

Hebrews

Hebrews 2:11-13 - The heart and hope of Jesus

Part 7 was about the road to holiness and the stages we go through in Jesus making us holy, and how recognizable each of those stages can be. Like the first stage, for instance, which is the natural goodness our Creator put in us when he made us in God's image and said everything he'd made was "very good." And we see that natural goodness he put into us in the Garden of Eden - in the man's willing response to caring for the garden and naming the animals and birds, and in his wildly enthusiastic response to the woman God gave him. All those things came easily and naturally to him.

We can add to that the conscience God gave us too, that enabled Adam to know what the serpent was saying was wrong and make a choice to resist it. But he couldn't resist and that's where his journey on the road to holiness stalled. His natural goodness and built-in conscience weren't enough to enable him to obey and trust God.

So we learn in Genesis there's something missing in us humans that stops us progressing on the road to holiness. And what's missing is our ability to be holy. We can be good quite easily, yes, and we can discern between right and wrong thanks to our conscience too, but it doesn't come naturally to us to be holy. We have to be "made holy," as **Hebrews 2:11** tells us.

And there's only one way we can be made holy, a point brought out last time in Acts 10, where we met a Roman centurion who was "devout and God-fearing," who also "gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly." So here was a good man doing good deeds in the community, and his reason for doing good was his devotion to God too. What more did he need, therefore? Surely this man would be classed as "holy," right?

And judging by God's reaction it would seem so, because he has Peter tell Cornelius in **Acts 10:35** that God "deeply appreciates anyone who respects him and does what's right." Cornelius fits that bill exactly, and so would anyone else whose actions are motivated by a belief in God. A person may not have a grasp of who the real God is yet, but so long as he or she is devoted to what they believe to be God - God notices and it is very pleasing to him. And that's wonderful because the second recognizable stage on the road to holiness is wanting to be good and right with GOD in mind.

So that would include multiple billions of people today in all sorts of religions or societies like Alcoholics Anonymous that believe in a higher power and that's what motivates their actions, because if God is the underlying reason for a person's lifestyle - or for a religion being started - it is very acceptable to him. Does that mean, then, that all roads lead to God, like Buddhism and Islam, and nothing more is needed?

A lot of people might think that, but Peter doesn't, because he goes on to say in **Acts 10:38** about God "anointing **Jesus** with the Holy Spirit and power," and in **verse 42** "appointing **Jesus** as judge of the living and the dead," and In **verse 43** that "everyone who believes in **Jesus** receives forgiveness of sins through his name," and in **verse 44** about "the Holy Spirit coming on all who heard the message." So if all roads lead to God why this huge focus on Jesus, and why the need for the Holy Spirit too?

Because being devout and God-fearing is very acceptable to God - BUT - there is **more to being holy** that only Jesus and the Holy Spirit can provide. And according to Acts 10 it begins with belief in Jesus, based on the obvious power he had in healing people and being resurrected from the dead (verses 38 and 40), and that it's only through him that we are forgiven for falling so short of what God made us for (verse 43), and only because of forgiveness through Jesus that we receive the Holy Spirit (verse 44).

But why is receiving the Holy Spirit so important? Because the word "Holy" is attached to the Spirit. Holiness, therefore, is what we receive from the Spirit, because holiness is what we need. We can function quite well on our natural goodness and conscience, but when it comes to holiness we need help. In this third stage, therefore, we enter new territory that reaches beyond even being devout and God-fearing too. It requires us being **MADE** holy by Jesus "with the Holy Spirit and power" (verse 38).

So what exactly does the Holy Spirit do? Well, in the context of **Hebrews 2:11** "the one who makes us holy and those who are made holy are **of the same family**." Through the Holy Spirit in this third stage, then, it dawns on us at some point that in Jesus making us holy we are "of the same family" as him, but what does that actually do for us as Christians knowing that?

Well, "of the same family" means we're branches off the same root. We come from the same stock, or the same origin, or the same source. But the same root, stock, origin and source as what? According to verse 11 it's the same root as "the one who makes us holy," which in the context is Jesus. So because we're being made holy we're now made of the same stuff Jesus is.

