

“The Source of Salvation“

In our message this week, we are going to be drilling down deeper on what we were talking about last week. Just to give you a quick refresher, last week we were looking at Ephesians 2:1-10. We saw that the natural condition of human beings is that we are dead in our transgressions and sins, and dead to God. Ultimately there is nothing we can do about our deadness... that is the very nature of being dead, right? Dead people do nothing. With no spiritual life in us, we are powerless to spiritually connect ourselves to God.

And then two huge words we hear last week were: “But God...” We were dead, but God did something. God made us alive in Christ. We are saved by God’s action not ours.

Now this week, we’re going to drill down on how Christ made us alive. What was it about him that sets us right with God?

Now, the text we’re about to look at offers us a solution to a problem. But if we don’t appreciate the magnitude of the problem, neither will we be particularly amazed at the solution found in Christ. So let me set this up for you.

The letter to the Hebrews from which today’s sermon text comes, was written to Christians of Jewish descent that were in danger of abandoning their faith in Christ. Two things put their faith at risk. One was increasing persecution. The other was reverting back to a broken religious system.

The context of this letter shows us that the Christians to whom this letter was addressed had already been through a persecution. It appears they had a respite from it for a season. And now it was ramping up again. It’s likely the persecution referenced in this letter was the persecution that began under the Roman Emperor Nero. Under Nero, it *was* okay to be an adherent to the Jewish faith. They were not persecuted. But it was not okay to follow Christ. So imagine you are a former adherent to Judaism, and the heat is being turned up on you because you are now a Christian. It seems some were thinking: “Is there really that big of a difference? Why don’t I just go back to the Jewish faith, the Jewish system, and also believe in Christ?” That would be ideal.

The problem was, those two belief systems were incompatible. They were in opposition now that Jesus had come. Let’s call the old system the priesthood and temple system. Christ had not yet come, and so God designed a system that would remind them of both the seriousness of sin, and of God’s solution which was yet to come. The whole system was pointing forward to Christ. In that system, sinful humans (which was all of them) did not have direct, free access to God. Sin separated them from God. And so they would have to go to the holy place, which was symbolic of God’s presence, and there would be a holy man, the priest. He was God’s designated go-between who would intercede for the sinful people before the holy God. The only way to have access to God was through an intercessor and that intercessor had to offer a sacrifice for your sins. Sins had to be atoned for. The guilt would have to be removed. And so the priest would offer the sacrifice for the sins of the person, after which, their sin would be forgiven and they would be right with God.

All of this was a foreshadowing of Christ, the perfect high priest who would offer the perfect sacrifice: his own body. And so when Christ came, that whole priesthood and temple system was abrogated. It was done away with. It was no longer necessary. In fact, not only was it no longer

necessary, it also served to turn people from Christ to a now defunct and useless system. Christ is the one and only intercessor, the great and perfect high priest. To abandon him and turn to a different system means you lose it all: you lose Christ, you lose God's favor and forgiveness, you lose eternal life. And so the recipients of this letter were warned of what could happen if they stuck with that old system.

APPLICATION: Now here's what this has to do with us today. Human beings are naturally drawn to the priesthood and temple system. And since we Christians are human beings, we're also drawn toward it too, and it's dangerous! This priesthood and temple system is one that is found in nearly all world religions, and it's where we could land too if we're not careful.

So here is how the priesthood and temple system looks today: In order to get right with God, you have to go see a holy man in a holy place who will share with you some / his holy writings. If you properly do in the holy place what the holy man says is written in the holy book, and if he intercedes for you before God, then God will be pleased with you and you can go on with your life. But make sure you come back next week. You will have once again accumulated sins and God once again is growing more and more angry with you. If you wish to avoid his punishments and disfavor, then come back to the holy place and speak to the holy man who will tell you what you must do according to the holy writings. He will once again intercede before God on your behalf, and through all of this he will once again make you right with God.

