2:1-4 THE FIRST WARNING PASSAGE

Another way in which the author of Hebrews proves the superiority of Christ to angels is to show the nature of the salvation which He has won.

2:1 "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it."

Hebrews 2:1-4 is the first warning passage to the readers. In Greek, Hebrews 2:1 begins with "for this reason" making it a conclusion to what was just said. We could summarize chapters 1 and 2 like this: "In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son (1:2) . . . for this reason we must pay closer attention to what we have heard“ (2:1). To state it differently, chapter 2 begins by telling us that chapter 1 is the reason we should pay close attention to the message God brought us in the person of Christ (see notes on 1:1-2a) . . . because in these last days God has spoken "in His Son", and because the Son is the Creator and Sustainer and Owner and Ruler and Redeemer of the world—above all angels—"for this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard in Him.

As Hodge so masterfully summarizes

"The doctrines of the Bible are generally stated with authority; announced as facts to be received on the testimony of God. It is seldom that the sacred writers undertake to prove what they teach. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is an exception to this general rule. The divinity of Christ is here formally proved. As the design of the Apostle was to persuade the Hebrew Christians to adhere to the gospel, and to guard them from the fatal sin of apostatizing to Judaism, he sets before them the immeasurable superiority of the gospel to the Mosaic economy. The first point of that superiority, and that on which all the others depend, is the superior dignity of Christ as a divine person, to Moses and all the prophets. To set forth that superiority, he first asserts that Christ, the Son of God, is the possessor of all things; that through Him God made the world; that He is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of his nature, upholding all things by the word of his power; and that because He has by Himself made purification for sin, He is now, as the Theanthropos [the God-man], set down at the right hand of the majesty on high. The true divinity of Christ being thus asserted, the Apostle proceeds to prove that this is the doctrine of the Scriptures. (1.) Because He is in the Bible called the Son of God, a title which cannot be given in its true sense to any creature. Christ, therefore, is higher than the angels; and as the word angels in the Bible includes all intelligent creatures higher than man, Christ is higher than all creatures, and therefore cannot Himself be a creature. He belongs to a different category of being. (2.) All angels (i.e., all the higher intelligences)
are commanded to worship Him (i.e., to prostrate themselves before Him).

(3.) While the angels are addressed as mere instruments by which God effects his purposes, the Son is addressed as God. "Thy throne O God is for ever and ever." (4.) He laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of his hands. (5.) They are mutable, but He is immutable and eternal. (6.) He is associated with God in glory and dominion. On this great truth, thus established, the Apostle grounds all the duties and doctrines which he urges on the faith and obedience of his readers. It is on this ground that there is no escape for those who reject the salvation which He has provided. (2:1-5.) It is on this ground also that He has a dominion never granted to angels, all things being made subject to Him. (2:5-10.) As it was a divine person, the eternal Son of God, who assumed our nature, and became a high priest for us, his sacrifice is efficacious, and need not be repeated; and He is a perpetual priest, higher than the heavens, who can save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. This Savior is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Faith in Him will enable us to overcome the world, as faith in the promises concerning Christ enabled the ancient worthies to witness a good confession under the greatest trials and sufferings."(Hodge Systematic Theology, II, 520-521)

There is an urgency here in Hebrews 2:1. Literally it says, "It is exceedingly necessary that we give heed to what we have heard" (Piper). We are not only to turn our mind to Christ but to act upon what was heard (Morris, 21). This is not an isolated command in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 3:1 says, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus." Focus on him. Stay close to him and keep him in your thoughts. Learn more and more from him every day—what he is like and what he says and the way he sees the world. Likewise, in Hebrews 12:1-2 the author says, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus."

"The first command of this book is not "labor for Jesus," but "listen to Jesus." He is not commanding us to work for him, but to watch him. All our spiritual life-changes come from that (2 Corinthians 3:18). . . The Christian life is first and foremost a life of contemplation—listening to Jesus, considering Jesus, fixing the eyes of the heart on Jesus. Everything else in the Christian life grows out of this. Without this the Christian life is simply unlivable. This is why the next phrase in verse 1 is a warning: " . . . lest we drift away from it." "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." The first reason for paying close attention to what we have heard in God’s word through his Son is that the Son is infinitely greater than angels: Creator, Sustainer, Owner, Ruler, Redeemer." (sermon by John Piper, Heb. 2:1-4, April 28, 1996 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org)

It is exceedingly necessary that we remember God’s revelation in Christ!
The danger is that we might drift away (a term used elsewhere of a ring slipping off a finger - Morris, 21) from the protection provided by the knowledge of Christ. We don't need to be violently opposed to the gospel to suffer loss; we only need to drift from it. This is the second reason for paying close attention to what we have heard of God's Word through his Son: if we don't do this, we will drift into destruction. It takes no life and no motion to float by. One need only do nothing.

