

Sermon for Sunday, September 30, 2012
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Jesus our Brother
Hebrews 2:10-18

2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.' ¹³ And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Behold I and the children God has given me.' ¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same thing, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not with angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, 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. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

I once took a leadership test that investigated motivation. What makes you want to get up and go to work in the morning? What makes work satisfying? The test said: "It's important to you to be a valued and respected member of a team. Teamwork motivates you." I thought, "Exactly right." Later, I thought, "Wait, who *doesn't* want to be a respected member of important teams?" You do too, right?

Well, some people *do* like to work alone, live on a mountain. Some choose to have no phone. But most of us want to be part of something – a family, a team at work, a team of volunteers. The drive may not be the same in everyone, but much of our life touches the desires and delights of belonging. Even a baby cries, longing for attention and affection. We long to be known, to belong to a people and a place.

Wanting to belong is a constant theme in relationships. It's a good, God-given desire, but like every gift, sin distorts and corrupts it. Belonging can matter too much. It can become a god, which is a problem because family and friends can't give us all we might want. Only Jesus gives perfect love and acceptance, without conditions. But the desire for respect and dignity has another side. We wonder: What if I don't perform well, don't make the team? What if I'm the weak link? What if I let everyone down? What if I'm rejected, cast out, because of my failings?

The question is urgent because *we all fail* and *deserve* to be cast out for it. The people around us may not see it, but we know, and God knows. In the language of Psalm 8, Hebrews 2, God crowned humanity "with glory and honor and put everything under [our] feet." But "at present we do not see" it, because we rule, act poorly. We are selfish and misguided. As a result we don't *deserve* love from God or neighbor. But Hebrews 2 says we *do* have God's love.

Indeed the gospel calls us to belong to God—to be accepted, known and loved. The gospel summons us to this, since God has set his affection on us. Hebrews 2:10 said it this way: "For it was fitting that [God], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."

"It was fitting" doesn't mean "It is necessary." God was not *obligated* to create this universe or mankind. God was not sad, lonely, or bored. He gave his creation the *gift* of life. Then, when we rebelled, he had no obligation to restore us. No obligation, but it does fit. It's fitting. Why? God is the final cause of

all – "All things exist for Him." And he is the efficient cause of all – All things exist by Him. So it *fits* that he should care for us. It fits the kind of God, the *person*, that he is. He is kind, caring and compassionate, so he acted.

God made us for glory, we lost that glory, and now Jesus leads us back to glory. The way he does this suggests how much he loves us. The Father did this through the suffering of the Son, the Author and Leader of our salvation.

Luke T. Johnson says Greco-Roman writers considered what is appropriate to the gods. But no one thought *suffering* was fitting for the gods. That was incomprehensible! The gods are *far above* such things! But the Bible says God brings many sons to glory through the suffering of our Hero, the Son of God. The path is suffering first, then glory. To lead us to glory, Jesus had to suffer with us and for us. He wasn't obligated to restore our glory, but once he decided to restore us, it required suffering, on the cross. This will sound familiar to churchgoers, but the next statement in Hebrews may not.

1. Jesus has solidarity with us.

Hebrews 2:11 says, "He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers." In this case, "sanctify" has its root Old Testament meaning, to set apart, dedicate, or consecrate to God. To sanctify, is to set apart a day or an object that is marked - belonging to God.

When Jesus calls to us and we believe in him, he sets us apart as people who belong to God. Jesus sanctifies and we *are sanctified* but we have one origin. Literally we are "all of one [family]." So he is not ashamed to call us brothers.

"Not ashamed" means he is glad to accept us as brothers and sisters. It could be otherwise. Last week, we saw that Jesus is the hero or champion of the faith who entered combat with Satan. He tasted death, then rose, breaking the power of Satan who held us in the fear of death. So Jesus is our hero, but what sort of hero? There are two kinds. The first rescues but stands far above his people. Shakespeare created Coriolanus, a great but proud and arrogant warrior. Or consider the entertainer who tries to escape the crowds that came to hear him.

