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Hebrews #6

Jesus, the “Pioneer” Man, made “Perfect” through Suffering

Hebrews 2:10-13

Let me be entirely honest with you this morning. My guess is that most of you think I never have doubts about my faith in Christ or that everything in Christianity makes perfectly good sense to me. Quite honestly, that’s not true. ***I often find myself asking why God did what he has done.*** What reason did he have for doing it this way and not that way? On occasion, to be honest, it doesn’t strike me as being the best or most efficient way of doing things. On occasion, I say to myself, and to God, “That doesn’t make sense to me. It seems really odd that this is how you have chosen to go about achieving your ultimate glory in creation and redemption.”

I have to guard myself because I don’t want to be guilty of unbelief or cynicism. But why, for instance, was it necessary for the Second Person of our great Triune God to become human? Why did God create the world and permit the fall into sin and orchestrate human history in such a way that it became necessary for God the Son to take to himself human nature and become a man? Why was it necessary for him to suffer and endure the mistreatment that he did? And why was it necessary that he die by being impaled on a cross? Of all the ways that God might have gone about reconciling us to himself, why did he choose this way? Could he have chosen *another* way?

Just so you know in advance, the Bible doesn’t always answer those sorts of questions in the way we might prefer. Sometimes we are simply asked to trust God and his wisdom and to realize that his ways are infinitely above our ways. Sometimes I just have to put all my reasoning and my questioning and my doubting on hold and read one more time what Paul said in Romans 11:33-36 –

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be

repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

I find it interesting that Paul uses almost the same language in Romans 11:36 that our author uses in Hebrews 2:10. Paul concludes his doxology by declaring that “from” God and “through” God and “to” God are all things. “To him be glory forever.” And here in Hebrews 2:10 he describes God as “he, for whom and by whom all things exist.”

My question is: Why insert that statement here in v. 10? What reason could there possibly be why it’s important for us to know and believe that this is actually true of God, that he is the One by whom all things exist, that he, through the Son, is the One who created everything that is. Why is it so important that we hear it stated yet again that he is the One “for whom” all things exist, that is to say, that he and his glory are the goal and aim and purpose of why there is something rather than nothing; that he and his fame and praise are the ultimate explanation for why everything is done the way it is done?

I think the answer to that question is found in the opening words of v. 10. Here we are told that ***“it was fitting”*** that God the Father, in saving many men and women and bringing them into the experience of his own glory, should do it by making God the Son, Jesus Christ, ***“perfect through suffering.”*** So, when I ask the question, as I often do, *why* did God have to send his Son into this world as a human being, and *why* did God require that Jesus suffer as he did, and *why* did God believe it necessary that in order to save us and bring us into glory Jesus had to endure the shame and pain and horror of suffering on a cross . . . when I ask those kinds of questions, the author of Hebrews tells me: “it was fitting,” or “it was appropriate,” or “it was in perfect harmony with God’s nature and character,” or “it was compatible with God’s intentions to glorify himself,” or some such rendering.

In other words, ***Christianity is what it is because it perfectly expresses the perfections of God.*** The way in which God has gone about securing your salvation and my salvation is entirely “fitting” and “good” and “proper” and “reasonable”, at least to God’s way of thinking! It is coherent and symmetrical and beautiful and grand. There is nothing illogical or absurd or immoral or unsavory about the way God saved you and me, namely, through the sufferings of his Son, Jesus Christ.

People who lived in the first century, when Jesus walked on this earth, would strongly disagree with that conclusion. They would have insisted that nothing could possibly have been ***“less***

fitting” than to save and reconcile people by having the Messiah suffer the way he did and ultimately die on a cross. You may recall that in the ancient world crucifixion was obscene. It was morally and socially repugnant. It was a horribly inefficient way to execute a criminal. It often took hours, and in some cases days, before the victim finally died. If you wanted to dispose of some social outcast or kill a criminal why not use beheading as the form of execution?

What we’ve learned from scholars is that *crucifixion was regarded as utterly shameful, not just physically painful but emotionally repulsive and aesthetically disgusting*. It was against the law for any Roman citizen, regardless of his/her crimes, to be crucified. Only slaves, criminals, and the utter dregs of society were allowed to be nailed to a cross.

This is why the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18 that “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” And again, in v. 22 he says that to speak of a crucified Christ is “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.”

For the author of Hebrews, therefore, to state in no uncertain terms that the suffering of Jesus by which we are saved and brought to glory was “fitting” would have sounded indescribably stupid and contrary to all reason and aesthetically repugnant and out of harmony with everything that people thought they knew about the nature of God.