In Hebrews 2:2 an OT analogy is used to show why the gospel should be heeded. It gives the reason why drifting is so dangerous.

2:2 "For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,
2:3(a) how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?"

Although the OT does not directly allude to the fact that the law was given through angels (though see Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19), the Jews believed that it was. The sanctions of the law were severe and inescapable. Every commandment had a penalty for those who failed to comply, and there was no reprieve for those who could not keep it perfectly (i.e. “every transgression and disobedience received a just reward” as 2:2 says). "Yet the law was not imparted by such august mediation as the gospel; the law was 'the word spoken through angels'" (Bruce, 67). If the law, which came through angels, was to be unquestionably obeyed by man, how much more should the word which came through the Son be heeded (Mk. 1:14; Lk. 4:18-21)!

"The argument given in verse 2 for why we will not escape if we drift and neglect our great salvation is that "The word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense." In other words, in the Old Testament God did not yet speak directly through his Son on the earth. He spoke through intermediary messengers. Hebrews says angels were involved in the revelation of God’s Word. Nevertheless, the firmness of this mediated Word was so great that every neglect and rejection of it was punishable with a just recompense.

Now something much greater has come: God has spoken to us not through angels, but unmediated through a Son. God himself stood forth from heaven in Jesus and spoke a great salvation with his lips and his life and his death. Now, this writer says, if we neglect this great Word, we are much more guilty than the Old Testament people who disobeyed the Word of God given through angels, and therefore we will not escape." (sermon by John Piper, Heb. 2:1-4 , April 28, 1996 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org)
The obligation to hear Christ’s word rests upon every believer (Heb. 2:3-4). The question, “How shall we escape if we disregard so great a salvation?” has as its answer: “We shall not.” Neglecting the gospel is to abandon any hope of escaping judgment.

Not only the rejection of the Gospel, but also its neglect, deserves the heaviest punishment. The more precious God’s gifts are, the greater our ingratitude is when we do not value them. In proportion to the greatness of Christ will be the severity of God’s vengeance on all the despisers of his Gospel.

“To disregard” is literally, “not to care for”. It is rendered, to “make light of” or “not to regard,” and was used by Jesus in a parable about men who rudely and willfully ignored the gracious invitation to a feast (Matt. 22:5). Failure to gain life comes from nothing more than neglect.

The salvation spoken of is called a great salvation. In particular, it is great because (1) it was proclaimed by Christ Himself (not just angels), (2) it was confirmed by eyewitnesses, and (3) it was authenticated by God through various signs as Hebrews 2:3-4 demonstrates.

2:3 (b) After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

2:4 God also testing with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Christ was the One who first announced the finished salvation, which the prophets alluded to in a partial and predictive way. The Greek text says, literally, it was announced “through” Christ implying that the Father is the source of salvation just as He is the source of creation (see notes on 1:2 regarding creation).

In addition, there were witnesses who had heard the gospel preached by Christ and had seen His death and resurrection first-hand. The words of Christ were confirmed as true, over and over again.

Lastly, God Himself confirmed the message by accompanying the proclamation of the gospel with signs (supernatural signposts that pointed to Christ), wonders (supernatural events that created a sense of wonder or awe in those who observed them), miracles (lit. “powers” - events that displayed
supernatural power; cf. Acts 2:22; Gal. 3:5), and spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit (presumably those particular gifts which also displayed supernatural power). Only a great salvation would be announced and attested to in such a way. To neglect it would be an immeasurably foolish error with consequences that could not be escaped. (See appendix 1 for more on the nature and purpose of “signs, wonders, and powers”)

2:5-9 CHRIST’S HUMANITY DOES NOT CONTRADICT HIS SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS

“As the Son of God, Christ is more than angels. As the Son of Man, Jesus is more than angels too... Not only the divinity but the humanity of Christ will prove how infinitely superior the new dispensation is to that which was given by the ministry of angels” (Murray, The Holiest of All, 71).

