

Why Did God Become Man – Hebrews 2:14-18

This is Christmas Sunday. *Christmas* means a *celebration* of Christ. Specifically we celebrate Jesus' incarnation and birth during this season. His incarnation is the moment he became *incarnate* (the moment he took on the flesh and became a man). That was of course 9 months before he was born, but we celebrate it all together at Christmas. That's the event that Hebrews 2:14-18 (our text) is reminding us about. It's reminding us that the Eternal Son of God, at Christmas, actually became a man.

At the appropriate time, in accordance with the Father's desire, the Eternal Son of God who was spirit willfully became a *living human being*. For eternity *past* God was not a man. But around 3 or 4 BC, the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary, and the Son of God took on the flesh and became a *living, human being*. He didn't stop being God. He was still the Son of God. But now he was additionally, truly and fully a human being at the same time. He was fully God and fully man. That's Christmas.

That's the truth that we are *celebrating* at Christmas. It's an amazing thing, worth celebrating, worth adoring our Savior over. The Eternal Son of God *willfully* partook of real flesh and blood, just like us.

Now, in case you haven't heard, around the first week of May, Jessica and I plan on having our first child who, as it turns out, is a little boy! One of the great joys that I have never gotten to experience and that I am so anxious to enjoy is that thing children are so famous for. A few years from now, I'll be driving our son to church. He'll be looking out the window when something tickles his brain. He'll say, "Daddy." "Yes son." "Why do birds live in trees?" My response. And then he'll say, "Why". And I'll tell him. And he'll say, "But why?" And so on and so forth we'll dance. Me answering and him posing the exact same word-worded question: *why*.

If my son were already born and if he were sitting on my lap as I was telling him that great, eternal truth that God *became man* and that that is what this Christmas is all about, I can already hear his cute little voice ringing in my ear asking, "But daddy, *why*?" **Why did God become man.** That's a good question!

That's the question we're going to answer from Hebrews 2. Call it *prenatal-parental-pastoral-preparation*. Or just call it preparation for your soul to celebrate on Christmas. But let's answer the question: at Christmas, *why did God become man*? **Reading of the text.**

In verse 17, in answer to our question, (Why did God become a man) we see actually that Hebrews says it *had* to be like this if he was going to be our Redeemer. Jesus *had* "to be made like his brothers in every respect." But if my son is going to be anything like his daddy, "it had to be like that" just isn't going to cut it. *Why* did it have to be that way?

Our text gives us four reasons God became man, four reasons *why* the Eternal Son of God had to partake of actual human flesh and blood like us.

- 1) The Son of God *had to be made like us in every way* so that he could **overcome death**. Christmas had to happen, the incarnation had to happen, so that Jesus could *overcome death*.
 - a) One of our biggest problems as human beings is that we die. Each one of us. There's no use in denying it. I know some people don't like to admit it or talk about it; we try everything in the world to cover it up, make-up and botox and skin creamers; we dye our hair, pop magical pills, and we try to do things that keep up our youthful persona; but the sad reality is: this room is filled with those who are already dying.
 - i) Something I always say at funerals is that death is not natural. So many times people say, "It's okay, death is just a part of life." That's not true; Christians don't say that!
 - ii) God created us to *live*, not die.
 - iii) If you turn to the first and second page of your Bible, you'll see in Genesis 2 that God put Adam and Eve in his wonderful Garden with two special trees. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (from which they were forbidden to eat) and also the Tree of Life.
 - iv) When Adam and Eve *sinned* by eating the forbidden fruit, God shuts them out of the Garden *explicitly to keep them from the Tree of life* (Genesis 3:22). Before they sinned, they were not going to die! He created them to live, to live with him in his glorious presence and fellowship.
 - v) Death only came when they sinned. Death comes from our sin.
 - vi) So then, death is not natural *if you believe in Genesis*.
 - vii) As 1 Corinthians 15:26 says, it's the "last enemy to be destroyed." It's an enemy because it thwarts God's created purpose for us and it separates us from worshipping and fellowshiping with God as body-soul creatures, which is how God created us.
 - b) So if God is going to *save us*, if God is going to take a group of people and once and for all make them eternally the people he created them to be, then God is going to have to deal with the big enemy/problem of death. Those people he is going to save are supposed to die. They are supposed to die; and once they die, they are supposed to *stay dead*, cut off from him and from the blessing of life that comes *from him*.
 - c) But, as someone has said: "God has a big problem. He cannot die." Men die; not angels, and certainly not God.
 - d) If he is going to *triumph* over death, if he is going to deliver his people *from* death, then he is somehow going to have to meet death, taste death, and triumph through death for those people he is coming to save. And yet, he cannot himself die.
 - e) So what does he do?
 - i) In the infinite wisdom of God, and to the eternal *praise* of God, God *becomes* man.
 - ii) He becomes a real, flesh and blood, subject to death, *man*.
 - iii) That's what's going on at Christmas.
 - iv) A baby is being born for the soul purpose of *dying*.
 - v) That's what verses 14 and 15 are all about. He partook of flesh and blood, "that *through death...* he might destroy the devil and free us from our slavery to the fear of death". He took on flesh and blood to die. Celebrate *that* at Christmas.
 - f) That baby, although he himself did not *have* to die, would grow up and face death head on. He would grow up and *die willfully* on the Cross.
 - g) Yet, that death wasn't the end of his story.

