

Sermon 25, What Your Priest Did, Hebrews 5:7-10

Proposition: Your Melchizedekian high priest prayed, learned, and became your eternal Savior.

- I. He Prayed, v. 7
 - A. He prayed for deliverance from death
 - B. His prayer was answered at His resurrection
 - C. He prayed with devout reverence for God
- II. He Learned Obedience, v. 8
 - A. He experienced obedience
 - B. If you only do what you would have done anyway, you're not obeying
 - C. He learned to do what, as man, he did not wish to do
- III. He Became the Source of Salvation, v. 9
 - A. His prayers and sufferings perfected Him
 - B. He saves those who obey Him
 - C. He saves them forever
- IV. He Did it all as a Melchizedekian High Priest, v. 10

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you think of the duties of a priest, particularly after what we've learned about them over the last two weeks, you probably do not think of extreme sorrow and loud crying with tears. I compared a priest to a lawyer and a plumber. Those professions have their share of difficulty, but one does not think of plumbers as being emotional wrecks. Yet our text this morning describes Christ's priestly activity in terms of lamentation and suffering, and not just any lamentation and suffering. He prayed and supplicated with loud cries and tears. He learned obedience by what He suffered. And through His sufferings, He became the source of eternal salvation.

One would almost think that the writer has moved on from talking about the priestly work of connecting man to God, and that he is now rehashing the crucifixion. Obviously he is rehashing the crucifixion. But the frame around the passage — "high priest" in vv. 1 & 10 — makes it clear that he is still very much talking about Jesus' role as priest. In other words, in addition to the fairly vanilla stuff in vv. 1-6, we must understand the soul-and-body-separating suffering recounted in vv. 7-9 as further description of what Jesus did as our priest. We have to recognize that in addition to offering the sacrifice, our great high priest *was* the sacrifice. He did not just kill the lamb; He was the lamb, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. As that suffering Lamb slain, He prayed, He learned, and He saved.

I. He Prayed, v. 7

Your great high priest was, above all, a prayer warrior, even a prayer champion. His first action as a priest, at least, the first action recounted here, was to pray. Enfleshed, living among us as one of us, He prayed. And He did not pray in a desultory, lackadaisical fashion. He prayed and

prayed and prayed. How many times in your life could it be said of you that you prayed with loud crying and tears? Now, even of Jesus, it seems that this kind of prayer was reserved for the night before His death. But brothers and sisters, I want you to recognize that prayer is a priestly task. If you believe in the priesthood of all believers (which you do), then you know that you need to pray for yourself and for others. That is what priests do. Jesus prayed a lot. He pulled all-nighters for prayer on more than one occasion. He prayed at His baptism. And, most memorably of all, He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane.

A. He prayed for deliverance from death

What was the content of His prayer? Hebrews does not say directly. But in naming God as “the one able to save Him from death,” it implies that He was praying to be saved from death. He was asking the Father to do something only the Father could do. To Yah the Lord belong escapes from death. And that is what Jesus prayed for. Please, Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me! That is what He asked for; that is what He wanted.

B. His prayer was answered at His resurrection

Our text says that God answered that prayer, leading to all kinds of silly comments from Christians through the centuries. Some have taken this “answered” to mean that God did keep Him from dying, or that God delivered Him from the fear of death. But that is clearly not what happened. Instead, the way in which God answered this prayer was to let His Son experience death and then to raise Him from the dead. His prayer was answered at His resurrection. He asked “Deliver me from death.” And His Father delivered Him from death — not in the sense of keeping Him from ever dying, in but in the sense of not letting Him stay dead.

Brothers and sisters, this gives us a clue about our Heavenly Father. He often delivers us after the fact. He lets us suffer before He rescues us; He answers our prayers, not right away, but in His own good time.

Part of Christ’s priestly work was to be the sacrifice. But it was certainly not His job to stay dead forever. And so He prayed to be delivered from death, and He was.

C. He prayed with devout reverence for God

He was delivered because God answers prayer. We recognize that. But our text tells us that that’s not the whole story. Christ was also heard because of His piety, His devout reverence for God.

In other words, the attitude with which you pray is hugely important for whether you will be heard. Don’t just mumble a few words with a “Who cares?” attitude. There actually is a relationship between the attitude with which you pray and the answers to your prayers. Have a bad attitude, and you’ll get a bad answer. OK, so that may be an exaggeration. But it’s right here in black and white that Jesus was heard because of His reverence for His Father. If you want your prayers to be heard, it behooves you to pray with reverence for your Father as well.

II. He Learned Obedience, v. 8

But as important as prayer is, it is not the only thing that Jesus did as your priest and mine. He prayed His heart out, and His prayer was answered when He walked out of the grave. But in addition to praying, He obeyed. He prayed and worked, talked to God and carried out His responsibilities.

A. He experienced obedience

But the text does not just say that Jesus obeyed; it says that He learned obedience. Now, how are we supposed to understand that? Let me start out by saying that it does not mean what it would mean for a sinful person like me or you to learn obedience. We start disobedient, and gradually learn to put away sin and obey our Father better and better. To say that Jesus learned obedience does not imply that He started disobedient. Rather, it implies that He got to know more about obedience. He started as an obedient Son, but not as a fully mature Son who was well-versed in obedience.

