



Death Doesn't Mean Defeat

Hebrews 2:14-17

1. Free From Death (verses 14-16)

2. Free From Sin (verse 17)

It seems to me as if Christmas comes earlier and earlier every year. This year, Halloween fell on a Saturday. The next Monday, on my day off, I was in Lowe's, returning an item, which I had bought some days before. As I walked in the door, I was greeted by a Santa Claus figurine. I went to the counter and made a comment to the woman, "It's Christmastime already?" She merely shrugged her shoulders. Upon which I commented to her that I guess it makes for good business, whatever works. That makes it about two months of the Christmas spirit in the stores. That means a sixth of every year is Christmas season!

About a week later, I was in the Cherryvale Mall with my son, spending some father/son time together. As we walked through the mall, I noticed that they had a real, live Santa Claus, awaiting children to sit on his lap, a month and a half before Christmas! Christmas seems to come earlier and earlier every year.

Now, in some measure, Christmas has come to Rock Valley Bible Church this morning, because our text deals with the great theme of Christmas: the incarnation, God becoming flesh. As I read our text this morning, I want for you to listen for the incarnation.

Hebrews 2:14-17

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free 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 of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Where's the incarnation? It's there in verse 14, "Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same." It's also there in verse 17, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things."

This is the great reality of Christmas. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, took on flesh and blood. He became a man and lived among us. He was Immanuel, which means, "God with us."

Now, one of the great realities of the incarnation is that when Jesus came to live in the flesh, He didn't come merely to live. Oh, He did live; and His life was important. But, when Jesus came to live among us, it was so that He might die. Jesus, Himself, said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In this, Jesus is clearly referring to His death. He came to die upon the cross for many.

Paul said it this way, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that He might redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Earlier in the context of Galatians, Paul makes it clear that this redemption could only come through the death of Christ. Often times, we can let this slip by without thinking too much about it. But, I want for us to think about the realities of Christmas.

During the Christmas season, gifts are often exchanged. Now, imagine, parents, that you give your teenage son a brand new sports car, a BMW 650i Convertible, for Christmas. The thing zooms. It handles corners with ease. It's a racing machine. And then, imagine that your son takes it down to the Rockford Speedway and enters it in an event. You are thinking that he's going to enter it into some sort of race. But, you find out that he enters it into the demolition derby. He wrecks his brand new car--on purpose!

But, that wreck became the very means by which you became greatly blessed. You see, somehow your son's stunt was caught on video and uploaded to YouTube. Within a matter of days, millions of people saw what took place. Soon, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox News, and CNN were all at your door requesting interviews. Soon, that led to endorsements. It led to several millions. So, you could purchase another BMW 650i Convertible for your son, with plenty of cash to spare!

That's Christmas. A gift that was ruined, that eventually became a great treasure. See, God gave us a gift in His Son (2 Cor. 9:15). But, we took Him to the demolition derby and wrecked Him. Now, the good news is this: His death became the means of our life! That is, through faith in Him, we are reconciled to God. We have no reason to fear death any longer, because after death comes heaven. God is no longer angry with us because of our sin. His wrath has been satisfied in the cross of Christ.

Furthermore, there are other benefits that come. Jesus is now able to sympathize with us in a way that He could never do before, as He has walked among us. He can help us in times of temptation.

That's Christmas. The beautiful gift was ruined. But that process was ultimately for God's glory and for our good. You cannot separate the

incarnation from the crucifixion. The crucifixion was the reason for the incarnation. Jesus came to die. The BMW 650i Convertible was purchased to be wrecked!

In our text this morning, we see these two things placed together. You see His incarnation in verses 14 and 17. You see His death in verses 14 and 17 as well.

Hebrews 2:14

"Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,"

It was through the death of Jesus that He rendered the devil powerless.

Hebrews 2:17

"Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

It was through the death of Jesus that He made propitiation for our sins. In both verse 14 and 17, we see the incarnation of Jesus linked with the death of Jesus. The big question, however, is this: why would the writer tell us these things? I mean, what's His purpose?