- i) Within three days of his cross, the grave he had been laid in was found empty.
 - ii) It was empty, not because he had been stolen, rather because he literally, physically, came back to life. He started breathing again. His heart started *beating again* and he walked out of his own death-chamber.
- h) He was alive for two-reasons:
- i) He was alive because he is the life-giver, and just as he gives life to us, he gave life back to himself.
 - ii) But he was also alive because remember, death is nothing less than the penalty for sin. But when the Son of God died, he finished paying the entire, eternal payment for sin. There was no more death because there was no more sin. And there was no more punishment for sin.
 - iii) So the death-penalty was lifted and the Savior lived.
- i) On the day, at that hour when the Son of Man who died walked out of the tomb, at that *moment*, death died! As of that moment, for all the adopted children of God, death was dead.
- j) This Christmas, we are *joyfully* celebrating The Death of Death (John Owen, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ.) This Christmas, we are worshipping the One who freed us from death through his own death. This year, we adore the One who took away from us our fear and dread of dying by giving us the promise and victory of life *eternal*.
- k) Thanks to him, although we *will be separated* from our bodies for a time, yet we will not die. In this flesh, body and soul, we will live with the Lord, in his presence, in his joy, in his glory, forever and ever and ever. Thank you to that baby in that manger, to that Eternal Son of God who took on the flesh to die our death.
- l) Don't just drink egg nog Thursday, shout for joy that death's grip over you has been loosed! Rejoice that you have no more fear of death. You don't have to pretend like its not coming. You don't even have to hide it. In fact, in the craziest way, in the biggest victory imaginable, Jesus' work has even enabled us to *rejoice in the face of death* because it will only send us to be with our Blessed Redeemer.
- m) Christmas means death is dead.
- 2) Point two. *Why Christmas?* Why did God *have* to become man? Number two, the Son of God *had to be made like us*, *Christmas had to be*, so that Jesus could **be our mediator**.
- a) (*See appendix to this handout for extra notes on this point.*)
- b) Verse 17: "**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." He *had to be made like us* so that he could be our high priest.
- i) What is a *high priest* in Hebrews? A high priest is someone who is appointed to be a go-between or a mediator between God and God's people. Moses was the first mediator.
 - (1) He was appointed to kind of stand in between God and Israel and communicate to each on behalf of the other.
 - (2) When Israel needed to ask something of God, they asked Moses to ask God.
 - (3) When God spoke to Israel, he spoke to Moses and commanded him to tell the rest of Israel.
 - (4) When Israel sinned and God was going to pour out his wrath on them and wipe them out to start over, Moses pled with God to have mercy and to relent. And God listened to Moses and did just that.

