

## **OUR GOD IS ABLE**

### **Hebrews 2: 14-18; 15-16**

All of us who have been in church very long at all have heard some preacher or Sunday School teacher say that God has made each one of us unique. That was a major theme in our Vacation Bible School this year. And it is certainly true. God gave you a physical, mental, and emotional makeup unlike any other of the seven billion plus people that now inhabit planet earth, and when He finished He threw away the mold. And He made you just the way you are so that you might be a magnificent exhibit of His glory for all of the hosts of heaven to see. And because God has such plans for you it should make you feel special indeed.

But there is one thing characteristic you have that is not unique at all. You share it with every one of your human brothers and sisters and it makes you just like them. And that is, all of us are on a spiritual journey to eternity. All of us are on the fast track to a divine appointment with our Maker just inside the door of death. And we have only one life to live in preparation for that appointment and only one chance to get it right. And last week we saw what God has done to insure that we will get it right and be ready for our appointment – He has provided for us what the writer of Hebrews calls “so great a salvation”.

We saw that it is a great salvation because it comes through a great Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus was God’s perfect Son, the brightness of God’s glory, the perfect image of God, fully God and fully man in one Person. Jesus made the universe, and despite its corruption by sin and continual decay His power keeps it running as smoothly as it can possibly run until one day at the end of the age when it will be burned up and recreated for eternity. And Jesus is the only Source of God’s salvation, and therefore it is a great salvation.

It is also a great salvation because of the value of that which is saved, which is the souls of men. All of the redeemed are God's inheritance (Deut. 32:9). Many people have an inheritance from their parents that they expect to receive one day, and they look forward to it and perhaps even depend upon it. Well, God depends on nothing, but He does look forward to His inheritance, and if you are saved, that is you! And you are also Jesus' future bride, to be wed to Him one day when He comes again. So we are of infinite worth to God, and that is another reason God's salvation is so great.

But God's salvation is also great because of its cost. The cost of God's salvation was nothing less than the blood of His precious Son Jesus, which was everything to God, the very best that He had to give. And because God's salvation is so very great, the author of Hebrews warns his readers to pay attention to God's offer with **extreme care**, because those who ignore God's great salvation have no escape of eternal death.

Well, today we are going to see **three wonderful blessings** that **God is able** to give to us because of His great salvation. So get your Bibles, please, and turn to Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4: 15-16 (read). The first great blessing that we see God is able to give us is **power over death**. Friends, from the human perspective there is nothing good about the process of death. All of us have had a loved one or close friend that we've seen suffer immensely as they wasted away, wanting to die but could not, until death was actually a relief. And all of us know of a loved one or friend whose life was snuffed out suddenly and violently by the bloody fingers of death. Death often cuts off great hopes and dreams. Death shatters good relationships and leaves bad relationships unended forever. Death often causes family feuds or financial hardship or both. And as we've seen before, the Bible recognizes these things by calling death the last enemy (Paul). But worst of all

death eliminates life. Mankind was never meant to die. He was made to live forever. But death destroys that high and holy purpose for which man was created. So from a human standpoint there's nothing good about death.

But the Bible tells us in v. 14 that when Jesus died He destroyed the one who held the keys to death, which is the devil. Now, the devil did not die. He is alive and well. But the word "destroy" means "to render impotent as though no longer existing" (Rienecker). In the believer's life, Jesus reduced the devil to a toothless, paper tiger. Let me tell you how this happened.

When Jesus cried "It is finished!" and gave up His spirit, the Bible teaches that He went into Sheol, which is the grave. Sheol was not hell, but the abode of the righteous dead, all the OT saints from Adam to John the Baptist. But even though they were not in hell, none-the-less, they were still prisoners in the grave, cut off from eternal life in Heaven. And Jesus was a prisoner in Sheol with them for three days and nights. And you can be sure that for those three days and nights the devil had every demon in the universe sitting on the lid of Sheol, making sure that Jesus couldn't get out, and **would never** get out.

But Col. 2:15 tells us that when Jesus died on the cross He stripped Satan of all his powers, and He demonstrated that to the whole universe by His resurrection. And when Jesus walked out of that borrowed tomb, that prison of death, he led the biggest prison break in history! For the spirit of every OT saint in Sheol marched out right behind Him, with Satan standing by bruised and battered and powerless to do anything about it at all. Now, we know that when Jesus broke out He remained shortly on earth to comfort His disciples, but those OT saints ascended right on up to Heaven where they are to this very day.

