

Jesus, One of Us



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 2.

MEMORY TEXT: “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Jesus came in human flesh, was tempted in human flesh, suffered in human flesh, and died in human flesh; yet never once did He sin in that flesh. Now He is our High Priest in heaven.

CONDUCTOR AND COMPOSER LEONARD BERNSTEIN once was asked: “Mister Bernstein, which is the most difficult instrument?” Bernstein replied: “The second violin. I can get many first violinists, but to find one who with the same enthusiasm plays second violin or second French horn or second flute, is a real problem. Yet, if nobody would play second violin, we would not have harmony.” It is not always easy to be second, especially if one deserves to be first. It is even more difficult to step down after having been first; and it's more difficult still to be ridiculed and humiliated after having stepped down from being first. This, however, is exactly what Jesus did, and our lesson this week takes a look at what His condescension means for us.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why the emphasis on Christ's humanity? Why does Scripture present such a cruel picture of Christ's sufferings? What does His humanity have to do with His high-priestly ministry?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 19.

JESUS' HUMILIATION.

“But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one” (Heb. 2:9, RSV).

Hebrews 1 shows the superiority of Jesus over the angels (vss. 5-14). Then, the next chapter, in the context of His earthly ministry, says that Jesus “for a little while was made lower than the angels.” What a contrast!

Read Hebrews 2:5-18. Summarize in a few lines the essence of the verses:

Whatever you wrote, one thing is certain: This section is adamant about the humanity of Jesus, that though He was King and greater than the angels, He took upon Himself “the seed of Abraham” (vs. 16), human flesh, and He not only tasted death for every man (vs. 9), but He also became a “merciful and faithful high priest” in our behalf (vs. 17).

Notice, too, that Hebrews 1 refers to Jesus' exaltation, while Hebrews 2 focuses on His humiliation. Chronologically, at least in the context of His work of Redemption in our behalf, the humiliation came first and then the exaltation. Perhaps the author of Hebrews wanted to depict Jesus in His majestic role so the readers would immediately notice in whom they believe and would be reconfirmed in their faith.

The role of Jesus as the Creator points to His preexistence (that is, before He stepped into humanity); the role of Jesus as King points to His ascension (that is, after His earthly ministry). Although His incarnation, including the substitutionary death, are of extreme importance, they must be seen against the background of Jesus' eternal existence as God. Only then can the depth of His humiliation be truly appreciated.

Jesus, the Creator, God Himself, the King of the universe, had taken upon Himself a humanity in which He suffered more than any of us ever could. Dwell upon what this means. Pray over it. Ask the Lord to help you grasp the hope, the promise, and the good news in this amazing truth.

JESUS, THE HUMAN PAR EXCELLENCE.

“For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Ps. 8:5).

Compare Hebrews 2:6-8 and Psalm 8:5-7. How does the author of Hebrews use that psalm? What application does he give it? What point does he make by interpreting it as he does?

The use of Psalm 8 is . . . interesting, for this passage was never considered to be Messianic. The original context is man, yet not in his ordinary state but in his ideal state. . . . At creation man was given dominion over the earth, but ever since the fall that authority to subject has been lacking. The psalm is only perfectly fulfilled, therefore, in the ideal Man, Jesus Christ, who alone has that authority. The writer sees a fulfillment of this psalm in a way that the Jews never foresaw. The same psalm is cited by Jesus (Mt. 21:16) and Paul (1 Cor. 15:27), both in a way which points to its fulfillment in Jesus himself.”—Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 84, 85.

Jesus is the true Representative of humanity, and in Him the psalm found true fulfillment. As humanity’s Representative, He must share in the same conditions as humanity. To truly represent us, He had to be One of us. That makes sense. Only then could He blaze the trail of salvation for us and be an effective High Priest in the presence of God in behalf of humanity.

Though the basic meaning of Psalm 8 was to deal with humanity in general, Hebrews applies it in particular to Jesus, who was the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), the new Representative of the race depicted in Psalm 8. By applying the psalm in this manner, the author helps establish clearly not only the humanity of Jesus but the efficacy of His role in redeeming us from sin.

