

Hebrews

Hebrews 2:14-16 - Reason for hope in a scary world

Part 8 was about the heart and hope of Jesus, expressed in his own words in **Hebrews 2:12-13**. And the fact that these verses are all quotes from the Old Testament shows us that Jesus was thinking these things, and expressing them, long before he was born as a human being. So this has always been the heart and hope of Jesus, all through the Old Testament, and all through his ministry to the Jews in the first century, and now in Hebrews to his church as well.

And what is his heart and hope? It is making his Father's love and all his Father's wonderful qualities and divine nature come to life for us. It is Jesus' great joy now, having suffered and tasted death to restore us back to being children of God, to be able to talk to us as our brother and members of the same family about the Father he's always known, **whom we can now come to know too**. He waited a long time for this, having predicted it himself way back in Psalm 22, and prayed it would happen in John 17.

And now at last he has his church full of brothers and sisters with whom he can **SHARE** his heart and hope. And in three ways: first and foremost declaring his Father's name and singing his praises (Hebrews 2:12), so that, secondly (verse 13), we put our total trust in the Father - just as Jesus himself did - no matter what happens to us. And thirdly (verse 13), that we know what the result of our trust is, that one day we will be standing in our Father's presence with our elder brother Jesus, ready and eager with Jesus to fulfill and enjoy what we are the Father's children for.

It's these three things that we now take with us into **Hebrews 2:14**, which starts off with the words, "Since the children..." So the author of Hebrews is keeping our minds glued to this one central point, that as Christians we are God's very own children. It's who we are now, because "to all who received Jesus and believed in his name," **John 1:12**, "**he gave the right to become children of God.**" We are literally, as **verse 13** says, "born of God."

But **HOW** could Jesus give us "the right" to become children "born of God"? Because, **Hebrews 2:14-15**, "Since God's children have flesh and blood, Jesus 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."

From those two verses we learn what we humans needed to have the right to become children of God again. And I say “again,” because we had that right given to us originally in Genesis. God made all the other creatures “according to their kinds,” **Genesis 1:25**, but in **verse 26** he made humans according to his OWN image and likeness - or his own kind - which is the same as saying he made us as his very own children.

So we started off as God’s children. That was our birthright. And in Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 we see what our birthright as God’s very own children was for. It was all about God and man happily working together in caring for the planet, with God supplying all the man’s needs in Genesis 1, and the man willingly doing what God instructed in Genesis 2. And to begin with it all went swimmingly, because the man God chose to start the ball rolling did everything he was instructed to do, and he trusted God implicitly. In his obedience and trust he was truly BEING a child of God too.

And all the man had to do was keep obeying and trusting God for God’s plan to work, and the relationship between God and man to flourish. With the making of a woman as well, children would then be born into that same Father/child relationship with God as their birthright, to carry God’s plan from that point on to all creation by THEIR obedience and trust in God too.

But the serpent, under the influence of the devil (Revelation 12:9, 20:2), managed to break that relationship between God and humans by getting them to obey and trust what it said instead. And this became “the power of death” the author of Hebrews talked about in **Hebrews 2:14**, because when Adam and Eve made that fateful decision to not obey and trust God it was the death of our human birthright, the death of our relationship with God as his children, and the death of his plan for all creation through humans.

By not obeying and trusting God we gave the devil the power of death, and he held it in his grubby little hands with devastating results on our planet. It got to the point that people’s thoughts were so “evil all the time” in **Genesis 6:5** that God said, “I will wipe mankind from the face of the earth,” **verse 7**. That’s how great the devil’s “power of death” had become. It even included the death of animals and birds too, because God was so “grieved” he was ready to not only destroy humanity but the entire creation as well.

“But,” **verse 8**, “Noah found favour in God’s eyes,” because, **verse 9**, he “walked with God.” Noah obeyed and trusted God, which resulted in God preserving Noah and his family so that 400 years later Abraham was born, and through Abraham’s descendants God got his plan back on track again.

I mention all this because the author of Hebrews mentions it too, in **Hebrews 2:16**, when he writes, “For it isn’t angels Jesus helps, it’s Abraham’s descendants.” But why would he suddenly bring in Abraham’s descendants when talking about the devil having the power of death?

Because in Abraham’s descendants is the clue to how the devil’s power of death has been broken, and in that is the key to us being restored as God’s children so that God’s plan through his children is right back on track again.

