

Christmas is Freedom

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[0 : 0 0] Father, what a joy it is to be able to laugh together and sing together, worship you, the living God. Thank you that we're family.

Thank you that we are one in Christ, though we are diverse peoples, different ideas in many ways, but we are united in our faith that Jesus is Lord, that he's the reason for Christmas, that he is Christmas, and that, Lord, he is our only hope in this life and the next.

Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for the unity of the saints, and Lord, we're so grateful for all that you are doing in our midst. You are at work in us, in this church, and through this church.

Thank you. May you continue to use us for your glory. Father, we want to lift up to you our brothers and sisters who are grieving right now. We think of Kathy Sturgeck and Janice and Cornell White and Esther Mayen.

And Lord, we pray, oh God, for you to comfort them. Losing their sister Denise has been a great hardship. And Lord, we just pray for their comfort and the comfort of Denise's children and for the whole family, that they would find in Jesus the balm of Gilead for their hearts and hope in this life and the life to come.

[1 : 1 9] Bless them, Lord. Watch over them and keep them and strengthen them. Thank you for our brother Dan, who is here with us, Lord, having just had surgery. Thank you for him. May you heal him completely and totally.

We pray for that same way for Noel Whitebroke, for his healing totally, completely. Thank you for him. Thank you for them both, Lord, and these men of God and for their families.

Father, as the word goes forth now, will you use your unworthy servant to proclaim the true gospel, to preach the one true Christ and all that he has done for us. May Jesus be exalted and may your people be built up in the faith, strengthened, strengthened, confirmed in their faith.

And, Lord, if there's anyone here who doesn't know you, O Lord, will you today help them to see what Jesus has done, who he is, and may they surrender themselves to him for time and for eternity.

We ask your blessing on your word as it goes forth now in Christ's name. Amen. We're coming to Hebrews now. We're going to spend this week and next week looking at this passage.

[2 : 3 1] In Hebrews chapter 2. Today we're looking at verses 14 and 15. Hear now the word of God.

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.

That is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Thank you once again. Praise team. Beautiful. Thank you so much. All right.

In 2021, during the fall of Kabul, the U.S. launched an unofficial rescue operation.

Some of you may have heard of it. It was called the Pineapple Express. There's a book about it called Operation Pineapple Express. ABC News wrote an article at that time about this.

[3 : 53] Basically, in August of 2021, an all-volunteer group of American veterans of the Afghan war launched a final daring mission at night, dubbed the Pineapple Express.

It was designed to shepherd hundreds of at-risk Afghan elite forces and their families to safety. At least 500 people were saved by smuggling them into the airport after the Taliban had taken control of the entire city and encircled the airport.

You remember seeing it in the news, right? People trying to get on planes and fly out. Well, this operation of veterans, they weren't even active duty anymore. Vets went in to bring out those Afghans who had been sympathetic to our armed forces in that area.

It was an amazing and successful rescue operation. I like to remind myself, and I have to remind myself of all the gift-buying and beautiful singing.

I've been to a couple concerts now, me, the barbarian that I am, singing and concerts and tinsels, and I love malls this time of year. I love the decorations.

[5 : 18] If you've been to my home, you can see we love decorations. Amen. I love the parties around this time. It's great. It's amazing.

It's electric for me. I'm like a kid. But I have to remind myself that what we are actually celebrating is a divine special ops rescue mission to deliver God's people.

We forget. It's so easy to forget the daring and the danger that Christmas is. Why did Jesus have to become like us?

Humanity is enslaved, held captive in our sins, and by a spiritual adversary called the devil or Satan. It's easy to lose this fact, the way we celebrate Christmas.

You see, at Christmas, the Son of God is born to set his people free. So my question to you is, are you living in the freedom of the season? Are you really living in the freedom that Christmas brings?

[6 : 41] The first thing I want you to notice here in this passage is that to free us, the Son of God had to become one of us. He had to identify with us.

In chapter 2 of Hebrews, the inspired author is writing to instruct us about what he calls the founder of our salvation, Jesus. Beginning in verse 5, our Lord's humanity is the issue.

The Son of God takes up our humanity, and the text above this says he's lower than the angels. And I guess that's kind of weird to me.

Lower than the angels? Have you read the Old Testament in particular and seen how powerful angels are? I mean, Brother Art, you're shaking your head.

Why lower than the angels? You would think he would have come superior. I mean, at least as strong and mighty in appearance as them.

[7 : 47] Why does he become lower than the angels? Human beings are lower, right? Verse 9 says that.