What we see in Hebrews 1 and 2 is the idea that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. However difficult it is to understand this from a purely naturalistic perspective, what does the humanity and divinity of Christ tell us about the link between heaven and earth? How does this reality (the humanity-deity) of Christ help us trust in the salvation we have been offered?

JESUS’ SUFFERING.

Hebrews 2 contains strong language in regard to Christ’s suffering. The author talks about “the suffering of death” and states that Jesus by the grace of God might taste death for everyone (vs. 9). Death and suffering are again mentioned in Hebrews 2:14, 18; 5:8; 9:26; 12:2; and 13:12.

It is, in many ways, a cruel picture: the innocent Son of God suffering for the sins of the world. Jesus took upon Himself the wrath of God for sins He never committed, tasting death for every man, woman, and child, even those who, in the end through disobedience and rebellion, have to taste it themselves anyway.

Sure, it’s cruel, but that’s what it was meant to be, to help show us not only the cost of sin but what it cost to redeem us from that sin.

What are the results of Christ’s suffering?

Heb. 2:9-11 _____

Heb. 2:14-16 _____

Heb. 2:17, 18 _____

However great that suffering, look at what it wrought for us. Though much about Christ’s suffering and death eludes our experiences and is beyond our comprehension, we can only marvel at the results of that death, which include (1) the exaltation of Jesus, (2) the defeat of Satan, (3) the surety of salvation for us, (4) the closeness of Jesus to humanity, (5) His efficacy as our High Priest, and (6) His aid for us now when we ourselves face temptation. What else do we need?

Look at verse 14. It says that Jesus came so that by His death He might destroy the one who has the power over death. How do you understand this verse, given that we still die?

Some psychologists believe that the fear of death is the dominating force in our lives and that much of what we do, consciously or unconsciously, stems from this fear. Look at verse 15. According to this text, what has Jesus done that should give us the answer and the solution to this fear?

JESUS, OUR BROTHER.

Read again all of Hebrews 2, focusing particularly on verse 11. In the context of the whole chapter, what does the word *brother* indicate? What point was the author trying to make?

It is amazing that Jesus indirectly calls Himself our Brother. As the Creator and the King of the universe, He is, nevertheless, still willing to be the Brother of His creatures; that is, His fallen, sinful, and, oftentimes, pernicious creatures. Amazing!

The term *brother* in this context points to an intimate closeness and relationship. Jesus and His followers are one family. Because of what He went through and suffered, Jesus is one of us, and He will stay one of us in spite of His royal dignity. Verse 14 emphasizes that He became a partaker of our flesh and blood, of our nature and of our experience. There's no question: By having become one of us, He can relate to us and we to Him, in a manner differently than were He to have never lived as a human being. What better way could there have been for God to become close to us other than by what Jesus did?

Closeness may contain certain dangers. We can, for instance, turn Jesus into nothing but our buddy. Though there is the friendship element (John 15:15) in our relationship with Christ, it isn't the only term used to depict that relationship. What other images and terms does the Bible use to define that relationship? Matt. 22:36; John 10:11; 20:28; 1 Tim. 1:1.

When it comes to the Bible and to God Himself, we often talk in paradoxes or contrasting pairs. There are three divine Personalities and yet one Godhead. God is far away, unreachable yet present and close to us. Though not limited to time, He reveals Himself in time. We are already saved, and we still will be saved.

It is not either/or but one and the other. We must keep these different truths together, balanced with each other the best we can. Let us neither exclusively view Jesus as the distant Ruler of the universe nor treat Him just as a pal. Let us approach Him as our Brother in all due respect and love, because, no matter our intimacy, He's still the Creator, and we are still the creature—and a great distance exists between the two.

Caroline grew up abused by her brothers. Thus, the image of Christ as her "Brother" hardly evokes a positive response. How do you present Christ to someone like her?

JESUS, OUR HIGH PRIEST.

"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

Hebrews 2 culminates in the high-priestly office of Jesus, our Brother. It lists qualifications for that office. It describes Jesus in this function and briefly points to the ministry He performs. And one of the qualifications of Jesus was that He had to face temptation to sin, just as humans have, as well.

That Jesus was tempted is mentioned only two times in Hebrews (2:18 and 4:15). Look up the texts. How do they complement each other? What does the second one say that helps us understand what the first one says? Also, how can we understand the statement that Jesus "has been tempted in every way just as we are—yet was without sin"? (Heb. 4:15, NIV).