The second hero is the man of the people. He loves the people, lives with them. He returns the love of his admirers. He is like the people-loving politician, who wades into the crowds, to kiss babies, meet people he truly likes. Jesus isn't seeking re-election, but he loves us, is proud of us. He is "not ashamed to call [us] brothers."

Of course, he could be ashamed. Most clans have an embarrassing relative, an Uncle Norodnik, perhaps, with no social grace, missing teeth and an indictment or two. But in God's family, you and I are prime candidates to embarrass the Father or our older brother, Jesus. Yet he is *not ashamed* to call us brothers, nor is the Father "ashamed to be called [our] God" (Heb. 11:16).

I've said this before: I've never put a Christian bumper sticker on my car because my driving isn't up to it. I'm a decent driver, but I *can* do things that might hurt Jesus' reputation. I could shame him. And yet, we take Jesus' name wherever we go. If we belong to him, his name is on us. Our crimes, misdemeanors and follies dishonor Jesus. We're unworthy of him. Still, Jesus is not ashamed of us, he is proud of us. He calls us brothers and the Father calls us his children.

This is the acceptance many of us long for. Our parents said, "You will never amount to anything." But God declares, "These are the good works I prepared for you to do" (Eph 2:10). People have said "You're weak," but Jesus empathizes with us in our weakness.

Parents and grandparents shamed us, saying "You should *be ashamed* of yourself." But Jesus calls us his brothers and shares his glory with us. Paul said, "We are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory" (2 Cor 3:18).

Hebrews 2:12-13 is complex, so let me state the point. When Jesus assumed our humanity, he became one with us "in weakness and temptation." As he did, "he displayed that perfect dependence on God" that is essential to us – and became so to him. In this sense he becomes our brother.¹

Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22, which David wrote in great distress. He was mocked and despised, his heart melted, his strength is gone. Jesus quotes those words on the cross, applying David's anguish to himself. But the psalm changes tone when David cries for help, and God delivers him. David is most grateful and declares, "I will tell of your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." That is Psalm 22:22. Jesus sings this first and best, but we sing it with him. We join Jesus in praising God for delivering us.

Next, Hebrews 2:13 puts the words of Isaiah 8:17 into Jesus' mouth: "I will put my trust in him." The incarnate Son put his trust in the Father. When we trust someone we expect help in time of need. Indeed, Jesus looked to the Father in Gethsemane as he pondered his impending death. He called to the Father on the cross, as his body perished: "Into your hands I commit my spirit." In this, Jesus is like us; we are brothers. We call on the Father for help as he did.

So Jesus can say to the Father, "Behold I and the children God has given me." Jesus is the leader, but we share his humanity. Jesus always trusted the Father and so should we. So we truly are Jesus' brothers. We are his family and he accepts us.

How liberating! There is, in almost all of us, a sense that we must prove ourselves. Contribute. Do something notable. But we have flaws, gaps, holes, so we never know if we've done enough. Even if we become best at something, someone is Number One at something else. Besides, how long can we stay on top?

Jesus says we can quit the performance game. He accepts us as his family. We are his brothers and sisters. Of course, struggles continue even after God accepts us. If Jesus, our big brother, "tasted death," we expect adversity, too (1 Pet 1:11, 4:13-14).

Jesus ends our shame

Jesus ends our shame and gives us a sober self-concept: We enjoyed grandeur at creation, fell into misery through sin, and return to grandeur in Christ. The grandeur-misery-grandeur pattern is our lot. Realism makes us expect to succeed, but also to fail, and feel miserable over it. But because we belong to God's family, we can handle disappointment a better way. Consider some misguided strategies we use to manage failure:

¹ Hughes 108-9

- We indulge in **self pity**, self-condemnation: "I'm a failure. An idiot. The worst."
- We wallow in **self-recrimination**: "I failed myself, I failed those who love me. People should stay away from me."
- We **shift blame**: "I failed, but it's really his fault."
- We **resolve** to work harder: "I'll never make that mistake again."
- We brush failure off, pretending we don't care.

