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Jesus Is For Us
Hebrews 2:10-18

¹⁰ *It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make **the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*** ¹¹ *For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father.* ¹² *For this reason **Jesus^[k] is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters,***

*“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”*

¹³ *And again,*

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

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

¹⁴ *Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, **he himself likewise shared the same things,*** so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ *and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.* ¹⁶ *For it is clear that he did not come to help angels but the descendants of Abraham.* ¹⁷ *Therefore he had to **become like his brothers and sisters in every respect,*** so that he might become *a merciful and faithful high priest* in the service of God, to make a **sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.** ¹⁸ *Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is **able to help those who are being tested.***

.....

Today we are starting **a study of the Book of Hebrews,**
a great book at the end of the New Testament,
all about Jesus being our **High Priest,** the **pioneer** of our faith,
And the one who **suffers FOR us and WITH us.**

It is in Hebrews that we find verses that might be familiar to you,
like Hebrews 11:1: *faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,*
or Hebrews 4:14-16, *let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, or*
Hebrews 12: *since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, or the*

verses we heard just a couple weeks ago from Hebrews 13 about mutual love and hospitality.

It's a challenging book, because read in the wrong context or spirit,

We could interpret it to mean that we should ***nullify*** the Old Testament and Jewish law and beliefs...

but we know from Jesus himself in Matthew 5:17

that Jesus did ***not come to abolish*** the law and the Prophets,

but to ***fulfill*** them—a word that means the completion of, or finding the full expression of.

So Jesus brings us a New Covenant with God, as our High Priest,

but this new covenant does NOT nullify the Old one.

It is the furtherance and full expression of it.

All throughout the Book of Hebrews,

we see that Jesus is the PIONEER of our faith—

the one who has gone before us in faithfulness to God,

also before us in temptation, suffering,

and even death, on the cross.

Because of his death, we no longer need to fear death.

We are not exactly sure of the original audience of this book,

but we know it was written to early Christians

who were coming from the Jewish faith,

and being ***tempted to go back to the Law only***, instead of relying on Christ.

It was also written to Christians who were being ***persecuted*** for their faith, and needed encouragement and strength.

So it is a book of hope,

It is a book of ***encouragement***,

And a book about the ***power of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice*** for us.

So it's perfect for the MOMENT we find ourselves in TODAY.

A moment where violence and hatred seems to have won the day.

Where vilifying those with whom we disagree is the norm,

And wanting their suffering is justified.

We've all heard the news this week, no need to restate it.

But the fact that there was a ***political assassination*** is soul-crushing to those who believe in civic discourse, and love of the other, even our enemies.

We follow a Savior who told us to turn the other cheek,

and pray for those who persecute us.

Jesus NEVER encouraged hate, hateful speech, or any kind of violence.

And yet that is what is happening, all around us.

In this assassination this week,

In those of lawmakers in Minnesota three months ago,

In the assassination of Jewish leaders in D.C. four months ago,

And the near assassinations of Josh Shapiro,

and Paul Pelosi, and President Trump.

This kind of political violence is not new—

we remember Steve Scalise, Gabby Giffords, Ronald Reagan, and the deaths of JFK, RFK, and MLK Jr, and many others.

The difference today is that when these things happen, people see it on social media.

Imagine the ***trauma*** of all the young people who saw this on TikTok.

That is something we should be praying about.

And the fact that it was on social media means this kind of hatred can spread at lightning speeds.

The difference is that in the past, leaders have universally CONDEMNED political violence.

And today, some celebrate it.

Some feel it is inevitable.

Some encourage further violence by not condemning the hatred we see and hear.

And then we have the senseless gun violence everywhere—

the violence that means all of our schools, churches and businesses have to think about this and plan for this—all the time.

Just think about that!

We've been desensitized to all this violence and hate.

We hear it and see it all the time.

Coverage of 310 mass shootings, just this year.

And it is BREAKING God's heart, and ours—

the loss of children in church,

students in school,

people gathered in restaurants, nightclubs or parks.

What does God have to say about all of this?

Well, Jesus has a lot to say about hate.

He encourages us to pray for those who persecute us,

And love those we consider enemies.

He says we should LOVE one another—as He loves us—

not just those with whom we agree,

but all people, as beloved children of God.

Jesus also spoke up against injustice,

Abuse, and evil, like violence, and taking advantage of the least of these.

But he did it with mercy.

With patience and kindness.

With love.

Love really is the key—in times like these, especially.

And what might HEBREWS have to say to us, today?

Well, this passage affirms that Jesus was made perfect through his suffering, Specifically his suffering on the cross.

His suffering means that we are never alone in ours.

