

## Our Bethlehem Brother Is Our Heavenly High Priest

A sermon based on Hebrews 2:10-18

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” If you read through Matthew’s gospel, you’d see that was a question Jesus asked when he was preaching one day, and Mary and his siblings were outside, wanting to see Jesus.

“Who is your brother...or sister?” If you were asked that, how would you respond? That little annoying punk sitting next to you? Or, maybe they’re a few cities or states away, but they’ll always be little and annoying to you. You’d obviously think of a sibling, wouldn’t you?

Now, ask that same question of a football player, or a basketball player, probably an athlete in any team sport, and the answer would probably be different. “My brothers are my teammates.” Or, in the military, the same sentiment would likely be shared, “My fellow soldiers are my brothers.”

They might not share bloodlines, but there is a special comradery forged when undergoing some great ordeal, like a grueling season or some severe training or an intense battle. Those people were with you, they shared some tough experiences with you, they had your back, you were all working towards the same objective, and often the results are a bond that is as strong, if not even stronger, than that you share with blood.

We have one who has suffered along with us. He’s been with us in our tough times. He always has our back. He might not be part of your earthly family, but he is your Bethlehem Brother. He’s Your Heavenly High Priest!

Now, I don’t know about you, but doesn’t it seem a little too sudden to be moving on from Jesus’ birth, especially since it was just a couple of days ago? I mean, take a look at our gospel, and Jesus is already a young boy, twelve, on the threshold of becoming a teenager. And then our verses for our sermon today, take us even further down the road, to Jesus hitting his stride in his earthly ministry, getting down to the real purpose of his being here.

Now, besides a couple of weeks from now, where we’ll take a step back at Epiphany and look at the Magi visiting, likely when Jesus was less than two years old, that’s pretty much all the time we spend with infant Jesus. You disappointed? But, then again, his birth wasn’t the reason Jesus came now, was it?

This baby from Bethlehem, he didn’t come just to be born. No, he’s here to be our brother. Obviously, this isn’t in the sense of him being a blood relative, but instead, this is the comradery, a relationship forged through endurance, hardship, and survival...for Jesus, that is. Isn’t that what you take from these verses? Phrases like, **“it is fitting that God...should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering,”** and, **“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family,”** **“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...and free those who all their lives were held in slavery,”** **“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he...might**

**make atonement for the sins of the people,” and finally, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”**

Sounds like quite the brag sheet for Jesus, doesn't it? If any of you grew up in a family with multiple children, you might know what I'm talking about. Sometimes, there's that one child parents especially like to brag about, "Oh, did you hear what David did at school this week? Did you see the great play David made for his football team at their last game? Did you know David got the lead in the school play, he's on the honor roll again this semester, and he just got a raise at work for doing such a great job? David this, David that..." (Not that I have any pent up resentment from my childhood!).

That's Jesus in God's family. The writer to the Hebrews especially likes to point that out, as we can see here. You know, one of the main themes in the book of Hebrews even deals with Jesus' superiority, how he's superior to the angels, greater than Moses, he is the great High Priest.

And while you'd maybe expect there to be at least a hint of jealousy on our part, that it seems to be so much about Jesus, I don't believe any of us have that problem at all. The fact Jesus is the one getting all the praise...we're ok with that!

Especially when we look at our inferiority. Imagine you had to fill out a brag sheet. What would yours look like? "Relies on God...only when it's convenient or when I'm really in need (like when the car unexpectedly breaks down – that's a huge expense – or when the bill of health does not come back from the doctor clean like I was hoping it would). God kind of takes a back seat when things are going great."

Maybe "Practices patience...but it doesn't usually last too long. I'm quick to get angry at people who continually disappoint me, and I consistently put a negative spin on their words and actions rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt. I tend to withhold forgiveness from those whom I don't think are deserving of it."

How about "Suffers gladly...at least from what others can see, while on the inside I'm hurting and am livid with God that he's allowed this to happen to me...or in private, I complain about my trials, as if I'm the only one who has to deal with them, instead of seeing God's hand in it all."

I'm sure every one of our brag sheets (or more like, nothing to brag about sheets) look slightly different but they all share the same trait in common...sin. Born in sin, lives mired in sin, every choice and every action covered in sin.

The writer to the Hebrews is right. We are those who **“all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** We don't belong to be in God's family. We don't deserve to be his children. We're slaves to sin. We're slaves to Satan. We should only have a fear of death, or as Hebrews later describes, a **“fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”**

And again, that's why we are more than ok with Jesus getting all the credit and praise and accolades. Not only because he's superior, but because he's our Bethlehem brother. He's our heavenly high priest. He's our hero.

