

Hebrews 5:7-10 “The Humble High Priest”—part two**

Main Idea: In Hebrews 5:1-10 we learn about the humility of our high priest, Jesus Christ, who exhibited humility in two ways.

I. We see the humility of our high priest in His calling (1-6).

II. We see the humility of our high priest in His suffering (7-10).

A. Ponder His praying (7).

1. We're told when He prayed.
2. We're told to whom He prayed.
3. We're told how He prayed.
4. We're told what He prayed.
5. We're told the result of His praying.
6. We're told the attitude of His praying.

B. Ponder His obeying (8-10).

1. His obedience was learned (8a).
2. His obedience was costly (8b).
3. His obedience resulted in perfection (9a).
4. His obedience resulted in salvation (9b).
 - a. Salvation comes from Christ alone.
 - b. Salvation is eternal.
 - c. Salvation belongs to those who obey Him.
5. His obedience resulted in His priesthood.
 - a. Because of Christ's obedience we have a Savior.
 - b. Because of Christ's obedience we have an example.
 - c. Because of Christ's obedience we have access to God.

Make it personal: Three responses are in order...

1. Am I trusting in Christ?
2. Am I following Christ?
3. Am I living a life of prayer?

It was quite a day. Crowds of people lined the street, each person straining his or her neck to catch a glimpse of

him. He was the talk of the nation, and when news hit the streets that he was coming the whole city turned out for the occasion.

“What’s that?” someone shouting over the crowd noise. “He’s riding a *what?*”

“He’s riding a donkey,” was the reply. “You know, just like the prophets predicted!” Indeed, the questioner did know. Every good Jew knew what this meant. And so the excited multitudes began to cry out, “Hosanna! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! (Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38)!”

We call it Palm Sunday because on that day the people spread their clothes in the road along with palm branches. They did so to give honor to this amazing person who was riding into their city on the colt of a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. “This must be the king!” they concluded. And indeed He was and is, the king of all kings. But what the crowds didn’t understand, what so many even today fail to grasp, is that He is a very unique king. He hadn’t entered the city that day to rule, but to *suffer*. And oh how He suffered!

Why did Jesus suffer and eventually die on a Roman cross? So many people don’t know the answer, and many who think they know would offer an answer that focuses on a secondary reason, rather than the primary one. “He died because He loves sinners,” some would announce. And they would be correct, for the Savior does love sinners, but there’s a more fundamental reason. Indeed, there was a higher motivation that governed the actions of the Son of God, higher than His matchless love for undeserving rebels like us. And what is that? We find the stunning answer in Hebrews 5:7-10, the text to which we’ll devote our attention today.

In Hebrews 5 we learn something amazing about Jesus the Messiah. He is presented here as *the humble high priest*. His humility is demonstrated in two significant ways in verses 1-10, the first of which we considered last time, which we’ll review briefly and then proceed to ponder the second.

I. We see the humility of our high priest in His calling (1-6).

Notice verse, “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.” The first readers of this letter knew that quite well. It’s called *Hebrews* because the letter was written to a primarily Jewish audience, Jews who had professed faith in Messiah Jesus. But that profession was costing them dearly, and some weren’t quite so sure it was worth the cost. They were thinking seriously about throwing in the towel.

And one apparent reason had to do with the subject of the high priest. For fourteen centuries the Jews had enjoyed access to God through high priests. Their high priest was the God-ordained representative who entered the Holy of Holies and offered a yearly sacrifice for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. “How can you turn your back on God’s chosen high priest?” the critics were saying. “How can you ever expect to please God without a high priest?”

To which the writer of Hebrews responds, “But we do have a high priest, the God-appointed high priest who excels all other priests!” As with the previous high priests in Israel, He too was called by God, as verse 5 declares, “So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’” So Christ did not initiate His priesthood. God the Father did. And God the Father told His Son something that set Him apart from all other priests, stating in verse 6, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

So we see the humility of our high priest, first of all, in His calling. But that raises the question, “What exactly was His calling? What did the Father call His Son to do?” The answer is astonishing, and it brings us to verses 7-10 where we see the second expression of the humility of our high priest.

II. We see the humility of our high priest in His suffering (7-10).

At first it sounds like the writer changes the subject in verse 7. He's been talking about the fact that we have a high priest in heaven, and he says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth." What does what happened to Jesus *on earth* have to do with His high priesthood *in heaven*? The answer is *everything*. It's because of what Jesus did on earth that we now have a high priest who sympathizes with us in heaven.

