

So What If God Was One of Us? (Hebrews 2:9-18)

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[0 : 0 0] let us read the Bible passage for this week. So if you can get your Bibles out, electronic or physical, to Hebrews chapter 1, verse 13.

I'll be reading from NLT, and those who are following, you can point out what I read wrong. Okay, here we go. And God never said to any of the angels, sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.

Therefore, angels are only servants, spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation. So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.

For the message God delivered through angels has always stood firm, and every violation of the law, and every act of disobedience was punished. So what makes us think we can escape if we ignore this great salvation that was first announced by the Lord Jesus himself, and then delivered to us by those who heard him speak.

And God confirmed the message by giving signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit whenever he chose. And furthermore, it is not angels who will control the future world we are talking about.

[1 : 1 2] For in one place the scriptures say, what are mere mortals that you should think about them, or a son of man that you should care for him? Yet for a little while, you made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

You gave them authority over all things. Now when it says all things, it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all things put under their authority.

What we do see is Jesus, who for a little while was given a position a little lower than the angels, and because he suffered death for us, he is now crowned with glory and honor.

Yes, by God's grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone. God for whom and through whom everything was made chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus through his suffering a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation.

So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. For he said to God, I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.

[2 : 1 8] I will praise you among your assembled people. He also said, I will put my trust in him. That is, I and the children God has given me. Because God's children are human beings made of flesh and blood, the son also became flesh and blood.

For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

We also know that the son did not come to help angels. He came to help the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect, like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful high priest before God.

Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested. Thank you, William.

Thanks, Fran, for reading that. So do keep your Bibles open at Hebrews chapter 2. We will focus not on that whole section that she read. That was just a bit of context, but we will be looking particularly at from verse 9 through to 18.

[3 : 33] So yeah, it would be great if you have that open. But before that, let me pray as we hear from his word. Lord, your word is active. It is alive. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, the book of Hebrews says.

And so, Father, let it penetrate even to our soul and our spirit. Let it cut us in the heart. Let it judge our thoughts and attitudes now. And let it reveal your son, Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, died on a cross, and was raised three days later to life again.

We ask all these things in his mighty name. Amen. So, as I shared in the interview a little bit, I grew up in the 90s, grew up in Malaysia, and then here in New Zealand.

So, I don't know what your childhood was like, but my siblings and I, we grew up watching lots of TV shows, especially on Saturday mornings. Shows like Full House and Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, and cartoons like the original Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

So, it's kind of, that's my generation. So, yeah. And so, actually, I don't know. For my kids' sake, it's probably a good thing. I don't know if those shows are on anymore. But one memory I do have from my childhood, I was about eight years old, was watching a music video.

[4 : 50] In those days, you didn't go on YouTube to watch music videos. You went on this thing called MTV. And on MTV, they just played the music videos for you. And then one came up, and it was a singer, her name was Joan Osborne, and she asked this question, what if God was one of us?

I wonder if you heard this, maybe at Countdown while you're doing your shopping or something. What if God was one of us? It was a very catchy chorus. I kind of remember watching this music video, being a little bit puzzled by the woman with the curly hair and the nose ring, asking questions about God.

And then I think she's kind of, in the song, she says lots of years. Like, yeah, yeah, yeah, sort of thing. So, that song was out in 1995, probably before some of you were born.

It became an instant hit on the radio, okay, and actually nominated for a Grammy Award. And when asked what inspired these lyrics, the songwriter, his name was Eric Bazelian, he explained that, I'll quote him, for me, the song was more about what happens to you when you look at something that has completely changed your worldview, which could be meeting God, it could be meeting an alien, it could be a near-death experience, it could be anything like that, is what he says.

It's just how everything you knew was wrong, and now everything you know is right, and you didn't know it. I don't know about you, but for some of us, a story of Christmas, a story of a guiding star, a virgin birth, maybe it's so over-familiar that when we hear it, we'd probably go, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[6 : 20] Or maybe it's so surreal, maybe you just think, how could this be humanly, scientifically possible, okay, that you just politely put it aside? It's about as relevant to you as Santa Claus.

But what if God was one of us? What if Christmas means, like Eric put it, that there is a change, a shift of your view of the entire world?

So brothers and sisters, it's six days till Christmas. I'm sure there's a lot of shopping to do, but there's a lot of reflection, I think, we need to do. And so today, I want us to reflect on the wonder of the main truth of Christmas called the incarnation, God coming to live on earth with us.