- (5) That's a mediator. A mediator represents God to the people, and the people to God. And a mediator intervenes for the other party.
- ii) We *need* a mediator because of our sin. When we are in the presence of God, we come covered in our sin and deserving only God's eternal wrath and punishment. Our sin *cuts us off* from fellowship with God. So we need a mediator. Someone to represent us, but someone who is not covered and corrupted by sin *like us*.
 - iii) That's why Moses was not really a very good or effective mediator. When it comes to sin, he was just like the rest of Israel. He too was descended from Adam, covered in sin, having a wicked heart, and deserving only God's eternal wrath and Hell.
 - iv) So what God's people ultimately need is a mediator to function like Moses but who is actually far superior to Moses, a mediator who can represent us, and yet who has no sin of his own.
- c) May I present to you the Eternal Son of God become *man*, Jesus, our righteous, sinless Mediator. He came to be our high priest.
 - d) Yet there were two problems with the Son of God being our Mediator:
 - i) He's God, not man. How can *God* represent man? In order to represent us, he has to be like us, because our representative must have the credentials and merits that God requires *of us* (he needs to do what God has called us to do and be what God has called us to be, he's need to be perfect and righteous and obedient to God's Law). But that means that to represent us he must be man.
 - (1) That is why, in order to mediate for us, in order to stand between us and the Father, it was necessary that Jesus take on flesh and blood and be made like us in every way.
 - (2) That's why Christmas was *necessary* and why Christmas is so glorious! It's the first step in our Mediator becoming our Mediator.
 - ii) The second problem is that we've already blown it. How is he going to mediate for us and make our relationship with God right when we're already *ruined*? That leads us to point three.
- 3) The Son of God *had to be made like us in every way* so that he could ***make propitiation for our sins***.
- a) Verse 17 again, "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."
 - b) What in the *world* is propitiation? It's a really good, important, Christian word.
 - i) Some debate whether we should still use a word like this because people don't use that word anymore, and sometimes folks get angry when they hear words they don't know used.
 - ii) The problem is that there's no adequate substitute for this word right now. To choose a different word means to sacrifice the meaning of this word. (NIV has *atonement* which misses *so much!*)
 - iii) **Propitiation means** a "wrath-absorbing sacrifice" or a "wrath-absorbing substitute". To *propitiate* means to take wrath that was meant for someone else and to bear it yourself. So *propitiate specifically* refers to wrath and punishment.
 - c) Remember, our mediator has just taken on this enormous task of representing a group of people who have lived entire lives of rebellion against God. The people Jesus now represents are worthy of an eternity in Hell. And Hell is not just a "separation from God"; Hell is the eternal

receiving of God's wrath and active punishment for sins. Hell is where God punishes people for ever and ever.

- d) So if Jesus is going to mediate for us, save us from Hell, and make our relationship with God eternally right, the most important thing he is going to have to do is somehow turn away God's wrath from us.
 - e) Because God is God, because God is perfectly just and his anger and wrath for our sin is righteous, he cannot just forget about his wrath. He can't pretend like he doesn't care. His wrath must be carried out.
 - f) That's a really big dilemma!
 - g) Enter our mediator. He willfully chooses to represent guilty people before God.
 - h) When Jesus chose to represent God's people, he chose to have everything that was ours in God's sight considered as his. He chose to have the Father consider him the representative **of our sin!**
 - i) Jesus *chose* to propitiate the Father's wrath for *our sins*.
 - i) That's what he was doing on the Cross. He wasn't suffering for his sin. He was suffering for ours. And he wasn't just suffering from the Romans or the Jews; he was suffering the wrath of God.
 - ii) When you read the account of Jesus dying on the cross, honestly, it's like seeing yourself in Hell. Jesus is bearing and suffering our Hell for us at that moment. You are witnessing nothing less than your sin receiving the wrath of God's anger being poured out, not on you, but on Jesus Christ as your representative.
 - iii) That's the Gospel! If you repent and believe, he will become your representative in his dying and his bearing of God's wrath.
 - j) But for him to *propitiate* God's wrath for our sins, he had to be just like us (with the one obvious exception of sin). He had to have hearts like us so his could break as ours should have broken. He had to have *hands* like us to be pierced as ours should be pierced. He had to have *feet* like us to be nailed as ours should be nailed. He had to have ribs and a side like us, so he, instead of us, could be pierced. He needed blood to spill and eyes to weep. He needed a throat and vocal chords to yell in our agony. If he was going to take God's wrath that was due to us, then God's wrath would have to be carried out on an adequate substitute. And so, to be our faithful and merciful high priest, our mediator, to bear God's full wrath for our wretched sin, he willfully partook of flesh and blood, just like us.
 - k) *That's* Christmas! That's the *motive* and the *why* for Christmas.
 - l) Bulls and goats were not adequate substitutes for bearing God's wrath for God's people. Only a sinless, righteous, perfect man could bear God's wrath for someone else.
 - “...[I]t is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ... Behold, I have come to do your will, O God.’” (Hebrews 10:4)
 - m) At Christmas, our infinitely gracious Mediator was accepting the body the Father had prepared for him, the body that would bear and receive the Father's Hell that was due to God's people.
- 4) The Son of God *had to be made like us in every way* so that he could **help us in all our temptations**. That's verse 18.
- a) In verse 17, Hebrews says Jesus became our “merciful and faithful high priest”.

