

Adoption

What's in a Name?

By **Dr. Derek Thomas**

Hebrews 2:10

Turn with me now, if you would, to the book of Hebrews and the second chapter. We have been considering together the doctrine of adoption, and we've looked at some general aspects of that marvelous truth as we found it in some passages, in particular, in Galatians and Ephesians. Last week we drew particular attention to the truth that in our adoption we are brought, of course, as sons and children of God into a relationship with God as our Father in heaven. Next week I want us to think in terms of what adoption might mean in terms of a relationship that we have with the Holy Spirit. But tonight I want us to focus on what adoption means in terms of bringing us into a relationship with Jesus Christ as our elder brother. And the passage that particularly speaks to this issue is the one that's before us tonight in Hebrews chapter 2. I'm going to read, first of all, from verse 5 and, yes, down to the end of the chapter. So before we read the Scripture together, let's ask God the Holy Spirit to illuminate and make clear to us the meaning of these words of God. Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we bow again in the majesty and glory of your presence. We are cognizant, once again, that every jot and tittle of Scripture is given by inspiration, the out-breathing of God, and is profitable for doctrine and for reproof and for correction and for instruction in the way of righteousness, that the man of God might be made perfect in every good work. And we pray, Lord, for the blessing now of Your Spirit as we read Your word. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Hear now the word of God:

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, "What is man, that Thou rememberest Him? Or the Son of Man, that Thou are concerned about Him?" Thou hast made Him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honor, and hath appointed Him over the works of Thy hands; Thou has put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not subject to Him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him. But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and

honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, and bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise." And again, "I will put my trust in Him." And again, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me." Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Now, we've been looking together at the doctrine of adoption. This high and glorious truth, and a truth it has to be, that has at least in some ways been a little bit neglected by theologians down through the centuries. And we've been considering together the way that God, through regeneration on His part and faith on ours, brings us into a relationship with Himself in which He is our Father and we are His children, adopted children.

And tonight I want us to think, not so much of our relationship with God as our Father, but our relationship with God the Son. Because in the trajectory of this doctrine of our adoption into the family of God, there is the corresponding truth that emerges: that not only are we brought into a relationship with God as our Father, but we are also brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ, whereby He calls us His "brothers." And He is our elder brother, "elder brother" because, at least in one sense, He was a Son before we were ever sons.

Now I doubt that we think of Jesus that way often. We think of Him as a King to rule over us. We think of Him as a Prophet to teach us. We think of Him as a Priest to forgive us our sins. But Scripture is at pains to tell us that He is our brother, our elder brother made like us in everyway, except for sin. Now there are subtleties here that could get us into some serious trouble if we're not careful. So let's look at this particular passage, Hebrews chapter 2.

I want to focus in particular on those areas and those distinctives that particularly reflect for us this idea that Jesus is our elder brother. I want to do that by seeing two principle things in this passage that we've read tonight: First of all, that Jesus

becomes a man and, in particular, our brother; and secondly, the reason why He becomes a man and our elder brother.

I. Jesus becomes a man.

In the first place, Jesus becomes a man. There's a background here, of course; it needn't concern us unduly just now. It's a fairly complex argument that Jesus is greater than angels and greater than even an archangel. Perhaps the writer is writing into a context where some of that was in measure of doubt, and the writer of Hebrews has been meditating, just like you and I meditate on Scripture. I don't know what verse of Scripture you've been meditating upon today; I trust that you have been. But the writer of Hebrews has obviously been meditating on that glorious 8th Psalm. Now I can't even think of the 8th Psalm without hearing Dr. Lloyd-Jones in my head somewhere: a sermon that I heard almost thirty years ago on the 8th Psalm, and it still resonates. I can still hear his voice, "What is man that Thou are mindful of him or the son of man that thou visitest him?" The writer of Hebrews has been meditating on the eighth Psalm. And as he meditates on this Psalm, he begins to think of another Psalm, the 22nd Psalm, the Psalm that Jesus quotes upon the cross, "My God My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But it's not that part of the Psalm that he's meditating on. It's the end of the Psalm and where the Psalm begins to say that "God is declaring His name to His brothers," and He begins to speak of one who is obviously Jesus Christ, but He's singing the praises of God with his people, along with His people. "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise."