So what precisely did Jesus do on earth? The writer points out two activities. Both have to do with His suffering, and both beckon us to ponder them carefully.

A. Ponder His praying (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."

When you read the story of Jesus' life, one of the things that stands out is that Jesus prayed a lot. For instance, He prayed all night before selecting the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-13). His transfiguration occurred as He was praying (Luke 9:29). Luke 5:16 says that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

But the author here seems to have a specific prayer time in mind, a time when Jesus prayed with "loud cries and tears." When did that happen? Most feel the writer is thinking of *Gethsemane*. It was there in that garden that Christ faced the horror of what lay before Him the next day.

I'm thankful we live in a day when we have so many resources available to help us understand the Bible. God gifts His people so they can help the rest of His people. I have been served greatly in preparing this message by a commentary written by Philip Hughes, and I'll be inviting him to serve you as well throughout this message. Consider his comments about Gethsemane :

"Now in the Garden the moment has come, in his self-identification with mankind, to plumb human depravity and fallenness to its very depths as he prepares, in all his innocence and purity, to submit himself in the place of sinners to the fierceness of God's wrath against the sins of men. This meant an experience incomparable in the horror of its torment, from which his whole being shrank instinctively but which was inescapable if the purpose of his coming was to be achieved."^[1]

There are mysteries in Gethsemane that our human minds can't possibly fathom. Yet there's value in trying, pride-crushing value that comes from contemplating the unparalleled suffering of our humble high priest. Let's examine His praying carefully. We learn six insights from verse 7.

1. *We're told when He prayed.* Verse 7 mentions a time indicator, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth." The text literally reads, "During the days of His flesh."^[2] God actually left heaven and robed Himself in human flesh, says John 1:14. It's called *the incarnation*. The Son of God became a human being, and although He never ceased being God, He actually experienced life in our flesh. He felt the need for food and sleep. He shared in our humanity (2:14). He was made like His brothers in every way (2:15). He suffered when He was tempted (2:16). He became "subject to weakness" (5:3).

That's when our high priest prayed, during the days of His flesh. And it was one particular night when He prayed the particular prayer we're pondering.

2. *We're told to whom He prayed.* He prayed "to the one who could save him from death." Who is that? His Father. Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, the One who had the power to save Him out of death.

That raises a question, doesn't it? Could not the Son of God save Himself? Is this prayer an indication that Jesus Christ did not possess all the attributes of deity, namely omnipotence (the possession of all power), or that He lacked the ability to deal with this particular foe, the foe of death? Not at all. The Son of God did not cease to be God when He tabernacled in this world as a human. And to prove that point He did miracle after miracle, healing the sick, casting out demons, even raising the dead. No, Christ never ceased being God, and Christ did not pray this prayer because He lacked divine power. Why then did He pray? The answer is found in the final two words of verse 7, "because of his *reverent submission*," words we'll explore carefully in a moment. For now, let's consider a third

insight into His praying.

3. *We're told how He prayed.* He prayed “with loud cries and tears.” Jesus was no Stoic. When He prayed, He not only poured out cries to His Father, but *loud* cries. The NKJV says “with vehement cries and tears.”

There's a rabbinic saying, “There are three kinds of prayers, each loftier than the preceding: prayer, crying, and tears. Prayer is made in silence: crying with raised voice; but tears overcome all things.”^[3]

The question arises, “Why the loud cries and tears?” Was He afraid of dying, of the physical agony He would endure in the next twenty-four hours?” The fact is, others have faced painful deaths courageously. No, it wasn't merely physical death that our high priest dreaded, as painful as that would be. It wasn't the nails He dreaded, nor the thorns jammed into His scalp, nor the whip that shredded His back, as terrible as these physical brutalities were. The loud cries and tears were elicited by something the human eye could not see that day we call Good Friday.

I'll call upon Philip Hughes to serve us again with this insightful perspective: “In a real but deeply mysterious manner, which no words of man can explain, the incarnate Son as he hung on the cross endured the desolating anguish of being torn away from his Father. He took our sins, the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2), upon himself at Calvary in order that there he might bear our judgment, the Righteous for the unrighteous (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). It was then, on that cross, that ‘God made him who knew no sin to be sin for our sake, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Cor. 5:21).”^[4]

That's what happened. On the cross, the perfect Son of God became a substitute for sinners, and consequently felt something He had never felt in the eons of eternity past... *alienation from His Father*. That's what He saw in the cup He asked His Father to take away in Gethsemane .