We are lower than the angels. But the Bible shows us that God made us to rule his creation, not angels. In the garden, humanity is given the rule of all of creation to image God, to represent him in creation, not angels.

In fact, angels are used by God to serve us. Hebrews 1.14, Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

But the Son of God, who is greater than angels, became one of us, not one of them. So in the Gospels, what we see is Jesus in our humanity actually being served by angels.

And we just think about it as birth. Angels heralded his birth. After his temptation in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, angels come and minister to the Son of God, to Jesus.

[9 : 07] In the Garden of Gethsemane, we are told that after he sweat great drops of blood, angels came to strengthen him. And even at the resurrection, who's guarding the tomb to even let humanity in?

Angels. Serving the Son of God, listen, in our humanity. The writer here above our passage is quoting from Psalm 8, which speaks of God's majesty as creator of all things, including you.

But the writer of Hebrews is now applying that passage to the Son of God and his humanity. Jesus, therefore, listen, Jesus is the ultimate human being.

He is crowned with glory and honor, which the text says of humanity, but he is crowned with glory and honor because he gave his life to save God's children.

And so our passage, I read verse 14 says, he partook. He took part in literally, not flesh and blood, but blood and flesh.

[10 : 23] I don't know why, but that's what it says originally. He took part in our blood and flesh. He took part in our human nature.

He had to be like us. He had to be one of those who bear the image of God, who represent God's rule on the earth.

Because listen, we are the ones who messed up. We are the ones who caused the fall. It was humanity that caused the fall, that all of creation is tainted by sin and is in our humanity that Jesus comes to set everything right.

He had to be made like us to identify with us. So the question I want to ask you is this.

How are you identifying with him? He came to identify with you. How are you identifying with him?

[11 : 36] Second thing I want you to notice that he came to free us. The son of God had to defeat the devil as one of us. He identified with us.

We blew it. He came to reclaim it. But he had to defeat the devil too as one of us. Remember the second part that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death that is the devil.

In our humanity he's still the son of God. He's still, remember from last week? He's still the logos. He's still the eternal one. But he's in our human flesh now. He's one of us both at one time.

Don't ask me to explain it. This is God stuff. And so as one of us he defeats the devil.

Because humanity has an enemy. I know you and it's not the Republicans or the Democrats. Thank you very much. We have an enemy, a spiritual enemy that is far greater than any tank, any bomb, any war machine, any AI.

[12 : 54] We have a spiritual enemy who led humanity into rebelling against God in the garden. He tempted and tricked our first parents, Adam and Eve, into believing that God was holding them back from their full potential.

Remember what he said to them? God knows you'll be like him if you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was telling them God is keeping you from being all that you could be because God's insecure.

God, God, God's scared of y'all. See, I ain't scared of y'all. I'm here to help y'all. I'm here to help you live your best life now and reach your full potential.

Whew. And like today, they fell for it. They ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and they set in motion all of the pain and suffering the world has ever seen.

They committed cosmic treason, as R.C. Sproul used to say. Death is the consequence of treason, as God promised. The day you eat, you will die.

[14 : 11] And so, they brought death into the world, spiritual and physical death because death is God's judgment on creation because of rebellion, because of the rebellion of those who are supposed to represent him.

Satan instigated it. Satan orchestrated it. Satan, he was, he, he, he, without him, that doesn't happen.

Therefore, he is the bringer of death. He's the bringer of death. How do you defeat death, right? How do you defeat death?

We've been trying in our scientific endeavors and whatnot. We're trying. How do you defeat death? Humanity submitted to the devil, so now humanity must now defeat him.

But no human being can stand against him. No human is wise enough. No human is strong enough to beat him and his great weapon death. No one, none of us can stand.

[15 : 18] Nobody that you know or will ever know. Human being can do it until the Son of God becomes human. the perfect man.

How do you defeat death then? With life from death. The eternal Son cannot die. Remember, as the Lagos, the eternal Son of God, with God, and God, and is God from all eternity, cannot die.

But if he becomes human, his human nature can die. He takes up our weaknesses.

We'll talk more about this next week. He takes up our weak humanity, subject to illness and death.

and goes to the cross. And the human nature of the eternal Son of God dies.

[16 : 36] But then he resurrects. Satan, I can see Satan now.

We got him! I can see hell! Well, actually, he doesn't rule hell. You know that, right? That's a figment of our imagination. That's Dante's infernal.

Satan does not rule hell. He's destined for hell. So, just so you know. So, I'm just, okay. Just, just to make sure we're all clear. But he was excited that Jesus was gone!

