

Strand #3 A Savior Who's Defeated our Foes

Hebrews 2:14-18

In the month of March 2014, on a Tuesday afternoon, then President Barak Obama hosted an impressive Medal of Honor ceremony for 24 Army veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and the Viet Nam War. **The Medal of Honor** is the highest U.S. military decoration awarded by Congress to a member of the armed forces for gallantry and bravery in combat at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty.ⁱ On that day, the 7 WWII army veterans had already died; their honor was long overdue. Of the 17 remaining Korean War and Viet Nam War honorees, only 7 were alive to attend the impressive ceremony.

As you know, their individual stories are immensely impressive. Men who showed incredible courage in leadership:

- [Master Sgt. Manuel V. Mendoza](#) "is being recognized for his actions on Oct. 4, 1944, in Mt. Battaglia, Italy, where he is credited with single-handedly breaking up a German counterattack." [A longer Army account of his actions](#) says that "the enemy launched a violent counterattack preceded by a heavy mortar barrage. Mendoza, already wounded in the arm and leg, grabbed a Thompson sub-machine-gun and ran to the crest of the hill, where he saw approximately 200 enemy troops charging up the slopes employing flame-throwers, machine pistols, rifles, and hand grenades. Mendoza immediately began to engage the enemy, firing five clips and killing 10 enemy soldiers." He survived that battle, and the war, dying at the age of 79.

-- [Master Sgt. Mike C. Pena](#) "is being recognized for his actions on the evening of Sept. 4, 1950, near Waegwan, Korea, when his unit was fiercely attacked. During the course of the counter-attack, Pena realized that their ammunition was running out, and ordered his unit to retreat. Pena then manned a machine-gun to cover their withdrawal. He single-handedly held back the enemy until morning when his position was overrun, and he was killed."

-- [Staff Sgt. Felix M. Conde-Falcon](#) "distinguished himself on April 4, 1969, while serving as a platoon leader during a sweep operation in the vicinity of Ap Tan Hoa, Vietnam, April 4, 1969. Conde-Falcon was killed in action that day after destroying multiple enemy bunkers and demonstrating extraordinary leadership under fire." [The Army's longer account says](#) that "carrying a machine-gun, he single-handedly assaulted the nearest fortification, killing the enemy inside before running out of ammunition. After returning to ... three men with his empty weapon and taking up an M-16 rifle, he concentrated on the next bunker. Within 10 meters of his goal, he was shot by an unseen assailant and soon died of his wounds."

All of their stories are breath-taking. But what particularly grabs your attention is the courage and willingness to do, in the moment, something "single-handedly." For a leader, a Master Sargent, or a

captain, to go out ahead and do what he knew had to be done to win in the conflict takes a leader who can successfully make the difference through his engagement with the enemy.

Last Sunday morning, in the letter to the young Hebrew Christians, specifically the 2nd chapter of that letter, offered to us a fascinating description of Jesus. It called him the captain or pioneer of our salvation. We noted that this description found in Hebrews 2:10 in the words “the founder” of their salvation

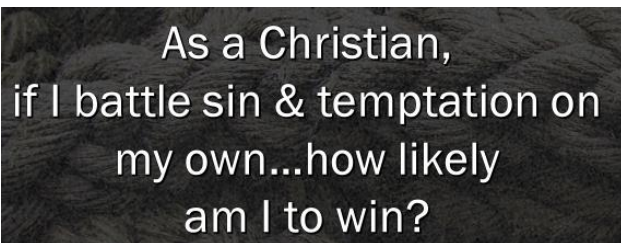
Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Helpful English words to translate ἀρχηγός include “leader, founder, originator” or better, “pioneer.” It can mean “someone who originates.” But perhaps best is the word “captain” (as in KJV) for, in Greek military usage, it described “the unique commander of an army who *went ahead of his men and blazed a trail for them.*”ⁱⁱ Someone who was the first through the tough stuff, securing salvation, and opening up the way to victory. Please NOTE: It matters what you think about Jesus Christ.

So...when this captain, this leader, founder, this originator, this “pioneering captain” of our great salvation went on out ahead and charged through the enemy’s lines, what did He face and what did He accomplish? The answers are found in the next verses of Hebrews chapter 2.

Jesus faced what we are tempted to fear the most.
The power of death in the hands of our enemy – evil can take our lives
The consequences of sin before a holy God – sin can condemn our lives

The Captain of our Salvation faced, and defeats what we are tempted to fear the most, and sets us free -- from the fear of death and from the condemnation of sin.