There's a lot of great passages I think we could turn to, right? We could turn to the gospel accounts themselves, right? The one we've been trying to memorize, Luke's gospel in chapter two. And I mean, this time last year, we looked at Matthew's gospel, didn't we?

As we looked at that start of those gospel accounts, we saw Joseph and Mary's point of view. But I think what Fran just read from Hebrews chapter two, Hebrews chapter two is kind of a concentrated, like, drink this to stay awake version of the Christmas story.

[7 : 36] Whether you've heard the Christmas story a thousand times, whether you've actually never heard it before. Hebrews chapter two, I feel like it's kind of the pure-brewed argument that tells us not just that God became man, but why he became man, right?

Why he became man, which is important for us. Which is important for us. And now, if you've never read the book of Hebrews, let me just tell you, it's a fantastic book of the Bible. But it can be quite a hard read, right?

Because it's quite a long book. And in fact, actually, in Hebrews chapter 13, the writer says, I urge you, brothers, right? This is after 13 chapters. He says, bear with my brief word of exhortation.

He's saying, just hang in with me, you know, after 13 chapters. For I've written briefly to you, right? And you're kind of like, 13 chapters. Okay. But look, the key verse, actually, of the whole book, even if you struggle through this book, you've already seen, right?

We've already read. It's Hebrews chapter 2, verse 1. We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard about Jesus so that we do not drift away.

[8 : 41] So if you want to sum up the book of Hebrews, the message, it's basically two words. Don't drift. drift. It's like a boat that's kind of lost its mooring. Or maybe like a driver asleep at the wheel.

Or maybe your phone just gradually slipping out of your pocket. The first readers of this letter, they were kind of just gradually drifting away, barely holding on to their faith, right?

Back in those days, the original readers, they were outnumbered. They were a minority in their society. Everyone around them was not a Christian. Some of them were being beaten up. You read this in Hebrews chapter 10.

Some of them, they lost everything, their possessions. And in this letter, it sounds like some have stopped paying attention to the Son of God. Some have forgotten the basics of the faith.

Chapter 5 talks about this. And some have even stopped meeting together, right? Chapter 10, verse 25. How about you? How about you, right?

[9 : 42] What has 2021 looked like for you? Have you just, after a long year, had enough of church? Been starting to drift away? And so to us at Christmastime, right, the writer of this letter also says, pay attention.

Don't drift. Don't neglect so great a salvation in Jesus. Don't neglect so great a gift in the promised Son of God.

So I want to spend most of our time from verses 9 to 18. That was a little bit of the context for you that we read out. Because from verse 9 to 18, I think we get from the author, we get three different descriptions of the God who became one of us, right?

And I think from those descriptions, we get three reasons why. Why the Son of God became one of us, right? And so those are my three points today.

We see Jesus described in three different ways. Firstly, we'll see him as a leader. Secondly, we see him described as a brother. And then finally, he gets described verses 17 to 18 as our high priest.

[10 : 53] So if you're not taking type, feel free to put those in your phone and then we'll try and flesh that out together. So let's first, let's have a look, verse 9 to 10. Let's see how God became one of us to be a leader who faces death for us.

Verse 9 says this, right? But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone.

You see, what's happened so far is that in the first chapter of Hebrews, the author has kind of presented a big view of Jesus, right? How the Son of God is far superior to all the angels and then by the time we get to this verse, right, he's just quoted one of the Psalms, Psalm 8 and where the Psalm is saying, you see this in verse 7, this a little earlier, you made him a little lower for a while than the angels.

So you see, the person of Jesus, he's a real paradox, a paradox, it's like a puzzle. On the one hand, the Son of God is far superior to any created being and yet on the other hand, at his incarnation, he has been made a little lower than the angels.

He humbles himself to need to eat and sleep and go to the toilet. He humbles himself to exist as a baby. God as one of us, I wonder if you've ever found that idea weird, troublesome, maybe even offensive.

[12 : 28] How could a divine being limit himself into time and space? How could God even become man? Earlier this week, I was reading the Gospel of John with someone over Zoom and in John's Gospel, particularly in chapter 6, 7, 8, there's a bit of a back and forth with the religious leaders.

You see how furious they got when Jesus starts to draw a crowd and claims to be God and do God-like things. And they were offended because here was a teacher saying that he was God.

How could God be a man? That was their objection. More recently, a Canadian author, Jan Martel, he's written a novel called The Life of Pi. Some of you might have seen the movie, right?