And if anyone understood that it was those Christians in Hebrews, because their congregation was mainly made up of Jews who were literally descended from the great patriarch Abraham. They knew it too, because all Jews called Abraham their “father” in **John 8:39**. So they knew the promise God had made to their father Abraham, that he would bless the whole world through Abraham’s descendants (Genesis 12:3, 22:17-18). They knew WHY God had made such an amazing promise to Abraham too: Because Abraham had obeyed and trusted God (Genesis 26:5, Hebrews 11:8).

So here was a congregation of Christians who knew what God had called Abraham for, they knew the promises God was fulfilling through them as Abraham’s descendants, and they knew the importance of obedience and trust in the fulfillment of God’s plan through them personally. They also knew that when God made promises he stuck to them, which meant he’d do everything in his power to help them, since they were the ones he was fulfilling his plan through. And that becomes meaningful to us Christians today too, because **Galatians 3:29** tells us that “**We now are Abraham’s descendants**, so the promises God made to Abraham are now promises to us” as well.

What we have in Abraham, therefore, is a promise from God that he will never give up on his children or his plan for this planet. He didn’t give up on his plan in Noah’s day, and he hasn’t given up on his plan through Abraham’s descendants either. So we have a genuine reason as Christians for having hope, even in a scary world that looks like it’s collapsing all around us.

And this is what the Christians in Hebrews needed to hear as well, because they too were living in a scary world in danger of imminent collapse. Many of their fellow Jews were rising up in violent rebellion against the Romans, which the Romans clearly would not tolerate. And they didn’t tolerate it either, because in only two or three years time, in 70 AD, the Romans unleashed their might on the Jewish nation, resulting in the death of millions of Jews, the destruction of the Temple and the ransacking of Jerusalem, just as Daniel and Jesus had predicted.

The “fear of death,” therefore, that the author of Hebrews talks about in **Hebrews 2:15**, was very real. And it’s becoming just as real today too, as the facts of climate change are becoming more and more obvious, and there’s a sense of panic filling the air as people realize what we’ve done to our planet and what the future holds for us because of it. Their future in Hebrews looked really grim, but so now does ours.

But here we are as Christians with a clear reason for hope given to us in these three verses in Hebrews. And it’s based, first of all, on **Hebrews 2:16** and the help we receive from our Father, and now Jesus too, because **as Christians we’ve now inherited the title of “Abraham’s descendants.”**

Those two vital words hopefully ring loud and clear in the ears of every Christian, because they contain the absolute assurance that the Earth and humans are not going to be wiped out by climate change - or by anything else for that matter. That fear is removed, because the existence of Abraham’s descendants on this planet means God’s promise of blessing all nations still stands, and that means he’s very much on the job saving the world from all the corruption and nastiness of evil that caused all our problems in the first place.

But how do we know Abraham’s descendants still exist on this planet? The answer to that from the author of Hebrews is in **verse 15**, because Abraham’s descendants are noticeably fearless when it comes to death. Or, as verse 15 phrases it, they are the ones who are “free, who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

Abraham’s descendants are the one group of people on this planet who have found reason to hope in a scary world. And that is quite something, because as Abraham’s descendants today we live in a world with death being thrown at us from every angle. It’s all around us in the endless news reports of people dying in floods, wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Add to that list all those who die from disease, famine, drought, poverty, accidents, terrorism, wars, suicide and murder. And add yet more to that list of those who live in fear of death every day from evil dictators, secret service hit squads, religious persecution, economic collapse, chemical pollution of their air, water and food, rising water levels, violent weather, loss of their livelihood to big corporations and crime, radioactive fallout from leaking nuclear reactors, and the loss of people they depend on - like children losing their parents to AIDS in Africa. We face fear of death like never before, and on a global scale too where no one escapes the effects of a rapidly changing climate. And the media makes things worse as well, by feeding on our fears so that even if climate change isn’t that bad the FEAR of it certainly is.

