

A God Like Us Hebrews 2:10-18
December 27th, 2015 Christmas 1 C Pastor Robin Zeratsky

Well, Christmas is done. Did you get the gifts you wanted? Or at least have the fun you wanted, see the people and family that mean the most to you? Maybe that's still to come, the holiday season isn't quite done yet. But one more week and it's basically over, right? One more celebration with the New Year and then it's back to plain-old regular life. Back to the daily grind. The excitement and hubbub is past...and there's that post-rush letdown as we slide into boring January.

The memories of the holidays fade and by and large the gifts that we were so excited about sit around neglected. If we bothered to make any resolutions, they might last the month and then they too drift into the background. Wouldn't it be great if there were a gift that kept us excited all year round? Something we could have to hold on to that thrill of the Christmas season without all the craziness that goes with trying to keep up with the holidays?

Well there is, of course, or I wouldn't have brought it up. And it's right there in front of us. Perhaps so much so that we lose track of its significance. But the gift that keeps on giving, the gift that never fades or spoils or loses its thrill is the first Christmas gift ever given. The gift that inspires us to give each other gifts during this time of year. The gift of the Savior. The gift of God-made-man; Jesus.

This gift of God himself wrapped in human flesh is the answer. After all, what is it that drags us down regularly? What is it that hurts us and takes away our joy? It's sin. It's sin within and it's sin without. Our own inability to live up to God's standard harps at us, the devil uses that list of our failures to accuse us and steal our peace. And the sin of the world piles on its own consequences to just plain cause us trouble and try to drive us to despair and hopelessness. All working together to make us each feel inadequate, hopeless and alone.

But you are not alone. Because of the gift. The gift of Jesus, the God who is like you. <read text: Hebrews 2:10-18>.

Ah yes, of course. Jesus. Jesus is God. Jesus is the all-powerful God who created this world, who made you, the one with the ability to do anything and with complete authority over this world. But Jesus is also truly human. He was born of a human mother. He ate, he slept, he grew and he lived. He laughed and wept with his friends. He experienced hunger and pains and temptations. He was just like you. In other words, he took your place. Jesus lived a life as one of us, a human life. The most important part of that human life was that he lived under the same law of God we are under. He did everything you have to do.

You see, you have a God who has walked a mile in your shoes. You have a Savior who has been where you are. Just think for a minute on what a great blessing that is for you. A lot of times when we're dealing with a particularly troubling problem, we'll look to speak to or confide in someone who's been through the same thing. It's the principle that most support groups are built around. Why? It reminds us that we do not suffer alone. It's comforting to know that others have faced these same challenges, and they know what it's like to face them. They can offer empathy and support as well as helpful advice for your situation that helped them. Jesus understands what you're going through because he went through it. And Jesus has promised to be with you always. So there, in just that, you always have someone who is with you who always knows what you're going through. Someone who always understands what it's like for you.

But another reason we like to speak to people who have been through similar circumstances is so that we can see that it's possible to overcome these problems. Someone else was able to get through this and be okay, so I must be able to as well. And when I look at the problems I face in this life, struggling to keep hope alive with the constant attacks I endure and struggling to stay faithful to God and carry out his commands, I can see that Jesus was able to do it. Jesus overcame temptations and trials, He grew in the Word and He went with the Word. Fantastic! It can be done.

"Well hey that's not really fair!" you might want to say. Jesus has something of an advantage there. He was able to live a perfect life because he was born without sin in him. Jesus is true God after all; God *can't* sin, it's one of his defining characteristics. I don't have any of that going for me. I was born with sin, a whole lot of sin as we mentioned before. In fact, I was born only able to sin. The nature I have is fundamentally opposed to God and his holiness. That means that all I *can* do is sin. And I was *born* that way! So how on earth does it help that Jesus was able to get through life without sinning help me in any way?