He put it this way, talking about Jesus. He says, this son, on the other hand, who goes hungry, who suffers from thirst, who gets tired, who's sad, anxious, who's heckled and harassed, who has to put up with followers who don't get it and opponents who don't respect him.

What kind of a God is that? It's a God on too human a scale, that's what. Martel is very, you know, he's very partial to kind of Hindu and Hinduism and other Eastern ideas of religion.

[13 : 45] And so, for him, a God who becomes human is just not powerful enough. In his mind. But what if Jan Martel, what if others have misunderstood?

And actually, what if a God who becomes one of us is exactly what we need? That's the argument of the writer of Hebrews, right? Because you see, a powerful but distant deity cannot die for us, cannot be a substitute for us, but someone, our God, who chooses to enter his creation can taste death for everyone, right?

What might seem humiliating, verse 9, right, to us is exactly why Jesus is crowned with glory and honor, because he suffered death. And when we get to verse 10, it says here, the author of Hebrews, he kind of drops our first key word, our first key description of Jesus.

So, your translations might differ, but it says here, right, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

So, in NIV, it says author, the newer one says pioneer, or founder, it depends on your translation. The word in the original refers to someone who kind of goes before us, that we can follow, right?

[15 : 09] Maybe another English would be a trailblazer, a visionary, a champion, a captain. And this word actually only appears in the book of Hebrews. It appears here once, and then later on in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, and I don't know if you remember, that's where he talks about Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Right? We had a lot of fun last week, right, seeing our senior pastor, right, Pastor Albert, on our safety video, right? And what was he dressed up in? He was dressed up in a captain's costume, right?

A lot of fun. I don't think I could copy him and, you know, throw my hat up and say, cafe, there's another word, right? But ultimately, it is Jesus Christ.

When he became human, he became our captain. He becomes the one who can lead the way, pioneer the path to salvation. No one else. And I think the phrase here in verse 10, right, it says, made perfect, right?

It simply means he got the job done. No one else but the Son of God got the job done. He founded the way to salvation. He completed his mission through coming to earth, through his suffering, through his death.

[16 : 26] Praise God. Only because God became one of us could he live a perfect, obedient life. Could he suffer and die for our sins? To save us, God had to.

He was pleased to become one of us. Jesus, first picture, Jesus is our captain, our leader who willingly flies into death for us.

I mean, look, our world is full of celebrities, right? And influences, athletes, men and women, they all call us to follow their lead, right? Like and subscribe, whatever. But sooner or later, they fail us, don't they?

They disappoint us. There's a scandal. They stop posting. They blow up and we never hear about them again. But when we see Jesus, we see someone worth following.

He is our leader in flesh and blood. He is the one who runs to the cross and it says here, verse 10, he brings many sons and daughters to glory. And only by declaring our allegiance to this captain, this champion, can we follow him into the glory that awaits?

[17 : 35] So that's my first point. God became one of us. Firstly, to be our leader who faces death for us. Secondly, the writer of Hebrews argues he, God became one of us to be a brother, to identify with our weaknesses.

I love how actually, you know, we didn't plan it, but Fran was like, you know, would you rather have a brother or a sister? I'd rather have a brother if it was Jesus Christ. Let's say that straight, right? And I hope so would you.

Because look what 11 says. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Can you imagine that? The supreme eternal son, far superior to anything, anyone else, he's not ashamed to identify with you, to call you brother or sister.

And then, and then the writer backs this up by quoting words from the Old Testament. Okay? It's as if he's saying to the Hebrews who are reading this, don't take my word for it, take your own words for it.

[18 : 44] Take your writings and instructions. Let me quote Psalm 22, right? In verse 12, that's what he does. And then, in verse 13, he quotes Isaiah 8, 17, and 18. It's interesting, he quotes Psalm 22 there.

It's particularly fitting because how does Psalm 22 start? Some of you might know because Jesus cried out those words at the cross. Verse 1 says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

You see, he makes a connection to the cross, to the praise of his people, to identifying with brothers and sisters, the people he saves. And so, the author of Hebrews is telling us that through Jesus' suffering, his death, his resurrection, that the words and hopes of the psalmist, like in Psalm 22, is finally realized.

Through Jesus being one of us, identifying with us as a brother, we see the hopes of all the Old Testament writers, the psalms and the prophets.