2:5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.
2:6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, “WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?
2:7 "YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;
2:8 YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.
2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Until now, the author has shown the superiority of Christ by referring to things said about Him prior to the incarnation. But someone may wonder if these things changed when the Son became man.

Presently, angelic beings are vastly superior to humans. The law was given through angels (Heb. 2:2) and angels have positions of rule over the earth today (Deut. 32:8 LXX; Bruce, 71; Dan. 10:20, 21; 12:1). Furthermore, man, unlike angels, is subject to frailty and death. If Christ were man, wouldn’t that mean that angels were also superior to Him?

Though humanity is presently inferior to angels, this is not an eternal arrangement (Heb 2:5). When Christ returns and sets up His kingdom, believers,
not angels, will rule with Him (Rev. 20:6). Believers are even said to judge angels at a future time (I Cor. 6:1-3).

In order to demonstrate the dignity of man, the author quotes part of Psalm 8:6: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Heb. 2:6). This Psalm is the reflection upon man in comparison to the creation around him. In this verse, “son of man” simply refers to man, not Christ. (In Hebrew poetry, this is known as synonymous parallelism, that is, two equivalent thoughts are created using synonyms.) When compared to the vastness of the universe, man appears to be an insignificant speck (Psa. 8:3-4). Yet when man is considered in light of all that God has done for him and the prerogatives God has given him, man possesses an essential greatness from his Creator (Psa. 8:5-9). He has been made the crown of God’s creation and was to exercise dominion over all the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26, 28). As the author of Hebrews says, God made man a little lower than the angels, crowned him with glory and honor, and put everything under his feet (Heb. 2:7-8a) - not only in this age, but in the age to come (cf. Eph. 1:21 - the age to come is the Messianic Kingdom when Christ rules upon the earth - In the prophetic books of the Old Testament, it was predicted that the Messiah should be invested with this universal dominion. See Ps. 2; 45; 72; 110; Isa. 9:6, 7; Dan. 7:14, etc.). This place of dignity could never be held by any angel (Heb 2:5).

Though God has put everything under man, and has left nothing that is not subject to him, we do not see this presently (Heb. 2:8). Man seems to be the victim more than the victor (Kent, 53); we suffer from floods and hurricanes and tornadoes and diseases and death . . . we do NOT see creation under our rule . . . but we DO “see Jesus” (Heb. 2:9) who, on account of the suffering of death, is crowned with this absolutely universal dominion (Eph. 1:20-22; Matt 28:18; Heb 1:13; Phil 2:9-10; Heb 1:2; I Pet. 3:22; I Cor. 15:27). Jesus, the true representative of humanity, perfectly fulfilled all that is written in Psalm 8 and now holds an exalted position that we will some day share.

“What was true of man in promise, we see fulfilled in Jesus:
what we see in Jesus will be made true of man”
(Murray, The Holiest of All, 72).

[see appendix 8 for detailed discussion of Christ’s position as ruler over the universe]

In speaking of the extent of the dominion granted to man, Hodge says,

“Judging from the account given in Genesis, or even from the stronger language used in the eighth Psalm, we should conclude that his authority was to extend only over the inferior animals belonging to this
earth. But the Apostle, in his exposition of the words of the Psalmist, teaches us that far more was intended. In I Corinthians 15:27, he says, "When He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him [i.e. the Father is not included in all things that are subject to Christ]." And in Hebrews 2:8 he says, "In that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him." It was therefore an absolutely universal dominion, so far as creatures are concerned, with which man was to be invested. This universal dominion, as we learn from the Scriptures, has been realized and attained only by the incarnation and exaltation of the Son of God. But as God sees the end from the beginning, as his plan is immutable and all comprehending, this supreme exaltation of humanity was designed from the beginning, and included in the dominion with which man was invested. (Hodge, Systematic Theology, II, 103)

Later in his *Systematic Theology* Hodge further explains,

"In this exaltation of Christ to supreme dominion was fulfilled the prediction of the Psalmist . . . that all things . . . were to be put under subjection to man. In the former passage [Heb 2:8] the Apostle argues thus: The world to come of which he spoke [Heb 2:5], i.e., the gospel dispensation, the world during the Messianic period, was not put under subjection to angels, for the Scriptures say that all things are put under man. And when it is said all things (πάντα) are put under Him, nothing is excepted. We do not yet, however, see all things put under man as man; but we do see the man Christ Jesus, on account of the suffering of death, crowned with this absolutely universal dominion. It is, therefore, at the feet of a man in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead, that all principalities and powers bow themselves in willing subjection and adoring love. And it is at the feet of this once crucified man that all the redeemed are to cast down their crowns."

(Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 638)

The Son of God could become man and enter into possession of the glory that God had promised to man because man had been created with a nature capable of such a destiny. "This foundation being laid, it is evident that God's bounty belongs not to us until the right lost in Adam be restored by Christ" (Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*).

"What then is the answer to our hopeless subjection to death? How are we going to attain the destiny that Psalm 8 holds out to us? The answer the writer gives is that Jesus Christ came into the world as a human being so that he could be the forerunner of a new humanity that will burst the bonds of sin and futility and death and enter the glory and honor promised by God. This is what he says in verse 9."

The reason why Christ was made a little lower than the angels is that He
came and tasted death (i.e. experienced it) to gain the salvation of fallen humanity.
As God, Christ could not die so He had to fit Himself with human nature to make
death possible. In His lifetime, He successfully accomplished all that God in His
grace desired for Him to do and is now crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9).

"In other words, Christ was the first man to be restored to the magnificent
destiny of Psalm 8. He was crowned with glory and honor over all creation. But he does
not enter his glory by himself. Verse 10 says that he "is bringing many sons to glory"—
the glory of Psalm 8. Our great salvation is that, united to Jesus, we will experience
the fulfillment of Psalm 8 as well. Jesus is the great forerunner of our salvation.
What has happened to him will happen to us. Because he tasted death for us, we can
be sure that we will share his rule over creation." (sermon by John Piper, Heb. 2:1-9,
May 19, 1996 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org)

Why is our salvation so great and immeasurably valuable (Heb. 2:4)? —
because in this salvation we are destined for something unspeakably great—we are
destined to have all that is in creation put in subjection under our feet. It will all
one day serve us completely for a good and joyful end.

Note: It should be noted that Christ died for everyone (2:9). In one sense
(the sense intended here), "His death had the effect of justifying the offer of
salvation to every man; and of course was designed to have that effect. He
therefore died sufficiently for all" (Hodge Systematic Theology, II, 561). However,
this glorious salvation is only appropriated by those whom God has chosen to have
faith in Christ; therefore, in another sense His death is limited. The fact that
Christ's salvation is sufficient for the sins of every man but is limited in its
application to those who believe is called "limited atonement". Perhaps it is more
accurately called "limited redemption."

To summarize, the humanity of Christ in no way diminishes His superiority to
angels, for as man He has absolute dominion over creation which could never be
said of an angel. Furthermore, Christ's position of authority makes our salvation
exceedingly great for through Him we are admitted into His family so that we may
enjoy the whole world, together with the favor of God... therefore, we should
never neglect so great a salvation!
2:10-18 CHRIST'S SUFFERING DOES NOT CONTRADICT HIS SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS

Verse 9 ends by saying that Jesus tasted death for us. Verse 10 explains why this was appropriate:

2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

“it was fitting for Him (God) . . . to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.”

In verses 10 and 11 the writer is thinking about the way God accomplished salvation, particularly the reason why Christ suffered. He is telling us why Christ's suffering and death was “fitting.”

Far from being humiliating and unworthy of Christ's position, Hebrews 2:10 says it was fitting (suitable, proper, right) for God to allow Christ to suffer, for suffering was necessary to complete Christ's identification with us and become a perfect Savior.

There was a necessity for the sufferings of Christ. It was through Christ's suffering and death that God made it possible for men to be saved from the effects of sin and be brought into a glorious position. Christ had to become man to bear the penalty for man in his place. By experiencing all that men experience and dying in their stead, Christ was made complete in that He accomplished the goal for which He had come. Hebrews 5:8-9 is similar: “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” Thus it was fitting that God allow Christ to die, for it is consistent with his perfections and character, which is the highest conceivable kind of necessity.

Furthermore, it was fitting for Christ to be the author of our salvation because He took on human nature. Literally, Hebrews 2:11 says, “For both He who sanctifies [i.e. Christ] and those who are sanctified [i.e. believers] are of one,” - that is, there is a solidarity between Christ and humanity (thus the NIV translation, “of the same family” - not “one Father” as the NAS translates it). Having truly become one with humanity meant He could die for humanity. For Christ, as our
Pastor Ted Kirnbauer

Hebrews 2

Forerunner, to truly identify with humanity as our “brother”, He had to experience suffering as we do (see 2:16-18). It is also because of this that He is not ashamed to call us "brothers".