And sometimes the fear of death gets real close to home too. I feel it every time my son jumps into his car for another adventure, knowing that 3,000 people are killed every day in car accidents. That's over a million people every year. I felt it when my wife was told she had congestive heart failure. I felt it when the sky turned green a few years back and the wind came howling in like I'd never heard it before. I feel it when I'm flying and the plane suddenly drops three hundred feet in turbulence. I'd feel it if I was surrounded by thugs demanding money too, or if my Doctor told me I had a terminal illness, or I heard footsteps behind me in a dark alleyway in a dangerous area of town, or a car was heading straight for me in my lane, or I'd just found out my diet had been killing me and it's too late to reverse it, or I've just lost all my savings in a scam, or I'm trapped in my car as it sinks in a lake or it's just caught fire.

And these were just a few of the thoughts I had when writing a list of things that make me afraid of death or dying. I came up with forty six things in total, and very quickly too, including the fear of my brain dying and getting dementia, of receiving death threats for something I've written or stood up for, and of not being there for my family if I die. I'm afraid of how I'll die too. And what if I was in a jail cell with a psychopath? And there are so many types of death too - the death of our dreams, the death of a lifelong relationship, the death of any feeling of purpose in your life, the death of your faculties, like eyesight, and the death of not feeling loved or useful.

And it manifests itself in a feeling of hopelessness and dread of the future. I've talked to several young people of late who are truly scared of what's coming, and so much so they don't want to have a family because of what their children will face in school, the idiotic ideas people have about sex, marriage and family, the expense of living and of husband and wife having little time together, and what climate change may do to everything from the soaring price of energy to the threats of food shortages and anarchy when panic really begins to spread.

It also manifests in people who are deathly afraid they're missing out on life, so they feel they must live life to the full, regardless of risk or concern for other people. Life is not a dress rehearsal, they say, or you only have one life to live, so do everything now while you can. Carpe diem, seize the day. But all those statements tell of how much death haunts us, including trying to deny it and dilute it by calling funeral homes 'Life Celebration Centres'.

So how on earth can we Christians have hope - and offer hope - when we face all these fears too? The answer from the author of Hebrews is back one more verse to **Hebrews 2:14**.

Our source of hope in this scary world according to verse 14 is Jesus “sharing our humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil.”

To get an understanding of what that means, we go back to the story of Abraham again, because tucked inside the promise God made to Abraham and his descendants was this promise in Hebrews 2:14 of Jesus too. And Paul takes the time to explain it for us in **Galatians 3:16**. When talking about the promise God made to Abraham’s descendants - or “Abraham’s seed” as he calls it - Paul says: “The Scripture does not say ‘many seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘your seed,’ meaning one person, Christ.”

So Paul narrows down Abraham’s descendants to just one descendant, Christ. The promise of blessing all nations, therefore, would come through Christ. But wasn’t the promise God made to Abraham’s descendants in the plural, not to just one person, right? Again Paul explains, this time in **Romans 9:7**, that God was fulfilling his promise to Abraham through just ONE LINE of his descendants, starting with Isaac, then Jacob, and then through Israel the nation, leading up to just the Jews as God’s people for four centuries, which in turn led up to the birth of Jesus as a Jew.

It would be through Jesus, therefore, a direct descendant of Abraham, that God’s promise to bless all nations would be fulfilled. It all hinged on Jesus. So what did Jesus do to make the blessing of all people on Earth possible?

According to Hebrews 2:14 he died as a human being to destroy the devil and the devil’s power of death over us. Or as **Philippians 2:8** phrases it, “he was made in human likeness and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.” The word “obedient” is so important in that verse, because it was Jesus’ **obedience** to God’s will that he die a human death, and his **trust** in God’s plan and promise, that gave Jesus’ death power over the devil. So I would add “by Jesus’ **OBEDIENCE** to death” in Hebrews 2:14 that the devil’s power was broken, because it was **Jesus’ relationship with the Father as an obedient and trusting son** that stripped the devil of his power over us when he broke that relationship we had with God in Genesis.

Jesus did the one thing we did not do - that would have given US power over the devil too: He obeyed and trusted God in recognition of who he was, a son and child of God, and that was what made him respond the way he did. It resulted in the devil having no power over him, and no more power over the rest of us humans too. So all those things that make us fear death, or that make us feel life is hopeless, scary and totally futile, are no longer valid.

They're no longer in effect either. They're still in effect for people who are "following the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" in **Ephesians 2:2**, yes, but they are not in effect in the descendants of Abraham who believe Hebrews 2:14, that Jesus' obedience to death on a cross shattered the devil's work and power over us.