A number of years ago (and I believe I actually used this in a sermon a while back) a young man named Ross McGinnis, a regular soldier in the army, while on patrol in Iraq, made a sacrifice that was anything but regular. Just a couple of weeks ago, I saw something a friend and fellow soldier, Brennan Beck, had posted on Facebook in tribute to Ross. He wrote,

*"We were both 19 then. Ross was the youngest man in our battalion. He was a goofy kid with a great sense of humor. He was so skinny you could almost count his ribs under his shirt. He hated PT as much as anyone. Not your typical "American Sniper" type hero.*

*But despite his non-heroic appearance, I'll wager you won't find a more heroic person.*

*Nine years ago today, he sacrificed himself by lying on top of a hand grenade thrown into his vehicle, absorbing the blast and saving the other four soldiers inside his Humvee. Ross was killed instantly and was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award.*

*For years, this day brought me grief, but now I take something else away from it: Love. Ross loved his country so much that he put aside personal liberties to join the Army during wartime at 18 years old. Ross loved his job so much that he did it without complaint every day through the worst of conditions. Ross loved his brothers so much that he literally died for them.*

*I still grieve his death and think about him daily (his picture is hanging on my office wall to remind me of his selfless sacrifice every day). But my love for him is greater than my grief. I appreciate what he did more every day. His single act of selflessness not only saved those four men, also my Brothers, but many of those men have since had children, who will one day have children of their own. It's impossible to predict just how many lives Ross's sacrifice will ultimately impact--how many lives he saved."*

A rather insignificant man making a selfless sacrifice for his brothers (not blood-related), saving countless lives, even though it meant giving up his. An act motivated by love. A mere reflection of another insignificant man, even more loving, saving even more lives through one selfless sacrifice, giving up his life to save those of his brothers and sisters (again, not blood-related). You know who he is.

Take a look. Born in Bethlehem (small among the clans of Judah), a carpenter for a father from Nazareth (what good can come from Nazareth, they asked, right?). His job was a teacher. Arrested, convicted, crucified in a most shameful way on the cross.

Jesus became one of us so we could become one of his. Our verses say, **"He had to be made like his brothers in every way."** He had to. It was God's will. There was no other way.

In order to save us inferior sinners, Jesus had to become like us, share in our humanity, and he did. At Bethlehem, Jesus became our brother when he was born a human, just like us. That means he had emotions just like we do. He felt pain just like we do. He was tempted to sin, just like we are. But he didn't give in, like we do.

You see, he wasn't just our Bethlehem brother. He was God's faithful priest as well, sent down from heaven to earth, there to selflessly serve his Father's will. And God's will was a perfect life without sin. And God's will was for him to suffer pain and death, the selfless sacrifice to **"make atonement for the sins of the people."** For people, again, not blood relatives in the physical sense. And yet we are blood relatives, because when we were strangers, enemies of God, Jesus shed his blood on the cross to make us his own. His motivation? "God so loved the world..."

And we don't grieve his death but rejoice because he's alive. Jesus rose. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus perfected, or completed, our salvation. Our heavenly high priest, truly is superior to us. He truly is our hero.

So today, especially, we remember he's our Bethlehem brother as well. Sometimes we think our lives are tough, maybe even unfair. That's one of the downsides of Christmas. A couple days after, and it's back to real life and all its troubles and struggles.

Our Brother understands what you went through. He shared in our humanity. He was there. He knows. And he's conquered. And he sets our sights beyond this world of sin, beyond this life of sin and sorrow. His Word reminds us that after this, Jesus is "**bringing many sons and daughters to glory,**" to heavenly glory.

Maybe it is a good thing, then, that we moved on so quickly from Christmas. He's here. The time to look in the manger has passed. The cross is next, but that soon shall pass as well.

You know, here's how Brennan ended his note to Ross, *"I love you, Ross. Thank you for your service and sacrifice. Thank you for your friendship. And thank you for your heroic example! I can't wait to see you again in Heaven one day, Brother."*

Friends, keep your focus there. Jesus loves us. That's easy to see. We love him. We thank him for his earthly service and his loving and selfless sacrifice. He's not just our friend. He's our brother, a relationship forged through his suffering a blood. We saw him born in Bethlehem. We cried as he hung on the cross. Now we can't wait to see him in heaven...our Brother, our Hero, our Savior! Amen.