

Text: Heb 2.17-18

In Hebrews, we've been working on the theme of the superiority of the Son. Chapter 1 begins with a glorious series of propositions concerning him. They present the Son as the chief spokesman of God, highest among all who have ever spoken for him, prophets and angels alike.

We then worked through a series of passages showing how the Son is superior to the angels in his current position at the right hand of God.

Therefore, we were told, pay close attention to him (Heb 2.1-4).

The balance of chapter 2 shows that when the Son became a man, his assumption of an inferior position did not make him less than angels, but more than them.

We will review the argument of the chapter shortly, but I want you to consider now the opening phrase of our text for today, so let's read most of the chapter and then focus on this one phrase.

Read Heb 2.5-18, text 17-18

Here is the phrase I want to call to your attention:

He had to be made like His brethren in all things

The text sums up the Incarnation. He was made like his brethren (focusing on believers here) *in all things*.

- Born as a human baby
- Raised in a human home
- Grew in human understanding
- Worked in human activity (presumably as a carpenter, and the daily work of life in the 1st century)
- Suffered human wants (weariness, hunger, thirst)
- Endured human death
- Raised to newness of life (something awaiting his brethren, it is 'not yet' for any of them)

All of that we know to be true. But think of the opening: "he had to be made..."

The word conveys the idea of obligation.

In verse 10, the Bible says:

it was **fitting** for Him... to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings

We could say, "it was **proper** for Him..." This speaks about the propriety of God perfecting the Son through the sufferings imposed on him.

Now, our text says, "he **had to** be made like his brethren"

"He was morally bound, stronger than the 'it became Him' of ver. 10. It means that, with reference to the object in view, there lay upon Him a moral obligation to become a man with men."¹

Proposition: The Incarnation was necessary to accomplish the priestly work that bridges the gap between fallen man and Holy God.

I. The work of the Son on earth required Incarnation (5-16)

A. The Son became a man to rule the world to come (5-9)

1. The Creation mandate called man to dominion
2. The Fall ended hope of dominion (but not instinct for dominion)
3. The Son recovered glory and honour through suffering, preparatory for dominion

B. The Son became a man to bring many sons to glory (10-13)

1. The Son suffered the penalty of the Fall
2. The result was many children whom God gave him

C. The Son became a man to defeat the devil (14-16)

1. The Son defeated the devil by dying, making the devil powerless
2. The Son gave freedom to men, giving them believers the aid they needed

¹ F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 53.

II. The work of the Son between earth and heaven requires the Incarnation (17b-18)

A. To open the door to heaven (17b)

1. The priest acts first in a God-ward direction: “in things pertaining to God”

a. Some commentators separate the terms

1) “merciful to us and faithful to God.”²

2) Little discussion of the “to God” part

b. A priest is a mediating figure

Gal 3.19-20 ¶ Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.²⁰ Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas God is *only* one.

1) Moses stood between God and man, mediating the law

¹ Tim 2.5 For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

2) Now Jesus stands between God and man, mediating grace

c. Towards God, Jesus satisfies the requirements of the Law

OT used a word about the sacrifices, often translated “soothing aroma” in our version; the smoke of the sacrifices pleased God. (“sweet savor” KJV)

“that which brings reconciliation, peace and relationship between two parties as a figurative extension of a pleasant odor (like incense) in the nostrils of a party”³

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Heb 2.17.

³ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

2. The priest acts secondly in a man-ward direction: opening access

- a. Here we see his merciful acts: “mercy” = “refraining from giving us what we deserve”

(“grace” = “giving us what we don’t deserve”)

- b. The way he does this is by propitiation

- 1) The term occurs in four verses in the NAU, KJV, and ESV

Rm 3.25, Heb 2.17, 1 Jn 2.2, and 1 Jn 4.10

- 2) NET Bible translates it an “atoning sacrifice” in two of these refs, and has it as “to make atonement” here

- 3) Atonement looks back to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

- a) Kippur means “covering”

- b) The Day of Atonement was the day where, every year, the nation

i) was cleansed of its pollution (sins covered) and

ii) was granted continuing access to the sacrificial system (access to God)

- c) The Day of Atonement enabled access for all sinners, faithful and unfaithful Israelites alike

- 4) In his mercy, Jesus opens the door to heaven, so that sinners may come in penitence and confession to God

B. To bring aid to his brethren as they pass through that door

1. The Lord’s likeness to us made his aid to us effective (18)

- a. His likeness is described, “tempted in that which he suffered”

- b. His likeness is emphatic, “He Himself”

- c. His likeness is not merely in his humanity, but in his life, his “lived experience”

“The power of sympathy lies not in the mere capacity for feeling, but in the lessons of experience. And again, sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the

strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain."⁴

2. The Lord's sympathy creates his ability

- a. "Come to the aid" is often used to mark military assistance; in OT refers to God delivering Israel
- b. Sympathy enables his aid when his people are sorely tempted

"Grudem offered a helpful analogy about a woman obstetrician who wrote a textbook on childbirth. Then she became a mother herself and could sympathize much more fully with other pregnant women."⁵

- c. As we are looking into the original recipients, remember their present temptation was to turn away from Christianity to the old religion
 - 1) They would leave the superior for the inferior
 - 2) They would not please God
 - 3) But our Lord Jesus, in sympathy with them, knows what it is to be tempted

And, in mercy, he has opened the door for grace

III. The Son had to become fully human (17a)

A. Back to the "oughtness" of the Incarnation

1. We already said he was morally bound to come to earth in the Incarnation
 - a. God promised redemption after the first sin

Gn 3.15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 59–60.

⁵ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 226.

- b. Redemption could come only through a perfect sacrifice administered by a perfect priest
 - 1) A perfect man
 - 2) An infinite man
 - c. Since God promised, he *must* send His Son
2. The Incarnation had to be “like his brethren in all things”
- a. He had to have a like nature
 - b. He had to have a like experience (sufferings, see v. 10; temptation, see v. 17)
 - “All things means in every way, specifically by experiencing human life and by suffering.”⁶
 - c. He had to have one thing we lack: victory
- B. The Incarnation makes Him the One Glorious Person on whom all praise is given
- 1. The angels do not occupy this high station
 - 2. Men can never achieve this high station
 - 3. Only one man achieves this status, standing between God and man, making salvation possible

Conclusion:

Proposition: The Incarnation was necessary to accomplish the priestly work that bridges the gap between fallen man and Holy God.

We’ve belabored this week after week as we consider the work of Jesus Christ.

I hope you do not think of our topic merely in terms of theology.

I hope you see it as your life!

If you don’t know Jesus as personal Saviour, you can have the life he offers, even today.

⁶ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Heb 2.17.