And the evidence that the devil's work in us has been shattered is our freedom from the slavery of the fear of death. And that really brings to life **Romans 8:20** which takes us back to Genesis when God actually made us "subject on purpose to frustration," hopelessness, futility and fear of death for not obeying and trusting him in the Garden of Eden. But through Jesus obeying and trusting him God has been "liberating us from that bondage," **verse 21**, to bring us "into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

God's been getting us back to being his children again, in other words, so that we never have to fear for our lives or ever be plagued by feelings of hopelessness and futility again. "For in this hope" we now have as his children, **verse 24**, "we are saved." We are saved from all that stuff this world throws at us to make us fear for our lives, that make us feel like we're missing out on life, or that make us feel bitter at life and God when we're suffering.

And what makes all this real to us is the Holy Spirit enabling us to "see Jesus" (Hebrews 2:9), including seeing Jesus now in these three verses in Hebrews 2:14-16 that tell us what Jesus did as our brother to break the power of the devil over us. What he did was obey and trust his Father all the way through to death on a cross, because he too believed in the promise God made to Abraham, that through Abraham's descendants all nations would be blessed. And HE was the descendant of Abraham that would start that ball rolling.

But to get that ball rolling Jesus could never allow the devil to break his own relationship with the Father. No matter what the devil threw at him, Jesus would never waver or wobble in his obedience to and trust in his Father. He would always be his Father's Son, obeying and trusting his Father's instructions, believing his Father loved him and his Father knew best.

But it made him sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the point an angel was sent to strengthen him in Luke 22:43, which is encouraging to know, because when I read in **Romans 4:20** that our father Abraham "did not waver or wobble through unbelief regarding the promise of God" either, he too "was strengthened in his faith." So, both Jesus and Abraham needed help to obey and trust, and they got it too.

And what that help did for Abraham was “fully persuade him that God had the power to do what he’d promised,” **verse 21**, the result of which was “it was credited to him as righteousness,” **verse 22**.

So in strengthening Abraham’s belief in God’s promise to bless all nations through him, Abraham was given full credit as a righteous person. Well, we know what being “righteous” means; it means having God’s character and God’s nature. And having God’s nature is the best thing we could have as humans, because it means we’re back to being made in his image again, we’re back to being his children, which should jolly well “fully persuade” us too that we have nothing to fear either, because it means God’s promise to and through his children still stands, and the blessing of all nations through Abraham’s descendants is still in full swing.

And it’s in that hope that we now live every day, because it’s just as the author of Hebrews said in **Hebrews 2:16**, that it’s Abraham’s descendants Jesus is now helping and strengthening, because we are now the ones the promise to Abraham is being fulfilled through. No wonder Jesus so often told his disciples to not be afraid, and that like him we can overcome the world and all its fears and feelings of hopelessness and futility, because just like him we have the help and strengthening WE need too.

And we need help and strengthening, because the devil uses every tactic in the book to get us worried and fearful and overwhelmed by feelings of doom and gloom. And what an opportunity he has to do that now, as fear and panic about climate change are really taking hold. So what is our response as Christians?

Well, in these last days God is speaking to us through his Son, so that’s my starting point in response to climate change. And to not start with him is to neglect the great salvation God has provided through him. But **WHAT** salvation has God provided for us through his Son?

It’s salvation from the devil’s power of death holding us in slavery to the fear of death, so that our lives are filled with hope instead, no matter what’s happening in the world or to us personally. That’s the salvation Jesus has made possible by his death. He’s restored our relationship with God as his children, which takes on real meaning today, because if what’s happening climate-wise in the world right now continues at its present rate we could easily get caught up in being fearful too, or be tempted to bury our heads in the sand and deny climate change is even happening, both of which make us totally useless to people who really are scared and are looking for help.

The Christians in Hebrews were becoming useless too, because their focus was on how tough and scary their world was, instead of remembering who they were and what their purpose was. So the author of Hebrew reminds them that they are Abraham's descendants through whom the blessing of all nations is happening exactly as God promised, so their purpose was to be a blessing to people, for which God would provide them with all the strength and help they'd need.

