

Group Study Guide

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Why Christmas?

To Destroy our Enemy (Hebrews 2:14-18)

12.17.17

Main Point

Jesus became a man so He could represent us. His incarnation was necessary for our salvation. Christmas is a celebration of the humanity of Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf as the “firstborn among many brothers.”

Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What’s one thing that you can do well that not many other people can do?

What are some positives about our uniqueness as individuals?

What about the things we have in common? What are some things that are universally true about humans no matter where or who they are?

Here’s another thing that, according to Scripture, we have in common. We’re all sinners in need of a Savior (see Rom. 3:23). The world’s first two humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and became sinners (see Gen. 3:1-7). Every human being descends from this first couple; therefore all of us are born under the curse of sin. And here’s the awful truth about our sinful nature: We can’t save ourselves from sin even if we somehow wanted to or tried to. We must have a Savior—One who is like us, yet who is able to do for us what we can’t do. Jesus Christ is that Savior. The eternal Son of God took on human nature—real flesh and blood—so that He could save us from sin and death. The writer of Hebrews urged his readers to cling to their confession of Christ. He explained why it was necessary for the Son of God to become like us so that He could provide the salvation we need.

Observation

Ask a volunteer to read Hebrews 2:14-16.

Which phrases in this passage describe the experience of being human? How does Jesus’ experience as a human compare to our experience?

What characteristics of God are demonstrated through Christ taking on a human body?

Jesus became “flesh and blood” when He was born on earth. He was like us in every way except He was sinless. Jesus also died. Jesus was fully human and fully God simultaneously. Jesus became human to destroy the Devil, who has power over death.

Jesus came to help humans (“Abraham’s offspring”) rather than heavenly beings (“angels”).

Read Colossians 2:12-15 and 1 John 3:8. How do these verses help you understand the Hebrews writer’s statement that Jesus died to defeat the Devil?

Since Jesus destroyed the Devil, why do we still see evidence of the Devil in today’s world?

Satan has “the power of death” because he introduced sin. Death is the result of sin. The Devil has power, but Jesus is more powerful. Jesus can provide eternal life through His own death. Satan can no longer frighten us through the fear of death. Even though The Devil is still present (1 Pet. 5:8), but someday his power will come to an end (Rev. 20:10).

What other passages come to mind that point to Christ defeating the Devil? How do those verses add to your understanding of who Christ is?

What do you fear most about death? How can an awareness of Jesus’ power help you overcome that fear?

Many people fear death—either their own or that of their loved ones. They fear the process of death or the grief that comes from being separated.

How can you use this verse to explain how trusting Christ removes the fear of death and replaces it with hope and assurance?

How might these verses help a believer share Christ with someone who fears death?

As believers, we can replace the power and fear of death with the promise of eternal life. Death will still occur, but we need not be afraid of it. We have the assurance that death cannot separate believers from God’s love. Jesus will one day destroy death completely. John 3:16; John 14:1-3; John 11:25-26; and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 point to the reality of eternal life.

Ask a volunteer to read Hebrews 2:17-18.

What is the significance of Jesus’ being a “merciful and faithful high priest”? What does being a priest have to do with helping us?

Hebrews 2:17 refers not just to a priest—but to a “high priest.” Hebrews is the only book in the New Testament that uses the term “high priest” for Jesus. In fact, Hebrews uses the term 17 times. The high priest was a person who was completely committed to God, was ritually pure, and was always ready to do God’s will. The readers of Hebrews came from an Old Testament system, where priests made sacrifices to God on their behalf of the people’s sins.

Because of our sin, we are separated from God. Jesus took on a human body to break the power of sin. He became our substitute, a sacrifice to God on our behalf. He experienced the suffering and death that we as sinners deserve.

Have you ever heard the word “Propitiation”? Based on these verses, what does it mean?

Propitiation means to make amends in a relationship where someone has become offended or angry. In this case, it speaks of how we have made God angry by our sin (Rom. 1:18). God’s anger stems from His love for us. He wants us to be in a right relationship with Him, and our sins separate us from Him. It was not that Jesus’ death satisfied the angry demands of a peevish God. God Himself provided the payment for our sins because of His ever-abiding love.

Application

Take some time to identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to our lives.