We finally got the contract fulfilled. He put the hit out on Jesus from the moment he was born. He had, he had his hitmen trying to take Jesus out for 33 years.

They were trying to get Jesus gone. And finally, but then Peter gets up and preaches and tells the story in Acts chapter 2.

[17 : 37] God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. Why? Because he's the Alagos.

He's the eternal son in human flesh and death could not hold him. I can see the devil holding, trying to hold him down, trying to keep him from resurrecting. I'm just using my sanctified imagination, okay?

Where are you going? What, what's going on? When the earthquake hit and the, and the angels rolled away the stone, I can see, I can see all the, all of demonic world trembling and shaking in their boots and they're trying their best.

What, what's he going? What's he doing? Can somebody do something? Woo! Woo! It was, it was not possible.

In other words, it was impossible for him to be held by death. As one theologian put it, when death took, when death took hold of Jesus, it bit off more than it could chew.

[18 : 42] Woo! Jesus is life. In him is life. He is the life. So death has no lingering hold on him. Death is defeated in our humanity by the divine son of God, Jesus the God man.

Defeated death and defeated the devil. Right? On his head. Boom baby!

2 Timothy 1.10 which, which has now been manifest through the appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Oh, hallelujah. The eternal life and joy in Christ conquers the eternal death and misery which the devil brings. And as I said before, the devil himself, wonderfully, beautifully, the devil himself and all of his demons are destined for the same eternal death and misery they were trying to lead us into.

Revelation 19, Revelation 20.10 And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever and ever.

[20 : 06] Amen. The Son of God became like us that he might conquer the devil for us in our place.

Therefore, you are no longer powerless against the enemy's tricks, traps, and lies about life and death. You are no longer, you have eyes to see now.

You have a wisdom from on high as you open the word of God. You have life in you, child of God, you have life in you that will live long after the devil himself is in torment.

You have life in you, you have light in you, you are no longer darkness, you are light in the Lord. You are a child of light now.

You do not have to give in, you can see, you can see. The devil's lying to the whole world. The first John says, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

[21 : 14] But not you. You're not lying in his power. You've been set free. So you should be able, if you will walk in your privilege as children of God, you should be able to see his lies.

And not fall for his tricks and traps. Not listen to him tell you who you are through media. But listen, but you can listen to the voice of your good shepherd because you see the glory of Jesus and now you are enabled to live for God, to live in his kingdom, to live according to his will because you're no longer subject to the enemy.

There's only two camp saints. There's only two camps. The kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. You were in the kingdom of darkness. You are now in the kingdom of light. You are no longer under his authority.

Are you walking like that? Are you living in the light and the truth of God? Do you have your ears still tuned towards channel 666?

Lastly, not only does Jesus defeat the devil, he delivers us from fear.

[22 : 41] To free us, the Son had to deliver us from the fear of death as one of us. Oh, this is my favorite part here.

Verse 15, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. The devil is a tyrant who rules his kingdom through fear.

Specifically, the fear of suffering and death are powerful motivators for those trapped in the kingdom of darkness. People will do almost anything to avoid suffering and certainly to avoid death.

Loyalties are broken, contracts are violated, friends destroyed in order to avoid suffering and especially death. The fear of death is the big club of the devil.

When I was in college, I had to take some electives as I got into my major and one of the ones I chose was a course on death and dying.

[23 : 44] My professor, who I think was a Christian woman, she was a big fan of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. A name, anybody know that name? A few of you know? Yeah. She was a Swiss-American psychiatrist who pioneered our understanding of grief and of dying.

She wrote a classic book on that subject called *On Death and Dying*. She talks about, you've probably heard this before, the five stages of grief, right? Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance.

Now, it's not always in order like that. Some people skip stages, but really pioneering good work, okay? It's the standard now for helping people deal with grief.

But here's the thing I thought about. When I look at all those stages, they take place because at the core of our being, we all fear death.

Without the fear of death, we don't need those. It's because we fear death that we deny. First of all, you're told you're dying. I don't believe it.

[24 : 56] Then there's anger about it. Then there's, not always in this order, but this is the stages. Bargaining. Well, maybe if I try, maybe if we, what if I do? Depression.

Which is really a sense of, there's nothing, kind of a hopelessness sometimes. And then finally, the final stage is acceptance. Here's the thing. Some people never get to acceptance before they die.

They die in those areas, other areas. I think a lot of people die in those other areas, actually. They never get to real acceptance. Some refuse to even talk about death.

