way for us to follow.

The Son is qualified to function as our Pioneer because God has made him perfect through suffering. But, you may ask, wasn't Jesus perfect throughout his life? We tend to think of *perfect* and its opposite *imperfect* as polarities of *good* and *bad*. But that's not the primary meaning. The polarity is between *complete* and *incomplete*. In grammar, for example, the imperfect tense is used for action that is incomplete; the perfect tense for action that has been completed.

The eternal Son entered into Israel's history and human history as a man. He needed to live out his earthly life as a man faithful to the end, to completion, to perfection. His path lay through suffering. He suffered in the wilderness when he fasted for forty days and forty nights and was hungry. Then the tempter, the devil, came and tempted or tested him three times. But Jesus remained faithful. Each time he resisted the tempter with the words which God had spoken in the past to his ancestors in the prophets. He emerged perfect, victorious over the tempter. He suffered again in his passion, beginning with the agony in the garden, when he submitted himself in obedience to his Father's will. He was faithful and obedient unto death, even death on a cross. In the resurrection he came out of the grave, vindicated by his Father and victorious over death. He was made perfect through suffering.

The preacher will reiterate this in chapter 5: "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 (hear) him" (5:8-9).

It was fitting for God to do this. Yet many find this to be not fitting at all. It is unthinkable, unimaginable that God should do this. It is inconceivable that God should suffer and die, let alone in a way that conferred maximum humiliation and shame. Early graffiti shows that the Roman world mocked Christians for worshipping a crucified God. Muslims have a high regard for Jesus, considering him the greatest prophet. But his death by crucifixion is one of several reasons why they cannot accept that he is the Son of God. It is beneath the majesty of God to enter the world, even more so to suffer and die. But we have such a God.

God is the one for whom everything exists and through whom everything exists. He is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. But he sent his Son into the world to surrender all power, to submit himself to all powers, even to death. It was fitting for God to make the Pioneer of our salvation perfect through suffering. We bow in awe and wonder.

2. The Son's solidarity with us (2:11-13)

The preacher next explores the solidarity between the Son and the many sons and daughters:

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. He says,

"I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises."

And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again he says,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me." (2:11-13)

Jesus is the one who sanctifies, and we who follow him are those being sanctified or made holy. To sanctify means to set apart as holy, and thus fit for God's presence because he is holy. Sanctification is the work of a priest. The priestly ministry of Jesus will be the center of this sermon, but we're not there yet. First, how is the Son qualified to serve as priest so that we might be sanctified? How is it that the sanctifier and the sanctified are "of one"? How is it that we are knit together so he can act on our behalf and for our benefit?

Because we are "of one," the Son is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. ESV has simply "brothers" while all other recent translations have "brothers and sisters." This time ESV does offer "brothers and sisters" in a footnote, stating that the "plural Greek word refers to siblings in a family." But women, my sisters, you don't belong just in a footnote; you belong in the text itself.

Jesus identifies himself with us. He's not ashamed to have us tag along with him. Indeed, he's out front pioneering the way for us to follow. He's not trying to get away from a pesky younger sibling who keeps trying to follow. He is delighted for us to follow. He is pleased for us to be his peeps. And he affirms this with three quotations from the OT, each spoken in his voice.

The first quotation is from Psalm 22, the famous psalm that begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But after a long lament about his dereliction, the psalmist turns to praise for the Lord's deliverance. We heard these words as our call to worship: he will proclaim and praise the Lord's greatness to his brothers and sisters, in the assembly (Ps 22:22). In the psalm this is the gathered congregation of Israel. In Hebrews it is those who follow Jesus, those whom he considers his younger siblings. God, his God and Father, has been faithful and has vindicated him by delivering him from death. Jesus proclaims this to his siblings.

The second quotation, "I will put my trust in him," is from David's song of praise when God delivered him from his enemies. He had taken refuge in God his rock (2 Sam 22:3). Three centuries later Isaiah said the same thing in the face of invasion by mighty Assyria (Isa 8:17). David the king, Isaiah the prophet, and Jesus the Son each placed their trust in God and he delivered them.