That was never what Old Testament Judaism was supposed to be, but it kind of degraded to that. It's what the readers of Hebrews were in danger of returning to. It's what we tend to turn to as well.

Why do you come to church? If you view your church according to the priesthood and temple system, you are on the wrong track. Your eternal salvation is in danger.

So here's the big thing: The source of your salvation is not you. It's not your efforts. It's not in doing certain rites, rituals or sacrifices in a certain holy place according to the directions given you by a holy man. You cannot earn a right relationship with God by your obedience, because it always falls short. But God had a better plan.

Now we're ready to listen to today's text in Hebrews 5:7-10.

We have a perfect high priest in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 5:7-10 **7 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.**

What is talked about here is Jesus' anguish just before his suffering and death on the cross. Now what's presumed but not directly mentioned is that up to this point, he was obedient to his heavenly Father. Jesus could bear the sins of the world if he was not himself perfect. If Jesus had sinned, then he would have suffered and died for himself. But that's not why he suffered and died. He had always lived in reverent submission to the heavenly Father. His Father was well pleased with him. He declared it at his baptism and repeated it at the mount of transfiguration.

For some 33 ½ years, the Son lived in perfect obedience to the Father. We call this the active obedience of Christ. God said, "Do this" and Christ in thought, word and deed did it. God said, "Don't do that." And Christ in thought, word and deed obeyed. Think of the Commandments. No other gods. Don't take God's name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day. Honor your father and mother. Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not covet. Jesus obeyed every Commandment all the time perfectly. His record of obedience was flawless.

And so God listened to his prayers and cries. And here we're reminded of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. There the obedient Son pleaded with the heavenly Father to have the cup of suffering removed. If there was another plan, another way, that did not involve the incomprehensible burden of carrying the sins of the whole world... if there was a path that could bypass the cross somehow.... Let it be that way. The plea came with such intensity that his sweat fell in huge droplets as if blood were pouring out of him. Yet he concluded his prayer: But not my will but yours be done.

And the Father willed that Jesus should suffer and die. He could not and would not deliver him from the suffering. But he would and did strengthen him to endure it.

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.⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered [Profound mystery. God's Son learned something! According to his human nature, he learned the full cost of obedience by what was suffered. It would cost him everything. It would involve suffering that he had never experienced before.

9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. [Don't think that Jesus was imperfect and eventually made enough progress that he became perfect. That phrase "once made perfect" means "having reached his goal; succeed fully in accomplishing a goal"

he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

HE became the source of eternal salvation. Yielding to Christ. Trusting in him, we have salvation. He is the source, not us. It is not the priesthood and temple system that saves, but Christ alone.

and [Jesus] was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Who was Melchizedek? He's a mysterious character in the Old Testament. During the time of Abraham he was the King of Salem... which is thought to be Jerusalem. He is also called a High Priest of God. Abraham, great as he was, gives a tithe, a tenth of his possessions, to Melchizedek, this priest-king. And then just as quickly, Melchizedek disappears from the Biblical narrative.

The point here in Hebrews is clear. Jesus was not a priest in the line of Aaron. He was not of the tribe of Levi. He was a different kind of priest. He was a priest-king. And he was directly appointed by God to accomplish what all the other priests were powerless to do. He offered the perfect sacrifice – himself – perfectly obedient... on the cross to God for the sins of the world.

So pulling this all together, what is God teaching us? We do not approach God or get right with him through our own obedience, but going through the right motions, performing the correct rites, giving the right offerings and sacrifices. It's not by showing up at a holy place and listening to a holy man who claims to have a special connection to God, who can tell you what God is looking for, if only you will do this or do that. In other words, God is crystal clear: the source of your salvation? **It's not you!** Even though that's what we're inclined to believe.

No, the source of our salvation is Jesus Christ, and Christ alone. It is his perfect obedience for us that merits God's favor. It is his suffering and death on the cross for our sins that makes the full payment. The only way to approach the Holy God is through his holy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Abandon all else, and rest fully on Jesus Christ. HE is the source of our salvation! Amen.