They were all hoping, not just for a savior, a Messiah, they were also hoping for a true older brother, finally realized in Jesus. And the argument, right, in Hebrews continues, since, verse 14, the children of flesh and blood, right, Jesus, our brother, shares in our humanity.

[20 : 01] And he came to die so that he might destroy the one who has the power over death. I don't know about you, but this year, we've been thinking a lot about death, how to avoid it, how to vaccinate against it, how to put all these safety precautions so we won't get sick and die, right?

I think we are a very death-averse society, aren't we? It may not be in COVID, we might chase beauty treatments, eyebrow jobs, even surgery to pretend to be young again.

It might be our choice of masks or how we will self-isolate and interact with our friends and family. Or we might just think of, maybe it's just life choices we make.

We think, oh, I'm going to die soon. Let me just quickly do this, this, this, this in my life. And yet, death is unavoidable, isn't it? All right? I know it's corny, but, you know, someone has said before, 10 out of 10 people die.

But friends, because of Jesus' death, we don't have to fear our death. We don't have to be enslaved by this fear, right? You know, verse 15, free those, this is what Jesus does, who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

[21 : 18] Do you fear to die? Are you running away from death? Well, if you are, put your trust in Jesus and then you can sing out with Paul, oh, death, where's your sting?

Oh, grave, where's your victory? I mean, verse 16, it says here, for surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. That's another reminder that Jesus, he is for you.

He is for you. He wants to identify with you and relate to you. He helps the offspring of Abraham. Do you remember that promise he makes to Abraham in Genesis 12, right? Through one of his descendants, all peoples of the earth will be blessed.

How does God fulfill this important promise? He sends his son as a descendant of Abraham, not only a son of Abraham, but our older brother.

It's the end of the year, isn't it? And some of us were on maybe the cusp of a next stage of life. Maybe some of you are studying uni, some of you are studying new jobs, maybe you're moving to a new town or city to call home.

[22 : 26] Can I plead with you, friends? If you're tempted to drift away, come back to your elder brother. Go back to the son. Jesus, he is more than an abstract concept.

He wants to be more than your spiritual vaccine pass. He is and he wants to be your older brother that you've always needed. And at Christmas, we rejoice that because God became one of us, we have Jesus who is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.

How good is that? Friends, Jesus is a leader or pioneer. He's our brother. Finally, briefly, our passage tells us God became one of us to be a high priest who can represent us.

I'll say that again. God became one of us to be a high priest who can represent us. I mean, listen to the author's logic when he gets to verse 17. He says, for this reason, he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

This might all sound a little bit foreign to you, but the original readers who were mostly kind of Jewish background believers, they would have perked their ears up at this point because they would have gone, oh, we know lots about priests.

[23 : 50] Their whole lives, they were surrounded by these priests interceding for them, doing festivals for them. Actually, the term priest or high priest actually appears 30 times in this letter alone.

It's a fairly important idea, particularly through to chapter 7. You see, because one of the things the Hebrews, the original readers, they were in danger of drifting away from.

They were in danger of drifting back, away from Jesus, back to their old way of life, where they would go through rituals after rituals, religious systems, where they would be human priests in a physical temple making sacrifices for sins day in, day out, in the same patterns as their forefathers.

Now, you have to read the rest of the book of Hebrews to find out why Jesus is a better priest. But for now, the key thing I want you to understand is this, right? A priest's job is to represent men and women before a holy God.

That's one of their main roles. That's why we need a priest. To do that, they have to be a human being, right? Okay? No animal can get up there and represent me and God, right?

[25 : 00] You can't put a Pokemon there. It won't do it. It has to be a human being. Okay? So, we get that. To be a priest is to be human. And so, to represent us before God the Father, the Son of God becomes one of us.

That's the wonder of the incarnation. Some of you might ask, why do I need a middle man, right? Why do we need an advocate, a priest? Well, our verse says here, for the sins of the people, right?

Because there is an immense gap between us and God. There's a crack in the universe that splits us from our maker. There is a gulf because of our sins, your sins, my sins, sins like gossip and bitterness, laziness, racism, lying, lust, greed, selfishness, or just unbelief.

All these sins and so much more have separated us from our holy God, our maker and creator. And even though we were God's special creation, made even little lower than the angels, how did human beings respond?

Since our first parents, we responded by rejecting God's rule over our lives. That is the bad news, right? And by rejecting God, whether in word or in deed or even in our thoughts, we have cut ourselves off from our creator and we rightly deserve judgment, anger, punishment for our sins that are deserved.