You know, John Calvin and his marvelous commentary on Hebrews, says about this particular quotation of this Psalm here, that the chief choir conductor on Sunday morning when we're singing the praises of God is actually Jesus Christ. And a more glorious truth which I remember reading somewhere in Clowney, that every time you sing the praises of God in the corporate gathering of God's people, Jesus is singing over your shoulder. He's singing the praises of God in the midst of the congregation. He's meditating then on Psalm 8, and he's meditating on Psalm 22, and then he begins to meditate on some verses in Isaiah chapter 8. And what this exercise in spiritual meditation has done is to lead him to the glorious realization and the profundity of the realization that this Jesus whom we worship has actually become a man, He's actually for a short time been found in a condition that is lower than the angels. Look at how he puts it in verse 14: "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity." He says in verse 17 "For this reason He was made like His brothers in every way."

Now it is important for us to see the trajectory by which he comes to say this. You've actually got to go back to the very opening chapter, and you've actually got to go back to the very opening verses of the chapter, because there the writer

of Hebrews has said the most astonishing thing about Jesus Christ: that He's the radiance of the glory of God. That He shines forth the glory of God, and He is the exact imprint of His nature. He is the radiance, or the effulgence, of the glory of God and the express image, like a photocopy, the express image of His nature. And you see where he's gone. He's gone from saying that Jesus is the divine Lord, that Jesus is none other but God, the only God there is, that Jesus is in possession of all of the attributes and characteristics and distinguishing features of deity, to saying that at the same time, for a short time, He is found a little lower than the angels, and He's found in fashion as a man and in the form of a servant, the One who made all things, the One who spoke everything into being. Look at verse 3 of chapter 1 again: "He upholds the universe by the word of His power."

You've been looking at Mars? You better do it quick because it's going to go away, and if you're going to see that orange glow in the sky, you realize that it's that hand of Jesus Christ that holds that in the universe. And now in chapter 2 he's saying, "This same Jesus, for a little while, is made lower than the angels and is made like His brothers in every way. He's made flesh and blood, not a ghost, not an apparition; someone that could be hungry and who ate fish, of all things, by the Sea of Galilee; like you and I had catfish, at least many of you did, this evening. And Jesus did that. Well, it wasn't catfish, I'm sure, but it was some kind of fish. And thirsty too--that from the lips of the one who holds the universe together come the words, "I thirst." Who could fall asleep from sheer exhaustion in the back of a boat and was found in a condition whereby He did not know everything--that as to His human nature, He did not know the date of His second coming. Now there are people in this world who think they know the date, but Jesus didn't know it. "In every way He had to be made like His brothers in every respect," in every respect. So that in chapter 4 in verse 15, he's going to make the application that He was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin. This Jesus, this glorious, magnificent, splendid Son of God from all eternity, becomes a man, flesh and blood, with a reasonable soul.

II. Why Jesus became a man.

And having told us that Jesus became a man. he goes on now, in the second place, to tell us *why* He became a man and *why*, in particular, He becomes our brother, our elder brother. And this is a multiplex argument now because he's going to draw all kinds of conclusions about why it is that Jesus became a man. And he'll tell us, he'll tell us first of all, of course, that He became a man in order that He might redeem us, in order that He might provide atonement and propitiation for our sins. It is because of our sins (verse 17). "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." That's why He has to become a man.