But here is the blessing for you and me. Sheol is still empty! For Satan has been trashed and his prison has been trashed.

And if you close your eyes and use your holy imagination you can see Sheol boarded up, taped off, with a huge sign posted in front saying, “Christians, Keep Out”. And if you look again and you see a whole host of cherubim surrounding Sheol to make sure that ever believer in Jesus keeps out.

And no believer will certainly ever die and go to hell, either. Because Jesus lives in the heart of every believer, and Jesus Himself said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). And beloved, the Greek word for never means never. Eternal security is not a Baptist teaching, it is a Bible teaching. Jesus is not going to live in your heart until the moment you die and then say, “Adios, Amigo”. And if you know Christ as your Savior and die today, the Christ in you will say, “Hey, you’re still a sinner, but I promised that I would never leave you, and you and I are **not** going to hell. I’ve already been there and done that for you. You’re debt is paid and Satan’s hold on you is broken!” And Jesus will whisk you up into Heaven the split second you take your last breath on earth.

So beloved, the first blessing that we have from God’s great salvation is that **He is able** to deliver from the **power of death**. But God’s great salvation gives us another blessing I want us to see. Not only is He able to deliver from the **power** of death, but He is also able to deliver us from the **fear** of death. Look again at Heb. 2:15. Someone rightly said years and years ago that you are not ready to live until you are ready to die. And that is the dead right, no pun intended. Many, many people carry a silent fear of death around with them like a heavy weight firmly attached to the back of their breastbone. And they are in bondage to their fear and it robs them of all of their joy and it cripples them from being what God has called them to be. And they spend all of their days running from death as fast as they can. They run to their jobs or their hobbies or sports teams or their children or grandchildren

and immerse themselves in them, trying to block out the fear of death from their minds. Or they run to relationship after relationship after relationship. But nothing they do or no one they love can remove the fear of death from their heart. And some of these people who fear death so much are truly saved. And yet they still are afraid to die.

There is an old legend of a merchant in Baghdad who one day sent his servant to the market. The servant came back shortly, and he was white as a sheet, trembling, and greatly disturbed. When his master asked what was wrong he said, "Down at the market place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd, and when I turned around I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Master, please lend me your horse, for I must hasten away to avoid her. I will ride to Samarra and there I will hide, and Death will not find me". So the merchant lent him his horse and the servant took off in a cloud of dust for Samarra. Later in the day the merchant went to the market and saw Death standing off to herself, so he walked up to her and said, "Why did you frighten my servant this morning? Why did you make a threatening gesture?" "Oh", she said, "I did not threaten him. I was just surprised to see him here. For I have an appointment with him later today in Samarra".

Are you one of those who through the fear of death are in bondage every day? Well, let me tell you the bad news. You can't outrun death. It **will** catch up with you, for God says, "...it is appointed for a man once to die.." (Heb. 9:27). But let me tell you the good news. You don't have to run from death! For God **is able** to give you peace that will crush the fear of death in your heart. Jesus said in John 16:33: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in them you may have peace...." Paul writes in 2 Thess. 3:16: "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means..." So you say, "OK, preacher. If Jesus promises to

remove the fear of death and give me peace, then how can I have it? What do I have to do?

Well, if you are not saved, then your only way to peace is to repent of your sins, that is, turn away from your sins, and trust in Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to come into your life and save you. And you do this by faith alone. “By grace are you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.....” (Eph. 2:8-9). Confess to God you are guilty of breaking His laws and throw yourself on His mercy, based on nothing but what Jesus did for you on Calvary’s cross, and you will not fear death anymore. You will have God’s peace.

But if you have been truly saved and you are still afraid of death, then God’s answer to you is Isaiah. 26:3, which says, “You will keep in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because He trusts in you”. That’s the key to conquering your fear of death. Keep your mind fixed on Jesus.

You see, beloved, Satan’s great purpose is to get you to keep your eyes fixed on yourself. And when you look at yourself you’ll always have doubts. You’ll think, “My faith is not strong enough”, or you’ll think, “I’ve committed too many sins”. And you’ll always wonder if you will measure up on Judgment Day. Well, I can tell you, if your faith and your goodness is your standard, you won’t! Your faith is a flawed faith, because you are a flawed, depraved sinner. There’s nothing good in you, so how do you think you could have a faith good enough to be saved? But have you placed your faith in Jesus, weak as it may have been? Then do what Heb. 12:2 say to do. It says, “Looking unto Jesus, **the author and finisher of our faith**”. Did you get that? Jesus is the author of your faith, the originator of your faith. And He’s the finisher, the completer of your faith. It’s Jesus that planted faith in your heart to believe in Him. Would you doubt the faith that He

gave you? I hope not! So keep your eyes on Jesus if your faith is weak.