In the words of John Piper,

“... what God is doing in sending his Son into the world to suffer is bringing many sons to glory.

What glory is he talking about? It’s the same glory promised in Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2:7, "You have crowned him with glory and honor and appointed him over the works of your hands." This is the glory we have fallen from in our sin and rebellion against God. But now God is undertaking a "great salvation." He sends his Son to taste death for us, deliver us from the futility and defeat and misery and condemnation of sin and death, and lead us to glory. To do this he has suffered and entered before us into that very glory, as verse 9 says: "Jesus, because of the suffering of death [is] crowned with glory and honor." So he is our Forerunner. He becomes a human being. He suffers and he dies in our place. He rises from the dead victorious, and he enters into glory. Why? So that he might "lead many sons to glory."

So what we need to see here is that the writer is still talking about the Great Salvation mentioned in verse 3. Our great salvation is that we are destined for glory through the incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ our Forerunner. The promise of Psalm 8 will be fulfilled for us because it has already been fulfilled in Jesus, our Forerunner. He "tasted death for us" so that he could "lead us to glory."

This is a great salvation because the destiny we are saved for is great: we will one day break free from cancer and paralysis and arthritis and blindness and depression and corruption and futility and inherit the glory of the risen Son of God. He has been crowned with glory and honor (2:9); and that is where he is leading us. And it is a great salvation because the Savior is great: This is the Son of God who came, not an angel, not a mere human being, but the Son of God, who is God—worshiped and revered forever. No one less than God has come to lead us to glory. So this is a great salvation because the Forerunner is great and because the goal is great. The Forerunner is the Son of God and the goal is glory of God." (sermon by John Piper, Heb. 2:1-9, June 6, 1996 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org)

Christ’s solidarity with mankind is demonstrated in three OT passages.

2:12 saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.”

2:13 And again, “I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM.” And again, “BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.”
1) Hebrews 2:12: "I (Messiah) will declare your name (God's name) to my brothers (humanity); in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises. (cf. Ps. 22:22)" This Psalm contains the prediction that Messiah would faithfully reveal the Father to men whom He calls "brothers." He does this in a very personal way "in the presence of the congregation." "Brothers" shows that He is a member of the human race.

2) The second quotation is in Hebrews 2:13: "I will put my trust in Him" (Isaiah 8:17). Though these words were originally spoken by Isaiah, they also typify Christ. Why these words are quoted in this context is difficult to know.

3) The third quotation is also in Hebrews 2:13: "Here am I, and the children God has given me. (cf. Isa. 8:18)" Here Isaiah identifies himself with those who trust in God. Isaiah's identification with believers is a prophetic type of Messiah's identification with us.

2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 2:15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

"Therefore" (2:14) indicates that the author is drawing a conclusion from what has preceded. "Inasmuch as men are related to one another in a common sharing of humanity, Christ needed to participate also in genuine manhood if He as the substitute was to suffer the penalty which men had incurred" (Kent, 38, 39). So, the author makes it clear that He shares "flesh and blood" (a Greek expression for "humanity," usually with reference to the frailty of the human nature) with us. He did this to defeat the devil who is said to have power over the flesh through death. This is the purpose of the incarnation (as marked out by the word "that" [hina - ἐν].) "By means of death" (his own death) Christ broke the power (kratos - krátoj) of the devil over death (paradoxical as it seems) . . . " (RWP).

To state it differently, Christ took on our nature so that it would be possible for Him to die: "since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death . . . " In His divine nature alone Christ could not die (Hebrews 7:16), but since death was necessary for man to live, Christ became a man and through His death nullified Satan's power over death.
In this the infinite love of God toward us appears: “but its overflowing appears in this — that he put on our nature that he might thus make himself capable of dying, for as God he could not undergo death. . . he has so delivered us from the tyranny of the devil, that we are rendered safe, and that he has so redeemed us from death, that it is no longer to be dreaded” (Calvin, Commentary on Hebrews). “This is what love does. It embraces suffering and death for the life of others” (Piper).

As Calvin says, “. . . the destruction of the devil, of which he speaks, imports this — that he cannot prevail against us. For though the devil still lives, and constantly attempts our ruin, yet all his power to hurt us is destroyed or restrained. It is a great consolation to know that we have to do with an enemy who cannot prevail against us” (Calvin, Commentary on Hebrews).

