

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Complete Savior (Part 4)

Hebrews 2:10-18

III. A Faithful Savior (2:17-18)

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. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

What comes to your mind as you hear the word “faithful”? I would imagine that given the context in which we find ourselves, here in a church, studying the Word of God, your thoughts might be well centered on things spiritual and religious. But if you would for a moment, think not in so-called spiritual terms, but rather common or earthly terms. What would be a more “everyday” conception of what it means to be faithful?

We certainly use the term “faithful” and even covet its idea in a variety of ways in our lives. We might speak of a faithful dog or a faithful car, indicating that there has been a loyalty and trustworthiness of such items. We desire faithful friends, people in whom we can confide in and know that our friendship and our reputations are not in jeopardy. In marriages we desire faithful spouses, those who will be devoted and committed only to their husband or wife. Yes, many are the areas in which we long for the faithful, that which will not let us down, in which we can constantly depend, and in which we might never be disappointed.

To be faithful then in these terms means “to be completely committed to and focused upon something.” In fact, consider how Webster’s defines “faithful” as it is used in common language:

- steadfast in affection or allegiance (*i.e.* loyal)
- firm in adherence to promises or in observance of duty (*i.e.* conscientious)

In our study of Hebrew 2:10-18, we have seen Christ as the Faultless Savior (10-13) and the Freeing Savior (14-16). Now this morning I wish to present to you the final picture of Christ from these verses, namely that Christ is the Faithful Savior (17-18). And by “faithful” I am referring to this idea that Jesus Christ is perfectly “committed to and focused upon something” with that something actually being two-fold; for Christ is committed to and focused upon those whom He intends to save and foremost He is committed to and focused upon His Father’s will and plan. To see Christ as the Faithful Savior is the

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weightiest of our author's argument as to why He is our Complete or perfect Savior. From our text in verses 17-18 we learn of three offices or positions Christ possesses which illustrate His being "faithful." We will unveil these one by one.

1. Christ is a faithful Priest (17a)

We begin with the thought that Christ is a faithful priest. Our text begins again with the word "therefore" which links it to the previous thoughts. The main idea here is this, because Christ would free us from the fear and curse of death that is part and parcel of being human, He would have to do something, and this something is first His identification with us. For our text says, "*He had to be made like His brethren in all things...*" This idea that Jesus "*had to be made like His brethren*" speaks of an obligation which results from the position which Christ assumed. Because Christ was to free His brethren from the power and fear of death, He had to become like those who were under the power and fear of death. In other words, we have another emphasis here on the absolute humanity of Christ.

It is important to note that in each of these points our author makes, he emphasizes the actual and real humanity of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 2:9 we learned that just as man was made a little lower than the angels, Jesus likewise was made just like man, a little lower than the angels. In Hebrews 2:14 we are told that Jesus actually partook of man's disposition and nature, revealing Jesus as a real man. And now, here in verse 17, Jesus had to be made like His brethren in all things, or in every way. This of course is a reference to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, that blessed event when God the Son, took on the form of man, being born of the Virgin Mary.

Now sometimes we do not think through this concept of God becoming man. What was it like for Jesus as a baby? As He lay in His mother's arms as a baby, did He consciously think, "Mary, I know you think I am a helpless baby, but actually I am the Creator of the universe"? Do you know that there are people who believe this and that the early church actually identified such thinking as heresy, or false teaching (docetism), because it does not line up with what Scripture teaches.

To be sure, the Bible teaches that when the Son of God became man, He did in fact retain both then and throughout His earthly life, His divine attributes. Jesus never ceased to be omniscient, omnipotent or omnipresent. But according to Philippians 2:5-11 we learn that the "emptying" of Christ was not His giving up those attribute that made Him God, but rather that He voluntarily placed them under the discretion and direction of God the Father. What this means is this, that Christ only exercised His divine attributes as God the Father directed Him. Jesus Himself tells us this was the case in verses like John 5:19 where He says:

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John 5:19

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

The key point to be made here then in this phrase, “*had to be made like His brethren in all things*” is that Jesus was truly and completely man experiencing all the facets of humanity in body, in thinking and in emotions, only without ever sinning. To put it another way, “*Christ progressively smelled like an infant, a boy, and a man – he thought like a child before he thought like a man – he knew the same range of human emotions as we did as he grew to maturity.*”¹

You see, if Jesus is to become this merciful and faithful high priest, He had to be made like us in all things – He had to be human. For in the Word of God we learn that all high priests are human. In the law, God made provision for the sons of Levi to be His priests. And every son of Levi was always a male human. Levi was the first of what would be known as the Levitical priesthood. Now, there was another priesthood mentioned in the Old Testament, on in which we will spend much time considering, and that is the priesthood of a man named Melchizedek, mentioned in Genesis 14. Some have wondered whether this Melchizedek in Genesis 14 is actually a Christophany, that is a pre-incarnate revelation of Jesus Christ. However, as we will learn, Jesus is our high priest, not according to the Levitical priesthood under the law, but according to the priesthood of Melchizedek. Now, if a priest, in order to stand between God and man, must be a man, then Melchizedek must have been a real man, a real person and Jesus must also then be a real man and a real person. There is nothing simulated in Christ. He did not pretend to be a man, but was truly man in body, mind and emotion. And this enabled Him to be a complete and perfect priest.

There are two main ideas that we are to learn about Christ as our high priest. These two ideas are actually contrasts, but let us take them one by one. First, Christ is presented to us as being a “*merciful...high priest.*” The word for “merciful” here actually carries the idea of active compassion. It means “to act in order to alleviate one’s pain or great need.” We see Jesus model this very thing throughout the gospel accounts. For example, in Mark 1:41, in response to the pain and great need of the leper wanting to be healed we read;

¹ Hughes, R. Kent, “Hebrews Vol. 1,” p. 83

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Mark 1:41

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

And in Matthew 9:35-36, just prior to Jesus sending out the twelve disciples to evangelize we read:

Matthew 9:35-36

35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.

This is what it means to be merciful – *to do what is necessary to meet the need of those in pain or great need.* This is what Jesus did for man. Jesus saw the great need man has for deliverance from the penalty, power and presence of sin and so He took it upon Himself to do what was necessary to be such a Savior and such a priest, that is, He took upon Himself the fullness of our humanity. You see, as God, man might well say, “God, you don’t know what it is like to be man, you don’t know how it feels.” So, Jesus “had to be made like” us. To illustrate the point it can be said that a good husband is compassionate and merciful as his wife gives birth. But how much more merciful would he be if he first had the experience of giving birth. If he were to be made like his wife in all things, including body, hormones and the pain of childbirth, would he not be more merciful. Jesus reveals the depth of His mercy, becoming like us in order to be our high priest and our Savior.

But Jesus is not only *merciful*, but also *faithful* according to our text. Remember I said there is a contrast here. You see, the idea of mercy is directed toward the “brethren” those whom He would save. But the idea of faithful in this verse is directed specifically in “what” according to our verse, *“in things pertaining to God.”* Jesus is *merciful and compassionate toward the humanity* He came to free and save. And Jesus is *faithful*, that is totally committed to and focused upon the *“things pertaining to God.”* And what are the *“things pertaining to God”*? This appears to be a reference to work of the priest. The “things pertaining to God” refer to the specific commands, demands and requirements of worship or service to God. In other words, Jesus perfectly and completely fulfilled all the commands, demands and requirements of God. This can be seen in the fact that Jesus was faithful to bear the sins of humanity.