In fact, we're so like Jesus that "Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers," **verse 11**. But it's what that means to the author of Hebrews that's fascinating, because he immediately bursts out with three quotes from the Old Testament in **verses 12-13** that show us WHAT "stuff" our brother Jesus is made of. And all three quotes were written down hundreds of years earlier, waiting to be expressed right here in Hebrews, so that we'd be given a real insight into what motivates Jesus, or better put, what his **heart and hope** are.

And that's what the Holy Spirit reveals to us. But why mention it here in Hebrews? Because this is what those Christians in Hebrews needed to hear to lift them out of feeling sorry for themselves, out of slipping back a notch to stage two and thinking the law or being devout and God-fearing was all they needed, or slipping even further back to stage one and thinking their natural goodness and following their conscience were enough, or sliding even further back to thinking they were still living under the Old Testament administration of angels, and angels, therefore, were the ones still guiding and leading them.

But they were in stage three now and Jesus making them holy, which put them on a whole new level of being brothers with Jesus. And it's on this level that the Holy Spirit takes us on a new but another highly recognizable journey, because Jesus had already described it in **John 14:26** when he said "the Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you," and in **John 16:14** the Holy Spirit "will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."

There's no missing what happens in stage three, therefore, because the Holy Spirit is glueing our attention on Jesus, which is exactly what's been happening in Hebrews so far. It's full of information about Jesus to get these Christians back on the road to holiness. But it's interesting seeing WHAT words of Jesus the author of Hebrews focuses on. They're not based on any words or anything Jesus said in the gospels during his human lifetime. They are all quotes from the Old Testament.

All three quotes are traced back to the words "He says" in **Hebrews 2:12**, the "He" referring back to Jesus in the previous verse. So in each of these quotes it's Jesus speaking, but in verses straight out of the Old Testament.

The first of them in **verse 12** is a quote from **Psalms 22:22**, which isn't surprising because it's easily recognizable as words Jesus would say. We see that in the opening words of the Psalm, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - which are the exact words Jesus said on the cross. And the next twenty verses follow suit in expressing Jesus' agony.

But then in **verse 22** Jesus' tone changes, and he cries out, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." So even in his agony Jesus' main concern is reaching out to his "brothers." It's our first hint of the heart and hope of Jesus, that even as far back as Psalm 22 Jesus is looking ahead to us being his brothers, and what that would mean to those who realized it.

And this is the verse the author of Hebrews picks up on in **Hebrews 2:12** too, as a follow-up to **verse 11** in which he says Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers, because this is what he wants his congregation to grasp - and clearly what the Holy Spirit wants all those on the road to holiness to grasp - that in stage three **we see Jesus as our brother.**

We've seen Jesus in other guises so far - in his royal power and position in Chapter One, and as our suffering human Saviour in Chapter Two, but now we see Jesus in a whole new light, as to what his heart and hope is for his brothers. And **Hebrews 2:12** is in quotation marks too, meaning these are the very words of Jesus himself, so we're hearing it from Jesus direct what his heart and hope as our brother is for us.

So what exactly is his heart and hope for his brothers?

It's right there in **verse 12** when he said, "I will declare your name" and "sing your praises." Well, we know what Jesus meant by "declaring your name," because all through his ministry he referred to God as his Father. But why bring this up in Hebrews? Because if we're now Jesus' "brothers" it means we share the same Father, right? Jesus' Father is now our Father too, therefore, which means we're right back into being children of God again. So what we lost back in the Garden of Eden has been restored. Back in Eden we cut ourselves off from knowing God and his love, but because Jesus is making us holy - which also makes us his brothers - our relationship with God as his children has been restored, and we can now get to know the Father and experience his love, just as Jesus prayed we would back in John 17:26.

And this is what the Father is now speaking through his Son to us in Hebrews, and in Jesus' very own words too, pulled up from the depths of the Old Testament by the Holy Spirit at a time when Christians in trouble really needed it. It's to help them and us remember who we are now. We are the Father's children and this is what our Father sent Jesus to tell us. And that's exactly what Jesus spent his ministry doing among his brother Israelites, saying they were no longer "orphans" in **John 14:18**, and in **verse 23** that the Father loved them and would "make his home" with them.