In every way, actually. Because Jesus is a God who became like you. Not like you are, but like you should have been. Jesus living a perfect human life is the *only* way for you or me to be helped. Look at what is written here, "**Since the children have flesh and blood (that's us), he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.**" Only by becoming human, only by living the perfect life that we simply could not, only by dying the death that belonged to us, only this way could He take away the devil's power.

The devil's power is death. Eternal death. Separation from God forever. And we know that we have only one of two options when we leave this life. Heaven or Hell. The only thing worth being afraid of is Hell. Anything, and I mean anything else in this life that happens to us will eventually pass away. But once this life is over and judgment is passed, that's it. That's the only permanent thing that ever happens to us. And we know, instinctively, that we don't measure up. We have God's law written on our hearts, we have our conscience always standing up, pointing that finger and reminding us that something's wrong, that we are not good enough. And so instinctively we fear death, because we know we're not good enough, we know that we deserve punishment. And we're slaves to that fear just like we're slaves to sin.

And Jesus set us free. Not just by going through the same experiences and giving us advice on how to get through it ourselves, he just went ahead and did it for us. He lived a perfect life and called it ours. He paid the horrible price for sin on the cross and then credited that payment to our account. "Just have faith," he said, "and it's all yours." God wasn't just like you, he was you. Everything he did is counted as yours. He filled in the gaps you left, he took away the mistakes you made. And now by faith you become like him. Not full of power or all-knowing or anything like that, but in a much more important way. You are holy again. You have the image of God restored. The image lost and destroyed in Eden has come back to you. You are again like God because God became like you.

So there you have it. The worst problem we could ever face, the only problem ever worth really worrying about is already taken care of. Because Jesus became one of us, because he lived our life and died our death, death no longer has any power over us. We are forgiven and heaven is ours. And Satan's only power is made useless. He can't threaten us with death because death is no longer an issue. And with the threat of death gone, so is fear. We never have any reason to be afraid again because we know the end of our story is heaven. Will we still be afraid from time to time? Yeah, probably. We still have sin in us on this side of eternity. We still will sin, we still will fail, but even though we don't want to take that lightly, we also have confidence that it is already forgiven. The devil may be able to tempt us into it, but that sin has been paid for too. Heaven is still ours.

It is not, of course, a license to go out and do whatever we please because, "hey, it's forgiven", but it is a comfort to us when we do fall. Our greatest challenge has been conquered already. The greatest and ultimately only important threat we could ever face has already been nullified. And this gift came in through the baby delivered Christmas Eve. That is a gift worth being excited about every time we see it. There in the manger, God became like us that we might be like him again.

Of course, what I said earlier on is still true. Jesus still knows about your day to day problems. And he understands what they're like. And he is and will continue to rule this world for the benefit of you and all believers everywhere. There will continue to be challenges. There will be events that happen to us and events we cause that try to steal away our peace and joy in our Savior. We have never been promised an easy life. But Jesus knows what those challenges are and he's ready to help you with them. He will not give you more than you can bear, and no matter what it is, no matter whether you can see it or not, there will be a good reason for it all. And above all, he will carry you through it.

So, we look forward to the next year with confidence. As we prepare to face the challenges ahead of us we know our Savior Jesus is right there with us. He is there as we go to carry out the Christian life he calls us to live. He is there in his word to strengthen us when we come to him, to grow us in our faith. And he is there to be with us in that strength as we take his word to those who have not yet heard it. We can go to others without fear, reaching out in love and care. We know what will happen if they remain lost and we know that nothing can happen to us along the way to make us lost again. We know that Jesus is watching over us, blessing our efforts and keeping us in his care, guiding everything to ensure that we are kept in him until we reach life eternal in heaven with him.

Our greatest Christmas gift is the reason for Christmas itself. God has become like you that you might be like him. You are holy in the Lord, heaven is yours. Let the thrill and joy of that truth fill you daily, let it create in you a heart that desires to live as you are. You are made holy again by Jesus, you are like God, show your thanks for that great gift by living your life as God now sees you. Amen.