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As we will come to see in a moment, the thought of bearing the full weight of the sins of His people was a task that Jesus, as a man, might have found so burdensome, so troublesome and so repugnant, that He might have been tempted to forgo the cross. But, Jesus was faithful, committed and focused upon the things pertaining to God. Jesus was like the Old Testament priests in offering the sacrifice for sins. And I can only well imagine that sometimes the idea of slaying the sacrifice, seeing all the blood poured out and removing the inward parts of the animal, the liver, the fat, the bowels, could become a repulsive thing to have to do, and yet there were faithful priests in Israel who did it time after time. But now, the sacrifice was not a lamb or a bull, but Christ Himself. The gruesomeness and sickness of sin would not be symbolically transferred to the animal but literally laid upon the very being of Jesus Christ. Why did He do it? Because He was faithful – He was totally committed and focused upon fulfilling the will of God. In this Christ sets an example to us of faithfulness. So then, Jesus is our merciful and faithful high priest.

2. Christ is a faithful Propitiator (17b)

In addition to being our high priest, our text also reveals Christ as our faithful propitiator saying, *“to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”* This is an interesting phrase, *“to make propitiation.”* And while it is a fancy term, I would wish that every believer would come to know, appreciate and contemplate the depth of its meaning. Some translations state here that Christ *“made atonement”* for the sins of the people. But these two words, *“propitiation”* and *“atonement”* although related, are really two different thoughts. Let me first define *“atonement.”* The atonement was the whole work of Christ in both His life and death that earned salvation for all who would believe in Him. The *“propitiation”* of Christ is a more specific aspect of the atonement and refers to the actual bearing of God’s wrath on our behalf so that God’s wrath might be turned away from us.

By way of example, the atonement, being the broader term, is like saying, *“I am remodeling my house.”* To remodel the house may include a number of things such as tearing out a wall, putting up new drywall, painting and decorating. So just as repainting is an aspect of remodeling the house, to make propitiation is one of the aspects of the atonement. It is the part in which Christ, by bearing the penalty of God’s wrath on our behalf, fully satisfies God wrath, fully puts away God’s wrath and fully provides the way for man to be atoned for, or made one with God.

In this work where Christ becomes our Propitiator, that is, the one who would satisfy and put away God’s wrath for us, we see a clear picture of the gospel. For we learn in the Scriptures that all sin arouses the wrath of God. For Romans 1:18 declares:

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Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Notice that it does not say that the wrath of God will be or even has been revealed, it is currently being revealed, although it continues to build up against all who so sin and continue in this state of sin. And so, because we are sinners, rebelling against the ways of God, Romans 5:9-10 declares this about us;

Romans 5:9-10

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Both without and prior to Christ work in our hearts, we are declared to be the enemies of God. How did we cease to be the enemies of God? Did we declare peace? Did we do anything to atone for our sins, to make propitiation, that is, bear the wrath of God for ourselves? No – rather Christ does all of this, all of this for us. We see then that Christ, as our Propitiator, has done everything, everything to secure our salvation. This sounds like a merciful and faithful high priest. This is our faithful Propitiator.

And by way of application, we must see that if Christ has gone to such great lengths to bring us salvation and reconciliation with God, if He willingly chose to bear not only your sins, but also the full wrath of God that your sins deserved, and if He bore those sins and suffered God's wrath victoriously, what trials, what problems, what difficulties could there ever be that He cannot come to your aid? In which you could not find comfort? In which you cannot depend upon Him. He has done everything to secure your position before God. How much more will He not do everything to ensure your position before God?

3. Christ is a faithful Provider (18)

This then brings us to our final consideration from verse 18. For not only is Christ our faithful Priest and our faithful Propitiator, but He also shows Himself to be our faithful Provider. Again, note verse 18 which says,

For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

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This verse again emphasizes the real humanity of Jesus Christ, telling us that He was tempted. Remember that Jesus *“had to be made like His brethren in all things.”* And so, just like we noted last week that a part of what it means to be human means to die, and that Christ came to die for humanity, now we learn that another part of what it means to be human is to be tempted. The most basic meaning of this word “tempted” means “to try whether a thing can be done.” It can be used positively, as in 2 Corinthians 13:5 where we read, *“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith...”* Here we are not in a temptation but a test, to see if this thing of faith is true about us.