None of these strategies fits the new life we have by faith. Because Jesus called us brothers, our identity, our sense of belonging, is secure. We see our blunders in a healthier way. If we do our best, but our performance falls short, we can say, "I did what I could, but it wasn't God's will to grant what I wanted just now."

If we sin, and see our sin, we count correction as a blessing. Proverbs 9:8-9 says. "Rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still." This is important. A healthy person is *thankful for correction*, even rebuke. We say, "Thanks for telling me!" Listen: it's easy to take correction when we're secure. When we know that God **loves us**, it's easy to hear correction.

That's an important lesson, and it has implications. We don't need to fear correction. We don't have to vow "Never again." We will sin again and God's love and will apply that day, too.

2. Jesus represents us.

Hebrews says Jesus doesn't just accept us despite our sin, he also removes our guilt and shame. We saw this last week: Since the children shared blood and flesh, he shared blood and flesh, so that by *his* death, he might destroy the one who has the *power* of death, the devil. And *set free* those who, by their *fear of death*.... were liable to *slavery*.²

Jesus became a man and a champion for mankind. He entered combat with Satan and death. As our champion, He fought our great foes. When he died in our place, by a magnificent paradox, he broke the power of death. Satan has no more claim, no hold on us, and Jesus secured our life and salvation.

Jesus is also our priest. The Lord has many concerns. God's interior life is largely hidden from us. But we know his actions - he helps us (2:16). Jesus took flesh, became a man, "that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation [atonement] for the sins of the people."

To make propitiation is to remove wrath toward sin by a sacrifice. Suppose a man forgets his tenth anniversary. His wife has reason to be upset, even angry. Because he feels terrible, he *may try to atone for his mistake* through a gift perfectly chosen to show he knows her and cares for her. The technical term for this gift, given to remove offense and make things right, is propitiation. Our passage says Jesus offers such a gift as our priest. Consider how this shapes life with Jesus.

² Lane 49

3. Our life with Jesus.

In a famous statement Paul says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). It's one sentence but it makes two points. *All sin* means we violate God's law and standards and so become guilty. *All fall short of glory* means we lack greatness, the proper capacity to reflect God's majesty, which humanity once had.

We have two problems – sin and no glory. But historically the church stresses that sin creates guilt. (See chart.) If we follow God's law, we are righteous. If we break it, we sin and become guilty. Jesus removes our guilt by atoning for sin. Jesus' grants us good legal standing with God. When we stand before God, the Judge, he will declare us "not guilty, justified." All true and important, but...

Jesus also cures our **shame** by adopting us and assuring us of his love. Deviance, failure, lack of accomplishment, lack of beauty and glory can create shame. Christians tend to neglect this problem.

Shame is complicated. People ought to be ashamed of some things, including sin. If we sin and feel no shame, it shows we are oblivious to God's standards. Shamelessness is a sign of a defective conscience (Jer 6:15, 8:12).

On the other hand, we can feel ashamed when there is no guilt. If our body seems to have the wrong size or shape, we can feel shame. Facial blemishes, hair loss, a weak voice can make us feel shame. If we have less money than our peers, if our clothes or cars fall short of our peers, we can feel ashamed. If we are clumsy or technologically illiterate, we may feel shame. (See the chart.)

Moral sphere: Our doing	Personal sphere: Our being
Keep rules -> Righteousness	Display greatness -> Glory
Break rules -> Sin, guilt	Display deviance -> Shame
Solution for guilt: Atonement	Solution of shame: Achieve, be loved

Most people neglect one element of the guilt-shame duo. Secular people erase guilt. If there is no transcendent, moral God, there are no moral absolutes, and there can be no objective guilt. We may violate local standards, but therapists tell us there is no need to feel guilty. Meanwhile, Christians neglect the problem of shame. But shame is a valid category. We can describe it this way:

Break rules -> Guilt -> (partial overlap with) shame
Lack glory -> Shame -> (partial overlap with) guilt

We know Jesus removes our guilt, but he also erases our shame and starts us toward glory. Our shame dissolves if we know we are loved and accepted despite our failures. Fifteen minutes ago, I quoted Luke Timothy Johnson's statement about the gods. Most of you never heard of him, so normally I would say, "A noted scholar said." I mentioned his name for a reason. I was his teaching assistant in graduate school. Dr. Johnson might be the world's premiere Catholic New Testament Scholar. And he chose me, a conservative Protestant. For a while, that gave me cache in certain circles.