- b) The rest of that verse explains how he was our faithful high priest. But now, in verse 18, he explains why Jesus is our “*merciful* high priest.”
- c) If you think back to Moses as kind of the first high priest, this will make sense.
 - i) Not only did the high priest offer sacrifices for the people and represent the people before God, but he also *led and instructed and taught* the people. That’s kind of how he represented *God* to the people. He oversaw the worship of God. He instructed the people in the Law. **He was the spiritual leader of the people.** He was the one helping them to do what God required and be God’s people.
 - ii) So Jesus as our high priest means, not only does he intercede for us before God’s throne, but he is also our ultimate Spiritual Leader, our True Pastor-Shepherd.
- d) Now, we might be tempted to think, “Oh great, our teacher, our leader, our pastor, he was God! He’s never been through what I’ve been through. He won’t understand my struggle with sin. How is he going to be any help to me at all?”
- e) But that would be *wrong*. That’s not the kind of high priest that we have.
- f) Our merciful high priest became a man as much as you are a man or a woman. He was flesh and blood, mortal, dependent on eating three or so times a day. He had to get 5 to 8 hours a sleep a night. He was subject to cold weather and to hot weather. His feet got blisters if he walked too far. He was as man as we are.
- g) Furthermore, he didn’t live in a magical, make-believe world. He lived in the exact same world we wake up to every single day. Satan was as active and hateful. The world was lost and corrupt and dangerous. Tragedy happened. It rained and snowed at inconvenient times. People got hurt and sick and died. Everybody was greedy for possessions and money and prestige.
- h) In terms of sin and temptation, it was the *exact same world* in which we live.
- i) *Therefore*, he experienced every kind of temptation we experience on a daily basis. He was tempted in *every way* like us, with one difference: his temptations never caused him to disobey, disbelieve, or dishonor the Father. He was tempted but never sinned.
 - i) And you might think, “Well if he never sinned, then does he really know what I’m going through.”
 - ii) Consider a televised competition where five contestants have to hold buckets of water over their heads without spilling it. Whoever outlasts everybody else wins.
 - iii) After the competition, when only one man withstood the whole time and everybody else gave up or failed sometime during the contest, when the cameras want to know, *What was it like? What did it feel like? How hard was it? What was the pain like in your arms?* Who are they going to interview? Who is the one most qualified to answer those questions? Only the one who withstood the *full experience*; only the one who suffered the full brunt of the agony and pain. Nobody else experienced it in its fullness. They all only experienced a part of it before they gave in.
 - iv) And so it is with us. Do not short-change the *help* that our Mediator can give to us in our suffering and in our temptations.
 - v) He *alone* has been suffered in every way and yet has withstood. He *alone* has been tempted in every way and yet remained faithful to God. He had *every dart and weapon the devil had to throw* thrown at his head. He had every snare the world had to lay laid in his path. He faced every physical agony known to man. And yet, he bore it all, faithful and righteous before God.
 - vi) There is no one *more qualified* to help in our time of need. And, there is no one with more resources at his disposal.

