

Suffering Son, Perfect Savior

Hebrews 5:7-10

Introduction

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

1. Agonizing Prayer Rewarded (7)
2. Full Obedience Experienced (8)
3. Priestly Mission Fulfilled (9-10)

1. Agonizing Prayer Rewarded (7)

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

Ever cried out to God in a time of great agony? There are seasons when we seem shielded from the harsh experiences of life, but live long enough and you hit the hard times.

On Mother's Day we celebrate parenthood, but the path of parenthood is often very different from the greeting cards. It can be a broken road. I know many of you have traveled such paths. No doubt, you will remember, as do we, when we first encountered heart breaks we never expected. Back when I had begun work on doctoral requirements beyond the classes, our first son was born. It was two days after Christmas. Perfect timing right between semesters. But after a smooth pregnancy, Brad died during labor, plunging us into grief, obliterating what we thought our life would be, and shaking our notions of how we thought God would always operate. With job expectations falling through, hormonal disruption, and satanic oppression, that season tested our faith in ways we'd never encountered before.

Friends who had been expecting along with us suddenly withdrew, unsure how to relate to us without creating really awkward situations. For me almost done with a Ph.D. in theology, I questioned whether I had any business pointing other people to God when my own confidence in Him was so shaken.

We were grieving hard, like a person struggling to stay alive in ICU, but the dominant message we felt like we heard from pulpits was that those who love God are

strong overcomers, warriors for God, never doubting, never weak, never broken, never weeping. Messages calculated to inspire victorious living seemed blind to our pain and to our need for gentle help.

I thought to myself, surely the Bible talks about the heart struggles we're experiencing, even if some preachers don't. And sure enough, we found the theme woven throughout the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms.

It was a healing discovery to find that God was well aware of our internal agonies and faith struggles—that He did actually care, and that we were well within the experience of His believing people to be experiencing them. Ever since then, I have found the Psalms a welcomed place to go when we go through the deep waters, and our faith feels like it will fail.

Psalm 77:1-4

¹ I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. ² In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. ³ When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. *Selah*
⁴ You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

Jesus experienced times like this.

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears,

During His days on earth as fully human

Picture Jesus' crying out to God this way. Does it surprise you that He would respond with loud cries and tears? Isn't He always calm, always has it together, always helping others with their problems, never problems of His own? Actually, that's a sanitized version of the life of Jesus as the NT historical documents describe it.

The closest accounts we have of a time like this in Jesus' life are from His time in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

Mark 14:32-34

³² And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."

Mark 14:38

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Luke 22:41-44

41 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, **42** saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." **43** And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. **44** And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

When trauma reaches a crisis point, the capillaries can burst, and blood will ooze from the sweat pores.

Jesus foresaw not only the agonies of the cross, but also the horrors of hell as He was forsaken by God, bearing as He was all the sin of the world and thus the wrath of God for us.

To him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Literally, "out of death"

God's answer was Jesus' resurrection from the tomb. God did a greater miracle than just thwarting the efforts to have Jesus arrested and crucified. He delivered him out of death—as the firstfruits of all who put faith in Him as Savior.

The resurrection of our bodies that God promises us in Jesus is the great trump card. Nothing—not even death can separate us from His love. And nothing in life can either, no matter how brutal it may be.

Over recent weeks brothers and sisters in our church family have found themselves suddenly in the deep waters of grief, of life-threatening disease, while many others continue long-standing physical and spiritual battles.

Jesus our High Priest and Savior participates in our pain and draws close to us in our sorrows. He has been there Himself during His days on earth, and He continues to intercede for us. His deep love for us and His deep commitment to the Father's will in the midst of great suffering gives us the hope and strength we need.

Listen to words posted this week by a dear sister suddenly facing cancer:

"I'm learning at every hour of the day that God intends suffering to be a means of bringing me into the greater experience of his presence."

"My suffering drives me to seek after God in ways I have not previously known."

"This came about so that God's works might be displayed in [me]." John 9:3

And when he brings me into suffering “the Lord [stands] with me and strengthen[s] me.”
2 Timothy 4:17

She adds, “We really are still processing all of this and grieving as we look toward more uncertain days.”

“Please pray”

And I know many of you are. We grieve with those we love and seek to minister to them in their need. But understand this well, what we do is but a reflection of a far Greater Lover of our Souls, who is with us in our suffering.

Over a year ago a seminary professor shared insight into God’s self-description, I am, that comes to mind even though I know I’ve shared it before:

It’s like you’re cave so deep that there’s no light at all. As you try to accustom yourself to the dark, you start to realize that there’s someone else in the cave with you. So you finally ask, “Who’s there?”

A voice answers, “I am.”

His name is Yahweh, He is.

No wonder Paul expresses desire for the “fellowship of His sufferings” in Philippians 3. Jesus has willingly entered our experience of suffering. When we follow Him in faith, we enter the experience of His sufferings, as well. He declares that anyone who wants to

be His disciple (learner, follower) must deny himself, take up his cross, follow Him.

When you encounter the deep darkness of distress, feeling all alone, uncertain what to do, He is. He is with you. He has experienced the deep darkness too. And He did so because of His great love for you.