The third quotation is also from Isaiah, from the next verse. With his trust placed in God, Isaiah can say "Here am I, and the children God has given me" (Isa 8:18). God had given him two sons, with significant names: Shear-Jashub, meaning "a remnant will return" (Isa 7:3), and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning "quick to the plun-

der, swift to the spoil” (Isa 8:1, 3) They were signs from God given to inspire confidence, faith in God. But for Jesus, these children are the brothers and sisters whom God has given him.

Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, and to present us to his Father. In the Upper Room Jesus prayed to his Father for “those whom you have given me,” as Shawn talked about recently. “I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory” (John 17:24). He wants his younger brothers and sisters with him.

3. Made like us (14-16)

In the third section, the preacher describes the incarnation: why God became man, why he became human.

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. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. (2:14-16)

All humans share together in blood and flesh. Externally we may look different: skin color, color of eyes and hair, height, and many other features. But beneath the surface we are all the same in being blood and flesh. The Son, therefore, in his solidarity with us, partook of the same blood and flesh. He became fully human. He became like the children as their brother. He became like us. The eternal Son, present in the Godhead before the beginning of time, stepped down into our world. Agent of all creation, he entered into creation as a creature, as a human. The Greek text is triply emphatic about this identification with us, though only NASB captures this: “He *Himself likewise* also partook of the same,” of our same blood and flesh.

His identification with us in incarnation had a dual purpose. First, it was to nullify the power of the one holding the power of death, that is the devil, the accuser. He did this “by his death.” He entered into death itself to fight Death. He could do so because Death had no claim on him. Death had to let him go, and in doing so Death died. The death of Death in the death of Christ.

The result of this is to liberate all who were enslaved all their lives by the fear of death. People live in fear of death; they try to avoid it. More and more people live beyond 100, thanks to medical advances and better nutrition. But many researchers and investors have much more ambitious goals to postpone or even abolish human death. Many people here in Silicon Valley are working on this. The dream is to reach longevity escape velocity, where life expectancy of an individual increases faster than the time taken to make those gains. But it is in the death of Christ that death has been defeated; in his resurrection that a human has entered into the new creation; in his exaltation that a human has entered into the eternal world of God’s presence; and in the gift of the Spirit that we are invited to enter into new life also.

It is not angels who need this liberation. They are not part of the material world that is subject to decay and death. It is the seed of Abraham, his descendants. After sin and death had entered the world through the unfaithful disobedience of Adam and Eve, it was to Abraham that God made a promise of a new beginning. Aged Abraham and his barren wife would have a son, who would become

a great nation, and through whom God would restore blessing to the world. God was faithful to his promise. He gave to Abraham Isaac, to Isaac Jacob, and to Jacob twelve sons who multiplied to become the children of Israel. God took them to be his people: “I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you.” But Israel failed to enter into its inheritance, as we’ll see in the next chapter and a half of Hebrews. Has God’s purpose failed? In Christ Jesus, his faithful Son, born into Abraham’s line, God helps Abraham’s descendants. “Help” really is a weak translation here. The verb implies reaching out and grabbing hold of someone. It is used this way later in the sermon. Referring to Israel’s exodus from Egypt, God says, “I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt” (8:9, quoting Jer 31:32). Jesus our Pioneer saves us by taking hold of us to pull us out of death and lead us to glory.

The image I’ve chosen for this week’s sermon is the *Anastasis* icon. This particular one is in the Chora Church in Istanbul. Those who have been to Turkey with me have seen it. Within the Eastern Orthodox church an icon is not a painting, but a theological picture that is written not painted. *Anastasis* is the Greek word for resurrection. In the icon, the risen Jesus has grabbed hold of Adam and Eve, and is pulling them out of their tombs, pulling them out of death into resurrection life. Beneath his feet lies trampled death.

It is the seed of Abraham that the risen Lord pulls out of death. But who is the seed of Abraham? In the OT it was Israel, Abraham’s physical descendants. But in the NT membership is refined and expanded, as we heard in our Scripture reading (Gal 3:26-4:7).

