

*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.<sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered<sup>9</sup> and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him<sup>10</sup> and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7-10)*

### Who Better to Save Us?

How do you find the best person for a job? I'm a big Chicago Bears fan and I've been following their efforts to improve their team during the off season. A week or two ago, they addressed one of their biggest needs by trading for a wide receiver. But is he the right man for the job? Nobody questions his ability. He once caught 21 passes in a single game. But this will be his third team in four years because he has serious character issues. Do his other issues negate his talent? Of course, that question applies in many other situations. Who is the right man to be president of a congregation? What is the balance between gifts and commitment and personality? In the company you work for, can you imagine a situation in which someone is a really good technician or programmer or craftsman, but he or she causes so much drama that it's not worth keeping them around? Or what would you do with somebody that everybody likes but who can't do the job right? Obviously, we're not here for a human resources seminar. We're here to grow in our faith. But this morning, the book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus had a job to do and he was the only person who could've done it. **Who better to save us?**

#### I.

The job of saving us comes down to two main phases. The first phase consists of the things that Jesus did while he lived here: living a perfect life, dying in our place and then rising from the dead. The second phase consists of Jesus guarding and guiding us so that when our life ends here, we have the eternal life he worked so hard to win. The lesson we have before us this morning teaches that when Jesus completed the first phase – when he won eternal life for us – he showed that he's perfectly qualified for the second phase – bringing us home to heaven.

There simply is no better Savior. Why would you want anything else? This morning, God shows us that by pointing out that Jesus understands what it's like to live in a sinful world. I read an article the other day about effective managers. The writer had worked in a fast food restaurant and he described how his boss spent hours in his office doing the scheduling and ordering and financial calculations that keep a business running. But almost every day he came out of that office during their "rush" period and helped to cook or serve or take orders. He knew what it was like to work in the restaurant and the writer had enormous respect for him.

Jesus knows what it's like to be us. The writer to the Hebrews mentions the night before Jesus died, when he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. There Jesus endured the terror of death and hell that every sinner has to face. He prayed to his Father and asked that the cup would pass from him – in other words, he asked to avoid the cross. Our text says, **"He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."**

Jesus reacted the way we would react if we knew that we were going to be crucified – or if we were going to face death in the hospital or even on the highway as we felt our car sliding off the road. So he prayed to the one person who can save us from death: God the Father. Now, why did that happen? Jesus had a perfect faith. Shouldn't he have calmly accepted his Father's will? Certainly. And in fact, he did. Once the prayer was over, Jesus went from arrest to trial to torture and to death without flinching or hesitation. What he suffered in the garden was not weakness or corruption in his faith. He suffered what we have to suffer because of sin. Why did Jesus die? Death is what we earn when we sin. But Jesus never sinned. He suffered what sin does to us. That was true in the garden, too. Sin makes us afraid of death. Sin makes us dread facing God's judgment. Jesus was about to face God's judgment for our sin and then die, so he felt the way we sinners feel when we face death and hell.

He felt what we feel. Now, by the grace of God, many times I've stood next to Christians who were dying and they've told me they were ready to go home. That's a wonderful blessing. But I've also had the

other experience. I once served a man who was dying of cancer. He told me, “Pastor, I’m so afraid.” Now, he had confessed his faith in Christ many times. But as he saw death coming closer and closer, as he reflected on his sins and what they deserved, he was afraid. Can we blame him? I remember one time my wife and I attended a Bible study. The pastor asked, “Who here is afraid of death?” He was surprised when I, another pastor, raised my hand. But it’s true. I’m a weak and sinful human being. When I had minor surgery last spring, I was nervous. When I felt my car begin to spin and slide off the highway this past winter, I felt fear while I wrestled with the steering wheel. The natural response of the sinful heart is weakness and fear when we face death. Our sinful nature is terrified of what God is going to say afterward.

But we have a Savior who went through that fear for us. He prayed the prayers we pray and he offered those prayers perfectly in our place. Because he did, God counts all our prayers in those moments as perfect. Jesus conquered that fear. He removed the reason for it – he paid for our sins. He paid for the weakness in our faith that is terrified of death and judgment. So we are free. Hell is not waiting for us. We will live in heaven. Death is just a door we have to pass through, and even that is temporary. When Jesus returns these bodies will rise and live. And even the effects of sin and death on our bodies are temporary. When we rise, Jesus will undo age and illness and weakness and we will be physically glorified. And he will care for us during all the decades that we live here. He will strengthen our faith and carry us through sadness and fear and guilt and loss. He will not let our faith die.

