



Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Catalog No. 1326-2
Hebrews 2:8b-18
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July 6, 2008

Champion, Brother, Priest

SERIES: *Hebrews: Jesus for Beat-Up People*

We celebrated 4th of July this weekend—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We all saw the fireworks. But, do you ever feel like when you look up, when you look at the world around you here in 2008, all you see is darkness and no fireworks? Do you ever feel like our world is a *mess*, like it's falling apart?

Two weeks ago a car bomb exploded in Baghdad, instantly killing 51 people. The United Nations Refugee Agency just released a report that set a new record. Last year 11.4 million people became refugees—11.4 million people were driven from their home countries because of war, persecution, and food shortage. Two months ago Cyclone Nargis struck Burma. The death toll stands at 80,000. Ten days after the cyclone in Burma, an 8.0 magnitude earthquake ripped through China. As of this week, the death toll is 69,172. Recent flooding in Iowa has left 15 people dead and thousands of people homeless. In America, every day approximately 3,700 babies are aborted. My neighbor John is in his late 70's. He suffered a stroke several years ago. His wife died two years ago. John spends his days sitting in his wheelchair out on his driveway, watching cars go by. I stop and talk with John two to three times a month and he tells me how much he misses his wife. Each one of us in this room has a family member or friend who has battled or is battling a terminal illness. Our economy isn't doing too well. Many of you here are out of work. Many of you are struggling to pay the rent or the mortgage. And perhaps worst of all, down the street from my house there's this big sign that says "501." And it's not advertising a new freeway or a pair of jeans; it's telling me that that's how much it now costs to put a gallon of gas into my car.

Our world is a mess. It's broken. Things aren't the way they're supposed to be. Life is difficult because we live in a world of pain, suffering, death, and injustice.

Are we alone in the mess? Do you feel alone? The only thing I can think of that's worse than living in a messed up world is living *alone* in a messed up world. Are we alone in the mess?

Every worldview, every religion, must address these realities, must address the human condition, that life is difficult, that the world is a broken place. Every other religion was founded by someone who said, "I'm a prophet coming to show you how to find god, how to find a god who stands outside of your messy, broken, beat-up life."

Only Christianity has a man saying, "I'm God coming to find you." Only in Christianity do you have a man saying, "I'm God, I've entered your mess, I've

experienced this broken world, I've entered the pain to find you. You are not alone."

That's what we need. That's what our nation needs, that's what our world needs. Incarnation. Only Christianity has Incarnation, only Christianity tells the story of God becoming human and entering the human mess.

Today's text tells us the three ways Jesus has entered our mess and how that changes everything.

"Now in putting everything in subjection to him (to Jesus), he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Behold, I and the children God has given me.' 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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 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. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:8b-18).

This text tells us three things. It tells us that Jesus is our Champion, he's our Brother, and he's our Priest. Jesus has come into our broken world to be the Champion, the Brother, and the Priest that you desperately need.

1. Champion

First, Jesus is our Champion. Five times in these 11

verses the author of Hebrews mentions death. Death happens. Death is something that happens to all of us. You can't prevent it. Swallow this, feel this: 100 years from now, every single person in this room—let me be safe...110 years from now—every single person in this room will be dead. Death isn't merely an event that awaits us, it's a power, a force, that permeates so much of how we live today, that makes us anxious and afraid.

Are you afraid of death? There are at least three reasons why we fear death. See if you identify with these fears.

First, we fear losing control. In his book, *The Art of Dying*, Robert Neale writes (and if you've ever watched someone die, you're familiar with this), "When you are dying, you have almost no control. There is an incredible vulnerability...It's almost as if one's last few minutes of life involve a vulnerability akin to one's first few minutes of life. Losing control over a body and environment which were at one time your servants must be a frightening experience."

Second, we fear separation from loved ones. We fear losing the people we love to death. In my former church there was a man named Oliver who lived to be 101 years old. Oliver used to tell me that no one he knew and lived the significant years of his life with, none of his loved ones, except for his 75 year old daughter, are still alive. If you're going to live to 101, you're going to watch a lot of your friends and loved ones die.

