

December 30, 2012
Christmas 1

"Another Year with Jesus' Our Brother"

HEBREWS 2:10-18

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." ¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human 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. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Relationships are important to you. You began life learning how to relate to your parents and others in your family. You learned to develop relationships with other kids in school. You learned how to get along with others in a dorm room or apartment when you went through college. An important part of your job is not just doing the work but learning how to work with other people. Your relationship to other members of this congregation is something very important to you as a member of the body of Christ. And then there is the life long effort to cultivate a good relationship in your marriage.

No relationship is more important to you than your relationship with God. You can make it through school and even get good grades without any friends. You can do your job at work without being a good friend with your boss. You can get along with other people without being connected through the social media of Facebook. But you cannot be loved by God in this life and for all eternity without having a close relationship with God. Such a close relationship with a perfect and holy God is entirely impossible to develop unless God develops that relationship for us.

That is why God gave us the gift of his Son as the banners before us so beautifully proclaim. He gave us the gift of his Son so we can have everlasting life. That means an everlasting relationship of love with God instead of eternal death in a place called hell. Jesus became your brother to live the perfect life you could never live and die the perfect death to spare you from the judgment to come. No one is closer to you than Jesus. Let's turn to these comforting words about Jesus being our brother found here in our text.

Jesus is not ashamed of us

I find it totally amazing that Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brother considering all the shameful things we have done wrong this past year. God the Father had an amazing plan from all eternity that involved using Jesus his Son to bring us out of shame into glory. "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." The reason Jesus is not ashamed to be your brother is found not in what you have done to develop a relationship with the God who made you. It is found in what God has done for you through Jesus.

We are told here "that it was fitting" for God to make the author of our salvation perfect through suffering. That word "fitting" reminds me of the many trips to the hardware store to find the right fitting to repair a plumbing problem. You cannot attach a hose for your wash machine without the right fittings. God has the right fitting to bring you to glory. He dumped your sin and the sin of the world on Jesus. "He became sin for us who knew no sin." Then he had Jesus suffer for that sin. When it was paid in full the Father showed this work was complete and perfect by raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus is the author or source of your salvation. He is the one who elevates you to the glory of being children of your heavenly Father.

If God's plan were to have me try to raise myself to the glorious position of being his child and having Jesus as my brother, how dismal my life would be. How sickened we were to hear how a homeless woman in LA was doused with rubbing alcohol and then lit on fire. We see so much evil in our world that sickens us. When we start scanning our life from this past year, we see evidence of evil thoughts and unkind words and selfishness even in our relationship with people who are closest to us. Take your ten worst thoughts of 2012. Record them on a cell phone in high definition video. Project them on a screen to a group of your family and friends or to your congregation. How could you ever survive such a shameful revelation?

Jesus never once had an unkind thought toward his parents. Our Gospel for today told us that Jesus grew in favor with God and men. His death on the cross cancels out and wipes clean all the evil that we have done in the past. Into the ledger account our Lord Jesus then gives his perfect life. If 2013 is the year judgment day comes and the books are opened, our God will see in our books the perfect life that Jesus lived for us. Do you see how important it is to have Jesus as your brother and to have him as the sole author of your salvation?

Because of all that he has done to rescue you and save you, Jesus is not ashamed to be your brother. "But 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. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." This is a quote from Psalm 22 where Jesus the Messiah speaks about his death on the cross and his resurrection 1000 years before it happens. Do you see how eager Jesus was to be your brother and then stand before other Christians and proclaim to them, "These are my brothers and sisters?" Look at the person sitting next to you this morning in worship. See how special they are. Jesus says to that person, "He is my brother. She is my sister." It even says that Jesus sings your praises. We gather for worship and sing the praises of our Savior and we also sing the praises of people who have become brothers and sisters to him and to each other through him.

Jesus is always there for you

Because Jesus is your brother, he will be there for you in the New Year whatever challenges and temptations might come your way. "Since the 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." Satan stands in the courtroom ready to project on the screen all the sins that condemn us. The Revelation says he accuses us day and night before God's throne. Jesus became your brother. He took on your flesh and blood and bones and skin and hair and heart and lungs that he might die a real physical death on the cross to destroy the devil's work. The projector is turned on to project your many sins of the past year in full color. Satan chortles with delight as he presents his case against you. Then he is horrified to see projected not your life of sin, but the perfect life Jesus lived for you. All of the ugly, mean and nasty things you did as a child were removed and in its place is that perfect life of Jesus, the young Jesus we saw standing in the temple and obeying his parents perfectly.

"For surely it's 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 sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." The angels do not need Jesus' help. They are already perfect. We are Abraham's descendants who believe as Abraham did that we are saved by a righteousness outside of ourselves that is found in Christ. We need help especially when it comes to fighting against temptation.

As you make your plans for 2013 do those plans include developing a better relationship with Satan? Hardly. No, we want to fight against temptation. That is why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Jesus your brother, the one who took on your flesh and made atonement for your sin, also knows what it is like to battle against temptation. It says, "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Jesus suffered when he was tempted. Think of how he allowed himself to be tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He knows the struggles you experienced this past year when you listened to the devil rather than listening to the voice of the Lord. "No body knows the troubles I've seen. No body knows but Jesus." We could paraphrase that song, "Nobody knows the temptations I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus."

We sing, "Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer."

"Daddy, can we get a puppy?" said the boy as they drove by the farmhouse with a sign that said, "Puppies for sale." I'll think about it said the father. The next day they went to the farmer and he opened the gate where the puppies were kept. They came running out and jumped all around the boy to play with him. One puppy was behind the others trying to jump up with a leg that was slightly twisted. The boy looked at all the puppies and then decided to take the one with the bad leg. The farmer smiled and asked why he wanted the puppy with the bad leg. The boy pulled up his pants leg and showed him the large scar where surgery corrected the bad leg with which he was born. "I think this puppy needs someone who understands him."

Jesus knows the temptations and challenges you faced this past year. He knows the temptations and challenges you will be facing in the year which lies before you. He is not ashamed to be your brother.

Your relationships to other people are important. I think I am safe in saying that many times you have prayed for strength to help you work with other people and get along with them. You have prayed for strength to help other Christians who need your help and encouragement. Of all your important relationships none is more important than your relationship to your God. How blessed we are to know that Jesus came to be our brother so we could live with him and our heavenly Father forever.

Here is what Jesus your brother prayed for you the night before he died. "Father, I want those you have given me, to be with me, where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." It sure is easy to wish each other a happy new year when you share the joy of knowing that Jesus is your brother. Amen.