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26-29)

If we are in Christ, symbolized by baptism, dying to our old self and rising to new life in Christ, then we are Abraham’s children. We are the heirs of the promise made to Abraham so long ago.

The Son became like us, entering into our story, so that he could raise us to be in God’s story, his story of how he is restoring life, blessing, and shalom to a world sunk into slavery to sin and death. Our older brother has taken our hand and is leading us out of death towards God’s glory.

4. Our High Priest (2:17-18)

In the final two verses, the preacher concludes with what happens when Jesus, our Pioneer who has gone before us, enters into glory, into God’s presence:

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. (2:17-18)

It was *fitting* for God to perfect his Son through suffering (v. 10). But here it was *necessary* for the Son to be made like us, his brothers and sisters, in every way.

The reason for this necessity is so that he might become high priest. Israel had three covenant offices, three different roles mediating the relationship between God and his people. The prophet, the priest, and the king. Each was one of the people, but also interfaced with God. The king ruled over God's people on God's behalf, leading with righteousness and justice to ensure a flourishing society. The prophet spoke God's word to the king or to the people. The priest represented the people "in service to God." This service was the liturgical action conducted in God's presence, in the tabernacle and later the temple. The various sacred rites that allowed a holy God to dwell in the midst of a sinful people.

Jesus is our high priest. He is both merciful and faithful. He is faithful towards God, unlike some former high priests who had not been so. God pronounced judgment on the house of Eli the priest for the wickedness of his sons in their priestly duties, and he promised he would raise up a faithful priest (1 Sam 2:35). Jesus is this faithful priest. He is also a merciful high priest. The service of the priests in the tabernacle and temple mediated God's mercy to his sinful people. God had revealed himself as "the compassionate and gracious God, abounding in love and faithfulness, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exod 34:6-7). His mercy is now mediated to his people through Jesus their merciful high priest.

The result of Jesus being the merciful and faithful high priest is that he is able "to make atonement for the sins of the people." Sin separates us from a holy God. It needs to be dealt with if we are to be brought into God's glory. Dealing with sin requires both expiation and propitiation. Expiation removes the sin itself. Propitiation removes God's wrath at sin. He is satisfied and relationship is fully restored. Jesus our high priest accomplishes both.

In Israel's liturgical calendar the most significant and solemn day was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would enter through the veil into the Most Holy Place, taking with him two types of blood: a bull's blood for his own sin, and a goat's blood for the people's sin. These he would sprinkle on the lid covering the ark of the covenant, the lid known to us as the atonement cover or the mercy seat. He would thus make atonement for himself, the priests, and the whole people of Israel. But he would have to do the same next year, every year.

The service of Jesus as our merciful and faithful high priest will be the major theme of Hebrews, covered in the extensive central section (4:14-10:18). Jesus is the high priest. He is also the offering. Being sinless he does not need to present blood for his own purification. Instead he presents his own blood for our atonement. He also is the mercy seat, the atonement cover on which that blood is sprinkled. He is the place where God's righteousness and human sinfulness meet. Having accomplished purification for sins, Jesus has sat down

at God's right hand (1:3). And now God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.

Jesus has an ongoing ministry there at God's right hand on our behalf. "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (2:18). The specific temptation that the hearers are facing is to turn back from following Jesus. Some were suffering. Was it worth it?

The preacher now turns to an extended section of exhortation and warning (3:1-4:13). He encourages his hearers to "hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory" (3:6). He warns them of the danger of falling along the way, like Israel in the wilderness, and thus failing to enter into God's rest. Then he returns to Jesus as high priest, picking up at exactly this same point:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (4:14-16)

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, God has himself provided for us the Pioneer of our salvation. Jesus has already entered into God's glory, has already made atonement for us, and now intercedes on our behalf. Our older brother has opened up the way for us to follow. Why should I gain from his reward? Because he is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

John the Revelator heard the number of people sealed as belonging to God: 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel. Then he saw the people gathered before God's throne and the Lamb: a multitude beyond counting from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They wore robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. "He who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them" (7:15 NASB). God will spread his glory over us, for he is bringing many sons and daughters into glory.

The Lamb has conquered, let us follow him.

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)

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