Third, we fear insignificance. If death is all there is, nothing you're doing right now, nothing you're involved in, is of any significance. In Ingmar Bergman's film, *The Seventh Seal*, there's a scene that depicts this fear of insignificance so well. There's a knight, he's returning from the crusades and he stops at a chapel, enters a confessional booth, and he is unaware that the one listening to his confession is actually Death. Here's the scene:

Knight: Why can't I kill God within me? Why does he live on in this painful and humiliating way, even though I curse him and want to tear him out of my heart? Why, in spite of everything, is he a baffling reality that I can't shake off? Do you hear me?

Death: Yes, I hear you.

Knight: I want knowledge, not faith...but knowledge. I want God to stretch out his hand toward me, reveal himself, speak to me.

Death: But he remains silent.

Knight: I call out to him in the dark, but no one seems to be there.

Death: Perhaps no one is there.

Knight: Then life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death knowing that all is nothingness.

If death is all there is, then nothing you're doing is of any significance, life is an outrageous horror. If God is not there, if you call out to God in the darkness but no one seems to be there, if God is not here in our mess, if God is absent, then we should be very afraid of death.

The book of Hebrews was written to people just like us. The book of Hebrews was written to a group of beat-up, weary, disillusioned Christians who lived in a messed up world and who were frightened of death. Life was hard in 1st century Rome. You got sick. You died young. Average life expectancy was, at best, 30 years old. You buried over half the children you gave birth to. You lived under a corrupt government. You experienced famine, war, and plague multiple times throughout your life.

And life was even harder as a Christian. The people that the book of Hebrews was written to felt alone. They lived in a messed up world, they lived in a climate of deep uncertainty, death was a vivid reality for these people, and they felt like God was absent.

The author of Hebrews knows this and this is why in the middle of this passage the author calls Jesus a "champion." Look at verse 10. Jesus is called "**the founder**" of salvation. Some of your translations say founder, pioneer, author, captain. This is the Greek word *archegos*. Probably the best way to translate this word is "champion," hero. This is a significant word. It has both a Greek and a Hebrew background...it's a rich word.

This word was used in ancient Greek literature to depict divine heroes. The legendary figure Hercules was referred to as an *archegos*, a champion, who did battle with death. Writing long ago, Euripides wrote that champion Hercules wrestled and conquered "the dark-robed lord of the dead."

By using this term to describe Jesus, the author is essentially saying that Jesus is the ultimate Hercules, Jesus is the ultimate strongman, Jesus is the ultimate champion who has come into the world to do battle with death.

This word "champion" also has a Hebrew background. It has to do with how combat was done in the ancient world—representative combat. David fought Goliath as an act of representative combat. David the Champion's victory over Goliath meant a victory for all of Israel over the Philistines.

What this text is saying is that Jesus is the champion that has gone before you and conquered the Goliath of death. If you've aligned yourself with Jesus, if you've made him your champion, if you're on his team, he's secured victory over your greatest enemy, over your greatest fear: death.

Look at verses 14 and 15. "**Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself (Jesus) likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.**"

Jesus destroyed death!

This is what our Champion did. He intruded death. He came from heaven. He lived 33 years in our broken world. He died on the cross, was placed in a tomb, and entered death. He marched into the dark

cave of death and his indestructible life was the dynamite that blew a hole out the other side. Jesus blew an opening through death...he made a way through.

If we peer into death, because of Jesus we can see light at the end of the tunnel. There's a way out! There's a passageway right through death. Nobody had ever done this before. Nobody had ever entered the jungle of death and come out alive. Nobody had ever hacked their way through death's jungle and come out on the other side. But our Champion did it! Jesus did it!

Verse 9 says that by the grace of God, Jesus "**tasted death for everyone.**" Do you hear what this is saying? Jesus the champion tasted death so that you don't have to. Jesus is your Death-taster! What this word "taste" means is that Jesus experienced death fully—he experienced the full darkness of death, for you. You still have to pass through death, but you don't have to taste it.

