

Presentation of Our Lord – Epistle

OF HUMAN BONDAGE AND DIVINE INTERVENTION

Hebrews 2:14-18

Presentation of Our Lord

Analysis by Norbert Kabelitz

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 be 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.

DIAGNOSIS: SUBJECTED TO ILL WINDS

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Drifting*

When the community of faith is “publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes partners with those so treated” (10:32-34), it may be tempted to abandon the faith and the community (10:25). When we are driven by such ill wind we can be tempted to drift away from the Gospel because of such opposition, difficulty, and hostility. Without the anchor of the “message” (2:2) we drift, battered by ridicule, doubt, and the

ways of the world (power, success). We develop a lifestyle that finds happiness and satisfaction without need for God. We indulge the lusts and drives of the flesh and find this drifting without direction, controlled by ill winds, enjoyable.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Faithless and Afraid

When circumstances in life are difficult, God is seen as hostile and, therefore, untrustworthy. We are seduced and deceived into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice. We will do anything within our power to avoid humiliation, suffering, or rejection. As Linus says to Peanuts, “I don’t like to face problems head on. I think the best way to solve problems is to avoid them. This is a distinct philosophy of mine. No problem is so big or so complicated that it can’t be run away from.” We are seduced into a misplaced confidence in self-survival. Unbelief avoids the problem by not caring about God. Where things are well (compromising with the ways of the world, power, and success) we can be happy without God. Comfort and security, material success is now sought as a reward for personal search and competence. Where there is discomfort it becomes an accident of fate and an excuse for complaint and surly irritation.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – No Escape

Such unbelief and confidence in self, avoidance of problems puts us at odds with God in the world and for eternity. Enslaved by the fear and denial of death, and thus denial of God (rather than fear, love and trust in God), puts us on a fast track to the very death and disaster we seek to avoid. There is no escape. “God hides His face from us.” God hands us over (v. 3) to the power of death (v. 14). Unbelief pushes us into denial of God, i.e., “If God is good He is not God; if God is God He is not good.” “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom” (1Cor. 15:50), and “if we live according to the flesh – we die.”

PROGNOSIS: DIVINE SHARING AND INTERVENTION

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *God's Christ Shares Flesh and Blood*

In the presentation (Luke 2:22-40), celebrated as Candlemas, Simeon characterizes salvation as a light for revelation to the Gentiles and "glory of your people Israel." As John Tietjen once said, "Jesus is dedicated to God's service as a lit candle burning Himself out in such a way that He brought light to the world." Jesus shares our nature, becomes vulnerable to the hostility of unbelief, the persecution and suffering, the fear of death, the Cross. He became "like us" in every respect to expiate, to make the supreme sacrifice as our High Priest (v. 17), our Pontifex Maximus, our High Bridge, our Crossing! In the service of God for our sake (2:9) "that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." Christ meets and absorbs the blockage and infection of "sin in the flesh" that puts us at odds with God. He drinks the poisoned chalice of suffering, not as some appeasement of an angry God (see 2:11) for God Himself set this ministry in motion, a pioneering effort to break into and overcome the hostility, the unbelief, the sin and death, to render it impotent, to "deliver us from its lifelong bondage (v. 15).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Faith in the Message Renders Fear Impotent*

Sin and death, and the bondage and fear that accompany them, have no power except what we in unfaith give them. Through Christ's pioneering work we are freed from drifting and given an "anchor that holds within the veil," within the hiddenness of God (LBW hymn #294). The message of the Gospel creates a new paradigm for my life: "The life I can now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). By paying attention to the message, I have a resource to overcome the infirmity of the flesh, the fear of death, and hear instead the

angel's message of "Fear not!" The Spirit endows us with signs and wonders and gifts (2:4).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Enabled to Help Drifters*

Jesus showed solidarity with sinful humanity so that we could be satisfied to trust in God (v. 18); so, in faith, we demonstrate solidarity with those who are tempted to drift and lose heart. We take heart in Christ and give ourselves fully into the service of "care and redemption." As Luke puts it, "When you are strengthened, strengthen your brothers and sisters" (Luke. 22:32).