And isn't that where our thoughts take us when we realize that's who we are now, that we're the present day descendants of Abraham whom God is blessing people through in our day too? And of course we're a blessing because we already hold all the cards in our hand that **give us reason for hope** in a scary world, which means we can now give hope to others. And that's what we're supposed to be able to do, in line with what Peter said in **1 Peter 3:15**, that we are easily able "to answer everyone who asks us **the reason for the hope we have.**"

Well, we have that reason. We know the devil's power over us has been broken, so he can no longer break our relationship with God as his children. It means we now have a Father - and an elder brother Jesus too - who will strengthen and help us if we're feeling a bit shaky ourselves, or we're being overcome with worry for those we care for, like our kids and grandkids, in the future. And we know that same help from our Father and Jesus is now available to **anyone** who asks for it too. Everybody on the planet now has free access to Jesus and his Father. And that surely has to be the most powerful blessing in a person's life, to hear that said by Christians who are also living examples of it too, who show what happens when we take advantage of our access to God. What happens is hope, beautiful hope, no matter how scary things get.

We've also got the example of Jesus' life and how he responded in the scary world he was living in. Jesus knew what was coming to his fellow Jews. Terrible, horrible things were about to happen at the hands of the Romans, which he warned about in Matthew 24. It was a scary world for Jesus personally too, because the Jewish High Priest and his cronies wanted him dead, so he lived under the constant cloud of knowing he would die a nasty death at the hands of people who hated him.

So what was his response in such a scary world? It was very simple; it was stick like glue to his Father's instructions, including obedience to death on a cross, a horribly scary proposition. But by obeying and trusting in his Father's instructions he could go to the cross with joy knowing his death would be the start of all nations on Earth being blessed.

But that was Jesus; what about us? Well, Jesus' answer to us was just as simple: "If anyone loves me, obey my teaching," he said in **John 14:23**. So the key in our lives too in being a blessing to others is to stick like glue to Jesus' instructions and what he taught his disciples when he was here, because in doing so he promised we would experience "peace" unlike anything the world offers, **verse 27**. There would be no need whatsoever, therefore, for our hearts to be troubled, and no reason for us to be afraid (same verse).

So now that he's given us the secret to not being afraid of anything or anyone, what instructions or teachings did Jesus actually give to his disciples that made them - and now us too - a blessing to others in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham?

Well fortunately for us, Jesus called Matthew to follow him, because Matthew being a tax collector made him meticulous in recording exactly what Jesus taught and summarizing it in just three chapters, which we call the 'Sermon on the Mount'. It begins with the words, "Blessed are....," so Jesus' focus right off the bat is about blessings and how we are blessed. We've got some really practical clues here, therefore, as to what blesses people.

And when you take into account that Jesus is talking to his disciples in their native Aramaic here too, the word "blessed" takes on even more meaning, because it means "Oh, the blessedness of." So the first thing Jesus says here is "Oh, the blessedness of the poor in spirit," to convey just how staggeringly wonderful it is for a person to have that quality in him. This is Jesus' primary focus, therefore; it's not on all the negative stuff that scares us to death in this world, it's on the wonderful possibilities we can experience from following his instructions, that we can now pass on to others too.

And it's a blessedness that won't disintegrate under fire too, because when Jesus promised blessedness or joy like this, he also said "No one will be able to take it away from you" in **John 16:22**. With that in mind I now translate "Oh, the blessedness of" into "Oh, the sheer unshatterable joy of," because to me that gets Jesus' point across that what he's offering us is a joy that cannot be destroyed by anything this world throws at us, whether it's pain, grief, loss, or fear. And it ties in perfectly too with Jesus utterly destroying the devil's power of death over us in **Hebrews 2:14**. All that fear and focus on death has gone for us Christians. And not just gone, they've also been replaced with all these unshatterable blessings instead. No wonder Paul wrote in **Ephesians 1:3**, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ," because that is our experience now and nothing can take it away from us.

So this is what we carry with us wherever we go and through whatever happens on this planet. This is the salvation Jesus opened to us by smashing the devil; it's a whole list of unshatterable joys in Matthew 5:3-11. And what a blessing they would be in all nations now being threatened with climate change or any other threat to life and limb, be it the fears we all face as humans still subject to suffering and dying, or the fear of what we face as a planet if we keep on destroying the environment and heating up the atmosphere.

And for me this is what bounced out from these three verses in Hebrews to give us genuine and comforting reason for hope in our increasingly scary world, for both ourselves and in us being a blessing to others. And it comes from seeing Jesus, knowing what he accomplished in his death, and as his present day disciples following his instructions and getting right at the meat of what he taught.