What's the worst tasting food that you can imagine? For me it's brussel sprouts. I still remember being forced by my grandpa to eat brussel sprouts as a little boy!

It's one thing to have to sit at the dinner table and come face to face with a bowl of brussel sprouts and it's another thing to have to eat them, to have to taste the brussel sprouts and experience them fully. At some point all of us here will have to take a seat at the table of death. But if Jesus is your Champion, you don't have to sit there for long, you don't have to taste anything. You're only passing through to the other side.

If this is true, if you believe this, that Jesus is your Death-taster, that he's your champion from heaven who's entered the human mess and blown a passageway through death, then you can quit being afraid. You don't have to fear your future. In fact, you can look forward to the future.

What does the future hold for you? Glory! Verse 10 says that Jesus has destroyed death in order to bring us to "glory." What's that? Glory is what you were created for, what you long for. If Jesus is your Champion, it's what you're headed for. Glory is eternity in the presence of God in a place where everything is as it should be—no more pain, no more suffering, no more injustice, no more heartache that makes it difficult to get out of bed in the morning. Glory! Everything as it should be.

If death is all there is, nothing we're doing right now, nothing we're involved in, is of any significance. But if there's a Champion who has entered our mess, if there's a passageway through death, if we're headed for glory, then your life, what you're doing with your life, is of tremendous significance, eternal significance.

2. Brother

The second thing we learn from this text is that Jesus is our Brother.

I think most of us here are familiar with the Big Brother Program. The Big Brother Program is this organization that provides big brother figures/mentors to come alongside and help boys or young men that don't have that, that need a big brother in their life.

Early on in Scripture we see that the role of a big

brother is to identify with and protect his siblings. But the first pair of brothers we meet in Scripture...things don't go to well for them. The very first big brother we meet in Scripture fails miserably at his role. It's the story of Cain and Abel.

What Hebrews tells us is that Jesus has entered our broken world, he's entered your broken life, to be your keeper—to be the big brother that identifies with you and keeps you.

Verse 17 says Jesus "**had to be made like his brothers in every respect.**" God himself, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, was made like his brothers, was made like you and me, "in every respect." Jesus Christ came into our world to find us, to be our brother, and he did this with a nature that was *both* fully divine and fully human. Hebrews and the Gospel of John, the two books of the Bible that most strongly declare the deity of Jesus (that he's God), are also the two books that most strongly emphasize the humanity of Jesus. Jesus added to his divine nature a human nature—he was made like us "in every respect." Just like us, Jesus experienced suffering, stress, stomachaches, setbacks, and sickness.

Jesus knows what it's like to be one of us. He understands you. What's entirely unique about Christianity is this truth of Incarnation—God himself became one of us and entered our world to be our brother. Jesus is God's Big Brother Program.

Look at verse 11, "**For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brothers.**" Jesus calls you "brother." He calls you "sister." He calls you part of his family. The text says Jesus is "not ashamed" to be your brother, to call you part of his family.

Who's in your genealogy? Like it or not, you're a product of your family. Your identity has been profoundly shaped by your family, your family tree, your genealogy. Are there people in your family, in your genealogy, that you're ashamed of, that you want to distance yourself from: a parent, a sibling, a grandfather, some distant relative? Or, are there people in your family that are ashamed of you, that don't want to identify with you, that are ashamed to name you in their genealogy?

Do you know who Jesus includes in his genealogy? Read Matthew 1.

Do you measure your worth by what other people have said about you? What have other people said about you? It doesn't matter what other people have said about you. It doesn't matter what other people have called you. I don't care who you are, it doesn't matter what you've done or the opinion other people have formed of you. Jesus calls you "brother." Jesus calls you "sister." Jesus is not ashamed of you. He calls you family. He's your big brother.