Now couldn't God from eternity have snapped His fingers and just said, "You're

saved”? Couldn't He have done that? Actually, it might surprise you how many theologians have asked that question and just how differently they have answered that question, and some of them would surprise you indeed. And it seems to me that if there had at all been a possibility of doing that, I cannot but imagine that God would have done that. But there is some kind of absolute necessity for the incarnation of Jesus Christ for the coming of Jesus into the world. He has to become like us if He's to represent us.

And the wonderful book that goes all the way back to the eleventh century by Anselm of Canterbury called *Cur Deus Homo, Why did God become man?* That's the question: Why did God, why did the Son of God, why did the Lord of Glory, why did the second person of the Trinity assume human flesh? Why? There's a character in Anselm's book called Bozo. He's a little dimwitted, you understand, and he can't understand why it is that the Son of God has to become incarnate. And to this person these words I said, “*Nondum considerasti quantum ponderis sit peccatum*” or “you have not yet considered the weightiness, the gravity of sin.” It's because of sin that Jesus has to become incarnate, so that He might take our position and provide for us on our behalf as our sin bearer and substitute atonement for our sins. It is for sin that He comes and becomes our brother. And not just for sin but for death. Look at what he says in verses 14 and 15: Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. It's because of death.

And in particular, He becomes our brother to deal with the issue of the fear of death. Stirling Moss--I don't know whether you know Stirling Moss; a Formula One racing car driver of another generation, my generation, back in the 70s: He would drive Formula One racing cars at speeds of up to 250 miles an hour. At the peak of his career, he said, “I'm afraid of death. I know it means going to meet one's Maker, and one shouldn't be afraid of that, but I am,” he said.

How extraordinary, then, that the Apostle Paul could say, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain”! And Jesus becomes a man; He becomes one like us in every way, tasting and experiencing the very ravages of death itself. He who is eternal life experiences the ravages of death--that His heart stops beating, that blood ceases to flow through His veins, that brain wave activity ceases, and He is dead. He experiences that for us to deliver us from the fear of death, so that you and I who love Jesus Christ can experience what we've heard others say in moments of grief and loss, “With Jesus at my side, I am not afraid. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside still waters; He restoreth my soul. Yea, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

But He becomes a man not just to deal with death, but “to deal with him,” the writer says, “who has the power of death,” namely Satan. He comes to destroy him, that is, to make his threats empty. And He conquers over all of Satan's strongholds and powers and pretended powers at that. And He puts him on a chain. You know that's where Satan is tonight? Our elder brother has put him on a chain. I remember when I was, I guess, but I wouldn't have called myself that. I was 16 or 17. My father for some insane reason had decided to become one of these census takers, and you were paid so much money for visiting umpteen houses, and we lived out in the country. Now it was miles and miles of traveling and asking people to fill out forms that they didn't want to fill out about who they were and their past and their marriage and their children and all kinds of questions every ten years that the government did. And I remember, I remember vividly, I've only done this once, but I remember vividly going to a house and there was a dog, a fierce dog, but he was on a chain. And having examined the chain closely, going up to him and saying, “woof,” and knowing that I was okay. And Satan has been dealt the deathblow by Jesus' propitiatory work on our behalf upon the cross and has dealt with that thing that he blackmails us with, namely the fear of death.

Ever read any of Somerset Maugham's novels? Maybe not; he's not my favorite writer. Somerset Maugham wrote once that “he longed for death” in one of his novels. “I'm drunk with the thought of it. It seems to me to offer the final, absolute freedom,” he says, “I am content that with my last breath, I will dissolve into nothingness.” But how did he die? This man of such brave words when it comes to death, how exactly did he die? Well, his nephew, Robin, wrote about it, and it was published in *The Times* newspaper.

“The following afternoon, I found Uncle Willie reclining on a sofa, peering through his spectacles at a Bible, which had very large print. He looked horribly wizened, and his face was grim. “I've been reading the Bible you gave me. . . and I've come across the quotation: 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' I must tell you, my dear Robin, that the text used to hang opposite my bed when I was a child.... Of course, it's all a lot of bunk. But the thought is quite interesting all the same.”