And this is what the Holy Spirit is now helping us Christians understand too, by pulling up this verse from Psalm 22 and applying it to us. We're now having God's name declared to US in Jesus' own words too, to help us realize we're no longer orphans either. We have a Father **and** a brother, who also both happen to be God too, and it's the wish of both of them to "come to us and make their home with us" (John 14:23). Which is exactly what they did and wanted to do in Genesis, by making this planet their home, and making us members of their family. Adam was even called "the son of God" (Luke 3:38).

And it's in realizing this that we enter the third stage on our road to holiness. It starts with realizing we are God the Father's much loved children, because the relationship we lost with him in Genesis has been restored. And this is our evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in us too, because as Jesus said in **John 16:15**, "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That's why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." Well, what belongs to the Father is his Fatherly love, and to Jesus this is the great "glory the Father has given him" (John 17:24). It's therefore now the great glory "the Spirit is now making known to us" too.

So if that is becoming real to us, and we're seeing God in that light, as our Father who loves us and wishes to make his home with us, we can rest assured we're into the third stage on our road to holiness. And we know it's the Spirit doing it, because knowing that God is our Father and he loves us does not come to us naturally. It didn't to Adam and Eve, and it didn't to the Israelites. This is a step on the road to holiness that only the Spirit can provide.

And he provides it by having these words from Psalm 22 brought up from the archives to remind us that this is what God sent Jesus for, so that in reading this verse we realize that no matter what we're going through we are loved. And not only loved by God as our Father, but also by a brother now too, whose heart and hope is to get it into our heads what an amazing Father we've got. We see that in the second part of Psalm 22:22, also quoted in **Hebrews 2:12**, where Jesus says "in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

So first he wants us to grasp we have a Father who loves us, but he also wants to sing the Father's praises to us too. He wants us to know every wonderful thing there is to know about the Father. This was his life's work while he was here as a human, because to him, as he said in **John 17:3**, "this is life eternal that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ," and in **verse 26**, "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known." It is Jesus' ultimate dream - his heart and hope, in other words - that everything he knows about the Father we come to know too.

So how does he do it? Well, since he has all these Christian brothers and sisters of his nicely set up and seated in congregations, and they're all very happy reading and listening to his word, he grabs the chance to stride right into our presence and sing the Father's praises. This is what made the agony he experienced and talked so personally about in Psalm 22 worth it, because he knew the time would be coming when he could walk right into all these congregations and really make the Father and his Father's love for us as his restored children begin to "sing" and come alive for us.

You can see why, then, in this third stage on the road to holiness we find ourselves wanting to meet together as Christians, because it's here that the praises of God come alive. To sing someone's praises means you're broadcasting how wonderful that person is. You love telling stories about them and the things you deeply respect and admire in them, like their integrity, honesty, goodness, generosity, kindness, patience, faithfulness, humility and gentleness. You'd love to go on and on listing their qualities and telling stories, as people often do at funerals.

Well, this is what Jesus wants to do in our congregations; he wants to talk about and sing the praises of his Father, and in just as much detail too. And how does he do it? Well, he has the Holy Spirit pulling up all these scriptures and verses that he, Jesus, himself said that remind us this is what he came for. And by us just reading them, as we are right now in Hebrews, it's an open invitation from us to Jesus for him to come on in and make that real for us. We're flinging the door wide open for him to stride into our congregation and right into our presence to sing the Father's praises.

And it's what I utterly depend on him doing, because I know I don't have the ability in me to make that happen. All I can do is slap together a few words in a sermon that I know full well fall far short of what they truly mean, which frustrates me to no end. I start and restart sermons as new thoughts strike me, so more hours are spent trying to phrase these thoughts into something I desperately hope is accurate, but also practical too, that spark something of real value in making what we're here in church for come alive.

I also know that within seconds of finishing a sermon most of it is forgotten, and especially when sandwiches and goodies appear, but for me to then think that nothing has actually happened in our heads and hearts is placing me in the same dangerous spot as those Christians in Hebrews 2:3, who were "neglecting the great salvation" Jesus had now made possible. And this has only just dawned on me because of this verse in Hebrews 2:12. I now realize Jesus can even take my ramblings and make them sing God's praises. Why?