No one is better able to care for our faith than Jesus because he knows what it feels like to live in this world. This winter, I did something dumb when I took my kids sledding and I sprained my ankle. For a couple of weeks, I had to limp around home and church. I discovered how much slower you move when you limp and how much more energy it takes to do anything. It made me think of all the members of our church who live like that every day. I hope that my experience gives me a greater sense of understanding and compassion for those people. Jesus cares for our hearts and our souls as we suffer because he has the compassion that only a fellow sufferer can have. **Who better to save us? Jesus knows what our lives are like.**

## II.

God heard Jesus’ prayer in the garden. He didn’t take away the death he was about to die. Like he often does for us, God strengthened him so that he could go forward. Jesus went willingly. As confusing as this may sound, Jesus’ prayer did not mean he was unwilling to suffer and die for us. It meant that he was standing in our place. Our text zooms in on that truth. It says, **“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”**

Jesus was God’s Son. But even though that was true, “he learned obedience from what he suffered.” What does that mean? Wasn’t he already obedient to God the Father when he entered the womb of the Virgin Mary? Wasn’t he already obedient when he kept every single command that God ever gave? Sure he was. But remember Jesus prayed: **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”** Jesus submitted to the will of God. This was not something new. But it was the ultimate example. Here Jesus learned by experience the price he would pay by actually going through sufferings and hell and death in order to give us life. Now, in a sense, he already knew that. Jesus knew all things. But it was an experience he had to go through to fully appreciate, at least in his human nature.

Then our text says, “Once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” What does it mean that Jesus was “made perfect”? Wasn’t he perfect already? Yes he was. Jesus never sinned once. But that’s not the point here. You see, perfect has at least two meanings in English. One meaning is that something is flawless. But the original meaning of the word perfect is “complete.” If you study grammar, you know there is a perfect tense. “I have earned a degree.” That means the studying is done right? It doesn’t mean that you got an A on every paper. Jesus was not “made perfect” in the sense that somehow his suffering burned his weakness or failings out of his system. He had no sin or weakness. But Jesus was made perfect in the sense that he completed his work.

The Greek word literally means that he reached his goal. That death that he prayed about and wrestled with in the garden was the goal of his life. When he died and rose, he became the source of salvation. The only way to get to heaven is by trusting in what Jesus did. So why does our text say that he’s the source of salvation for those who obey him? When Jesus obeyed his Father and died for us he became the perfect example of faith. He trusted his Father and put his fate in his Father’s hands and even as he prayed promised to obey. Our obedience doesn’t earn us heaven. It shows the faith that we have in Jesus. We follow him in this sinful world,

we face our own difficult cups, we submit to suffering and ridicule for doing and saying what he tells us to, because we trust in Christ. We trust that after all the hard things of this life, we will have eternal life in heaven.

What a wonderful gift that is. It's a gift that wasn't even on our horizon when Jesus faced the horrors of hell and completed his mission. Of course, it's easy to say that because Jesus did all that two thousand years ago. None of us was born then. But even when we were born, we didn't appreciate what he had done. We could have drifted through our whole lives without ever knowing that Jesus had reached his goal and won this eternal life for us. While we may have wrestled with the hardships of life here, it never would've occurred to us that the answer was Christ. That's true because we were all born sinners. In our pride and sin, we thought that we were good enough to get to heaven. We believed that when we did sin, it was just weakness. It didn't mean we weren't good people. That pride is a lie that threatened to drag us down to hell because it blinded us from seeing just how sinful we really are.

But Jesus didn't let that lie win. He went to the cross for the sins of the whole world. He did that knowing how many people would refuse to believe it. He did that knowing how easy it would be even for us Christians, on a day to day basis, to forget what he did and to live and act as if we were really responsible for our own salvation. He did that knowing that we would be guilty of sin in our hearts and in our lives every day of our lives. But still he did it. He let nothing stop him, not even the human terror of death and hell. He reached his goal and he won eternal life for you and me. That makes him unique in our lives and in our universe. **Who better to save us? Jesus reached his goal to bring us salvation.**

Finding the right person for a job is incredibly important. Even in the church, we struggle if we put a sincere and well-meaning person into a job they can't do. Often in the working world, when you get hired there's a three month trial period during which the boss evaluates whether you really are the person for the job he or she gave you. Sometimes, you're not. That could never happen to Jesus. He was the best possible candidate for the job of saving us. He was the only candidate, the only person in all the universe who could win eternal life for us. He reached his goal and won salvation for us. He knows how best to care for us while we live here because he knows what life is like in this sinful world. Trust in that Savior. Who is better for that job than Jesus? Amen.