

Jesus' Crucifixion Set Us Free
Sermon on Hebrews 2:14-18
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his wounds, we have been healed. Amen.

God's Word to us this Good Friday afternoon explains to us the significance of Christ's crucifixion. It is Hebrews chapter two, verses fourteen through eighteen:

Since God's children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil -- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.

For this reason 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. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word regarding Christ crucified.

Introduction: Satan Tempts Us to Doubt & Despair

Dear fellow Christians—for whom God himself died:

This afternoon we remember, with solemn searching of the soul, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's Word to us today also leads us to ponder our own death, in the light of his.

Chiseled on Christ's tombstone – not that they did these things in those days – was, of course, the date of his birth: say, “December twenty-fifth, five BC”. And carved on Christ's tombstone was also the day of his death: maybe, “April seventh, thirty AD”.

You could say that already your tombstone, too, is prepared. Already it states the day of your birth, doesn't it? And the date of your death is fast approaching. Some of us here will die this year, just as Christ died. Some of us here have, perhaps, forty years to go. And others might have eighty. But the chisel is already ready to clink at the granite, because all of us are bound to die.

Are you afraid of that? It's natural, isn't it? All we know is this life. The next is beyond our investigation (though not beyond God's revelation). Furthermore, it's natural for us to fear death, because we've got this gnawing feeling that we've messed up in this life. And we've got this sense of justice. We've got this sense that punishment is approaching for our many failures in life.

Theme: Jesus' Crucifixion Set Us Free

Well, brothers and sisters, it's for that very reason that one very bad Friday – one really awful, dreadful Friday afternoon – has ever since been called “Good”. The good news of Good Friday is this: JESUS' CRUCIFIXION SET US FREE. Jesus' crucifixion set us free: (1) FROM SIN. Jesus' crucifixion set us free (2) FROM DEATH.

Exposition One: Jesus' Crucifixion Set the Hebrews Free from Sin

It was late in the decade of the sixties AD. The cardinal events we commemorate today had been fulfilled nearly forty years earlier. The Hebrew Christians in Rome faced the threat of death for believing these things. Avoiding persecution was as simple for them as declaring that they were legally Jews again. They were sorely tempted to do that.

Satan was taking every pain to make the Hebrew Christians fall from faith. One of the lines of reasoning he used was this, “How can you trust in this Jesus? He was just a human. (And no one could deny that. So many people had known him.) Jesus was just a human. At least the angels have wings and dwell above you. How could this mere man be your God and Savior?”

God’s Word to us today answers those tempting questions very well. Let’s start with the second paragraph. ***For this reason Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way.*** Jesus couldn’t have wings. He couldn’t have a fiery glow about him. He couldn’t so swiftly move from place to place and wreak destruction or blessing here or there, as do the angels.

Why not? It was: ***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.***

You see: it was the job of a human being—one day a year to represent his people and enter into the presence of God. It was the job of a man—on the great Day of Atonement, to cross the temple courts, to enter into the temple itself, more than that: to enter through the curtain into the Most Holy Place, where God dwelled. It was the job of a man, the high priest—to sprinkle there the blood of a sacrificial victim. That took the place of the blood of the people themselves, because God’s very proper anger over sins required the shedding of blood in vengeance.

No angel could do that. Certainly, no angel could offer his own blood—since angels are spirit-creatures who have no blood. But God who had become man, Jesus Christ, could and did offer his own blood in substitution for the blood of the people, as payment for their sins.

Furthermore, the Lord assures the Hebrew Christians, under sore temptation to deny Jesus: ***Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.***

Appropriation One: Jesus’ Crucifixion Sets Us Free from Sin

So, my friend: the day of your death is also fast approaching. Are you ready? Has blood been shed for your every transgression? Will you die with no debt owed to God? Are you acceptable to the Almighty? Do you leave this world right in God’s sight?

Yes! Yes! Look at Christ on the cross! The pierced feet of God walked to Golgotha for you. God’s nailed hands have reached out in love for you. The bloody brow of God planned your salvation. God’s pain-stricken eyes have extended forgiveness to you. The bloody mouth of God has spoken your pardon.

God died to set you free from sin! Day after day, throw that in Satan’s face—and he will disappear!

Exposition Two: Jesus’ Crucifixion Set the Hebrews Free from Death

...But the devil will keep coming back. He’ll say to you, “You think you’re forgiven. You think your sins are gone. So, why are you getting weaker? Why do you suffer more and more pain? No, you’re still in my clutches. You are still going to die.”

God's Word to us today answers that, though. This is the first paragraph: ***Since God's children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity.*** God loved us so much: he covered himself with our skin. God loved us so much: our blood, whose genetic characteristics all people have held in common, ever since our ancestors Adam and Eve—our blood coursed through Jesus' veins.

And for what purpose did it do so? It was: ***so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil -- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.***

There had been an uninterrupted pattern since the beginning of the world.... Adam died. Satan wrestled Adam's soul from Adam's body and said to God, "Ha! A sinful soul. The body is mine. I'll make it rot. And someday, I believe, the soul will be mine, as well." And Eve died. And Satan wrestled Eve's soul from her body and said to God, "Ha! Another sinful soul. The body is mine. I'll make it rot. And someday, I believe, the soul will be mine, as well."

And so it went, until it came to Christ.... When Satan aimed to wrestle his soul from his body, the devil was chagrined. "No! A holy soul. It can't be mine to have." Instead, Jesus himself willed his death, saying: "*It is finished.*" "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. And maybe for the first time, a person scared Satan by his death—rather than the other way around. And can you imagine the devil's terror, three days later, when he found out Christ's body wasn't his to have either?

For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants, whom God would raise from the dead.

Appropriation Two: Jesus' Crucifixion Set Us Free from Death

So, my friend: the day of your death is also fast approaching. Are you ready? Have you discovered a way to survive the experience? Have you figured out a way to maintain your body and soul intact? Have you found anyone who underwent death and later lived to tell about it? Does that individual have the potential to shepherd you through the same?

Yes! Yes! Consider Christ on the cross! As surely as he has shepherded you through life, he is speaking to you from heaven today by virtue of his Word. He's saying, "Sure, you'll undergo death. And no, you haven't experienced at all what comes afterwards. But I have. And that's good enough. You see, you're not going through anything I didn't go through first. I know the pathway. In fact: I am the pathway. And paradise lies on the other side. I, who now fill the heavens and the earth—I have prepared a place here for you. You have nothing to fear, forever. In fact, you can't imagine the eternal heavenly happiness you're going to enjoy.

God died to set you free from death! As your last day approaches, throw that in Satan's face—and he will disappear forever!

Conclusion: Jesus Elevates Us to Righteousness & Life

So, my sister, my brother: it's true. The date of your birth is by all means engraved. And the chisel was at the surface of the granite, ready to carve the date of your death. But Christ's mighty hand shoved Satan away. Just as he forced Satan three days later to erase the date of his death, just as his risen hands chiseled on his tombstone, "I now live forever," you now live forever. Your sin is atoned for! Your death is done for! Satan has lost! Christ has won! And you have won! You are free from sin and death through Jesus Christ your Lord! Amen.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Amen.