

Hebrews 2:10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.¹¹ Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.¹² He says,

*“I will declare your name to my brothers;
in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.”*

¹³ And again, “I will put my trust in him.”

And again he says,

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.”

¹⁴ 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—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants.¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Dear Friends Whom Jesus Is Pleased to Call His Brothers and Sisters,

Two middle-aged brothers were reminiscing about days gone by. The younger said to the elder, “You were a good older brother...” The older brother was so glad to hear that. He often wondered whether he had been. He could remember fights and unkind words. He could remember being a bit overbearing—well, sometimes more than a bit. Then the younger reminded him of something that had happened long ago.

They were two teen-age boys walking home from downtown, crossing a deserted parking lot. Two other youths of about the same age buzzed by on bicycles. Even though the parking lot was deserted and open for a hundred feet, the bikers rode so close to the brothers that they almost grazed their arms. Then they did a couple stunts on their bikes just in front of the brothers. The younger brother sarcastically commented, “Oooh! You’re so cool!” The mini biker gang wheeled around on the younger brother, got in his face and demanded, “What’d ya say?” Silence. Then the older brother said, “He said, ‘You’re so cool!’” Turning the older they demanded again, “What’d ya say?” “He said, ‘You’re so cool!’” Biker dude number one thumped older brother in the chest. Older brother just stared him in the face. After a few seconds the biker gang rode off.

That meant a lot to the younger brother—that his older brother had stood up for him. But then, that is what brothers and sisters are for, isn’t it!

Which is why we are so glad to call Jesus our brother. Actually, the better news is that he is willing to call us his brothers and sisters. That is the message we contemplate today, the Sunday after Christmas:

NOT ASHAMED TO CALL US BROTHERS

I. He Identifies with Us (11)

II. He Supplies What We Cannot (10,17)

III. He Sympathizes with and Supports Us (18)

I. In thinking about brothers, let me ask an unpleasant question: Which would be more hurtful to you, for your brother to betray you or to deny you? If you want an example, look at Jesus. In his last day, one of his disciples, Judas, betrayed him to his enemies. Within hours, another disciple, Peter, denied Jesus. Peter pretended he did not even know Jesus. Which do you think hurt more?

Typically, Judas gets the harsher judgment. But my personal opinion, and you can disagree with me if

you want, is that Peter's denial would have hurt more than Judas' betrayal. Betrayal seems to say, "I reject your viewpoint." Denial seems to say, "I reject you because you are just plain embarrassing to me." It would be interesting to know what other people think about this, if only we could have an audience vote.

But here is why I think denial is worse: we are willing to stand up for our ideas. And if someone wants to persecute us for our ideas, we actually are pretty ok with that. But another person denying us, that strikes us where we are vulnerable. When we do something stupid, we fear that people will walk away. We fear that they will say we just aren't worth the bother and the embarrassment. Betrayal says that at least we are worth something. Denial says we are worthless.

Which is why it is so amazing that Jesus is willing to identify with us. When he became human, he decided to identify with the weak, the sinful, the rebellious, the foolish, the back-stabbers. By identifying with the human race, he stood to gain nothing. The only thing we could do was bring him down. Yet that was his choice.

When someone great chooses to identify with us, you know what that does. It lift us up; it is an encouragement. It proves to others that in spite of the fact that we are ordinary people, we have value. And so it is no small thing when Hebrews 2 says, "***The one who makes men holy [Jesus] and those who are made holy [we] are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers***" (11).

Faithful family members may disapprove, but they never give up. So when Jesus became one of us, he proved that he will never be ashamed of us. We know that Jesus will stand with us before the world, because he is our brother. And he is a brother like none other because he is the Son of God. When the world insults you, remember that he stands with you. When the world suggests that people who claim Jesus are a family of misfits, remember him who is your brother.

II. But how do we know that we are standing in the right place. What is it about standing with Jesus that gives us confidence?

