



**HE IS ABLE TO HELP**  
**Hebrews 2:10-18**

I have good news of a great joy to share with everyone today. There is a short, simple, but powerful message in the scripture lesson shared today. This portion of God's word delivered tremendous encouragement to those who heard it in the first century – and its work is not finished or completed. The word of God is more powerful than a double-edged sword. The Bible is bold to declare that, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”**

I believe these passages from the book of Hebrews today to be two of the most encouraging and helpful passages of all scripture. Here are five powerful words, **“He is able to help.”** That gives us not only sight but insight to walk through the valley of death, darkness and despair. Don't trade these words for any phrase or philosophy that Satan and all his fallen angels can give us to live and order our lives by. We can approach God confidently because of our relationship with Him, through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

I know that the words, “priest” or “pastor” or “Christian” have fallen on hard times. The headlines this past year have been filled with various church leaders who have confessed to immoral sexual behavior and abuse. Money and the desire for wealth have ruined even more. These scandals are devastating, not only to the body of the church – but to those who, outside the church, are honestly seeking spiritual help.

The story is told of a pastor who was visiting in the home of a child who had expressed interest in being baptized. The father wanted nothing to do with religion. He said, “You folks are nothing but hypocrites.”

The pastor then noticed a beautiful baby grand piano in the front room. On the piano was a musical composition by Mozart. He asked permission to play the piece. Well, the pastor really butchered the piece. The pastor said, “That stupid Mozart – he couldn't write a piece of music to save his life. Mozart wasn't much of a composer was he?” The girl's father got the point. He had been judging Christianity by the performance of one player rather than focusing on the composer. If you are going to base your attitude or decision about God on the actions of one person – make sure that person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eugene Peterson shares that, “The central word in **chapter 2** is ‘salvation.’ Salvation is important throughout sacred scriptures – but in the book of Hebrews it gets

special emphasis. Salvation marks God's action in Jesus Christ whereby we are accepted just the way we are – and by which we are in the process of being made whole – repaired on the ravages of sin and restored to our original splendor.”<sup>1</sup>

The way that God repairs the ravages of our sinfulness and restores humanity to its original splendor is the incarnation. Our text reminds us in **verse 17**, “He had to be made like his brothers 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.” My mentor, Eugene Peterson translates, “That’s why he had to enter into every detail of human life. Then when he came before God as High Priest to get rid of people’s sins – he would have already experienced it all himself – all the pain, all the testing – and would be able to help where help was needed.”<sup>2</sup>

In his provocative book, **THE GOD DELUSION**, the brilliant Oxford scientist Richard Dawkins postulates the position that those who believe in God are deceived. The Bible presents a much different perspective and thesis. The Bible declares and reveals that if you don’t worship the Living God – the Creator – you wind up worshiping the creation itself – where the real delusion comes from. G. K. Chesterton wrote 75 years ago that, “If people cease to believe in God – they will not believe in nothing – they will believe in everything.” Not good.

You and I are not deceived. In Jesus Christ we see the footprints of one who has gone before us. We see the evidence of one who prayed. We see his nail scarred hands. We see the one who hugged children – healed the sick – touched the outcast – welcomed sinners – and raised the status and position of women to that of men. We have one who is worthy to follow. To live without Jesus is the real delusion.

**In that spirit let us mine the gold that is in our text for today.**

### **FIRST, HE HAS BEEN TEMPTED.**

In 1970, as a freshman in college I was required to read a book written by John Howard Griffin. In 1959, at the height of segregation and racism in Fort Worth, Texas, this gentleman approaches the editor of a magazine written specifically for African Americans with an interesting proposal. He proposes that through a combination of diet, pills, and the use of a sun lamp – that he transform himself from a southern white man to pass as a black man. He then would write in a journal the experiences gathered as a black man living in the south – as compared to a white man. With the help of a dermatologist in New Orleans he was officially declared the status of a black man. His findings and writings eventually were published under the title, **BLACK LIKE ME**.

The book and the subsequent television drama helped to break down the barriers that separated people - not only in the south - because of something simple as the color of a person’s skin. The key word found in the Hebrew writing that we read today and the experience of John Howard Griffin is **IDENTIFICATION**. When we can identify with another we are more willing to listen and to eventually follow. This is the strength of

groups like AA, who help one another overcome the power that alcohol holds over their lives.

Yes, **Hebrews 2:14** declares that Jesus can identify with the totality of our human experience. The reason that Jesus can identify with us is that he has walked the dusty and dirty roads of life before us - and now with us. Christ has experienced and understands isolation, rejection, humiliation, misunderstanding, hurt, pain and even the greatest enemy which is death. He felt all of these and much more. This is why Jesus is a perfect priest.

This is what makes him such a great advocate for us. When we look at the cross we can never say, "Lord, you don't know anything about our human condition." Jesus – who is full God and full man – is the only true bridge between a Holy God and a fallen humanity. He has experienced both sides.

### **SECONDLY, HE HAS SUFFERED.**

I don't know the point of greatest pain in your life today. I only know that almost everyone has some place where it really hurts. There are some who are suffering physical pain, others who know the inner pain of sorrow. There are many who know the pain of rejection. There are multitudes who know the pain of a broken relationship and disappointment. Pain is a frightening thing to many of us. We seek to avoid it.