That evening, in the drawing room after dinner, Uncle Willie flung himself down onto the sofa. “O, Robin, I'm so tired....” He gave a gulp and buried his head in his hands. “I've been a failure the whole way through my life,” he said. “I've made mistake after mistake. I've made a hash of everything.” I tried to comfort him. “You're the most famous writer alive. Surely that means something. ” “I wish I'd never written a single word,” he answered. “It's brought me nothing but misery. Everyone who's got to know me well has ended up hating me. My whole life has been a failure.... And now it's too late to change. It's too late....”

Uncle Willie looked up, and his grip tightened on my hands. He was staring toward the floor. His face was contorted with fear, and he was trembling violently.

Willie's face was ashen as he stared in horror ahead of him. Suddenly, he began to shriek. "Go away" he cried. "I'm not ready... I'm not dead yet... I'm not dead yet, I tell you!" His high-pitched, terror-struck voice seemed to echo from wall to wall. I looked round, but the room was empty as before."

I tell you, our elder brother has come to lead us by the hand and say to us, "When death comes, everything's okay; everything's fine. Come and meet My Father in heaven." He does our fighting for us. When I was in school, in high school, in Lampeter in West Wales, I don't know, I was thirteen or fourteen. And I got into an altercation with another schoolboy who was bigger than I was. They were always bigger than I was at fourteen. And I was never, and still am not, I suppose, one for resolving issues with my fists, never was. But I remember well in the middle of this altercation my older brother, who's four years older than I am, and when you're fourteen, it might as well be forty, and he comes around the corner, and I remember saying to this fellow who was about to plant one on my cheek somewhere, "Meet my elder brother," and he disappeared. We laughed about it for weeks and maybe months, and we still, every time I go home, will still remember that little incident when he came around the corner and he was eighteen: "Meet my elder brother." And you know, my friend, if the devil is having a go at you tonight...and maybe you've come to this prayer meeting today from having battled with the evil one all day, because there is such thing as an evil day. There are days when the devil has us in his sights, and maybe today is that day. Tell him tonight before you go to bed, "Come and meet my elder brother. I want to introduce Him to you. I want to introduce the One who made the world. I want to introduce the One who holds it in the palms of His hands. I want to introduce you to the One who has been with God from all eternity and who is God. Meet my elder brother."

But there's one more thing. As the writer of Hebrews turns this thought about Jesus becoming like us, like his brothers in every way, there's one particular issue that the writer of Hebrews wants us to see and wants us to appreciate. He says in verse 17, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest." And then in chapter 4, at the end of chapter 4, he talks about Jesus "being able," in verse 15, "to sympathize with our weaknesses," to sympathize with our weaknesses. He's able to help us "because," the writer of Hebrews is saying, "He's been right where you are."

Maybe you're 16 or 17 and you're saying to yourselves, you sit in the back there, "Nobody understands me, certainly not my parents." And I'm saying to you, "I want you to meet my elder brother because He's been 16. He knows exactly what it is to be 16. He knows what it is when your body is doing certain things that your mind cannot even begin to comprehend. He's been there. He knows what it is to be tempted. He knows what it is to be assaulted by the Evil One. He knows what it is when friends let you down. He knows what it is to have members

of your family who disappoint you. He knows what it is to experience excruciating physical pain. And I want you to meet my elder brother who is able to sympathize, who is able to put an arm around you and reassure you that nothing will separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord. He wants to make you holy, my friend. And as He has hinted in at least two places in this chapter, He himself was sanctified through suffering. Don't be surprised as He calls you to walk through this pilgrimage. Don't be surprised if He asks you too to bear a cross, but you don't bear it alone. You bear it...and actually, you don't bear it at all because actually you bear it in union with your elder brother who, in a sense, has borne it all for you. Is there a more glorious truth than the assurance and certainty that we have One who has been tempted in every point, like as we are, yet without sin?

Amen.

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