

“Freedom”

Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus Our High Priest

Hebrews 2:14-18

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April 6, 2018

Jeff: Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for the day You've provided, that we might come before You and that we might not only study Your word, but that we might lift up our voice in prayer.

Father, as we come, our hearts are heavy this morning. We've heard so many distressing things. And so, Father, we first of all ask that You will be with the Westover family and the Eaton family and their losses. Father, these are difficult, and they remind us of the sting of death. And yet, having just emerged from that Easter season and remembering particularly the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we're reminded that there is life after death. And so the Eaton family and the Westovers may rejoice, rejoicing that their loved ones are in the arms of the Savior whom they confessed. And so we're thankful for that.

But we also look forward to that wonderful day of resurrection with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, Father, our hearts anticipate it. Our minds know it to be true. And our eyes look for it.

Father, we also pray for Dick Clouser this morning. Father, we ask that Your hand would be upon him. Lord, bless him and strengthen him with recovery. Lord, bring him back to us soon, Doug as well. Father, we ask that your hand would be upon Doug as he recovers from his hospital stay. And we pray that You will bring him back as soon as Your providence will allow.

Father, we pray for Ruth. And we're so thankful for Sig's report about her. And Father, we ask that You will bless her with continued recovery.

And Father, we pray for our brother Bruce. We ask on his behalf that You would continue to give him strength and encouragement of heart. We pray, Father, that You'll make him well. And Father, we give these requests to You, asking that You will bless and strengthen Your people.

But we also pray that You'll open our eyes to Your word. Father, it's on mornings like this that we rise and our hearts feel heavy. And yet we pray that You'll make them light by being in Your word. Lord, we ask that You'll not give us happy hearts, but we pray that You'll give us hearts that rest in thanksgiving and joy, because we know that though there may be circumstances in life that challenge our faith, we will always be kept by Your sovereign hand. And though our faith may fluctuate, our Savior will not. And so we're thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for a strengthening of faith. And we pray, Father, for an ever vigilant look to the sky as we anticipate Your coming, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Well let's turn to Hebrews chapter 2. And somebody read for us verses 14-18.

Participant: *“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*

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is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham’s descendants. 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. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.” The word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Okay. What I’d like to do today is like that outline up there. What I’d like to do today is to look at a few introductory matters. I’d like to look at *the Son in our humanity, freedom from fear, and help for us.*

What I want to do today is that I want to come at this text from a particular perspective. I might have started this text off in a little bit of a different way. But I’ve been reading a little bit about anxiety lately. I’m going to speak this summer at our family conference and I’m going to speak on the topic of anxiety. I’m a little anxious about that. (*Laughter*) But as I was thinking about this particular text, I was thinking about some of the things that I’ve read.

But as I was thinking about this particular text I was thinking about some of the things that I’ve read. Now I thought to myself that it might be helpful for you to have me introduce this text with some of that material and tie it in to what I’m going to say to you. So the introduction today will be, and may in some ways seem disjointed. But hopefully it won’t be once we get to the text and you see what it is that I’m after.

So what is anxiety? Let me begin with that basic question. That’s an interesting question. When you begin to look at the literature that is often given about this particular topic, one of the things that you realize is that there’s not a consensus on what anxiety is, especially in the medical literature, because the medical field is fragmented in terms of their ways of coming at this particular problem.

So one of the things I thought is this. Let’s start with *etymology*. Let’s start with the origin of words. How does the word itself look? How does it reveal what it means?

Well when you think about etymology, you know that *anxiety* or *anxious* has a stem that is *anx*. Now this is one of those goofy things that only a linguist can answer. And I am not a linguist. But this comes from the word *angari*, which is *ang*. Now how an *anx* word is related to the stem of an *ang* word again only a linguist can tell you.

Participant: It sounds very similar.

Jeff: I totally agree with that. But there’s some goofy explanation people give as to why that is. (*Laughter*) But *angari* means *to choke*. Now when you think about this in terms of its ancient usage, *anxiety* means the same thing that it does today in the sports world, right? I mean, I thought that’s kind of neat, you know? We know what that means in the sports world.

I was reading in some of this literature where they were giving some of the men who have choked in the sports world. I thought that some of you may know a guy by the name of Steve Blass.

Participant: Oh come on now! You can’t pick on him! (*Laughter*)

Jeff: A Pirates pitcher, 1970—

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Participant: How about Bob Moose?