Are you going to build your identity on what others have said about you or on what Jesus has said

about you? Jesus isn't just the brother who accepts you, he's also the brother who keeps you, who protects you. Verse 18 says, **"For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."** Jesus has been through it all, he's been through the worst in life. He's the stronger, wiser, more experienced big brother who can help you through whatever mess you might be in, whatever temptations you might be facing.

Do you believe this? Do you believe verse 18? Do you believe that Jesus understands your temptations? Some people object to this. They say, "Jesus never sinned so he couldn't possibly understand what it's like to face the temptations that I face, what it's like to be in my shoes." Really? Jesus knows more about temptation than you do. Jesus was bent to the breaking point of temptation and he didn't give in.

Imagine a strong man who performs at a state fair by bending bars of steel. The first bar he picks up is a half-inch in diameter. He bends it to a 90 degree angle and it breaks. Then he picks up an inch thick bar and bends it until the ends of the bar touch, but it doesn't break. Which bar endured the most pressure, which bar suffered the most? The second bar! The second bar absorbed the full force of the man's strength and didn't break. On earth, Jesus was like that second bar. Because he never gave in, because he never ran away, because he never went where the temptation would lead, but stood strong until the moment of temptation was over, Jesus endured the full power of temptation. Jesus endured stress, pain, suffering, and sacrifice of an intensity that you will never face, that you can't even fathom.

What temptations are you facing? Your brother understands. Jesus has been through it, he knows, he knows the intensity of your temptations better than you do. He's *with* you to protect you and help you, no matter what you're facing. What does verse 18 say? **"He is able** (he is able!) **to help those who are being tempted."**

You must believe this. You will never make any progress in the Christian life until you believe, until you really believe, that God is with you...until you believe that Jesus is your brother. If Jesus is your Champion, you don't have to fear the future. And if he's your brother, you don't have to fear the present. You are not alone. You have a big brother who is with you right now, who is always with you. In Hebrews 13:5, Jesus your brother says, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

You are not alone. You are not alone. You are not alone.

3. Priest

We have a Champion who has conquered death. We have a brother who is with us, who keeps us. And the third thing this text tells us, the third way Jesus has entered the human mess, is, he's our priest. Jesus is the perfect priest who entered our world—some of you are going to learn a new word today—to make *propitiation* for our sins. I love the word "propitiation." I love this twelve-letter word. I love to say it. I love to sing it.

This week I taught my 20-month-old son the word "propitiation." Why? When we start talking about how Jesus is our priest who's made propitiation for our sins, we're standing on the top of a mountain, on the edge of a great mountain, where you can catch a full view of just how beautiful, how vast, how good the good news of the gospel really is. I don't care if you've heard anything I've said so far today. If you simply catch a view of the Christian life from this mountain top of propitiation, where Jesus serves as our priest, I'll be happy...this sermon will have done its job.

What's the worst thing you've ever done? What's your biggest regret? What are your secrets...those secret sins from your past?

How does God view all that? How does God view your sin? How does God view you: a person created in his image to know him and honor him and enjoy him and obey him, but instead you've got this past full of sin, full of turning your back on God, running your own life and making a mess of things? Is God angry at your sin? Is God angry at you?

The most famous sermon that's ever been preached in America was a sermon preached about 250 years ago by Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. What Edwards says in this sermon is what the Bible says, that God is angry at sin, God is angry at sinners, and it would be just of God to pour out his wrath on sinners like me and you. A few hundred years ago people used to talk a lot more about God's wrath and anger. Today, in the American church, the pendulum has swung the other way and we seem to only talk about God's love and kindness.

According to Hebrews, according to the whole Bible, you and I are part of the problem of what's wrong with the world because we are all sinners. And according to Hebrews, according to the whole Bible, God is angry. What the Bible teaches is that your greatest problem, what you really need saving from, isn't death, isn't sin, it's God's wrath against your sin. Ultimately, our greatest problem is a problem with our Maker.