As Hughes concludes, “The ‘loud cries and tears’ which accompanied Christ's supplication are to be understood, then, in relation to the indescribable darkness of the horror that he, our High Priest, was to pass through as, on the cross, he bore not only the defilement and guilt of the whole world's sin but also its judgment. At Gethsemane and at Calvary we see him enduring our hell so that we might be set free to enter his heaven.”^[5]

4. *We're told what He prayed.* He offered up “prayers and petitions.” Actually, the word order in the Greek text differs from our English Bibles. Listen to the Young's Literal Translation of verse 7, “Who in the days of his flesh both prayers and supplications unto Him who was able to save him from death—with strong crying and tears—having offered up.”

That's what He offered up to His Father, “prayers and petitions.” ‘Prayers’ (*deesis*) is the general New Testament word for prayer and carries the idea of intense entreaty, even to the point of begging. It's this word that expresses the requests of the leper in Luke 5:12, the demoniac in Luke 8:28 & 38, the father of a demon-possessed child in Luke 9:38 & 40, and the distressed Simon in Acts 8:24.^[6] ‘Petitions’ has a stronger connotation, and, as Guthrie explains “is derived from the ancient practice of holding out an olive branch as a sign of appeal.”^[7]

He asked, He pleaded, He cried out to His Father, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done (Luke 22:42).” His Father sent an angel to Him, to strengthen Him (says Luke 22:43). Yet the Son's pleading became even stronger, for Luke's account says, “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44).”

His disciples did not help Him, for they were sleeping. He went to them, urged them to join Him in prayer. And then, while He was still speaking, the mob came with Judas leading them.

He had to go to the cross. There was no other way. He had to drink the cup, the very cup of the cross.

5. *We're told the result of His praying.* “He was heard.” His Father heard Him. The One who could save Him from death heard Him.

You say, “It sure doesn't look like His Father heard Him. He let the Romans kill Him, didn't He? If He could

save Him from death, why didn't He?" He did save Him from death, but not on Friday. He saved Him from death *on Sunday*. He raised Him from the dead!

That was God's plan all along, a point Peter emphasizes in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:23-24), "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. *But God raised him from the dead*, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

Hughes says it well, "The cross, being both the symbol and the reality of the greatest possible shame, assures us... that the reconciling grace of God which flows from it reaches to the most wretched and depraved of sinners."^[8]

6. *We're told the attitude of His praying.* "He was heard *because of His reverent submission.*"

Remember our earlier question, "Why did Jesus suffer and die?" Was it to save sinners? Is that why He suffered and died, for *our benefit*? Surely we do benefit from what He endured, but there was a higher motivation on His heart and we see it right here. He suffered and died *because of His reverent submission to His Father*.

The NKJV says, "He was heard because of his godly fear."^[9] Gromacki offers this perspective. "He 'feared' in that He had an acute concern for the honor of a holy God."^[10]

That's it. Jesus Christ had the power to save Himself (and to do anything else He desired) because He is God. But He lived His life in total submission to, and He never acted independently of His Father. He put His own care into His Father's hands, and He did so *literally*. Do you remember His final words from the cross? Luke 23:46 records them, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

The Son of God never acted on His own. He never "did His own thing." He never used His power to accomplish His own initiatives, but only and always in submission to His Father and His Father's will.

Is that the way you pray, *in submission to our Father*? As the hymnwriter put it:

Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way;

Thou art the potter, I am the clay;

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

while I am waiting, yielded and still.

This brings us to a second activity that is connected to the suffering of our high priest. We've pondered His praying. Now let's...

B. Ponder His obeying (8-10). "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 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek."

Allow me to make five observations concerning our Savior's obedience.

1. *His obedience was learned (8a).* "Although he was a son"—stop there for a moment. We've seen the Lord's *sonship* mentioned throughout the first section of Hebrews. Back in 1:2 we learned that the Son is climax of God's revelation to the world, and indeed is the One who made the world. In 1:3 we learned that the Son is the exact representation of God, so that if you want to know what God is like, then look at the Son. In 3:6 we discovered that the Son is over God's house. In 4:14 we were told that Jesus *is* the Son of God and that He is our great high priest.

But in the text before us we discover a shocking truth, for verse 8 declares, "Although he was a son, he *learned* obedience." The Greek verb is *emathen* (related to the noun for 'disciple,' *mathetes*; a disciple is a *learner*). That's significant. Jesus did what He calls us to do. He *learned*.