When the Bible clearly says that Christ took on human nature to help us, why do some people insist on doing things on their own?

Why is it important for you personally to know that Jesus knows and has experienced everything that you experience?

Is there anything in your life you are trusting more Jesus to do in you and for you? What are some practical ways you can make sure you are trusting in Jesus?

How does God help those who suffer through temptation? Take some time to thank God for the way He helps you face the temptations you face.

Prayer

Thank God as you close your group that Jesus has destroyed the power of the devil and removed the fear of death. Ask Him to help you live confidently, embracing His power to break the hold of sin.

Commentary

2:14. The writer of Hebrews here tells us something extremely important, although it might seem obvious at first. God created human beings with flesh and blood. Genesis 1:26 tells us that we were made in God’s image and were given the stewardship of all the earth. Genesis 2:7 then zooms in for a closer look at our creation. The Lord God, like a potter, scooped up a handful of earth and fashioned the man’s body. Then God breathed into that body the breath of life, and the first man became a living, breathing, flesh-and-blood human being. Later, God took one of the man’s ribs and fashioned it into the first woman (see Gen. 2:21-22). Thus the first man (Adam) and the first woman (Eve) were made in God’s image, yet were designed perfectly to live in the natural world God created. All of us as descendants of the first two human beings have

in common this basic feature of life. We are made in God's image yet of human flesh and blood.

Genesis 3 reveals that another being was present in the garden where the first two humans lived. That was the Devil—an evil being whose desire was to destroy all that God had made good. The Devil twisted God's Word into a lie and led the first couple to distrust and disobey their Heavenly Father (see Gen. 3:1-6). Sin entered the human experience, resulting in the curse of sin and death falling on the entire creation (see Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 7:11).

Keeping these two realities in mind—(1) all of us as human beings share the common feature of human nature, and (2) all of us are under the curse of sin and death resulting from the Devil's evil work in the garden—we are able to understand better why the Son of God took on human flesh and blood. To accomplish all that the Father willed for Him to do, the Son had to take on human nature. In order to represent humanity before God, He had to come as a Man—the second, final, and heavenly Adam (see 1 Cor. 15:22,45-49).

This has been the focus of Hebrews 2 since verse 5. In order to be our perfect High Priest, Jesus had to suffer what human beings suffer. When He took on human nature, He willingly assumed our weaknesses. He experienced hunger, thirst, tiredness, sorrow, and temptation (though He never sinned). He submitted even to physical death. He did this so that we could be saved and become like Him, holy and blameless. This is one of the verses in the Bible that teaches the wonderful doctrine of the incarnation, the Son of God's taking on of human nature.

This verse, 2:14, and the following verse highlight two specific reasons for the incarnation. First, God's Son came in the flesh to destroy the Devil. While God is the Sovereign Ruler over life and death, the Devil's evil work in the garden led to Adam and Eve's sin and the curse of death falling on all humanity. Jesus said that the Devil was a murderer and a liar from the beginning (see John 8:44). The Devil, or Satan, delights in death. Jesus willingly submitted to physical death, not because He deserved death but rather to overcome it and destroy the Devil who wielded death like a weapon. For those of us who trust in Jesus as Savior, death has been destroyed and we have no reason to fear it.

2:15. The second reason for the incarnation was to provide a way for sinful human beings to experience true freedom—freedom from the power and penalty of sin. Let this truth sink deeply into your heart! Through faith in Christ, believers are set free from that which kept us in bondage all our lives. Many live in fear of death, be they people who worship ancestral spirits or young professionals in a metropolitan business district. Death is a reality that never fully leaves our thoughts. We ponder questions such as “What comes after death?” and “Is this life all there is?” As humans, we have always asked these kinds of questions. Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God has put

eternity in our hearts. Deep inside, we all know that death is coming and that this life is not all there is.

Here is the good news for those who will trust in Jesus: The Son of God came and took on human nature to deliver us from the curse of sin and death. We were slaves to our fear of death until Jesus rescued us. He set us free by conquering what held us in bondage. We no longer fear death because we know Jesus overcame it by His resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15:55-57).