Some people believe if we, it's like if we talk about it, it's going to happen to me. Some people will do anything to avoid death, like freezing your body while you live.

If you have an incurable death-dealing disease or illness of some kind, some people go into chronic, cryogenic freezing now. You have to have a lot of money, I'm sure. They do, they have their bodies frozen in the hopes that at some point in the future, they can be, when the cure is found for their disease, they can be thawed out and reanimated.

[26 : 10] There's all kinds of discussion about is that really even possible, but that's beyond my pay grade. Anything to avoid it.

We even make our, we even make our, you heard me say this before, we even make our graveyards beautiful. We're afraid of death, but we make the graveyards beautiful. What do we, what is that?

I suggest to you, it's denial. You don't want to deal with the reality of death and the horror of it and the ugliness of it.

What do you believe? You see, as Christians, we don't see death as a friend either. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 15, 25 and 26, that the last enemy to be destroyed by Christ that is coming is death.

Death is an enemy. We see it as an enemy too. But then Paul says something later in that chapter. He says that our last enemy has lost its sting.

[27 : 24] 1 Corinthians 15, 50. I tell you, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal must put on immortality. I'm dropping down. He says, Oh death, where is your victory?

This is the saints now. Oh death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what, that's our perspective on death. Listen, it's an enemy. It was not a part of the original creation. Remember that. Death is an interloper. It comes as the, as the judgment of God because of our rebellion against him.

[28 : 28] Death physically and spiritually comes because of sin. But hallelujah, I see another one. I see a son of man. I see a God man who's come and he has defeated death by, in our humanity, by rising from the dead to let us know that in my father's house there are many rooms for you.

I see, I see one who was made a little lower than the angels now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death. He tasted death for all who believe in him that we might no longer be enslaved to it.

We don't have to fear death. Christ rules his kingdom through love and in love he has promised that we will be with him.

He had to taste death to deliver us, y'all. Death no longer has the last word over us because we're now destined for the glory. Glory is in glory with Jesus is what we are destined for and I pray we long for.

The world speaks of death like this. At least this suffering is over. We believe that is true if that person knew Jesus.

[30 : 06] If that person allowed Jesus to be his source of hope and joy in this life and the life to come. If that person surrendered themselves, confessed their sins and repented and said and heard the words of Jesus follow me and they followed him we know that that is true.

But that is not I suggest to you that is not the driving force of our lack of of our no longer fearing death. Not our not that suffering is over.

That's important. Amen to that. But for us there's more. We long for Jesus.

We long for the Christ. We long for our Savior. Paul said to be absent from the body is to be free of suffering.

to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Much more than an end of suffering.

[31 : 08] We long to be with Jesus. We long to be like Jesus. Finally that is glory. Heaven is heaven because Jesus is there for us.

If Jesus was not there then that would not be heaven for us. Matter of fact we wouldn't be allowed in. But because the God man is there bearing our humanity sitting next to the Father in all glory and honor in all of our humanity and his deity always containing both he sits there.

We have a way in. We are accepted to God. We have one who has paid for our sins who has taken the worst that this world could offer and the devil triumphed for us.

You cannot leave this life for glory unless you pass through the dark portal of death. death. But there truly is light at the end of the tunnel and it's not a train.

There's light. There's light. one of my heroes David Martin Lloyd-Jones was dying. I've mentioned him before a Welsh preacher.

[32 : 37] He died in 81 probably I think the same month I got actually he got saved actually I figured it out. He was sitting in his study with his Bible open.

He had a stroke and he was in his study reading his Bible amen to that right? That's how you face death y'all. In the word of God.

And he's reading his daughter Beth Anne came in to see him. And she noticed he had lost speech because of the stroke and so she looked at what he was reading.

Here's what he was reading. So we do not lose heart. Though our inner self is wasting away our inner self is being renewed day by day. For these light momentary afflictions is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look not to the things that are seen but the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal. And she looked at him.

[33 : 42] She said she looked at him. He says is that your experience right now? He looked better. His light and momentary troubles in a stroke that robbed him of his speech.

That's the light of momentary trouble. We're achieving for him an eternal weight of glory. He saw the glory and he longed for it because the glory is Jesus.

To be with Jesus. There's nothing better than that. But there's another death. Two more deaths real quick and I'm going to finish this real fast.

I think we have to talk about death in another way that really affects us today. Social death. We fear social death.

I'm seeing this more and more. Whether social death online when people cancel you and say stuff about you and people are just broken to pieces through social death.