Which raises the question, “How could the omniscient Son of God learn?” Again, there’s mystery here, but we must affirm what the Scriptures declare. As the *God-man*, Jesus Christ is equal with God, possesses the very attributes of God, and is entitled to equal honor. Yet as the *God-man* Jesus Christ experienced what humans experience (except for sin). This includes the experience of *learning*. Luke 2:52 tells us what happened when Jesus was twelve years old, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Let that sink in. Jesus *grew in wisdom*. He *learned obedience*.

2. *His obedience was costly (8b)*. Notice the next phrase, “He learned obedience *from what He suffered*.” He learned by experience what He had always known. And what classroom did He learn it in? The classroom of *suffering*. He learned “by the things which he suffered,” as the KJV puts it.

There’s why He died, beloved. It was an act of obedience, as Philippians 2:8 declares, “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!”

The theme of obedience is huge in the Gospel of John. God the Son always obeys His Father. Notice...

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” Notice who took the initiative. God, specifically God the Father, gave His Son. It was the Father’s plan for the Son to come to this world. And the Son obeyed.

John 3:17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Why did the Son come? Because the God the Father *sent* Him. And why did He send His Son? He sent Him on a rescue mission.

John 4:34 “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.’” What was the Son’s ‘food’? What was more important to Him than anything else? *Doing the will of Him who sent me*.

John 5:30 “By myself I can do nothing...for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.” The Son said He could do nothing by Himself. I don’t think that’s a statement concerning His *ability* (for He who created the universe has the ability to do all things), but about *possibility*. It would be impossible for Him to do anything *by Himself*, on His own, apart from His Father’s will. He simply never did so, a point He stated clearly in...

John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”

John 12:49-50 “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.” Let the weight of that sink in. Jesus said His Father *commanded* Him to say certain things, not simply requested but *commanded* Him.

“Clean out the manure from the cattle pen.” That’s a command, right? And that’s what I once heard my father tell me on a day I didn’t have school. And I did it because God has given dads authority and expects sons to obey them.

But do you realize that what He tells us to do is the very thing He Himself has done? The Son obeyed His Father. Was His obedience forced? Hardly...

John 14:31 “But the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.” What motivated the Son’s obedience? Love did, love for His Father. And love is the reason the Father commanded His Son, too. Notice...

John 15:9-10 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” The Father’s commands to His Son were an expression of His love for Him, just as the Son’s obedience to those commands was an expression of His love for His Father.

You say, “I don’t get it. How was the Father showing love to His Son His by commanding Him to come into this world and die on a cross?” It was loving because His Son’s obedience to His commands would result in something very special for His beloved Son. His Son’s obedience would result in glory to His Son. How so? Jesus sheds light on that question in His high priestly prayer in John 17...

John 17:1 “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” And how would the Father glorify His Son? By giving the very people for whom His Son died to His Son as a love-gift. These people would live forever and ever with His Son, praising and honoring Him for His matchless worth. Jesus acknowledged that truth at the end of His prayer...

John 17:24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

You say, “That’s amazing!” Indeed, it is. The Son’s obedience was both learned and costly. And because He did obey, the results He anticipated in His high priestly prayer in John 17 became a reality. We see three of these results mentioned in Hebrews 5:9-10. Here’s the first result...

3. *His obedience resulted in perfection (9a)*. “And once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation.” Hold on. Wasn’t the Son already perfect? Yes. In what sense then was He “made perfect”?

It’s important to keep in mind what the Greek thinking person meant by *perfection*. Barclay explains, “To him a thing was *telios* if it perfectly carried out the purpose for which it was designed.”^[11]

Suppose you bought a wrench, and I asked you, “Is that wrench any good?” You could say, “It sure is. It’s in *perfect* condition.” You’d say that because the wrench was flawless, without a nick or spot on it.

Now suppose five years later I came to see you and found you in your garage, working on your car. And suppose there in your hand I saw a wrench, and I asked you, “Is that wrench any good?” And you responded, “It sure is. It’s the wrench I showed you five years ago, and it just worked *perfectly!*” You’d say that because the wrench had perfectly carried out the purpose for which it was designed.

The Greek word for “once made perfect” is *teleiotesis*. It’s worth noting that Jesus’ words from the cross just prior to dying were, “It is finished (John 19:30).” That’s one word in the Greek, *tetelestai*. His obedience in life and now in death resulted in the fulfillment of the purpose for which He had entered the world as a man.

And what was that purpose? Our text tells us...