Jesus has cried out to God with flowing tears, so do not shrink from doing so yourself. His prayers were heard, and so are yours. His prayers were rewarded, and so will yours be. Because of Him you too will be delivered out of death.

2. Full Obedience Experienced (8)

⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

We have many families with young children. You're in the middle of child-training. Some of you are facing the infamous terrible twos. Others are grappling with the challenges of the teen years when there's a lot of adult desires with not much adult experience yet. My guess is that none of you have had to train your kids to what is wrong. That came naturally. You have to train them to do right.

As humans we are often having to learn obedience through the consequences we

suffer when we disobey. *For us, learning obedience involves unlearning disobedience.*

But there is another kind of growth in obedience. An obedience that is tested more and more but still holds.

Illustration: training Matthew not to destroy books he found in the house. The first page of a 19th century copy of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems, has been ripped out, and reinserted for the memory. And a MacArthur NASB Study Bible is illustrated with scribbles on the fly leaf. Placed a book in his view on the floor with the command not to touch. Later he was allowed to touch as long as he treated it gently.

This kind of training goes on all the time. In physical training, the more resistance you push against, the stronger you become. No veteran warrior gained his wisdom and skill through avoiding the battles. You don't gain mastery of a subject matter in school if you never increase the difficulty level.

So it is with the obedience that faith in God calls for. *The greater the opposition we encounter, the more the suffering on account of obeying God we bear, the stronger our obedience becomes. God strengthens our faith that way.*

This is the way Jesus learned—experienced, grew in—obedience. Luke reports of him after the events that happened at the temple when he was 12 that “Jesus increased in wisdom (skillful living) and stature (physical size and strength) and in favor with God (spiritual growth) and man (social growth).” Part of His humanity was growing strong in these areas. In the same way he grew stronger—he learned—obedience through the things He suffered.

“He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.”

His full obedience was tested to the death. But He never gave in. Because of His perfect obedience our failures don’t count against us if we are trusting in Him to be our Substitute, our High Priest.

3. Priestly Mission Fulfilled (9-10)

⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

As God he was already sinless, but for him to be our perfect high priest, he had to suffer. His perfect obedience made Him the only suitable sacrifice for our sin. He did not have to make sacrifice for his own sin—He had none. But to be our substitute, to completely pay for all our sin, he had to go through the

crucible of human suffering, including the battle against all kinds of temptation to disobey God.

That's why His sacrifice was once for all, not year after, not priest after priest, as each one died off.

Hebrews 9:12

He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

He is the Source of an eternal salvation. He is the perfect Savior, fully God and fully Man. *There is nothing to be added. No merits of our own. No years burning in purgatory to purge sins His blood did not cleanse. The salvation He procured for us is complete, perfect, and forever.*

To obey Him then is to believe in—to put full faith in Him as the one Savior God has sent.

John 6:27-29

²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

If you aren't trusting in Him you're sinning against him and against God. You are not righteous. If you don't think you even need Jesus to be saved from God's judgment on your sin, you dishonor God the Son and you dishonor God the Father who sent Him. You are calling God a liar.

If you consider yourself without sin, you are deeply deceived, hardening your heart to truth and believing a lie instead. You have to disregard God's definitions of right and wrong. You have to pretend that pride is no sin, that desires contrary to God's will are no sin, and that every single one of your thoughts, words, and deeds all measure up to God's perfect standard. You have to maintain that you never do wrong and you never fail to do right. You may think you actually meet that level of righteousness, but on judgment day you will learn otherwise. God will strip away your self-delusion.

1 John 1:8-10

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Illus: two individuals after a church service years ago

A man for the first time after years of a brutally hard life, abuse, drugs, prison.

"Did you understand the gospel you heard this morning?" I asked.

He answered in tears, "Yes, I'm just not sure Christ will have me."

A woman in her latter years, suffering early dementia, but a church goer all her life.

"I'm safe. I'm not a sinner. I'm a good person. I love animals."

Don't try to save yourself. You can do nothing but fail. Christ is your Substitute, your forever High Priest. Cling to Him in faith. Never let go.

Conclusion

What a Savior! Unlike any other. If He is yours and you are His, you are safe forever. He has made a way where there was no way.

1. Agonizing Prayer Rewarded (7)
2. Full Obedience Experienced (8)
3. Priestly Mission Fulfilled (9-10)

Discussion Questions

1. How does Jesus' praying to God "with loud cries and tears" connect to many prayers we find in the Psalms?

2. What do these Psalms and Jesus' experience tell you about other genuine believers and about God's understanding and care for your deepest pain and heart struggles?
3. What do Jesus' words in Mark 14 that he was troubled (shattered) unto death reveal to you about how fully He experienced human suffering?
4. In answer to his tearful prayers, Jesus was delivered "out of" death when He rose from the dead. How does knowing that even death cannot destroy you or separate you from God's love for you in Christ give you strength and courage in your present trials?
5. As a full human being, Jesus learned obedience through suffering. What are some ways your obedience has been tested and strengthened by the suffering and pressures you've faced?
6. Since Jesus was made the perfect Savior for us through His sufferings so that we could be given eternal salvation, is there anything at all we can add to merit salvation or to pay for our sins other than trusting Him to give us this priceless gift?
7. Can persons be saved as long as they think they have no sin? Why or why not?