In the first verse it says that he is "***the author of [our] salvation***" (10). That is a good translation, but the more recent version of the NIV Bible translates it to read "***the pioneer of [our] salvation.***" I think that is closer to the original language. The original word has behind it the idea of someone who starts something so that others coming later can enjoy its benefits. Like the pioneers of old, the ones who cut the first roads through the thick forests of Kentucky and founded the first settlements – with the thought that others would come after them and enjoy a new life of promise. Or like an expedition on foot that finds itself in a heavy snow. And the strongest member of the expedition is there in front of the team doing the hard work, breaking the trail. It is the work of that strong leader who gets everyone where they are going. Yet when they set up their camp, he doesn't look at the other members of the team around the fire and brag how they all would have been lost but for him. No, they are his brothers, and he has only been faithful with what he has been given for their good. Our faithful big brother Jesus supplies what we cannot. And no matter what we do, he never begrudges it, but rejoices that the entire family is being blessed.

The other picture the reading uses is Jesus as a "***merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, that he might make atonement for the sins of the people***" (17).

The role of a high priest is that of a mediator. He stands between sinful people and the holy God. This was part and parcel of the Old Testament faith, before Jesus came to earth. No one could draw near to God in the temple except the priest. We are too sinful to do that on our own. But Jesus is the high priest who unites us with God. Here again, his humanity is what assures us his work is even for the worst of sinners. By being human, he is merciful and faithful in providing what we cannot: the forgiveness of our sins.

Both in the picture of the "***pioneer of our salvation***" and "***a merciful and faithful high priest,***" Jesus our brother proves himself the ideal big brother. He supplies what we cannot. He offers the sacrifice for our sins. And even though we sin against God day after day, doubting his care, going our own forbidden ways, he continues to supply our needs. How glad I am that Jesus is not ashamed to call me his brother!

III. When Jesus became our brother, he identified with us. When he became our brother he provided forgiveness for sins that we never could achieve. And thirdly, his humanity assures us that he is sympathetic and supportive.

Many people who have been through trauma, or are working through difficult times go to support groups. Support groups have many members who are working through a similar difficulty in life, and they get together talk about that. What proves helpful to so many people in support groups is that others really understand. Some difficulties, some struggles, some temptations, some emotions cannot be understood by people who have never experienced the problems.

Now Hebrews 2 tells us this about Jesus: ***“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”*** (18). This is no small comfort to the Christian. Think about the way things work in our world.

One who is intellectually gifted may find it difficult to understand why learning is so difficult for the less academically gifted—often assuming they are lazy. One who is naturally charming and outgoing wonders why some people have are misfits – as if it were their choice. One who is successful and rich wonders why others just can’t get their life together and get out of poverty. One who is blessed with good health can never understand the struggles of chronic sickness.

And it goes further. The poor person *knows* the rich person can’t understand his situation in life. The one who has difficulty staying eligible for athletics *knows* that the “A” honor roll kid doesn’t appreciate how difficult school is for him. The person suffering acute anxiety or PTSD *knows* that other people just don’t get it.

We can look at God in the same way. If we go outside and look up, we feel the distance between us and God. He doesn’t walk the earth, worry about friends, have bills to pay, or diapers to change. God doesn’t age and face death. How can he sympathize with us?

Indeed, that is man’s natural outlook on God. All the other religions of the world are obsessed with trying to bridge the gap between us and God. Think of the Aztecs who made their daily human sacrifices to keep their gods happy. Go to the Bible with Elijah in his show down with the priests of Baal. When their false god didn’t answer, they *“slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom”* to get Baal’s his attention. Many Native American Indians had similar ceremonies of self-harm. These sorts of rituals assume a god who lives far away in the halls of heaven, with little sympathy or concern for his people. It assumes that we have to cross the canyon between us and God. But when Jesus was pleased to call us brothers, God stepped over the yawning chasm to us.

And because he came to our side, we have a faith in God’s love that no other faith can or ever will be able to promise. ***“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”*** (18).

So in your time of need, pray. Pray in the name of Jesus, our high priest who made the sacrifice for our sins. Pray in the name of Jesus who knows what it is to be human, to be faced with tragedy, to be faced with temptation, to be faced with death, yes his own death.

As we look at Jesus our brother, we look up to him for all he has done for us, and we admire him, we literally worship him. And in our own little ways we try to be like him—identifying with others, supplying what they cannot, and sympathizing with and supporting them as we can. Of course we cannot do that just like Jesus did for us, but we remember the words of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, *“Praise be to the...Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”*

The comfort is this: Jesus is our Savior, and he was not, is not and never will be ashamed to be called our brother! Amen.