As a Christian,
if I battle sin & temptation on
my own...how likely
am I to win?

There is nothing easy about facing what we may fear. And, quite frankly, if I try to engage in the battle with sin and temptation on our own--without a Savior who has been there and done that—how much more likely am I

to “throw in the towel” and quit?

Here’s the truth. The most important “strand” in our 3-strand cord is our Savior, the Lord Jesus himself. Because He is God, and because He became man, and because He is the Captain of our

past, present, and future salvation, and because He is successfully bringing many sons and daughters to glory

There's no one like God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

REASON #1 We know He can successfully bring us to glory because in suffering death before us, He captains (pioneers) our salvation. So, we will not throw in the towel. Hebrews 2:5-13 (last time)

Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

REASON #2 We know He can successfully bring us to glory because He defeats what destroys us. Therefore, we will not throw in the towel. Hebrews 2:14-18

Hebrews 2:14 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 power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

These verses address **two temptations** we face that Jesus defeated.

#1 We are tempted to fear power of death in the hands of our enemy. Yet Jesus destroyed the devil and death.

Hebrews 2:14 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 power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Human beings have always struggled with enslaving fear of not only death, but what might come after death. One of Jesus' own contemporaries, Roman philosopher, Seneca said

...the fear of death *controls human life to a remarkable extent...* it is the very *thought of death that we dread and not just death itself...* take anyone young, middle-aged, or elderly, "you will find them equally afraid of death".ⁱⁱⁱ

Margaret Manning, of *Life After Death* (9 min video) explains that even today we fear death for 5 reasons^{iv}...because

#1 Inside, I am biologically PROGRAMMED to want TO SURVIVE.

#2 I wonder if there is NO LIFE after death?

[and if so, what's the point of life? If there is no future life, being alive now becomes both philosophically and spiritually pointless]

#3 I wonder what if THERE IS LIFE after death?

[and what kind of life is it? which religion or philosophy has it right?]

#4 I wonder what will happen TO PEOPLE I LEAVE behind?

#5 I fear HOW I will die?

DEATH is not cool. We avoid talking about it; we want to talk about how LIFE is going, and what's next! DEATH, we silently know, has the power to TAKE AWAY what we love most, and TAKE US to a place we are not sure we are ready for. And so we can be TEMPTED to stick our heads in the sand in fear death's power more than anything else.

Which is exactly why we must wrap ourselves around the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus died fully aware that Satan was deeply involved his arrest, his beating, and his being brutally and nailed to the cross (cf. John 13:27). Voluntarily, He entered into the full experience of our fears about death, sweating great drops of blood talking with His own Father about facing death.

Opendoorsusa.org reports^v that each day, at least 11 Christians die for their decision to follow Jesus.

- In North Korea, Christians are considered hostile elements to be eradicated
- In Afghanistan, where Christianity is not permitted to exist
- In Somalia, where Christians are high-value targets
- In Libya where Christians face abuse and deadly violence
- In Pakistan, where Christians live with constant fear of mob attacks
- In Sudan, where Christian converts are targeted for persecution
- In Eritrea, where Christians are imprisoned and dying in storage containers
- In Yemen, where Christians are especially vulnerable in civil war and famine
- In Iran, where it is illegal to convert and illegal to preach
- In India, where there is an new wave of unprecedented violence against Christians

40K-50K Christians right now are in the cross-fire between Turkey's bombs and guns and the Kurds in northern Syria. Even for Christians, death is real and death seems powerful. Paul said, "All day long we [Christians] are regard as sheep to be slaughtered" (Romans 8:36).

But Paul also said this, "No in all these things we *are more than conquerors* through Him who loved us!" (Romans 8:37). How can Paul say *that* in the same breath with being slaughtered sheep? Because we have a SAVIOR who "through death" destroyed the one with the power of death, and

then rose to life in power and glory. Those who follow Christ by faith, those whose cord includes the strand of the Lord Jesus Christ, **are set free** from fearing death. Set free by the One who promised, “He who believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live. Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). We do not fear the devil. He has been neutered. We do not fear death. It is not the end.

**#1 We may be tempted to fear the power of death
*But our Saving Captain has destroyed the devil and his tool
by His resurrection to life.***

Secondly,

**#2 We may be tempted to fear the outcome of death
Yet Jesus himself has defeated sin and temptation**

Hebrews 2:16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, **to make propitiation** for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Here’s an important question: What could be the worst outcome of death you could imagine?