[26 : 42] And so friends, the only way to bridge this God-sized gap is for God's son to do it himself. That is exactly what Jesus has done in the incarnation.

That is why he became one of us. Right? Because verse 17 continues, he's a merciful, faithful high priest, serving God in order, it says here in the NIV, to make atonement for the sins of the people.

Some of your translations might say to make propitiation, whatever it says. The idea here in the original is to turn away God's righteous anger for our sins.

God was one of us in Jesus Christ. He represented us and he died for us. Friends, no other religion will tell you that God goes to these lengths to identify with his people, to save his people.

And friends, if you accept, if you trust Jesus by faith as your leader, your brother, your high priest, he will, by grace, present you before the living God, not as a sinner deserving of judgment, but as a child of the living God.

[27 : 55] Saved by grace through faith, freely, fully forgiven. Only because God became one of us can we become one of his. That's the good news of Christmas, isn't it?

And that's what verse 18 says. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he's able to help those who are being tempted. Our author reflects on this truth.

Author Tim Chester, he says this. God does not look down on our struggles from a distance and says, see you later. You sort it out yourself.

He rolled up his sleeves. He came down, got involved, and experiences our struggles firsthand. Okay? I want you to not settle for Sunday school version of Jesus, right?

He's not just dressed up in a sparkly robe. He's not just surrounded by happy children, though he was from time to time. He wasn't always. He was a real person. He lived in a world of dirt, of pain, of frustration, of death.

[28 : 58] And so because he became one of us, he lived among us. There is nothing we suffer in this life, let me tell you that, nothing we suffer in this life that Jesus cannot help you with, that he cannot sympathize with you with.

Whatever you're going through right now, whether it is rejection, whether it is a thirst and a hunger you can't satisfy, whether you are tired, whether you are tempted, whether you have been opposed or hated.

Every valley that you walk through, Jesus has been there because he was one of us. Imagine that. When you pray to the Father, there is a son right now interceding for you who actually is praying on your behalf because he knows what it's like to feel what you feel.

He's been there. That is why, right, verse 18, he can help us when we call on him. I don't know what your view of God is here, but if you see him as distant, uncaring, you need to look closer.

Look to Jesus. He was one of us. I don't know about you, if you're tempted to drift away this Christmas, look to Jesus. He has been tempted just as we are, and yet he obeyed the Father.

[30 : 12] Think on how amazing that is. Be amazed again at the wonder of the incarnation. The eternal Son of God became one of us to suffer and die in our place, to help us when we are tempted to give in, to give up.

Right? This is the plea from the book of Hebrews. Don't drift. Look to Jesus and see your leader, your brother, your priest, your helper.

Don't neglect so great a Savior this Christmas. Let me close with a brief story. This is from author and historian John Dixon. John once was lecturing at the university he was teaching at, and he was lecturing on the Christian view of God, and as he was explaining what Christians believed during the Q&A, a man politely stood up and actually just stood up and denounced everything that this lecturer has just said.

And this man argued the Christian idea, right, that God had entered into this world, became a baby, grew up, and so on, was just illogical.

And not only that, just blasphemous. How could a creator become lower than his own creation? How could it be possible that he would need to eat to go to the bathroom, he said?

[31 : 32] It's blasphemous because you should never associate the creator with a piece of his creation. This is the man's argument. God become man, unthinkable. Some of you might have guessed that this person turned out to be an Islamic leader, right, so a very different view of God.

And for him, a majestic God could not possibly enter into our world and become a man. But for John Dixon, for us, God is majestic precisely because he comes to earth and becomes one of us and gives himself for us.

And so actually, in the end, John Dixon, as he wrote, he replied to the man, thank you. Thank you for describing so well what we Christians believe to be the most precious.

Whether it seems like blasphemy to someone, whether it is mocked by someone else, whether it is ignored by our friends and family. This truth of the incarnation, God become man, is at the very heart of our faith.

At Christmas, God became man. Man to be our leader, our brother, our priest, saviour, and king. Merry Christmas, PCBC. Let's pray.

[32 : 51] Amen. Father, we come and we confess that we have drifted away from you this season. whether in our chasing whatever we're chasing this year, whether in our just trying to stay afloat on our own steam. Forgive us.

For every one look at ourselves, help us turn back to Jesus Christ, our leader, our brother, our priest. We come with nothing. We come weak and unstable and yet we know that Christ is born for us and so for that we give you thanks and we praise you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Friends. I■ him. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.