Jeff: I don't know, I'm a hockey guy. *(Laughter)* I'm just throwing this out because it's Pirates season and I just happened to have read it.

Participant: Now wait a minute. Steve Blass was the Oriole taker.

Second Participant: That's right.

First Participant: Well, he was.

Jeff: Well, I don't know. *(Laughter)* It said “the Pittsburgh Pirates.” *(Laughter)*

Participant: Not a good one. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: All right. We're going to cut it off. *(Laughter)* Just think about Alexander Ovechkin in last year's playoffs. *(Laughter)*

Participant: There you go.

Jeff: He choked offensively. Praise the Lord for that! *(Laughter)* We're going to move past this. *(Laughter)*

Medical definitions. When you think about anxiety, all these different ways of coming at the topic are interesting, but there's no consensus.

There's *psychoanalysis*. Freud says that we've got to dig deep into your past. We've got to find out why it is that you are feeling the way you're feeling. And that has something to do with your id and your ego relationship, and your mom and your dad, and so on and so forth.

And then there's the *behaviorist*, who talks about conditions and responses. And so you condition yourself to be nervous about this particular thing or that particular thing. You've given that response for so long that that's a pattern that you've built up.

Then there's the *biomedical*. And the biomedical has to do with the wiring of your brain and the way in which you've thought about things, the way in which you may be wired organically.

And then there's the *experiential view*. There are all these different medical views about anxiety. And what's interesting to me is that they just don't come to a consensus about how to give and provide a definition for anxiety. In fact, if you read the researchers, some of them believe in critiquing the formal definition of anxiety that's given. And they'll say that's not really a definition. It's just a description of some symptoms. So it's been really fascinating to uncover how much of a lack of consensus there is when you talk about something that's so pervasive in human life.

However, one researcher gave this definition and I absolutely love it. It's the “*existential crisis about ontological givens.*” *(Laughter)* I mean, you know a guy is really reaching when he gives these kinds of words because he's trying, he's hoping. He's going, “I'm going to give this definition. And I hope nobody asks because I don't know what it is. *(Laughter)* But it sounds like I do. And I'll say it in a hushed tone.” “Anxiety is the existential crisis of ontological givens.” *(Laughter)*

Transcriber's Note: Spoken with an affected tone and a mock English accent.

Jeff: And everybody says, “Whoa, that's really deep!” You know? *(Laughter)* But what is an existential crisis? It means just as it sounds. It's an existential existence. It's a crisis of existence. And *ontological givens*? Ontology is easy. It's about being. It's about the givens of life.

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Participant: It means you’re gonna die.

Jeff: It means you’re gonna die—mortality! (*Laughter*) When the man goes on to describe what these existential crises of the ontological givens, he says that it means you’re going to die. Bishop knows. You know what? Ask a theologian. (*Laughter*) He’ll tell you what it means, right? So it’s mortality, your fear of losing loved ones, meaning and purpose in life, feelings of humiliation. I mean, these are the kinds of things that we’re anxious about.

But you still don’t get any closer to a definition, and these are just descriptions. “What are you nervous about?”

“Well, I’m nervous about this.” You know, the funny thing about it is that when I was a kid of 17 years old, I struggled with anxiety badly. And you’d have some of the folk doctors tell you that you’ve just got a nervous stomach. And then the other folk doctors—and I’m talking about parents, aunts and uncles here—(*Laughter*), the other folk doctors would tell you that it’s all in your head. And you’d say to yourself, “Well, which is it? Is it all in my head or is it in my stomach?” Well, you know, it’s the basic worries of life is what it is.

But what about those people that are afraid of rats and cheese and vomiting and heights, and everything else? I mean, you know, it’s one thing to say that well, you know, fear and anxiety come from the fear of death, the fear of mortality, the fear of shame, the fear of losing loved ones, those kinds of things. But what about the person who has these kinds of fears?

Well one of the things that I learned when I was reading this literature is that I was learning about *fear displacement*. And I was learning that, for instance, the person who is afraid of vomiting is also afraid to fly. But they’re afraid to fly because they’re afraid that flying will make them nauseous and they’ll vomit. (*Laughter*) And so there is fear displacement.

Now on a very small scale that helps us to understand something—that fear is the root, and it’s displaced by those fears that we believe we can manage.

So here’s one doctor who comments on his patient’s fear of vomiting. “*His vomiting represents his fear of death. His vomiting and his unruly stomach generally are inarguable evidence of his embodiedness and consequently of his mortality.*” So even though it’s a fear of vomiting, his doctor says that it’s really stretching back to his fear of death. And his fear of vomiting and his fear of flying has displaced his real fear—fear of death.

Transcriber’s Note: The Latin word *radix* is on the board.

Participant: Define *radix*.

Jeff: Root. Sorry. Now I don’t know about you, but did anyone listen to the text we read today? Let me just read it to you. Hebrews chapter 2, and here is where the tie-in comes.

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: “*Since, therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the*

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power over death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

Now I look at that and I think to myself. Not only can the theologian tell you, but the person reading the Bible can tell you what the root fear of every individual is. It’s the fear of death. And that fear is the mother of all fears.

And we do live in a culture of fear. It’s been described as a culture of death. It’s been described in different ways. I think it’s a culture of fear.

When you look at websites that keep tallies of fears and phobias, from medical journals to lay journals to everything in between, there are over 500 words describing 500 phobias that people manifest. And so people in the medical community have to name over 500 fears. But it doesn’t take a medical doctor or a psychiatrist or a counselor to tell us what God has already told us—that our root fear is the fear of death.

Now the question really becomes, well, if that’s the fear that we have, then why is it that we fear things like rats and cheese and heights, and those kinds of things? Well, the answer is a really simple one. That’s not it. Why displacement? Why do we displace the fear of death with fear of other things like rats and cheese? Control. We think that we can control fears that we have displaced the fear of death with, right?

So I fear vomiting because I can control vomiting. But I can’t control death. I read this really interesting story. This guy was going to this counselor because of his fear of vomiting. And the doctor said, “Well what you need to do is that you need to be exposed to your fear in a most radical way.” (*Laughter*) “Which means that you need to vomit.”

Participant: Oo!

Jeff: “So what we’re going to do is, we’re going to give you ipecac, and we’re going to cause you to vomit. You’re going to face your fear.”

And he said, “No, you’re not!” (*Laughter*) For months he refused to do it, and then finally decided to do it.

And he writes about his experience on the bathroom floor, writhing in pain, experiencing nausea, but not vomiting. (*Laughter*) And the doctor keeps saying, “Take another dose.”

And he’s going, “I’m never taking another dose!” (*Laughter*) It’s sad, but it’s incredible. It’s just incredible. But what he realizes after the incident, he does a little research and he finds that people who are afraid to vomit have such control over their bodies that 15% of the people are actually able to counteract the effects of ipecac, which supposedly causes you to vomit soon after you take it.

Participant: Wow!

Jeff: Control! We’re all looking to control the world in which we live.

But I’ll tell you what happens. When you begin to lay hold of something that you can control, what begins to happen is that it controls you. You can’t get out from the ultimate fear of death, and what begins to happen is that the thing you displace that fear with begins to control you. Yes, Don?

Don: I have talked to some unbelievers or heard some unbelievers who say, “I’m not afraid to die.” Are they deceiving themselves?

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Jeff: I think that what they’re doing is that they’re suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: And that means that they are suppressing that aspect of life, because frankly I’ve watched believers, people who I thought were faithful confessing believers, that when it came time to die they were unsettled. And I’ve watched people who were unbelievers die in relative peace.

So I don’t give much credence to what happens on the deathbed. If a person is not a confessing believer and he dies in relative peace, I believe what the Scriptures say. I think that they’ve *“suppressed the truth in unrighteousness.”* John Gerstner Used to talk about them anesthetizing themselves with all of their materialism or the lust of the flesh, or whatever it was that they were participating in. And so there’s an anesthetizing effect that happens there. Yes?

Participant: I’m just gripped by Jesus’ text. *“Fear not he who can destroy the body. But fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* In a way, Biblically, in the New Testament, it wasn’t just death. It was facing the Lord as a sinner after death. We’ve kind of lopped that off in our culture, so we’re left just with physical death. It’s really worse than they think.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. It is. And the thing is that Hebrews 9 says that *“it is appointed for man once to die, and then the judgment.”*

Participant: That’s right.

Jeff: And so why is it? I’m not sure if I’m going to say this. I don’t think I am going to say this. But why is it that we fear death? We don’t fear death, for instance, because we think that nihilism is true. We all fear death because we’re in Adam. And 1 Corinthians 15 says, *“In Adam all die.”* And Hebrews 9 says that we face a judgment. And we know it. Intuitively we know that we are going to face a judgment from the Lord. Yes?

Participant: So it’s not only death that threatens us with meaninglessness, that makes our lives basically meaningless, but there will also be consequences. So it’s a two-barrel shotgun.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. Well, okay. All right. So let me give you a quick definition, a definition or a description. This is my definition. I may be wrong. If it is, don’t tell me. *(Laughter) Anxiety is our fear of death personalized and expressed in a thing or event that, despite our attempts, we’re unable to control.”*

You see, anxiety is our fear of death; there’s the root. It’s personalized and expressed; there’s the displacement. So we may not say that we fear death. We might say, “Well, I fear other things. I fear rats and cheese and other things.” There’s the personalization and expression of it. It’s a thing or an event that, despite our attempts, that we are just unable to control.

So that’s the definition of anxiety. But what does the Bible say about all of this? Well we’ve already looked and noticed that the Bible talks about how death is at the root of our fears. And it’s not just the meaninglessness of it; it’s the penal aspect of what death entails. Death was the fruit of the curse. And we will die and face the judgment.

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Okay. So what does the Bible say? Well let’s talk for a minute about *the Son and His humanity*, because I think that one of the things I’ve realized is that this particular passage is one of those really helpful passages in dealing with things like anxiety. And it’s also right in line with all that we’ve been saying.

In fact, let me say this to you as we think about getting into this text. We begin our text with “*Since therefore the children.*” And one of the things about what I’m going to say to you is that this pulls down from our text the last time. If you’ll look up, you’ll notice that in verses 12 and 13 that we find *brothers* and *children*. And our text continues that filial idea.

And what he’s going to say is that brothers and children are those He helps. He does not help the angels.

Now think about this. This is right in line with all we’ve been saying in chapter 1. The angels are part and parcel with that larger argument that Jesus is greater than not just angels, but angels as they are part of the Old Covenant. So the New Covenant of which Jesus is the Mediator is greater than the Old Covenant. So when he says that He helps the sons of Abraham, He doesn’t help the angels. That’s the idea. The idea is that I’m stretching back, I’m bringing in the old argument, and I’m pressing on forward. But the interesting thing is that the sons of Abraham are His brothers and His children. And so we begin to think that there’s a real connection between us and Jesus the Mediator.

Now what’s that connection? The connection is the Incarnation. The connection is that Jesus has assumed our nature.

Now here’s the thing I want to say. There’s a purpose in developing this for you. But really there’s a driving force that we see in this text. And the driving force, for instance, is that Christ’s humanity is described as “*flesh and blood.*” In other words, he wants us to understand that Jesus was a real man. His humanity was real.

There was an old heresy that Sig could probably tell us about that denied that Jesus came in the flesh, right? And that heresy wasn’t just in extra-Biblical literature, but John had to say to the church, “Don’t receive that person who denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.” And they were called *Docetics*. It’s from the Greek word *doceo*, meaning “*to seem.*”

And so Jesus Christ came in the flesh, in flesh and blood. But he drives this home again. He says that He had the very same nature.

Now the question that this raises for us is this. How did He have the same nature and yet was without sin? Well, the answer to that is given in a number of different ways throughout church history. The Roman Catholics give it one way. The Protestants give it another way.

But I’ll tell you what the Puritans said. The Puritans of the Westminster Assembly said that part of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the birth of Jesus Christ was also to sanctify His flesh at the moment of His conception. So He had the same nature as us, and yet did not have the condition of original sin.

In other words, when you think about Adam’s first sin, the guilt of Adam’s first sin was imputed, and the transgression was imputed to us, imputed to Adam’s posterity. And that’s called *original sin*. That’s the condition. But that was the condition which was

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immediately sanctified upon conception. So Christ shares in our same nature, yet does not share our original condition, our original sinful condition.

I want you to notice two things. First of all, I want you to notice that this word *sharing* is in the perfect tense. In other words, it describes the condition of humanity universally. He shared in humanity’s condition, that is, humanity.

But He partook of it. That’s in the *aorist* tense. There’s a sense in which that happens once with ongoing historical effects. That’s the Incarnation. So it’s really fascinating how it is that the writer of the Hebrews wants to drive home continually that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh in the Incarnation. He shared in our humanity.

Now think about this. The question is why? Why did He do that? To what end? And the answer is what?

Participant: To die.

Jeff: He came to die. Now I want you to think about that just for a minute. In light of what we’ve said about anxiety, He came to die! We’re absolutely terrified to die! And yet He came to die.

Well you hear all sorts of questions which ought to be running through your head. If it’s true that we’re afraid to die, not just because of nihilism, but we’re afraid to die because there’s a penal aspect to it, which is what He’ll mention in chapter 9, that upon death we face a judgment, then what about Jesus coming to die? What does that mean for Him? And we’ve already answered some of those questions implicitly in what we’ve been saying. But let’s unpack it a little more when we look at this next point—*freedom from death*.

First of all, he talks about *the devil’s work* in verse 14. What’s that?

Participant: He holds the power of death.

Jeff: He holds the power of death. He gripped us all of our lives.

Now here’s the question that we have to ask. If the devil held the power of death, then how could the suffering and death of the incarnate Christ result in the overthrow of the devil? That’s really the question, isn’t it?

Well, the answer is this. And it’s really not an answer; it’s more of a question. If that’s really true, then why does the devil seem to be at cross purposes with himself? Do you know what I mean? At one moment he tries to keep the Savior from the cross. Herod, right? He stirs up Herod to try to destroy all the babies two years old and lower in order to kill the baby Jesus. And then he comes upon Judas so that Judas will betray Him and send Him to the cross. So the devil seems to be at cross purposes—to the cross or not to the cross? It doesn’t seem to matter, because we’re gripped by fear. Yes, Don?

Don: John Gerstner says that the devil is the supreme blockhead. (*Laughter*)

Jeff: Yes. I seem to remember him saying that. I like that. I like that a lot. So we’re gripped by the fear of death. And the supreme blockhead wants to keep us there at all costs. Why? Because death is the curse.

I guess I was going to say this to the bishop here. In the Garden we need to remember that Adam failed to keep the probationary period. “Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or you will surely die.” And he eats and he dies. And so “*it is appointed for man once to die, and after that comes the judgment.*”

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But we need to remember that Christ was not held by the fear of death, because He was sinless. So now all of a sudden we have to remember that when we think about Christ coming to die, He was not held by the same fear. He did not possess the original sinful condition that we are under.

Participant: Why not?

Jeff: Why not? Because He was sinless. Yes, Sig?

Sig: I’ve got to follow my own rules and wait for the microphone. What happened in the garden of Gethsemane, when He says, “Father, if there is any way that this cup can pass—“

Jeff: That’s a great question. The answer to that question is this. What is it that He wants to pass from Him? It’s the cup. And what is the cup? The cup is the cup of God’s wrath.

Participant: Right.

Jeff: And think about this. He is not fearful of death. But He is the holy God. And there is no shadow of turning in Him. He is holy and so separate from sin. And yet He in the incarnate state realizes that He must bear the punishment of the curse for sin for people. We would expect the holy God to be repugnant at the thought of having to come into contact in any way, shape or form—in this case, imputation—with the curse of death which arises from sin.

So I don’t think it’s “Oh no, I’m going to die!”, like a martyr’s fear. What it is, it’s the holy God knowing that in this way He must come into contact with sin and the curse.

Participant: Isn’t it that He’s not so much afraid of the physical death, but the spiritual separation from His Father?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: That never happened.

Jeff: Yes, and that’s it. In terms of His state as a Mediator, He’s going to be isolated from the Father.

Participant: Big time.

Jeff: Yes. The Father is going to turn His back on Him because of sin. He recognizes that, which is the most horrible aspect of the death of Christ. Yes, over here.

Participant: I don’t want to minimize Christ’s humanity. He was tempted in all points as we are. There’s got to be some part of Him as a human being where He doesn’t want to die. I see Him agonizing in the garden as He is anticipating this. He knows what’s going to happen as far as the torture and the suffering. So I think that there’s got to be some part of his humanity there too, though.

Jeff: Well, think about it. We can only think about that as humans under original sin who know that death is penal. There’s a sting to it. And the sting is because it’s penal.

I think that with regard to Christ, I mean, let’s face it. We talked about that as Mediator He was separated from His Father. But as to His divine nature, He’s never separated from His Father.

So in terms of His Godhood, He is just as in communion with the Father as He ever was. But as to the Person of Christ, which the Godhead supersedes and oversees, that is the Person of the Son, who assumes and takes a human nature, as to that Person He’s

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isolated from the Father as Mediator. But as to the essence of His Godhead, He’s never isolated.

So He’s facing this in a way that we can’t possibly understand. And what I’m saying is that because He lacks that fear of the penal aspect of death, that doesn’t take away from His humanity, because that’s not essential to our humanity. It’s accidental. In other words, it’s added on because of the curse.

So there’s nothing less in terms of His humanity, because He doesn’t face it the way we face it. So that would be the way I would come at it.

So He was sinless. But He comes to be a propitiation for sins. Now what is it to be a propitiation? What is it to be propitious? It means *to be favorably disposed*. If you’re trying to get someone to be propitious toward you, you’re trying to get them to show favor toward you.

So for instance, if you’ve read Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth*, one of the things that you find is that the characters in that book are always trying to get the little idols of the town to be propitious toward them. And how do they do that? They’re always doing that by buying the little idol some kind of a paper dress, or offering incense to it, because they’re trying to gain the little idol’s favor.

Well, the thing about the Christian understanding of propitiation is this. It’s answered in two questions. What are we saved from? First of all, what are we saved from?

Participant: Death.

Second Participant: Wrath.

Jeff: God’s wrath. God’s wrath that came upon us by the curse, which is death, right? So we’re saved from God’s wrath. Who saved us from who?

Participant: God saved us from God.

Jeff: God saved us from God. It’s not like Pearl S. Buck’s little pagan idols, and the people coming and trying to get them to be propitious toward them. No! The Christian understands that he cannot make God propitious towards him. He cannot earn or glean favor from God Himself.

This is the way Isaiah puts it. God sees that there is no one to intercede. He dons His own righteousness. He comes and fulfills His own law by His own righteousness. And then He goes to the cross and takes upon Himself the curse, the punishment of the curse, due to us!

You know, oftentimes there is a truncated gospel being propagated out there. And by *truncated* I mean this. When people say, “What did Jesus do for you?”, the answer is “He died for me.” Well, that’s only half the equation.

Participant: Exactly.

Jeff: The whole equation is that He donned righteousness and fulfilled the whole Law, that He might become a Sacrifice without blemish, and so take upon Himself the curse. The whole gospel is His obedience leading even to His death on the cross, His whole obedience. We’re saved by grace. But that grace is firmly situated on Christ’s obedience—His obedient life and His obedient death, okay?

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So here is this sinless Man, Jesus Christ—the sinless God-Man, Jesus Christ—who comes to set us free from the fear of death by dying Himself and being a propitiation for sins.

Now this takes us to *His help*. And I’m just going to go through this fairly quickly. He helps the seed of Abraham. And by this I mean that I’m just going to explain to you what I mean by this. When I think of the seed of Abraham, I think of those who believe in the promises of Abraham in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of them being in the Messiah. And we who look backward at Christ’s coming as the fulfillment and climax of those promises, we are the seed of Abraham.

In other words, what I’m saying is this. What I’m saying is that the reason why Paul could say as a baptized Christian that “*we are the true circumcision*”, is because he means that he is a child of Abraham. And the reason why he could refer to the children of Abraham as being baptized, as the people in Galatians 3, is because he sees both the sign of circumcision and the sign of baptism pointing to one and the same Christ. And so the seed of Abraham are those who believe in the Christ to come, prefigured in the sign of circumcision or in the sign of baptism. So the seed of Abraham are believers of any age. That’s what I’m getting at.

Now think about this. He comes to help them. Now that is a weak translation of a strong verb. What do I mean by that? Well, it ought to be translated something like this. “he came to take hold of the seed of Abraham.” And some translations have it rendered that way. He took on the seed of Abraham.

And I think that’s pointing to His incarnation. Now think about it like this. I’m going to skip this. He’s *the right sort of Helper* as well. Now what do I mean by that? He’s not a mentor. He was tempted; that’s true. But the force of temptation came upon Him with such power that He was without sin. In other words, He wasn’t like us. He didn’t experience temptation and break down the moment of or the next day. He experienced temptation and never said yes to it. It’s not like He’s a mentor.

What he’s saying is this. He’s saying, “I know what you’re feeling. But”,--and this is what He’s saying,--“I felt it too.”? No. What He’s saying is “I know what you’re feeling. And I experienced it for you, that you might be forgiven.” That’s what He’s saying. “And so sin’s dominion over you is broken because of My life and death, and the imputation of the effect of that on you as you are united to Me by faith.”

I don’t know about you, but I look at a text like this one in light of a contemporary problem like anxiety. And I say that this is the groundwork for answering the person who’s anxious.

Now I’m not saying that we don’t live in a real world. Not only is sanctification *definitive*—in other words, I’ve been taken from the kingdom of darkness and sent into the kingdom of light,--but I realize that it’s *progressive*. We grow into that. We grow into what it means to be citizens of the new kingdom. There’s a progressive aspect to our sanctification, to our growth in grace.

But listen. This text becomes the foundation. It becomes the text that usurps anxiety in our lives, a fundamental problem in our culture. And if we really take seriously the fact

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that the Bible is God’s word to us because it’s God’s word, then it ought to mean something.

We ought not just to say, for instance, when we read a passage where it says, “Don’t be anxious about anything, but think about these kinds of things”, or “give yourself to prayer”, we ought not to say, “Well, I’ve tried that and that doesn’t really work. So I need to do this other thing that my doctor or this other person told me,” and so on. What we ought to do is that we ought to ask ourselves. If prayer doesn’t work for me, or if thinking about good things and noble things and trustworthy things doesn’t work for me, maybe the problem is with me. In other words, maybe I’m not giving myself to prayer enough. Or maybe I’m not really meditating enough on those good things.

You know, this is all of us. I’m not just saying that it’s one of us. I’m not saying that it’s me alone or any one of you alone. It’s all of us.

For instance, I sat with a guy one time, and I was talking to him. And we were doing devotions together because we were trying to get him on track. We would read a Psalm together, one Psalm a day. Think about it. Have some meditative thoughts about it, and then use it as the basis of your prayer.

And I had come every week. I would come and say, “Did you do your reading?”

“I didn’t really have time for it.”

Well one day we got into a discussion. And this guy said to me, “You know what? I don’t know why God is making me feel this way. I have done everything I can to try to be faithful.”

And I said, “Whoa, wait a minute. I’ve got to call time out. I’ve got to throw down the yellow flag.” I said, “Do you realize that for months on end we’ve gotten together. And I’ve asked you. Have you been faithful to do your devotions? And you haven’t been faithful one week. You haven’t been faithful one week to do five or six days of devotions.” All I’m saying is—

Participant: And he said,-- (*Laughter*)

Jeff: Nothing. (*Laughter*) All I’m saying is this. Before we start saying that the Scriptures don’t work for me, that prayer doesn’t work for me, thinking about good things, noble things, righteous things, just things doesn’t work for me, we ought to be saying to ourselves, “Maybe it’s me.”

Participant: Amen. That’s right.

Jeff: You know, I’ve got to tell you this really quick and then I’ll let you go because I’ve got to go too. I’ve got to take my wife to Erie today. By the way, you can be praying for my wife. We found out yesterday that her kidneys have dropped 10% over the past several months, and we didn’t realize that drop. And so they’re doing another round of tests for her. And they’re going to see how that—

Participant: What’s her name?

Jeff: Tabitha. But let me just say this to you. I was in a class with Sinclair Ferguson one day. And Sinclair Ferguson was telling us. “You know,” he said, “I hear a lot of men today say that preaching just doesn’t work today. You know, it just doesn’t.”

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And that resonated with me, because I was in a conversation with a couple of guys. And this one guy was saying to this other guy, “My elder board finally let me cancel the evening service.”

And the other guy said, “Oh, good! Now you can do something really productive.” *(Laughter)*

Participant: Oh my!

Jeff: Now listen to me. Sinclair Ferguson says, “I hear a lot of men say that preaching just doesn’t work today.” He said that what those men ought to be asking is this. Why doesn’t my preaching work today? And there was a dead silence in the room. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Yup.

Jeff: Because he’s absolutely right. Not that any one of us can make preaching effective. But I’ll tell you what. If we don’t trust the means that God has appointed to bring saving life, or to bring growth, then why do we think that God will use it effectively in our ministry? That’s what I’m saying.

All right, why don’t we pray? Father in heaven, thanks for this day. Bless it to us. Lord, we’ve heard some heavy things. But we’ve also heard some encouraging things from Your word. So let us take those things with us as we remember the heavy things. And let us remember that You are God and that Your Son conquered the fear of death for us that we might have life, and that we might live like people who have life. And so we pray that we would. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Participant: Thank you. *(Applause)*