Hebrews reminds us that Jesus was fully divine, and fully human,

Which means that he could both **save** us from our sins

as the **divine** Son of God,
And **feel** our pain, as the **human** Son of God.

We believe in the Incarnation of Jesus—

A word that means God became flesh and blood—one of us.
So he knows exactly what we are facing,
And how we feel.
He knows what it is to be tempted,
And what it is to stand up to temptation.
He knows violence, even political violence.
And he knows what it is to react with sorrow and anger over the violence around us.

Which is interesting, because as a Pastor,

one of the main reasons I hear people leave the church

is that they cannot understand how this angry, wrathful God
would demand the blood sacrifice of his only Son on the cross!
This makes no sense to them.

I have to admit, it makes no sense to ME either.

There are many different theories of atonement

that have been espoused over the centuries.

Atonement is the **mechanism of salvation** on the cross.

Some say that yes, God demanded a blood sacrifice of his Son,

just like the people of God had sacrificed animals for centuries.

That's known as sacrificial atonement.

Others say that God's only Son was paying a ransom to God—

to free us from sin.

And only Jesus could be that ransom.

Some say that Jesus' death on the cross was all about victory over death.

That's known as the Christus Victor theory of atonement.

Some say that Jesus was the sacrifice—of love.

And it is true that his was an act of love.

***But I wonder if understanding Jesus' death on the cross
is NOT about an angry, wrathful God,***

Or Jesus paying the price as a blood sacrifice,

Or Jesus being a ransom,

Or Jesus simply defeating death, although he did do that.

Or Jesus as a mere sacrifice of love.

What if it's not God who is violent and wrathful and vengeful—but US?

We are.

We---humanity.

We are the ones who are violent, not our loving God.

Some say that in this different view of the cross,

Jesus willingly took on the pain and humiliation of the cross,

Not to appease an angry God,

But to reveal OUR violence and cruelty towards one another.

He did this NOT to make us feel guilty,

but to FREE us from it all—

by offering us grace and forgiveness,

and a DIFFERENT WAY TO LIVE and love.

I cannot tell you how much I believe that.

Especially the longer I am in ministry.

I believe that God wants us to STOP the cycle of violence

that is running rampant right now.

I believe that God wants us to stop the hatred, the division,

the vilifying of those with whom we disagree.

I believe God wants us to STOP our words of hate,

Our actions that exclude those who are different,

And definitely to ***stop causing suffering*** for one another.

I believe that God wants us to treat one another

as beloved children of God,

As ***image-bearers*** of a loving God.

We are made in the image of God, and we are God's kids!

***I believe that the Incarnation of Jesus Christ
is God making a CHOICE to love us—***

in the most down-to-earth, real, flesh and blood way—
by becoming one of us, in the flesh....

and that Jesus took on the pain and suffering of human life,
so that we would NOT cause pain and suffering for human life!

Is this a stupid Pollyanna optimism?

I don't think so.

I think it's true to scripture.

I think it's true to Hebrews—where Jesus is our brother, and we are his family,
where Jesus is tested as we are, like us in every respect,
and he is the one who ***suffers FOR us, and WITH us.***

I think it's also true to the WHOLE of scripture,

especially the witness of Jesus' own life,
where he did NOT hurt those who disagreed with him,

He didn't hate them,

He didn't seek revenge upon them.

He simply LOVED them.

Can you even imagine?

What does that mean to YOU?

It reminds me of Paul's words in Romans 8—

where he says that in all things ***we are more than conquerors*** through him
who loved us,

And nothing—nothing—can separate us from the love of God in Jesus.

I wonder what that love of Jesus means to YOU?

I wonder what Jesus' call to ***love our enemies*** means to you?

If I may, I want to encourage you to do a few things this week.

First, pray for our country, and for all of our young people especially.

Second, try to move away from social media for awhile.

There is so much **evil** there.

So much **hatred**—especially the kind that hides behind the **anonymity and pride** of just typing on a screen, instead of having **real dialogue and real humility** before one another.

Finally, reach out to someone with whom you disagree.

Before you do that, **imagine** them as God's beloved child.

And ask yourself why God loves them, and how God loves them.

Then, **listen** to them.

Respect them.

Pray for them.

And ask Holy Spirit to help you to **LOVE them**.

And pray that they might love you too.

Friends, Jesus went to the cross FOR US—

so we are not asked to do that anymore.

But Jesus does ask us to treat one another as people for whom Jesus died.

He does ask us to show up for one another,

just as he shows up for us.

He begs and implores us

to turn away from hatred, evil, and violence,

And turn **toward the light** of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is for us.

The question is, WILL WE BE FOR ONE ANOTHER?

Or only ourselves?

May our Savior show us the way of love.

And for the gift of that love, all God's people can say together, Amen.