A second purpose of the incarnation is found in verse 15: the Son took on flesh and blood that He “might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” Satan’s defeat means that those who are under his power through the fear of death are set free.

If there were no judgment, death would be sad, but not feared. There is nothing fearful about drifting off into unconsciousness and never waking up. Fear comes from the fact that people sense that they will be held accountable to God for their lives. And they are. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

“The power of death and the devil has been so completely broken that there is now perfect deliverance from that fear of death that keeps so many in bondage” (Murray, The Holiest of All, 97). The death of Christ transformed death’s power forever. Jesus said, “I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” (cf. Rev. 1:17b -18). Jesus sets the captives of death free! Paul says, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor, 15:55-57).

Now verses 16-18 lead us to the final conclusion.

2:16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.
2:18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

The Son of God became man to help man (Heb. 2:16). "He did not descend to the level of angels and become one of them. He descended to the level of mankind and became a Jew" (Morris, 29). The work of salvation which Christ came to accomplish demanded incarnation; He was under obligation to be properly equipped for His priestly service and sacrifice. Verse 17 says, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things." He was made like us in all things except in things pertaining to sin (Heb 4:15).

"By this comparison he enhances the benefit and the honor with which Christ has favored us, by putting on our flesh; for he never did so much for angels. As then it was necessary that there should be a remarkable remedy for man's dreadful ruin, it was the design of the Son of God that there should be some incomparable pledge of his love towards us which angels had not in common with us" (Calvin, Commentary on Hebrews).

"To be made like His brethren" means that Christ, resembles us in reality (Phil. 2:7 - He was made "in the likeness of men") as we shall resemble Him in the end (Ro 8:29 - He is the "first-born among many brethren," and 1 Jo 3:2 - " We know that when He appears, we will be like Him," - where the same root is used as here [hoiôma, homoios]). (RWP)

Verse 17 tells us how Christ made powerless the one who has power over death (2:14). As a man He can become our high priest who can mediate between God and man and make propitiation (satisfy the wrath of God against sin, not "make atonement" as in the NIV) for our sin. He acted on our behalf in "things pertaining to God." On the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the holy of holies and officiated on behalf of the people to make propitiation for their sins.

Propitiation is the turning of the wrath of God away from us by means of an offering. It is "the acceptance by the wronged party of a compensatory payment, by which his anger against the one who has injured him is soothed" (Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, 146). When the wrath of God which was directed toward our sins was poured out upon Christ at the cross, it was averted from us (see Morris. The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, 184-202 for a detailed discussion).

So Jesus had to become a human—like us—in order to be our high priest and to offer Himself as a propitiation that turns the wrath of God away from us. As a man Jesus could be both the priest and the sacrifice necessary to atone for sin.
(See 7:27; 9:14, 25f.) As Hebrews 9:26 says, “... but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Sin leads to death, but because our sins have been paid in full, death has no power to hold us any longer.

Furthermore, “In order to be a perfect high priest, a person must sympathize with those on whose behalf he acts, and he cannot sympathize with them unless he enters into their experiences and share them for himself. Jesus did just this” (Bruce, 81). Through His sufferings and temptations, Jesus has gained perfect sympathy with us who also suffer and are tempted.

“He is compassionate, because he can sympathize with the tempted, having been himself tempted; and he is a true and faithful high priest, because he really expiated the sins of the people: and that he might be all this, he became like his brethren that is, by taking their nature” (John Owen, Calvin's Commentary on Hebrews – n. 50)

This section of Scripture begins with Christ’s kingly office which includes both dominion and the glory and honor that accompanies it (2:6 ff); but it ends with His priestly office. It is shown that Christ had to be a priest for Him to be a king. Man was promised dominion in Genesis 2:27 but he had no power to attain it. “Hence it became necessary for the Son of God to become the son of man, that he might obtain for his people the dominion and glory. This seems to be the view presented to us in this passage. The children of God, before Christ came into the world, were like heirs under age, though lords of all. He came, took their flesh and effected whatever was necessary to put them in full possession of the privileges promised them. See Galatians 4:1-6.” (John Owen, Calvin's Commentary on Hebrews - n. 52)

In conclusion, Jesus’ humanity and suffering did not make Him inferior to angels; rather, they made Him a superior mediator for man and a perfect Savior who alone can lead us to glory. "Christ has fitted Himself superbly so as to be worthy of the confidence of each believer. No angel is so qualified"(Kent, 62).