However, most of the time in the New Testament, this word “tempted” has a negative connotation. In Matthew 4 we have the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness and the same word is used, that Jesus went out to be “tempted” of the devil (v.1) and in fact the devil is called the “tempter” that is the one who would see whether a thing can be done. And what did the devil desire to see? Whether or not he could dissuade the Son of God from His mission. Remember that we gave this definition to being faithful, that it is being totally committed and focused upon something, in this case, the will of God. Was the will of God an easy road for Jesus to take? Absolutely not. What the devil seeks to do in Matthew 4 is derail Jesus, to get Him to take the easy way out and yet Jesus refuses. Was the temptation of Jesus, both by the devil and throughout His life real? Oh, yes my beloved.

Do not think for a moment that because Jesus was God that the temptations were less. Our text actually tells us something that I believe rarely can be said of most of us. Our text tells us that that He *“was tempted in that which He has suffered...”* I submit to you that we all are tempted, but very few of us actually suffer in our temptations. You see, Christ was faced with every emotion of man, with every sin that faces man and yet He faced them all, without ever sinning. We must not think that Christ was not tempted to pride, was not tempted to lust, or was not tempted to hatred. He was, but He was so faithful, so committed and focused on the will of God, that He would not allow those temptations to become motivators and the reality of His life. The reason why Christ suffered in such temptations was not because He every really wanted to succumb to them, rather, I submit to you that Christ suffered in His temptations because such sin so repulsed Him. For in His time upon this earth, Christ was faced daily with the very temptations we face and every trials we endure. Day after day He saw the temptation to hate the Pharisees, to lust after women, to pride Himself on a job well done. And day after day, such temptations to forsake His commitment to God were met with their defeat because the idea of so sinning against His Father’s will and purpose proved greater than the desire to succumb to such sin. And before we think that such an experience is unique only to Jesus

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because He was God, think again. For the Scriptures account for us others with such a commitment. Do you not remember Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife when tempted by her to have sexual relations. His response is found in Genesis 39:9 where we read;

There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?

In Job 31, Job makes a long list of sins and crimes against God and humanity and listen to what he says in verses 22-23:

Job 31:22-23

22 Let my shoulder fall from the socket, and my arm be broken off at the elbow. 23 For calamity from God is a terror to me, and because of His majesty I can do nothing.

And the Apostle John actually tells us that this attitude of finding sin repulsive is to be the experience of every believer, for we read in 1 John 3:9

1 John 3:9

No one who is born of God practices sin [that is habitual, God-defying sin], because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Now then, what does this have to do with Christ being a faithful Provider? Let us look at the rest of verse 18 which says, "He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." The point being made here is this, since Christ has experienced the same temptations we do, yet without sin, cannot we not see that He then is able to help because He understands. As we will learn in Hebrews 4:15, Jesus can sympathize with us. Think again at what Isaiah said of Christ in Isaiah 53:4

Isaiah 53:4

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

He is acquainted with us. A physically strong man cannot conceive of what it would be like to be handicapped. A genius finds it hard to empathize with a person who finds it hard to learn. But Christ is not like this. For while Jesus

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never sinned, He did suffer through the temptations. And temptations are in reality simply those things which are designed to break your commitment and focus upon God and following His will. Temptations are a means to make you unfaithful. Christ understands. What a Savior! What a blessing to know that Christ, our high Priest, our Propitiator and our Provider suffered through the same temptations, endured them and was victorious. And now He promises to provide “aid” to us as we are tempted, if we will be ask. If we will but humble ourselves before Him so that He might lift us up. Jesus is able to help you. He will provide a means of escape from the temptations of this life. But you must know Him, you must trust Him, you must look to Him. In short, you must be faithful even as He is faithful.

We must have a renewed vision of being totally committed and focused upon the will of God. Then we can experience the victory of Christ over the trials and temptations. Remember that in general, temptations are meant to provide you with an easy way out, an easier path to follow, but such a path leads us away from God. Remember what Jesus said to His disciples in John 16:33 and may we find our comfort and our resolve in this:

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Jesus has overcome the world! May our prayer be that Jesus may overcome our hearts and fill them with His resolve, with His devotion and with His faithfulness.

Soli Deo Gloria

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