In fact, any time we are chosen for something that seems important or by a person who seems great, we feel good, significant, affirmed. Shame disappears. Consider this. Jesus, Creator and Redeemer, King and Priest, our Hero, loves, chooses and accepts *you*. He is *glad* we belong to his family. Yes, our acts *could* embarrass him, but "He is not ashamed" – he is glad – to call us brothers."

Ordinarily, we overcome shame if we do something great. If we do something wrong, let someone down, we have to make up for it to cover our shame. (Once I forgot to show for a speaking engagement. Shame! What can I do?) Jesus covers our shame two ways.

First, he called us into a relationship with himself. He chose us, for his family. Once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, belonging to God (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

It sounds too good to be true. We belong, summoned into God's life, desired and enjoyed. He set his affection on us. None of our flaws surprise him. He will never doubt his love for us. I hope you believe in him, and believe that sweet, happy message. We belong to Jesus. Not the way furniture belongs to an owner, but the way a baby belongs to her mother, the way happy husband and wife or the best of friends belong to each other. That love and affection gives us honor. It erases the shame we feel for our weakness.

Second, Jesus gives us good works. He gives us his good works, counts them as ours. And he empowers us to do noteworthy things. We perform the good works he prepared for us. We can do substantial good, undo the curse. But let's be more specific with implications.

Implications

Above all, let's all stop setting value by achievements and status. Let's stop shaming people for things beyond their control – their nose, their hair, their care, their marital status. Example: If someone gets a divorce, they often feel shamed. Divorced people will tell you: "A lot of people drifted out of my life..." Some divorced people did no wrong, they suffered wrongs. Some did do wrong, but God forgave them. Who are we to condemn if God acquits? Jesus calls believers his brothers and sisters. Every member of God's family has great worth.

Flawed views of honor lead us astray. Baseball legend Ty Cobb entered the majors with Detroit Tigers in 1905. Cobb grew up going to church, but his culture shaped his idea of honor. One day a spectator shouted insults at Cobb all game. Hundreds heard it, and finally, one slur was too much. Cobb "vaulted the grandstand railing, reached" the spectator twelve rows up, "knocked him down and then began kicking him. Somebody cried out. 'The spectator had been maimed in an accident and couldn't defend himself.' Cobb shouted 'I don't care.'" This sounds like a trace of the dueling culture... People commented:

A prestigious Detroit club issued "a strong resolution *in support* of Cobb." Atlanta's mayor **praised** him for upholding "the principles of southern manhood." Cobb was from Georgia; his two senators, ten representatives sent him a telegram: "As Georgians we commend your action in resisting [this] insult." Today we're horrified that a professional would beat any fan, let alone a defenseless one. But Cobb and others thought he had to defend his honor. How then should we live? Briefly consider our personal duty, the atmosphere at church, *and* our thoughts.

It's our duty to see our neighbors as God does, with love's patient and forgiving eye. Let's not judge people by superficial standards, by their looks, career or connections. Let's not shame anyone, but honor everyone. See and praise their virtues. If their virtues are few, see them as God does. All have dignity because created in his image. And each one who believes is God's accepted, forgiven, loved child. We respect everyone in our church, however the world views them. Each of us is an important person.

In our private life, let's silence the voices that make us question ourselves, doubt our worth. God created you in his image. Jesus took flesh to win you. What greater value can you have? When we trust Jesus, we know He loved us and called us, apart from our merit or public estimates of our worth. When we believe, Jesus our brother is one with us. What more can anyone say to silence the dark voices? What more can we desire than this – to know Jesus as our Brother and Friend.