Now some of you don't like this...a God of wrath. But, all of that changes, your whole argument shatters, the second someone else sins against you, the second someone else wrongs you. When someone deeply wrongs you or someone you love, you want justice! You get angry, you want a God who will deal with sin and injustice. Try going to Rwanda, Darfur, Cambodia, where families, where whole cities, have been torn apart by genocide. Tell them you don't believe in a God of wrath, tell them you don't believe that God punishes sin. Try it.

There are people who have suffered unimaginable violence in Rwanda, Darfur, Cambodia, and elsewhere who can hold it together, who can resist responding with further violence, only because they believe in a God of justice, a God who doesn't wink at sin, but who gets angry at sin and who will one day

express his justice and pour out his wrath on those who refuse to turn from their sin. In a world as messed up as ours, the only kind of God worth believing in is a God who responds to the injustice with justice, with wrath, with a holy anger.

Did you watch the fireworks on Friday night? The fireworks looked beautiful on Friday night only because they burst open against a dark sky. Unless we look up at the dark sky of God's wrath and anger, we won't appreciate the fireworks of God's love and grace.

We stand as sinners in the hands of an angry God, but what God has done is send us priests. Early on in the Old Testament we see that instead of pouring out his wrath on sinners, God expressed his love for sinners by sending priests who made sacrifices to God to propitiate, to quench, his wrath against sin. J.I. Packer said, "The idea of propitiation—that is, of averting God's anger by an offering—runs right through the Bible."

At the center of this propitiation system stood the high priest. The high priest was the holiest man in Israel and on the holiest day of the year (Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement) this holiest man entered the holiest place (the Holy of Holies) and there he poured out, on the holiest piece of furniture—the mercy seat—the blood of a substitutionary sacrifice in order to propitiate God's wrath against the sins of Israel. Every year this needed to be done. The high priest was not a perfect man, the sacrifice was not a perfect sacrifice, and the people kept sinning, so this whole event had to be repeated every year.

But eventually, God sent us a perfect priest. God sent Jesus. Verse 17, **"Therefore he [Jesus] 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."** This high priest didn't present God with an offering and then continue on with life as usual. This high priest offered God his own life. This high priest sacrificed his own life on the cross in order to once and for all propitiate God's wrath against sinners so that you and I could have a relationship with God.

What was less than 400 minutes on the cross of excruciating physical pain was also for Jesus an eternity of agony. His chief sufferings were mental and spiritual as he endured the Father's wrath against our sins.

Jesus isn't only our Death-Taster, Jesus is also our Wrath-Quencher! The wrath that should have been poured out on us was poured out on Jesus our priest. If you've placed your faith in Jesus, if you've made Jesus your priest, God is not angry with you. His wrath and anger against you and your sin...Jesus made propitiation for it.

And your past...all that sin and regret? You don't have to fear your past anymore, you can forget about it. You have a great high priest who's made propitiation for you. If that doesn't make you sing, if that doesn't make you thankful...

I love the word "propitiation!" 1 John 4:9&10 says, **"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."**

Friends, Jesus is our Champion who's conquered death and our fear of death. Jesus is our Brother who is with us and who keeps us. And Jesus is our Priest who's made propitiation for our sins. No other religion has a god who came into our broken world to be our champion, our brother, and our priest.

And when you put all this together, it shouldn't just change your life, it should change other people's lives, it should change the Peninsula. If we really get what this passage is saying, we have a mission.

If Jesus is your champion, you can be a champion for other people. Jesus walked into your deepest fear and made a way through. So you can enter into other people's fears, into their darkness, and show them that there's a way through.

If Jesus is your brother, you can be a big brother for others. The need is great. You can come alongside one of the countless lonely, abandoned people here on the Peninsula, treat them like family, and show them that they are not alone.

If Jesus is your priest, you can have a priestly ministry to others. You can enter into difficult relationships where people will sin against you and wrong you, and you can handle it, shoulder it. You can love difficult people because Jesus did it for you.

We are not alone in the mess. We have a champion. We have a brother. We have a priest.

2008 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA