

10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says,

***“I will declare your name to my brothers;
in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.”***

13 And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again he says,

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

14 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 is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. 17 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. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (NIV84)

IT’S GOOD TO HAVE A BROTHER LIKE HIM

How many of you have a big brother? How many of you are a big brother? It’s a unique relationship that the big brother has to the family, isn’t it? He can be a bit of a bully to his siblings, but that’s really a job that he is selfish about, isn’t it? If someone outside the family starts bothers a little sibling, he’s right there to defend his flesh and blood. If someone picks on a little sister, look out, because big brother is coming. And if you want to take little sis out on a date, better plan on buttering up big bro, otherwise you’ll be facing an uphill battle.

For all the grief that older siblings give you at home, it’s nice to have them around when you are outside the home. Maybe you got to go to school with an older sibling – they might have been handy to have – to ask questions or to learn the ropes. Their support makes your life at school quite a bit easier.

I’m a little brother. I am the youngest of four and by a ways – my sister is the closest – she’s five years older than me. I only ever had my sister in school with me, and I was in 3rd Grade when she graduated the 8th Grade. My brothers were in high school before I hit Kindergarten so not much help there. I remember getting picked on when my brother’s friends came over, but not so much defended. I guess, I was 8 when he moved out of the house I didn’t need too much defending.

If you had siblings, they maybe were kind and loving, they maybe were mean and cruel or likely they were a mix of the two depending on what day it was.

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Today God encourages us that whether we came from big families or are an only child – we have a big brother. He's the best kind of big brother there is – one with all sorts of plus sides and not a single negative characteristic to be named. He's our perfect big brother. As Christmas continues we celebrate today that Jesus welcomes us into God's family through faith. Because of Jesus' work for us, we are sons and daughters of God and that makes Jesus our brother. That's the encouragement that the writer to the Hebrews gives in the words before us this morning. Rejoice my friends: **It's Good to Have a Brother Like Him!**

The first verse of our text is a bit perplexing when it comes to talking about Jesus. ¹⁰ ***In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*** Is it proper theology to say that God made Jesus perfect? No it really isn't! Jesus was and is perfect – and has been since before he took on human flesh. Being conceived of the Holy Spirit means that he didn't inherit a sinful nature like the rest of us. He was not made perfect but more accurately is and always has been the perfect Son of God. Well how then does the inspired writer to the Hebrews and the infallible Holy Spirit write that God ***should make the author of their salvation*** (that's Jesus) ***perfect through suffering***? The answer really lies at the heart of why we celebrate Christmas! It's not so much making perfect as making complete. Jesus work as savior is completed as he suffers and dies for a fallen world – for sinful wretches like you and me. We celebrate Christmas because of what we know was coming 33 years later. His birth would be meaningless without his death. It would be pointless to celebrate Christmas if Jesus and his work weren't complete in his death. Hold that thought – we'll come back to the connection between Christmas and Good Friday.

Do you have a resemblance to anyone in your family? Have you ever been mistaken for a sibling? I remember once that happened to me after a football game in college. My parents were able to make it to this particular game and I was visiting with them on the field after the game. When a lady about my parents age came up and said "Dave!" It was a lady that once was a teacher at the same school as my father, they hadn't seen each other in 30 years. She said "I would have never recognized you – but your son – he's exactly what you looked like 30 years ago – that's how I knew it was you." I still didn't believe it, so I took out some old pictures and "holy cow!" she was right!! I am my father!!

Maybe you got some good genes from your parents or maybe you got the big ears big nose gene from your dad the way I did. Maybe you are the spitting image of someone in your family or maybe you look like you might have been adopted, either way we all look like our parents on the inside. We inherited from them a birth defect called sin. They would have loved to have kept it to themselves but they got it from their parents and their parents before them. We all have a sad family resemblance – as those who cannot stand up under the law of God. We inherit an inbuilt independent spirit. We inherit a nasty case of selfishness and a pretty strong defiant streak. We cannot live our lives the way our heavenly Father wants, we end up following in the sinful footsteps of our earthly father. We inherit a sinful nature and then commit millions of our own sins destroying our chances of pleasing God.