Answer: Standing before God condemned in your own sin. Standing before a Holy God without the problem of my sin dealt with. Standing before God having to pay the penalty of your own sin. The worst possible outcome of dying. Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

But there is a Person who has defeated that which destroys us. Verses 14-15 speak of Jesus’ triumph over SATAN/DEATH. NOW verses 16-18 speak of Jesus’ triumph over SIN/TEMPTATION.^{vi} Someone (vs. 17) made “like his brothers in every respect” so that he could help us, as our High Priest before His Father, in two ways.

First – “he made PROPITIATION” for the sins of the people. What does that mean? It means that when He sacrificed himself as the innocent lamb of God on the altar of the cross, He took on himself ALL of God’s justified WRATH that our sin deserved. Because God is thoroughly holy, His response to SIN is JUSTIFIED WRATH. But because God is also relentlessly loving (i.e., self-giving), He provided HIMSELF – that is His Own Son – as the PROPITIATION. John Stott said it

It is God himself who in holy wrath needs to be propitiated, And God himself who in the Person of His Son died for the propitiation of our sins. Thus God took his own loving initiative to appease his own righteous anger by bearing it in his own self in his Son when he took our place and died for us.^{vii}

Second -- (vs. 18) “he is ABLE TO HELP those who are being tempted.” The Greek term for “help” here (βοηθεω) is vivid: “come to the aid of at the right or critical time”

- When a Canaanite mother brought her demon possessed daughter to Jesus, she cried out, “Lord, *help* me.”
- A father whose son, dominated by a demon, was always throwing himself in drowning water or into scorching fire, cries out to Jesus, “Please, if you can *help* us.” [Jesus: “(what do you mean) If I can?”]
- Paul receives a vision “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (by bringing the gospel) - Acts 16:9
- For God says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in day of salvation I have helped you” 2 Corinthians 6:2 (quoting Isaiah 49:8—read Isaiah 49!)

BOTTOM LINE – Two kinds of help from our Elder Brother, the Captain of our salvation. We have PROPITIATION for the sins we committed, and we have SOMEONE-WHO-CAN-TRULY-MAKE-A-DIFFERENCE help to avoid the sins we are tempted to commit. We don’t give in to temptation because we have to; we give in to temptation because we do not ask for the help our Elder Brother, our Captain, offers (cf. 1 Cor 10:13).

**#1 We may be tempted to fear the power of death
In the hands of our enemy
*But our Saving Captain has destroyed the devil and his tool.***

Secondly,

**#2 We may be tempted to fear the outcome of death
Under condemning sin
Our High Priest, Jesus himself defeats sin penalty
and temptation’s power**

CONCLUSION

There’s no one like the Lord Jesus Christ. His is the strand in my cord, in your cord, that we truly need. He has destroyed our enemy and His power. He has defeated the sin and the temptation to sin that destroys us.

May I ask you...how wrapped around the Lord Jesus Christ are you?

- Has He become the captain of your salvation?
- Has He become the one who has taken the fear of dying away from you?
- Has He become the one who has satisfied God’s wrath for your sin in your place?
- Has He become the one you/I walk through a day with, full of the power of the Spirit, living with conviction and holiness, always using His help at just the right time?

This Hebrews' letter writer says to us, "Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers..." Michael Yaconelli (*Messy Spirituality*) said it well:

Jesus is not repelled by us, no matter how messy we are, regardless of how incomplete we are. When we recognize that Jesus is not discouraged by our humanity, is not turned off by our messiness, and simply doggedly pursues us in the face of it all, what else can we do but give in to His outrageous, indiscriminate love?

~~*We are not surprised if living as Christians brings us to the place where we find we are the end of our own resources, and that we are called to rely on the God who raises the dead. (N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus*)*~~

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ⁱ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/03/18/291120789/here-are-the-24-heroic-stories-behind-todays-medals-of-honor>

ⁱⁱⁱ Neil. R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Baker Book House, 1976), 76.

ⁱⁱⁱ James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924, 1963), 35-37.
<https://archive.org/details/critalexegetic40moffuoft/page/n7>

^{iv} <https://lifeafterdeath.com/5-reasons-we-have-a-fear-of-death-and-what-to-do-about-them-3-is-simpler-than-is-sounds/>

^v <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/11-christians-killed-every-day-for-their-decision-to-follow-jesus/>

^{vi} Cf. lecture notes, Zane Hodges, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 1979.

^{vii} John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 175. NOTE: Stott's section on "Propitiation", pp.168-175, is invaluable.