But what about your many sins that cause you to fear death? Same remedy! Look to Jesus. Read with me Heb. 10:14. How many offerings for sin are necessary for the perfection of the saints? One. And the Greek meaning for “one” in this verse is “one”. Rom. 5:19 says, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous”. The one man who was disobedient was Adam, and the one Man who was obedient was not Joe, or Bill, or Suzy, or Mary, or you. The one man who was obedient was Jesus! And by the way, what was His obedience? His death on the cross.

So, beloved, if your sins are many and they cause you to fear death, God is able to take those fears away! Look to Jesus. Remember who He is, the God of glory. Look to His obedient death on the cross. And remember that His shed blood was sufficient to pay not only for your sins but for the sins of the whole world. Keep your mind fixed on Jesus, and you will have perfect peace.

We’ve seen how God is able to destroy the power of death and also to destroy the fear of death. But I want you to see one more thing that God is able to do today. Look at v. 17-18 (read). Beloved, there is a spiritual truth in force today that many believers fail to understand. And that is, it is just as impossible to live the Christian life in your own strength as it is to be saved in your own strength. Do you realize the life that Jesus has called you and me to live? It is His life. Jesus said in Matt. 5:48, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect”. That’s a pretty high bar, wouldn’t you say? Oh, but that is the life that we’re called to live! We are called to incarnate the life of Jesus in our mortal bodies until the day He calls us home. Certainly we’ll come short, but that is the standard. Anybody here

today who feels up to that task? And why not? Because we are weak, and yes, the devil's power has been broken in our lives, but the fact is, he walks about as a roaring lion, whom he may devour. And without God's power in our lives we are his toast.

But here's the last blessing of our great salvation: **God is able to give us strength to overcome when we face trials and temptations.** This is perhaps the second most important reason for the Incarnation, right up next to Jesus' death on the cross for our salvation. For when Jesus walked upon this sin cursed earth for 33 years, He encountered every trail and every temptation that you and I will ever face. Are you lonely? No one was ever as lonely as was Jesus when He died on the cross. Have you been hurt by your spouse, child, or friend? No one was hurt more than Jesus when in Gethsemane His friends all denied Him and fled for their lives. Are you tempted with materialism, power, and sex? Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was tempted **in all points as we were, yet without sin.** He came out spotless on the other side. And that truth gives us great comfort.

You see, beloved, what you are going through this morning is not unique. God says in 1 Cor. 10:13 that there is no temptation that has taken us but that common to man. That is, the devil is not just picking on you, and you are not the only one going through what you're going through. Some Christian somewhere in the world is going through or has been through the same thing. And some have come out on top. But you may not know anyone who has conquered your temptation. They may be in China, but what good is that to you? And no one around you can really give you the comfort you need, even though they try. Because they just don't understand. But beloved, there is One Who is closer than a brother who does! Because He's faced your trial and He's won the victory. His name is Jesus!

Are you battling some great sin in your life this morning? Is there a person in your life that is giving you grief beyond measure, even to the point that you consider them an enemy? Or are you just lethargic about your faith? Are you immersed in your own agenda and your own pleasures, and God gets the leftovers of your time and money, and deep down you know you need to change? Oh, beloved, **God is able** to conquer in every trial you'll ever face! In fact, Paul says that we are **more than conquerors** through Him Who loved us. For God's salvation is a so great salvation.

So if Jesus has all of this power to help me overcome, and He totally does, then what's my part in the equation? Look back to Heb. 4:16. Beloved, that's your part of the equation. You must go to Him as desperately as the day you cried out to Him to save you. And you must cry out again. You must cry, "Dear Jesus, I am helpless to help myself. Please, be the God Who is able in my life! Please take this trial or this temptation away, or please give me grace to walk through it. But above all, live Your life in me and be glorified". And beloved, just as surely as I stand before you today, Jesus will hear and answer your prayer, just as He did the day you were saved. His promise to all of us today is, "Call upon Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).