- j) That is why he became man. That is *why* Christmas.
 - k) God was mercifully providing for us the *resources we need* to be godly. Remember, God's *plan* for us (and he will see it to completion) is to transform us into the righteous image of Jesus, and to bring us righteous into his eternal glorious Kingdom.
 - l) And so we see here that God has provided us, *today*, with everything we need to look like Jesus Christ. He has given us not only complete forgiveness of our sins, he also given us *Jesus himself*. We have the power over sin, the new life of Jesus' resurrection, and the merciful, merciful compassion and understanding and encouragement of a Savior who has honestly been in our shoes and was yet faithful to God. He is so strong to save and so able to help! That's our mediator.
- 5) That's the joy, the glory, the *why* of Christmas. "Why did God become man?" Because he intended to love us by taking God's punishment for us for himself, by making our relationship with God eternally right and secure, by freeing us from our fear and bondage to death, and by being a helpful, compassionate, understanding Savior and High Priest. I pray that every one of you will immediately turn to love, adore, and serve this God-man and to worship him this week.

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APPENDIX #1

Further discussion and thoughts on point #2, Christ as our Mediator.

In verse 10, we see God's sovereign plan: to bring many sons to glory. Those *sons* are called Abraham's offspring in verse 17. So God's plan, and this has been his plan since the beginning of time, has been to take a group of people from out of this world and to make them into his Kingdom people, to give them his eternal Kingdom land and to live with them in eternal fellowship. That's God's plan.

But here's the problem: to enter into that eternal Kingdom of God, that paradise Kingdom on the new heaven and new earth, you have to be perfect! (v. 10) You have to suffer temptation and be completely without sin. You have to learn perfect obedience meaning, your whole entire life, you always do what God requires of you, and you are always *growing* in your love, honor, and obedience to the Heavenly Father. Perfect, you have to be perfect.

Unfortunately, the people God is bringing into his Eternal Kingdom are *not* perfect. They are all born into the world with the corruption and sin of the representative of their race, Adam. They are dead in their sins and trespasses, and when tempted, they sin. How are *those people*, dead in sin and represented by a sinner, Adam, how are *they* going to ever attain perfection in God's sight and enter his Eternal Kingdom?

The only possible way is for them to get someone else to *represent* them in God's sight, someone who has done everything God required of him, someone who was perfect, who learned and grew in obedience their entire life, someone who was tempted in every way and yet was without sin. Someone needs to live the life God requires to enter the Eternal Kingdom, and when that person enters that Kingdom, then God could consider him the new representative instead of Adam.

That's what Jesus does. That's why it was necessary that he take on flesh and blood and become truly human, truly just like us. That's why Christmas was so *necessary* because God intended for him to represent us! **But to truly represent us, he had to be made just like us.** And now that Christmas has happened, and now that Jesus lived that perfectly righteous life, fulfilling God's Law, loving God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, now that Jesus has entered into the glory of the Eternal Kingdom because he perfectly pleased the Father, now *he can represent us* before God.

That's what verse 17 is saying. He is now our *high priest*. And to understand how Hebrews thinks about a high priest, check out Hebrews 5:1 "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

See, a *high priest* is someone appointed by God to act on behalf of men in relation to God. In other words, a high priest is someone who represents man before God. For God's people (and God's people are those who have repented from their sins and trusted in Jesus alone to be made right with God) Jesus is their new representative. Formerly, Adam was our representative before God. His disobedience, his failure was ours. The corruption that came from his sin was ours.

But now, when we are born-again, Adam is replaced with *Jesus Christ*. And his obedience, his righteousness, his perfection, that is ours. The new life that comes from his obedience, that is counted to us. And God is bringing us into the Eternal Kingdom with our new representative, Jesus Christ.