The answer isn't too difficult, especially if you have been with us the past few weeks. If you recall, we are in a section of Scripture in which the writer is demonstrating that Jesus is better than the angels. It began in chapter 1 and continues on into chapter 2. In chapter 1, he demonstrated how much a greater being Jesus is than the angels. He's the Son; He's the King; He's the eternal creator.

In chapter 2, he has been demonstrating how his role is greater than the angels. Jesus has been made lower than the angels, but that doesn't make Him lesser than the angels (verses 5-9). Indeed, becoming lesser was for a short time, so that he might be crowned with glory and honor later (verse 9). Jesus has suffered, but that doesn't make him inferior to the angels. Indeed, His suffering was the means of His perfection (verse 10). His suffering was the means of our sanctification (verse 11).

And the argument continues in verse 14. The death of Jesus, in no way, makes Him inferior to the angels. Indeed, as we shall soon see, His death was all for our benefit. Jesus accomplished in His death what the angels could never do in their power!

My message this morning is entitled, "Death Doesn't Mean Defeat." I can almost hear those Jews of the first century protesting at the death of Jesus. "How can you say that Jesus is better than the angels? He died! Angels never died! How can a mortal being be superior to the immortal beings like angels? How can that be? It simply doesn't make sense."

The answer to the questioner is this: "Death Doesn't Mean Defeat." In fact, we see two victories in our text this morning. By way of outline, we are going to look at them one at a time. The first comes in verses 14-16. In the death of Christ, we are ...

1. Free From Death (verses 14-16).

Hebrews 2:14

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

By nature, Jesus was not "flesh and blood." Being God, His nature was "spirit" (John 4:24). And yet, because we are flesh and blood, Jesus, Himself, took on "flesh and blood." This verse comes immediately after verses 12 and 13, which put forth us as Jesus' brothers. That's why Jesus took on flesh and blood.

In so doing, Jesus felt our frailty. There were times when He was hungry (Matt. 4:2). There were times when Jesus was thirsty (John 4:7). There were times when He was tired (John 4:6). There were times when Jesus was grieved (John 11:35). There were times when Jesus was so exhausted from ministry, that He slept like a baby, even the midst of a raging storm (Mark 4:38).

Eventually, Jesus experienced the frailty of death. All of the gospel accounts record His death. They all speak of the floggings He received. They all speak of the sufferings that He endured. They all speak of the cross upon which He died. That's where verse 14 takes us. It takes us into the death of Jesus. "He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who has the power of death, that is the death." The death of Jesus was the means of disarming the devil.

The death of Jesus did some things. When we die, nothing much happens. I mean, our bodies are prepared for the tomb. People come to a funeral and say nice things about us. And then, we are placed into the ground to rot. Oh, if by God's grace we do something great in this life of historical significance to the world, then some things might be done in our memory. We could have a street or park named after us. Perhaps the history books would record something of our life. But, these sorts of things didn't happen because of our death. Rather, they happened because of our lives.

But, the death of Jesus actually accomplished something. It rendered the devil powerless. Look again there in verse 14, "He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who has the power of death, that is the death." The devil has many weapons. He has deceit. He has trickery. He has the sinful passions of the flesh. He is a foe, who still lives on. He is one from whom we need to run. But really, He has no power. For those who believe in Christ, the power of the devil is nothing. He has been rendered

powerless. Now, the reason that Satan is powerless is because Jesus has taken away his strongest weapon, which is death. Without death, the devil has no ultimate power.

The puritan, John Owen, wrote a classic book about the atonement of Christ. It's called, "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ." The title alone is worth the book. See, when Christ died, He gave a mortal blow to death itself. And that's what verse 14 is speaking about. Paul said it this way, "Our Savior Christ Jesus, ... abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

In some ways, this makes the devil like Barney Fife. For those of you who don't know who Barney Fife is, he was the deputy sheriff, played by Don Knotts, in The Andy Griffith Show. Barney was a naïve, gullible man who often brought trouble for Andy, the sheriff. Barney was the guy who took a minor infraction, and blew it way out of proportion. He would often over-react with panic, despair, or bug-eyed fear. Though he was inept, he certainly had a zeal for law enforcement. Now, one of the things that Andy did for him was that he removed all of the bullets from his gun and allowed him to carry only a single bullet in his shirt pocket "in case of an emergency." [\[1\]](#)

That's what Jesus has done with Satan. He has taken the bullet of death away from Satan, so that he cannot shoot his powerful gun any more. The result of this comes in verse 15, ...

Hebrews 2:15

and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

The result of the death of Christ was that we have become free. Death holds a bondage over all of us. It is the appointment that we all will keep. It is the appointment that we all fear, the day of our death.

But, since Satan has been disarmed, there is really no reason for us to fear this day. We have been freed from the fear of death. Death should no longer hold us in bondage. We are those who can look beyond the grave. We are those who can say with Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). He had so removed the fear of death from his life, that he was able to say that it was gain to die. As believers in Christ, we can sing the hymn,

It is not death to die
To leave this weary road
And join the saints who dwell on high
Who've found their home with God

It is not death to close
The eyes long dimmed by tears
And wake in joy before Your throne
Delivered from our fears

Chorus

O Jesus, conquering the grave
Your precious blood has power to save
Those who trust in You
Will in Your mercy find
That it is not death to die

It is not death to fling
Aside this earthly dust
And rise with strong and noble wing
To live among the just

It is not death to hear
The key unlock the door
That sets us free from mortal years
To praise You evermore [\[2\]](#)

We are free from death and all of the power it holds.

And so, it comes to you. Are you afraid of death? Now, certainly, within each of us, there is a natural tendency to fear the process of dying. Will it be quick? Will it be slow? Will it be painful? And there is certainly an anxiety that wells up within each one of us as we anticipate that unknown day. But, do you fear death? Or, have you experienced freedom from the bondage of death?

John Calvin has well said, "If anyone cannot pacify his mind by disregarding death, let him know that he has made as yet but little proficiency in the faith of Christ." [\[3\]](#) Perhaps many of us have made only a little proficiency in our faith. But, we will know true power in our lives when we cast off all fear of death.

What makes terrorists so dangerous? They have removed from themselves the fear of death. They are convinced that to blow up himself along with a dozen Christians will land him in heaven with pleasure forevermore. The danger of this is that you cannot fight against a man who is willing to blow himself up.

What makes Christianity so powerful? We have removed the fear of death from our lives. Now, it's not that we will go and blow others up and intimidate them into believing in Christ as the Muslim faith would encourage. Rather, our weapons are far different. It's our aim to live peaceful and quiet lives. And yet, when other hate us for our lives of righteous devotion to God, we are willing to die. That took place in the first 250 years of the church. Rome hated Christians, accusing them of being "atheists" because they didn't believe in the pantheon of gods. And so, they killed them. They killed them in great numbers.

You get a taste of the persecution in the following passage, ...

Hebrews 10:32-35

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

These Jewish exiles were facing tremendous difficulties in their lives. But, they conquered them by lives of godliness, the same way that the Christians of the early centuries conquered the Roman empire.

The way that the Christians failed to fear death caused a stir in the Roman Empire. So much so that the Roman Empire became known as the "Holy Roman Empire." That is, the Roman Empire had adopted the label of Christian. How? By the blood of the martyrs. By those who demonstrated that love to Christ was more dear to them than their own lives. By those who took heed to the words of Jesus, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). And as the Romans saw the blood of the martyrs spilt upon the soil, many became convinced of the reality of the power of Christ over death.

Do you fear death? Christ came to free us from such fear. Perhaps this is the root of so much of our anemic living. Yesterday, many of us attended a marriage conference with Norm Wakefield. At one point, he showed a video clip from a mini-series called "Band of Brothers." In the clip, a soldier was explaining how he had hidden himself in a ditch on D-Day.

The officer said, "Do you know why you hid in that ditch?"

The soldier replied, "I was scared."

Then, the officer corrected him: "We're all scared. You hid in that ditch because you think there's still hope. But, ... the only hope you have is to accept the fact that you are already dead. And, the sooner you accept that, the sooner you'll be able to function as a soldier's supposed to function: without mercy, without compassion, without remorse. All war depends upon it!"

[\[4\]](#)

So does your Christian life depend upon the fact that we are free from the fear of death because of Christ's victory on the cross.

The author continues, in verse 16, ...

Hebrews 2:16

For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

Angels can be divided into two categories. There are good angels, which we call angels. And there are wicked angels, which we often call demons, the devil himself being the chief demon. Before any human being stepped on the planet, there was a universe-wide rebellion of these beings. A third of them chose to follow Satan. The other two-thirds remained faithful to the LORD. And those fallen angels continue in their rebellion until this day. But, there will be a day when these angels are cast into the lake of fire, which has been especially prepared for them (Matt. 25:41).

Now, the amazing thing is this: God has provided no way of salvation for any of these angels. In God's sovereignty, He has not decreed to be merciful to these sinful angels. God did not provide them with an opportunity for salvation. God did not send an angelic redeemer. He did not send an angelic Messiah. God *did not* give help to angels, and God *does not* give help to angels today. But, on the contrary, God does give help to the descendant of Abraham. That is, God does give help to the household of faith. He gives help to us in providing a Savior for us, who is Christ the Lord.

In that way, Jesus is better than the angels, because He has done a noble work, to save us from our sins. In so doing, Jesus freed us from death. We come now to a second victory of the death of Christ. In the death of Christ, we are ...

2. Free From Sin (verse 17).

Hebrews 2:17

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

Oh, this verse is rich with meaning. It's rich with blessing.

Like verse 14, it's talking about the incarnation, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things." This is what we talked about earlier in verse 14. Jesus became one of us. He had flesh. He had real blood. He was just like us. He was born as baby into this world (Luke 2:1-20). He developed like all babies, learning to walk at one and talk at two. He was a little boy, who grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). He was educated in the Rabbinic schools. He learned the trade of his father, and became a skilled worker. He grew in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). I believe that Jesus was an average-looking Jew of his day (Is. 53:2). There was nothing particularly special about his appearance that we should be especially attracted to Him (Is. 53:2).

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus knew all about our human frailties. He knew hunger. He knew thirst. He knew muscle fatigue, mental fatigue, and weakness. The reason why Jesus became flesh is spelled out for us here in verse 17, "so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God."

Now, this is the first mention of Jesus being a high priest in the book of Hebrews. But, it will not be the last. In fact, almost 20 times Jesus will be called a high priest (Heb 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:1, 5, 6, 10; 6:20; 7:14, 15, 17, 21, 24, 26; 8:1, 3, 4; 9:11; 10:21). This point will be repeated over and over and over again, so much so that the writer to the Hebrews will say, "Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1).

We'll be talking about what it means to be a high priest in the book of Hebrews extensively over the next few months. So, let's get an introduction today. The high priest was the priest chosen each year among all of the priests to enter into the holy of holies on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement and the highest holy day in the Jewish calendar. On the tenth day of the seventh month, the priest would sacrifice a bull at the altar. He would bring the blood of the bull into the holy of holies, and dip his finger in the blood of the bull and sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat seven times. That was for his own sins.

He would then leave the holy of holies and sacrifice a goat upon the altar outside the holy of holies. Then, he would take the blood of the goat, enter the holy of holies, and sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat, in the same way: dipping his finger in the blood and sprinkling the blood upon the mercy seat seven times. This was for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:11-19). If all went well, he would leave the holy of holies alive and well under his own power. If things didn't go well, he would be struck dead and dragged out of the holy of holies by the rope tied around his leg.

That's the high priest, the one who offered up the blood on the day of atonement. He represented the people before God, pleading for God to forgive the nation of their sins.

It says here in verse 17 that Jesus has become our high priest in things pertaining to God. But, unlike the high priests of old, He didn't take the blood of bulls and goats into the holy of holies. Rather, Jesus brought His own blood into the heavenly holy place. He didn't merely sacrifice an animal. Rather, he offered up Himself.

Hebrews 9:11-12

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

I trust that you can see how much better the work of Christ is than that of the Levitical priests. They offered animals in an earthly tabernacle. But, Jesus offered Himself in the heavenly tabernacle. We see this again in the following passage.

Hebrews 7:26-27

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Jesus is a high priest alright. But, His high priesthood is a bit different. He didn't offer up unblemished bulls and goats. Rather, He offered up Himself, the unblemished God-man. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins, but Jesus, in His perfect sacrifice took away our sins. Or, as is my point here, His sacrifice freed us from our sins. I get that from the last phrase in verse 17, "to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

The word, "propitiation" is a big theological word that's not used much today. In fact, sadly, it's not even used in some of your Bibles. The NIV translates this, "make atonement," which lacks the richness of the word, propitiation. The word, "propitiation," is one of the greatest words in all of the Bible. I remember hearing a pastor say that learning the meaning of this word was worth his entire seminary education. The word means that God's wrath has been removed in the sacrifice of Christ. Where once God was angry with us because of our sins, now, He is happy with the payment that has been made. And, there is no sense at all that any further restitution need be made. The death of Christ fully paid for our sins. God is completely satisfied with the sacrifice that Jesus made. We no longer have to worry at all, that our sins might come up before Him, only to find them unforgiven later.

Picture yourself in the days of the settlers. The claim of free land, if you merely settle it, has brought you west. You find a plot of land to claim, and build a very modest home on the plains of Kansas. You are out there struggle to survive the realities of life of the plain. Nothing is around you for miles but prairie grass. And then, there are the constant threats of the Indians. It's a hard life.

One day, late in the fall, after a period of drought, when everything is dry, you look up and see smoke off in the horizon toward the west. As you survey the situation, you discover that it's a giant prairie fire, which the wind is blowing your way. Quite quickly, you determine that the fires are soon to come and consume your house. You think that you have about an hour or two left. You are stuck. You don't know what to

do. So, you start packing up your valuables and get ready to leave the house to flee from the prairie fire before it lands on your modest home.

And then, you see an Indian coming, galloping on his horse from a distance. Now, you have not had the greatest of relationships with the Indians in the past, especially this one. And so, you wonder what's up with his visit. Is he going to be hostile toward you once again? He wastes no time telling you to take water from your well, and pour it all around your house. You are thinking, "How can this stop the fire from damaging my house? You know that your house is a goner. But, for some reason, you do as he says. As you are beginning to water down the base of your house, you find that he sets fire to the grass a few feet from your house. And you are angry with Indian. "What's he doing? Is he going to burn down my house? Was pouring water all around my house merely a diversion?" Soon, you find yourself surrounded by flames. Surely, you have been tricked.

But, then you notice that the fire set by the Indian is moving away from your house, as it can't burn where you have watered. In about 15 minutes, you have a nice ring of charred prairie grass surrounding your home, which keeps getting bigger and bigger by the minute. Soon, you have a buffer around your home--a hundred yards of burned prairie grass, in all directions.

And as the prairie fire draws near to your home, you find that the buffer has saved your home. The prairie fire can't burn where your fire has already burned. And so, the flames of the prairie fire pass right around you. The Indian has saved you from the fire! And from that day onward, you know nothing but peace with the Indians. They saw the result of your dealing with the fire god, who didn't destroy your home. Their anger and their hostility are now gone. They now invite you to their feasts.

So it is with the sacrifice of Christ. The fiery wrath of God has already been poured out upon His Son. And, as you stand in the circle of the Son, you stand protected from the wrath of God, because, the fire has already burned on the Son. It won't burn again.

And that's what we have in the death of Christ. He has made propitiation for our sins.

Now, because of Christ's work on the cross, we are friends with God. There is no longer any hostility. There is no longer any tension. He is no longer angry with us. Instead, Christ has transformed His wrathful disposition against us into blessing.

Just as you have become friends with the Indian on that day. So also, the day you place your trust in Christ, you become His friend. God is no longer angry with you. Because, His anger has already burned upon Christ. It cannot burn again against you!

It has made you free from sin! Rejoice in this!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 22, 2009 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barney_Fife.

[2] © 2008 Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI). Original words by Henri Malan (1787–1864). Translated by George Bethune (1847). Music, chorus, and alternate words by Bob Kauflin

[3] John Calvin, commentary on Hebrews, p. 72.

[4] You can view the clip here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKYJLfWqTBY>.