Because that's the promise he made back in Psalm 22. And because WE are now his brothers this is what he's doing for us. That's why being here meeting as a congregation of Christians is the most important thing in my life, because this is where Jesus is right in his element declaring his Father's name to his brothers and in the presence of our congregations singing his Father's praises. It took up all his ministry while he was here as a human for his brother Israelites, and it's taking up all his ministry now with his brother Christians.

But Jesus has to watch everything pop out of our heads as soon as the sandwiches arrive too. He knows we've got a million **other** things pressing on our minds as well, so how on earth does he make the glory of the Father's love and his wonderful qualities come alive in us with so many distractions, stresses and pain interfering with the message? I wonder the same thing. I wonder if I can ever truly inspire or teach anything of useful and practical value in a world that knocks the energy right out of us.

But Jesus was up against the same thing in his ministry. Huge crowds eagerly followed him, but most of them hadn't got a clue what he was talking about, and many of his disciples drifted away when he preached things that didn't make sense to them. People were also suffering horribly from sicknesses and demons, and there was constant opposition to his teachings. By the end of his ministry he only had a hundred and twenty followers. All that effort preaching and teaching - and for what?

And the Christians in Hebrews were probably thinking that too, because for all their meeting as a church together for the last thirty years or so, they had little to show for it. It sounds like they were just a small house church, and they were under all sorts of pressure from people who hated them, including members of their own families. How on earth, then, could they grasp and be inspired by the greatness of the Father's love and his other amazing qualities in an atmosphere like that?

Well, into the mind of the author of Hebrews at this point pops another statement by Jesus from the Old Testament. It's in **Hebrews 2:13**, in which Jesus is quoted saying, "I will put my trust in him."

Talk about finding the proverbial needle in a haystack, because this one sentence verse was buried in the depths of Isaiah - in **Isaiah 8:17** to be precise. But this is the verse the Holy Spirit hauled to the surface for this moment, to show us how Jesus reacted to the impossible situation he'd been lumped with, of being sent to tell his fellow Jews about the greatness of the Father, when so few of them were in a position to respond.

So how did Jesus react? With this one simple sentence: “I will put my trust in him.” And that was it. That was the solution.

Well, you can see why the Holy Spirit pulled up this verse from Isaiah, because it was exactly the verse the author of Hebrews needed too. This entire book of Hebrews was sparked by a pastor who wanted his congregation to get back on the road to holiness, and back up to stage three again, of Jesus making them holy by developing the great God’s divine nature in them in preparation for them being crowned with glory and honour as members of God’s royal family basking in God’s Fatherly love forever.

So what they so desperately needed for that to happen was the Father and his love - and all the other marvellous qualities of his divine nature - to come alive in their heads and hearts. But here they were, instead, slipping back to stage two and thinking obedience to the law was all they needed.

It wasn’t, not in the third stage on the road to holiness, because holiness - the understanding and developing of God’s lovely qualities in us - is totally the work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. At stage three, then, they were learning to put all their trust in him.

And that’s the lesson for us too, isn’t it? For us to grasp the greatness of the Father’s love and all the other qualities of his divine nature, it isn’t a work of our doing, it’s a work of his. And I’ve had to learn that in my ministry too, because I know I’m not the best speaker in the world, nor am I a trained theologian with degrees after my name, and nor do I have the ability to sing God’s praises so well for us all that a splendid vision of God and what he’s planned for us opens up every time I do a sermon.

Like the author of Hebrews I’d love for that to happen, of course, but experience tells me it doesn’t. As soon as a sermon is done I hear people talking about sports and work and nothing about the sermon. So why bother doing sermons at all? But it’s dawned on me going through these verses in Hebrews that in the third stage of holiness it’s the work of the Spirit and he knows best what you and I need at the time we need it, and I’m learning to trust in that. It doesn’t mean I get lazy and not do any study, because I also know Jesus speaks to us through his written word, and that’s how he declares his Father’s name and sings his praises in our congregations. So I get into his word, absolutely, but trust him to take it where he knows it needs to go.

And then, hopefully, it trickles down to you next, that for you to get what you need to hear, you put your trust in him too.