2:16. Before stating a key conclusion to his argument in Hebrews 2:17, the writer once more made clear that angels neither were qualified to purchase salvation for sinners nor were they the reason for Christ's coming to earth. Christ did not take on the nature of angels. He took on human nature. This fact underscores that Jesus' destroying the Devil and breaking the curse of sin and death were not accomplished to rescue angels but to rescue fallen humanity. The term Abraham's offspring can refer specifically to the Israelites, the physical descendants of Abraham. In this context, however, the term probably is broader in meaning. It can refer to all peoples of the earth in that God promised to bless all the nations through Abraham (see Gen. 12:3). The apostle Paul spoke of this broader meaning in Romans 4:13-25, where he declared that God's promise of salvation by grace was guaranteed not only to Abraham's descendants through the law (Israelites) but also to those who are of Abraham's faith (see Rom. 4:16-17).

By His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, Jesus has removed forever the sting of death for believers. By His death, the Author of life rendered powerless the prince of death, the Devil. God the Son took on real flesh and blood to rescue those with whom He shared human nature. This rescue is given to every human being who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (see Rom. 6:23).

2:17. The term therefore indicates a conclusion based on what has already been stated. What the writer of Hebrews has stated clearly is that God's Son took on human nature so that He could rescue sinful human beings from their slavery to sin and death. This ministry of rescuing people from sin and reconciling them to their Creator was foreshadowed in the Old Testament in the work of the Israelite high priest. Jewish-Christian readers of Hebrews in the first century would have had immediate appreciation for the high priest's service to God and to God's people. What they (and we today) needed to understand better was Jesus' fulfillment of this ministry as the Great High Priest.

Simply stated, in Old Testament worship a priest was a go-between. He represented the people before God by offering sacrifices, and he represented God before the people in teaching them God's Word. In Israel's case, priests were appointed only from the tribe of Levi (see Deut. 18:1-5). This is why the Old Testament priesthood was sometimes called "the Levitical priesthood." Only members of the tribe of Levi were set apart to perform the priestly duties before God on behalf of the people.

Moreover, once a year the high priest—and he alone—went before the Lord on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of all the people (see Lev. 16). The sacrifice included the high priest's first making an offering for himself and his household (Lev. 16:6,11-14). Afterward he offered the sacrifice for the people's sins, which involved two goats. One goat would be slaughtered as a sin offering, and its blood would be taken into the holy of holies to atone for the sin of the people (Lev. 16:15). Only the high priest could make this sacrifice; no other priest was allowed to go into the holy of holies. Next the high priest would lay his hands on the head of the second goat and confess the people's sins. This goat then was sent away into the wilderness as a "scapegoat" (symbolizing the removal of sins from the people of Israel).

This crucial ministry of the Israelite high priest was fulfilled in an ultimate way by Jesus Christ. An upcoming study will focus even closer on this matter. For now, it is important to see that the writer of Hebrews described Jesus' ministry as our Great High Priest as the reason God's Son had to take on human nature—that is, to become like us in every way.

This is the logical conclusion of Hebrews 2:17. We would have no qualified (sinless) High Priest and Advocate before God if Jesus had not been made like us in all things. We would have no acceptable sacrifice for our sins, and we would still be enslaved to the curse of sin and death. This death is not just the first death (physical death) but also the reality of the second, eternal death that comes to those who continue to reject Jesus as Savior and Lord. Eternal death is the opposite of eternal life. Both are eternal. Eternal life gives us a sure hope and great confidence. Eternal death gives a fear that never subsides.

2:18. Verse 18 brings up a very important point. Jesus Christ knew the full weight of temptation. In fact, Jesus knows temptation more than we can ever know it, because He knows its full strength. Too often we give way to temptation when we are tired or sick or when we run out of patience. We say sinful and ungodly things. We do selfish things. We lust after money, sexual gratification, fame, or power. We're tempted, and at times give way to it. We collapse, spiritually speaking, under the weight of the temptation to sin. Jesus, however, was tempted in every way just as we are. Therefore, He is aware of the full weight of temptation on His followers.

Jesus also knows and provides to believers the way of escape from temptation (see 1 Cor. 10:13). Therefore, we can turn to Him and find mercy and strength to resist temptation. He promises that when we come to Him, we will find mercy and grace to help in our time of need, because He sympathizes with our weaknesses, yet without sin (see Heb. 4:15-16).