British author Oscar Wilde once said that the only way to deal with sin is to succumb to it. In contrast, it has been said that the one who falls never knows the full force of temptation, because he or she fails before the test ends. If true, then Jesus is the only One who has known the extremity of temptation, because He alone remained "without sin." He never gave in to it; therefore, He felt its tug worse than any of us have.

Even more so, He faced all that we face and so much more. When was the last time any of us were tempted to turn stones into bread or to command a legion of angels to bear us? And, considering the issues at stake in the great controversy, Satan must have been much more interested in causing Jesus to commit a sin than he is interested in getting us to. And yet, in the midst of all this temptation, Jesus never fell, never sinned, and this experience was one of the things that qualified Him to be our High Priest.

Read Hebrews 2:16-18. As we saw earlier in the week, Christ's humanity is likened to His high-priestly ministry. Look at the two words in verse 17 that describe the kind of High Priest He is. What did His humanity have to do with these two characteristics becoming descriptive of His ministry?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the chapter on “Gethsemane” in Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 685–697. It highlights Jesus’ temptation and suffering.

In Christ were united the divine and the human—the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam, the transgressor, meet in Jesus—the Son of God, and the Son of man. And having with His own blood paid the price of redemption, having passed through man’s experience, having in man’s behalf met and conquered temptation, having, though Himself sinless, borne the shame and guilt and burden of sin, He becomes man’s Advocate and Intercessor. What an assurance here to the tempted and struggling soul, what an assurance to the witnessing universe, that Christ will be ‘a merciful and faithful high priest’ (MS 141, 1901)!”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 926.

“The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. Yet He was God in the flesh. When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground’ (Ex. 3:5). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Dwell on the thought that Jesus Christ as a human being—that is, in human flesh—never sinned. Imagine a whole life in which He never, even once, succumbed to temptation. What does this truth do to all our excuses for sin?
2. How do you understand Ellen White’s statement that the humanity of Christ is the “golden chain” that binds our souls to Christ? What does that mean?

SUMMARY: Hebrews 2 portrays Jesus in His humanity and describes His accomplishments. He tasted death for us, became the pioneer of our salvation, conquered Satan and death, freed us from existential fear, makes atonement for our sins, and aids us when tempted. A heavy emphasis is on our salvation and the closeness of Jesus with us. We can be confident, because He is our Brother.



Hope Out of Hopelessness

Charlotte Ishkanian

Hartlah lives in Mongolia, where life is seldom easy. When she lost her job as a tractor driver, life became even more difficult. With three children still at home, suddenly she had no income and not enough food. Her friends avoided her, for they feared that she would beg them for food or money, and they did not have any to spare either.

One day some foreigners came to town with food, clothes, and Bibles. They gave Hartlah some food and a Bible. She began to read it and began to understand that there is a God named Jesus.

She wanted to know more about God, but the foreigners left, and she knew of no one in town who believed in God, no one who would tell her more. Then Hartlah heard of Sarool, a girl in town who believed in Jesus. She visited Sarool and began asking her about Jesus.

The woman and the young girl started studying the Bible together. Hartlah was the first person in Sant to study the Bible. Sarool started a small group meeting in her parents’ house. More people came. In a year about 10 people were studying the Bible together.

Hartlah’s life began to change as she started to understand and accept God’s love in her life. Her life took on new meaning and happiness. She realized that she was a sinful person, and she wanted to give her life to Christ. Soon she traveled to another city to be baptized, for there was no pastor anywhere near her little village.

Before Christ took over her life, she was often unhappy and argued a lot. Now she loves to help others. People teased her when she started worshiping God, but as her life changed her friends noticed the difference. She is now studying the Bible with one of her neighbors.

A volunteer missionary moved to Sant to help support the small group of believers. Hartlah attends church in the missionary’s home. Until recently she was, at 45, the oldest believer in her small town.



Evangelistic meetings were held in her small village. Every night the village’s culture center was full, and many people accepted God’s love for the first time. Hartlah was glad for the day when others her age took their stand for Christ.

Hartlah (left), lives in Sant, in north central Mongolia. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.

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