For me to think, then, that nothing much is happening in our little church, and that my sermons aren't doing much for anyone either, I'm actually neglecting the salvation Jesus provided in stage three, that he, through the Holy Spirit, will provide each of us with exactly what we need.

So first of all we see Jesus putting his trust in God, which served as a reminder from the Holy Spirit in Hebrews that if Jesus, of all people, needed to trust God, then obviously we need to as well. And that's what popped into the head of the author of Hebrews as a reminder to him too, that as a pastor he could trust Jesus to make his sermons meet the needs of his congregation, because in this third stage of holiness it was all about trust.

But there's another verse from the Old Testament that now pops into the author of Hebrews head, quoted in the second half of **Hebrews 2:13**, and also a quote from Isaiah 8 - in fact the very next verse after "I will put my trust in him." So it follows right along, but this time describing the lovely result of trust. From **Isaiah 8:18**, then, Jesus says "Here am I, and the children God has given me." And this is the result of Jesus' trust. It's coming before his Father one day with us in tow, and saying, "It's me, Father, with these children of yours that you gave me to care for and get ready."

So declaring his Father's name and singing his praises worked, didn't it? It didn't look like it at the time, because most of his brother Israelites and fellow Jews didn't appear to be catching on at all. But some did, and they moved from stage two to stage three on the road to holiness, as they saw and heard the Father's love in Jesus' example and teaching and they responded to it. And then in their congregations Jesus through the Holy Spirit sang the praises of God and all his virtues, which had the desired effect of transforming them into Jesus' likeness and sharing his divine nature in readiness for becoming his brother kings crowned with glory and honour and basking in the Father's love forever.

And that made me think about my job and my joy as a pastor, because I can't think of anything better in my life than being able to say, "Here I am, exactly where I want to be, with the brothers and sisters God has given me to care for and make ready." And then one day accompanying Jesus into his Father's presence and hearing Jesus say of us, "Here am I and the children of yours you gave me. And because this little congregation trusted me they're ready and raring to go."

It's a great reminder from the Holy Spirit in Jesus' own words that this is the heart and hope of Jesus for his brothers and sisters.

And that made me think of the fourth stage on our road to holiness, of passing on what we know to others. I asked earlier what it actually does for us knowing we're of the same family as Jesus. Well, here we've been given this picture in Hebrews of Jesus saying to his Father, "Here am I, and the children you've given me." And by using the word "children" it means we are as much sons and daughters of the Father as he is. Which means, then, that we're everything Jesus is, and this is what the Holy Spirit is now reminding us of in this verse. And it's wonderful knowing that, but for what purpose?

Well, if we're everything Jesus is it means we now SHARE Jesus' heart and hope of "declaring God's name and singing his praises" too, right? And that's exactly what Peter said we'd be doing in **1 Peter 2:9** when he wrote to his fellow Christians: "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God **SO THAT you may declare the praises of him** who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Our road to holiness, therefore, doesn't stop with knowing the Father and his love and all the other marvellous qualities of his divine nature for ourselves alone. Jesus is making us holy so we share his heart and hope of others coming to know the Father, and others coming to the point they too put their trust in the Holy Spirit to make God their Father - and all that he is and has planned for them - just as real to them too.

So now the fourth stage on our road to holiness becomes recognizable too, because at the heart of it is a whole new view of people. What we now see in people is that they're all on the road to holiness, because it's Jesus' heart and hope to say to his Father, "Here am I, and the children you gave me." This is Jesus' ultimate dream for us all, and the Holy Spirit is making it happen.

And that has dramatically changed my attitude to people. I see everyone now as somewhere on the road to holiness. I see it in the natural goodness in people, and how easily it comes out in their smiles, their enjoyment of each other, their love for their families, and their attempts at making the world a better place. I see it people being honest in response to their conscience. I also see it in people's desire to please God in their religions, and in Christians who are clearly being transformed into Jesus' likeness. All three stages on the road to holiness are clearly visible and recognizable all over the place.

It means that everyone either is, or is on the way to being, a child of the Father and a brother or sister to Jesus, being made ready for being crowned with glory and honour. And since I know it's my calling now in the fourth stage on the road to holiness to help people on the way to that, "I put my trust in him" that he'll make it happen through me.