4. *His obedience resulted in salvation (9b)*. “Once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” Christ died to please His Father—it was an act of obedience, that was the primary reason. But His obedience resulted in something quite amazing, that of course being *salvation for sinners!* We learn three things about salvation from this simple, yet potent statement.

a. Salvation comes from Christ alone. “*He* became the source of eternal salvation.” There is no other Savior. “I am the way,” He stated (John 14:6). Romans 5:19 explains, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

b. Salvation is eternal. “He became the source of *eternal* salvation.” The writer of Hebrews speaks of a variety of *eternal* things. He talks about eternal judgment (6:2), eternal redemption (9:12), the eternal Spirit (9:14), eternal inheritance (9:15), the eternal covenant (13:20), and here, eternal salvation. Those whom God saves He saves eternally! Does that mean you can “get saved” and then live however you want? No.

c. Salvation belongs to those who obey Him. The wording is quite specific. He is the “source of eternal salvation *for all who obey him.*” It’s not that obedience saves a person, for as Ephesians 2:8 indicates, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” But as Westcott

explained, “Continuous active obedience is the sign of real faith.”^[12]

But there’s more. Not only did His obedience result in our salvation, but...

5. *His obedience resulted in His priesthood.* Verse 10 says, “And was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.” That’s the phrase that ended verse 6, but now we know more about this amazing high priest, Jesus the Christ. When we call on Him He truly understands for He has experienced *praying* and *obeying*. He has, to use the vernacular, *been there, done that*.

The implications are significant, my friend. Here are three.

a. Because of Christ’s obedience we have a Savior.

b. Because of Christ’s obedience we have an example. Please don’t reverse the order. Before Christ can be your example, He must be your Savior for He alone can enable you to obey.

c. Because of Christ’s obedience we have access to God. Direct access, through the One who is our high priest!

It’s worth noting the very next words before we finish. In verse 11 the author states, “We have much to say about this, *but...*”, and he takes a detour. He says he has more he wants to say about Melchizedek and Christ’s high priesthood, and he will in chapter seven, but there’s a problem he must address. His readers can’t handle it. Unlike their Savior who *learned*, they are *slow to learn*. The problem is that they’re spiritually immature, a reality he will address head-on in the next paragraph and throughout chapter six.

Make it personal: Three responses are in order...so ask yourself these three questions...

1. *Am I trusting in Christ?* Christ obeyed His Father and provided eternal salvation. Are you trusting in Him? To be saved, you must trust in Him alone. Trust in Him and God will give you eternal life today.

2. *Am I following Christ?* He who obeyed His Father perfectly calls us to obey Him, to follow in His steps. Are you? Perhaps you are, and you’re suffering for it. Be encouraged. Warren Wiersbe tells a pertinent story about Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

“When [Spurgeon] was a young preacher in London, his successful ministry aroused the envy of some of the clergy; and they attacked him with various kinds of slander and gossip. His sermons were called ‘trashy,’ and he was called ‘an actor’ and ‘a pulpit buffoon.’ Even after his ministry was established, Spurgeon was lied about in the press (including the *religious* press); and this was bound to discourage him.”

“After one particularly scurrilous report in the press, Spurgeon fell before the Lord and prayed, ‘O Lord Jesus, Thou didst make Thyself of no reputation for me. I willingly lay my reputation down for Thy sake.’ From that time on, Spurgeon had peace in his heart. He knew that his Great High Priest understood his need and would give him the grace that he needed for each hour.”^[13]

3. *Am I living a life of prayer?* We’ve seen today that Jesus prayed, and in praying He was heard because of His *reverent submission*. May that be true of us. May we pray, yea, may we live lives in reverent submission to our wise and gracious Heavenly Father.

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Philip Hughes, p. 182.

[2] The NIV inserts the name “Jesus” but the Greek text simply uses the third person pronoun.

[3] Quote taken from Leon Morris, p. 49.

[4] Philip Hughes, p. 183. Hughes adds, “For this reason the second death has no power over those who by faith are one with him who as our Sin-Bearer endured the second death in our place; and for them the first death, which is the death of the body, holds no terror because the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that they too will rise to everlasting life (1 Cor. 15:20; 2 Cor. 4:14).”

[5] Philip Hughes, p. 183.

[6] Observation by R. Gromacki, p. 94.

[7] Donald Guthrie, p. 129.

[8] Philip Hughes, p. 186.

[9] The NLT says, “And God heard his prayers because of his reverence for God.”

[10] R. Gromacki, p. 95.

[11] William Barclay, p. 48.

[12] Quote taken from Hughes, p. 188.

[13] Warren Wiersbe, p. 293.