Thus, in short, the first thing to understand is that Jesus Christ experienced obedience. He got to know what obedience is like. He did what His Father told Him to, both in general (obeying the Ten Commandments) and in specific (fulfilling His call to be prophet, priest, and king). Jesus knows what it is like to have to obey. As God, He did not obey. He never had to.

B. If you only do what you would have done anyway, you're not obeying

This leads me to make an important observation: If you only do what you would have done anyway, you're not obeying. As Son of God, His will is identical with His Father's. He and the Spirit do not and cannot wish to do anything other than what the Father wishes. They are separate "persons," to use the accepted technical theological term. But they are not independently willing persons.

To apply this to you and me: If we only do what we would have done anyway, we are not obeying, not submitting, not saying "Not my will but thine." That's what obedience is, you know: It means doing what you do not wish to do, what you would not have done independently. To obey is better than sacrifice. But when you do both, like Jesus did — offering Himself as an obedient sacrifice — that's best of all.

C. He learned to do what, as man, he did not wish to do

The bottom line in saying that Jesus learned obedience is that as a man, He learned to do what He did not wish to do. He did not wish to bear the punishment for all the sins of the elect. He did not wish to go to the cross. But He learned to do it, to say (and to mean) "Not my will but thine be done." Human freedom opens up the possibility of a will that is not identical to the Father's. And when that possibility has been opened up, then (and only then) obedience becomes possible. Have you ever thought about that? We sometimes find our freedom troublesome, wish we just did the right thing because we could do nothing else. But Jesus Christ learned to do something contrary to His own will because it agreed with His Father's will. And that is what the Christian life is for us too.

We need to learn to pray. Come to prayer meeting; I am doing my best to teach the whole congregation how to pray better. But more than that, we need to learn to obey. That's the Great Commission: "teach the nations to obey everything I've commanded." That was Jesus' final word to His apostles. And in saying that, He was not asking them to teach anything He personally had been unwilling to learn. He did not want to go to the cross; He prayed very hard about it; and in the end, He submitted and obeyed His Father's will. Are you able to do that?

Much of the Christian life is not about doing what you want, or what feels good, but about what you ought, what God has told you to do.

III. He Became the Source of Salvation, v. 9

The third thing Jesus did as our high priest, after praying and obeying, was saving. He became the source of salvation, not a temporary salvation or a limited salvation, but an eternal salvation that delivers from all sin for all time.

A. His prayers and sufferings perfected Him

Now, can an imperfect Savior deliver an eternal salvation? I should say not. An eternal thing is, by definition, going to last forever. Something cannot be made to last forever by an agent that is flawed, that is imperfect. Such an agent would pass on his imperfections to his creation. Jesus is not like that. He is perfect. We already know that He is perfect; after all, He is the Son of God and God is perfect. But our author not only tells us that Christ is perfect; he tells us that Christ has been perfected. How is that possible? The eternal Son of God was in Heaven, the realm of being. Then He came to earth, the realm where being and becoming are in process — where being is becoming, in a certain sense. Here, He too became, underwent change, moved from a state of imperfection to perfection. He was never morally imperfect. But He was perfected in regards to experience, in regards to maturity. On earth, He grew up, in wisdom, in height, in favor with man — and also in favor with God. The Jesus we know today is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the one who was, and who is, and who is to come. But in another respect, He is different today than He was in the manger in Bethlehem. He is different than He was before the transfiguration, before the crucifixion. He has changed. He has been perfected. In particular, I would suggest, the juxtaposition of this verse with the previous two is telling us that He was perfected through His prayers and through His sufferings.

Jesus Christ is perfect. Yet He is not perfect by virtue of rolling out of bed. He is perfect because He prayed His guts out. He is perfect because He obeyed when obedience was literally killing Him. He prayed and obeyed to the death, and on the other side of that, He is perfected.

B. He saves those who obey Him

In His perfection, He saves those who obey Him. These people are a coterminous group with the elect and the believers. You can describe them any of the three ways. Jesus does not save any of us because we have been obeying Him, or because we trusted in Him prior to His choosing to save us. He saves us because He chose to save us; that's what "election" means. But all those whom He has chosen to save must and will obey Him. To be a Christian who does not obey Jesus Christ is a contradiction in terms. I'm not saying you have to obey perfectly; we all disobey. But is the general trend of your life in the direction of obedience? Do you mostly obey Jesus, and mostly try to obey Jesus? If so, you can have good confidence that you are the recipient of His eternal salvation.

C. He saves them forever

In fact, Jesus saves *forever* those who obey Him. His salvation will not quit after a certain period of time. In this world, everything comes to an end. Even government programs have ending

dates. But your salvation in Christ will not expire in 2025, or in 2525. It is good forever, world without end, amen.

IV. He Did it all as a Melchizedekian High Priest, v. 10

These acts of Jesus — praying, learning, becoming the source of eternal salvation — are all priestly acts. He does them all as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. His priesthood cost Him everything. You can call Him a “services professional,” but this goes far beyond professionalism. The proper name for it is “eternal love.”

So as I said, we need to challenge our thinking about priests. A priest stands between you and God, repairing and maintaining your relationship with God. To be a true high priest cost Jesus everything, including His life. Yet it also perfected Him and allowed Him to be the source of eternal salvation. Love Him; delight in Him; make use of His priestly mediation.

You have a loving Heavenly Father, who loves you through His Son. Love Him back, through and by His Son. Amen.