So often the long battle with pain is so draining, and seems so pointless. We find ourselves crying out "**WHY?** Why has this happened to me?" The Bible does not always answer the question, "**WHY?**" It does say, "**For because He himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help.**"

In seminary, I remember hearing one of the Korean students sharing the story in chapel of a Chinese convert who gave the following reason why he committed his life to Jesus Christ. The Chinese Christian said: "I was sinking deeper and deeper, and all of my efforts made me sink faster. Then," he said, "I looked up and saw a face look down in the well at me, and a voice said: 'My child, I am Confucius, the father of your country. If you had obeyed my teachings, you would have never landed where you are now.' Then, he waved his hand and left saying: 'If you ever get out of this well, be careful to follow my teachings next time.'

Then he said, "Buddha came and looked into the well at me and said: 'My child, you must quit the condition in which you find yourself. Relax, fold your arms and meditate. Soon you will find Nirvana, which is the peace we all desire.' I called out: 'Father Buddha, if you would help me out of this well, I could follow your teaching, but I cannot follow your instructions in this horrible place. Please help me!'

"Then there came another man. His face reflected sorrow and suffering. He came down in the well and pulled me out. He gave me dry clothes, and said to me: 'Follow me, I will never leave you or forsake you.' That man was Christ. That is why I

became a Christian. He descended into the depth where I was. He saved me with His own hands, and I will follow Him.”

### **THIRDLY, HE DEFEATED DEATH.**

We know that death was not God’s plan for humanity. He created a garden – called it Paradise. Death is the result of our willful rebellion against God. We were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Dr. Charles Stanley shares, “The Bible gives many reasons for Christ’s coming to earth. One of them was to defeat Satan – and forever take away his weapon of death – so that God’s people might say good-bye to fear and hello to life.”<sup>3</sup>

The very first prophecy mentioned in the Bible is **Genesis 3:15**, which shares that a deliverer would crush the serpent’s head. In order for Christ to fully share in our flesh and blood – he had to face humanity’s greatest enemy – death. The immortal – became mortal that he might restore life and immortality to us lost at Eden. There was no other way for a righteous Holy God to satisfy his justice – and yet demonstrate his love for fallen sinners. God, the Father, took the initiative to save us. **Romans 5:8** declares, “While we were yet sinners – Christ died for us. His death was unique – in that it overcame, defeated death. By dying – he killed death.”<sup>4</sup>

Our own Charles Wesley expressed this great truth in his great hymn **“And Can It Be?”**

“Tis mystery all – the Immortal dies  
Who can explore – his strange design  
In vain – the first born seraph tries  
to sound the depth of love divine  
Tis mercy all – let earth adore  
Let angel minds inquire no more  
Tis mercy all – let earth adore  
Let angel minds inquire no more.”

The reason that death could not hold him was that his life was sinless. The Perfect Priest broke the “power of cancelled sin and set the prisoner free.”

### **FOURTHLY, HE HAS WON THE VICTORY.**

This is the meaning of the New Testament from St. Matthew to the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John. Christ has opened the gates of Paradise through his death, burial and resurrection. God the Father has set Him on the right hand of the throne.

Christ acted and still is functioning as our mediator, intercessor on behalf of the individual who cries out and admits that help is needed to be released from the gripping powers of sin and death.

Yes, only Jesus Christ can reverse the bondage and tyranny to the powers of sin, despair, death, and alienation by simply admitting we are unable to stand up on our own power, we must stand on Jesus Christ, the solid rock. Jesus never breaks the promises he has guaranteed by His word to help us be calling upon his wonderful name. The Lord calls for us individually and as his chosen people, the church with whom he has made an everlasting covenant by His shed blood.

We are victorious because our great high priest understands our every longing. We will never be turned away. We have the confidence that we will never be met with condemnation, for there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. Bring your every need to Christ today. This is why Jesus is the perfect priest.

**LASTLY, AT THE THRONE WE FIND MERCY AND GRACE TO HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED.**

Steve Brown shares a story about a pastor who dreamed he was called before God. He expected a big book and a BIG MEAN GOD reading from it. Instead, in his dream, he saw a gigantic pair of scales.

On one side the angels were piling up the good he had done, and on the other side the demons were piling up the bad he had done. He had done a lot of good. After all, he was a pastor. But, to his horror, he noticed that the angels simply couldn't keep up. They didn't have the material. The scales began to tip quickly to the bad side. He cried out, "**Oh, Christ have mercy!**"

At that moment, he heard the sound of 3 blood-stained nails falling on the good side. They didn't look that heavy. After all, how much could 3 nails weigh? But as they dropped onto the scales, the scales tipped back to the good side and no matter what the demons added, they stayed there. Those nails, of course, were the nails driven through the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

I pray that the Holy Spirit will help us all to live more deeply and fully in this great promise.

**HE IS ABLE:**

Because he was tempted,  
Because he suffered.  
Because he defeated death.  
He has won the victory!

May this enable you today to hold fast to our confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
October 28, 2007

All Rights Reserved – Copyrighted 10/28/07

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **THE MESSAGE: Conversations with Its Translator**, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, page 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Peterson, 1892.

<sup>3</sup> Charles F. Stanley, **LIFE PRINCIPLES BIBLE**, NKJ version, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 37214, page 1440.

<sup>4</sup> Fred B. Craddock, [et al], **“Preaching Through the Christian Year, YEAR A,”** Trinity Press International, first edition, Harrisburg, PA, 1992, page 49.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Brown, **WHEN BEING GOOD ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH**, Thomas Nelson Publisher, Nashville, TN, 1990, page 160.