[34 : 58] You got canceled. We are broken to pieces. We fall apart. We become suicidal. When we are shunned or not respected or we think somehow that people look at us and think that we are weird or whatever, it kills us.

We are afraid of social death. Jesus himself entered social death. For you, he was maligned.

He was hated. He was lied upon. So much so that finally they got the crowd to kill him. He knows about social death. And he wants you to know, don't be afraid.

Don't fear social death. He's with you. Fear the Lord. Reverence him. Follow him even into social death. But lastly, in the other part of this death is not just physical judgment to come.

Why do we fear death as human beings? The great unknown, the ceasing. fear death. But I do wonder if we don't deep down in our hearts fear that something's out there and we're not in good standing.

[36 : 33] We fear judgment. The Bible calls the judgment of God the second death. If we believe in justice at all, it's because we are created in an image of God.

that's why human beings believe in justice. It wasn't our idea. He is the bar of divine ultimate justice and he will give all people what they have earned.

2 Corinthians 5.10, for we must all appear before the justice seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body whether good or evil. That is a terrifying thought.

Hebrews, right? Hebrews says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. That's the reality. Evil, injustice, and all unrighteousness will not be eradicated from this world until Jesus comes.

We as the people of God living out the kingdom of God, we fight against all of that. As the Lord's children who have been brought into the kingdom of light, we fight against evil and injustice and unrighteousness.

[37 : 44] We battle against it in ourselves and then in the communities around us and God will give us a measure of victory but not final victory and at times we will not even win on this side of eternity because you will not eradicate evil but Christ has won and his victory will be fully displayed when he comes again.

that's why we don't have to seek revenge. You've been hurt by someone, you've been hurt by the system, you've been hurt by people, whatever it is, don't seek revenge. Remember what Paul says, beloved, never avenge yourself but leave it to the wrath of God.

For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. That is the judgment. You don't have to get folk back. the fear of death and the judgment has led some to claim to be atheists and agnostics.

Not all, but quite a number. It isn't just science or lack of knowledge that people really fear. It's the fear of having to give an account to someone greater than themselves.

The four horsemen of atheism, you've heard of these guys, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, whatever, and I forget the other two guys' names, but they were the two cohorts. One is dead, now Hitch is gone, to his reality.

[39 : 14] Dawkins is still with us and the other three, I believe, but they came out, these people read their books like eating candy and these guys were so hard and they were attacking any kind of belief.

Religion is evil, religion is bad, Christianity is horrible, God committed cosmic child abuse, that kind of stuff. they long to be in control because if you're not in control, that's the great fear, right?

Not being in control, having to give an account to somebody else, somebody greater, that's what drives this down in this root. And when you're trapped in that kind of fear, you become a slave of the devil.

And some are dead while they live. And some are trying to give, are giving themselves to extreme living to fight off the dread of death.

We don't have that fear. We're set free. Well, I'm reminded of an old pastor from yester, yester, yesteryear.

[40 : 22] He said, all men must die, Thomas Boston, all men must die. But as men's lives are very different, so their account of death is also.

To an ungodly man, death is lost, the greatest loss, but to a believer, it is gain, the greatest gain. Paul said it better, Philippians 121, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

My friend Ligon Duncan, in his book, Fear Not, which I commend to you, tiny book, but neat book, about death. When believers die, they are immediately with Christ, whom they prize more than all things.

This is our most cherished blessing. For the believer, Christ is more precious than husband or wife, than parents or children, than riches, than fame, than power, than ambition, than influence, than success, than pleasure.

He is more valuable than anything. is that your Christmas? Has his Christmas love and mission overwhelmed you like that?

[41 : 24] Is he to you more precious than anything? More valuable than anything? Is he of such value to you that you would give up everything to have him?

He came for you. His mission was to die for you that you might live with and for him forever. Family, the transition from this life to the next may be scary.

Hello? I don't think I'm afraid of dying. I am not happy about the way I get there. I have a preference here, people.

Makes me a little nervous about the transition phase. but we must keep our eye on the destination so that we have courage and maybe even joy in the face of humanity's greatest fear, death.

What are you afraid of? What are you afraid of? Write that down somewhere and then go back to this passage and remind yourself that if Jesus conquered death, what have we to fear?

[42 : 50] Because what's the worst that can happen to us? We die and we gain. Merry Christmas.

Father, thank you for sending the Son that he might deliver us from the fear of death and from the power of the devil. Thank you that he became one of us like us so that he might share in our humanity but triumph in it as well.

May we walk in the victory that he has given us in Jesus' name. Amen.