Have you ever heard a judge hand down what sounds like a ridiculous sentence? The serial killer is sentenced to 14 life sentences, or some criminals are convicted of 375 years in prison. The point is clear – you're never getting out. Your debt to society will never be paid. Our sentences are worse. For each sin we've ever committed we owe our life. I'm coming around on 35 years old. Counting thoughts and attitudes, let's estimate a conservative one sin a minute and we'll even subtract

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out the hours that I sleep and you know what I owe God - I'll round up cuz I think that's more fair. For the times that I tell God how he should rule the world, and the times that I fail to give him my whole heart and the times that I get angry with those around me instead of serving them in love – This is a loud gavel - I owe God 13,800,000 life sentences. The debt I owe is far, far, far more than I could ever repay.

But it's **Good to Have a Brother like the One We Have**. This is the type of trouble that no earthly brother could fix, but our heavenly big brother bails us out. He takes our impossible sentence our deathly debt, and pays it for us so that we can be set free. ***14 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 is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.***

If you stood before a judge and received one life sentence, that would be a horrible fate. If you received a death penalty conviction, you would likely be paralyzed with fear. 13,800,000 life sentences – capital crimes – is enough to stop us in our tracks and leave us hopelessly despairing and fearful of death. But our brother has destroyed death. He sets us free from our sentence and the slavery of fear that entrapped us.

17 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.

Jesus became like us in every way. He took on frail flesh and lived our lives, on our earth, under God's laws, he put himself in our place. Only one difference – 13,800,000 instances of perfection. 13,800,000 times that he lowered himself to serve others and to serve you. 13,800,000 pure thoughts and expressions, attitudes, words of love. All for you, all for his brothers and sisters. ***16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.***

Our gospel this morning showed a few of those examples of perfection. Jesus was about his Father's business in the temple. He was worshipping God, keeping the 3rd Commandment in our place so we could be forgiven for our weak worship and meager meditation. Jesus was about his Father's business living as the perfect big brother to the world so that the flesh and blood he took at Christmas could be the flesh and blood that he offered on Good Friday. What was "started" on Christmas Day was completed with his death and resurrection. The working of your salvation begins in Bethlehem's wooden box and ends on Jerusalem's wooden cross. Our Advent wreath gets it right. We have Hope Love, Joy and Peace with Christ at the center of it all. Only in the shadow of the cross is Christmas worth celebrating. Only with his victory for us at the end of his life is the beginning worth pondering.

Jesus is our high priest who sprinkles on us not the blood of a lamb, but his own blood given for the forgiveness of sins. He offers us his blood to drink for the forgiveness of sins in his sacrament to draw us closer to himself. He makes atonement for us. At one is what we are with God. Though Prodigal sons and daughters, his coming to earth brings us back home – back to the family. Back to a place and a relationship where he can call us brothers. **It's Good to Have a Brother Like Him** who considers our lives as more precious than his own. **It's Good to Have a Brother Like Him** who was willing to die so that we might live with him in his family.

11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Jesus is not ashamed of you. He loves you. He doesn't catalogue your sins. They are gone, forgiven, atoned for. So we can rejoice in our place in his family and we can celebrate the others that are there with us. Everyone here is in the family too. So instead of family fighting, we can rejoice with our family in Christ. We can treat our new brothers and sisters the way that Jesus has treated us. In thanks for being adopted into the family, we can love the other blood bought souls that Jesus has brought to our sides. We can celebrate uniqueness instead of tearing it down. We look for opportunities to forgive instead of harbor grudges. We can seek unity and peace because that's what Jesus has secured for us.

And as Jesus isn't ashamed to call us brothers, so we can be not ashamed of our new family. We in fact, can talk it up and celebrate it in a way that others will know who we are and whose we are. We can look for ways to introduce our friends to our Brother. Because he could be their brother too. There's room in the family, we just need to get the word out so that other can know. We need to share his love so that our family might grow and that others might know the peace, love joy, and hope that Christmas brings.

It's good to be part of this family. **It's Good to Have a Brother Like Jesus.** He draws us closer to God. He draws us closer to each other. He draws us closer to the completion of his plans for us – that we might spend an eternity with him at the best family reunion there has ever been. Heaven will reunite us with loved ones – family members who have gone before us, beloved brothers and sisters in the faith who have shared time with us on earth or whose legacy lives only in the stories we've been told. But most awesome of all, is the reunion that awaits us with Our Brother Jesus Christ.

*Not in that poor lowly stable, with the oxen standing by
Shall we see him but in Heaven, set at God's right hand on high.
Then like stars, his children crowned, All in white, his praise will sound. (CW 50 st. 3) Amen.*