As some of you know, in the past few years there has been an increase in the number of voices from within the professing Christian world who likewise find repulsive the idea of Christ suffering the penal consequences of our sins. They think that requiring Jesus to suffer on a cross as the sacrificial victim who endures and satisfies God’s wrath against our sin is barbaric and is tantamount to what some call “cosmic child abuse.” They contend that it was profoundly “*unfitting*” that God would do it this way. So, when we read later in Hebrews 2:17 that Jesus made “*propitiation* for the sins of the people” they squirm and grimace and set themselves to finding out some way to avoid the meaning of that term. Somehow, in some way, they say, to “propitiate” does not mean to satisfy and appease God’s wrath against sin.

I, on the other hand, notwithstanding my doubts and confusion and struggles when it comes to *why* God does *what* God does, . . . I prefer to trust God’s wisdom and his kindness and his infinite knowledge and the inspiration of Scripture and believe that when the Bible says it was “fitting” for God to do it this way that it was “fitting”! Case closed. And precisely *what* was “fitting” for God to do in his efforts to save and redeem and reconcile lost, hell-deserving

sinners? I'll answer that in just a moment, but before I do let's back up and make sure we know how we got to this point in the book of Hebrews.

Although this is largely for the sake of those who are just now joining us in our study of Hebrews, I hope this brief review will be a blessing to everyone. We are people with very short memories and need often to be reminded of the remarkable things that God has done.

We saw in chapter one that our author labors to make it crystal clear that ***Jesus is the fullness and finality of God's revelation to mankind***. As great and instructive and enlightening as were all the many disclosures that God made of himself in the OT, whether in dreams or prophecies or supernatural phenomena, Jesus is better. ***He is the consummate expression of divine truth***. In him we hear God's voice to mankind. More than that, he is the one through whom God created all things and the one destined to inherit all things. He is the radiant expression of God's glory and the exact representation of God's character. If you've seen Jesus, you've seen God. He is upholding and carrying everything to its God-ordained end. He does this by virtue of his infinite power. He offered himself a sacrifice in our place to purify us of the defiling guilt of our sins and then sat down at God's right hand.

He is, therefore, greater than all the angels of heaven. **He** is God. They aren't. **They** worship him. He doesn't worship them. It was to Jesus, the Son, and not to any angel, that God the Father said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (1:13).

Because of the great, glorious superiority of Jesus to angels (a truth our author established in Hebrews 1) we are urged to pay close attention to him (Heb. 2:1). We are exhorted in 2:3 not to neglect the "great salvation" that he has provided. We are warned of the dire consequences should we devote ourselves to anything other than him. It is nothing short of spiritual suicide to disregard Jesus and occupy ourselves with lesser things.

We saw last week, beginning in 2:5 and extending through 2:9, that our salvation is great not only because it brings us forgiveness of sins and the indwelling Holy Spirit and adoptions as sons and daughters but also because it makes possible ***the fulfillment of God's purpose to elevate humans to a place of glory and honor and dominion over all of creation***. Sadly, though, this glorious destiny is not a present reality. At present, we read in 2:8 that "we do not yet see everything [in creation] in subjection" to mankind. If anything, creation appears to rule over us. As someone has said, *we can send a man to the moon and find a cure for polio and split the atom but we cannot stop ourselves from aging or from dying*.

Is there any hope, then, that mankind will *ever* conquer death and attain to the destiny that Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 have promised? Yes! This is the breathtaking reality we discover in 2:9. ***Although we do not now “see” the human race bringing all things into subjection, we do “see” the man Jesus Christ conquering death by his own death; we see him crowned with glory and honor and exalted to rule as sovereign and supreme over all things. Our destiny is thus realized in him.*** Even though you and I do not yet experience the glory and honor promised in Genesis 1 and Psalm 8, ***we will . . .*** because Jesus has entered this world as a human being and has shattered the chains of sin and death and has been raised into the glory and honor originally promised to us.

But none of this would have happened had not God the Son become the man Christ Jesus. Let me repeat that. ***None of this would have happened had not God the Son become the man Christ Jesus.*** As we saw last week when we looked briefly at Psalm 8, although God’s original purpose was to put all creation in subjection to “man” (i.e., mankind), sin has disrupted and postponed its fulfillment. If I may be allowed to paraphrase Hebrews 2:8-9, “at present we do not yet see everything in creation in subjection to ‘man’. But we do see ‘the man,’ namely Jesus, ‘the representative man’ in whom our destiny as men (and women) is ultimately fulfilled. Although for a little while (approximately 33 years) he was made lower than the angels, we now ‘see him’ crowned with glory and honor. This came about because he willingly suffered death and by God’s grace tasted death for sinners like you and me.”

Wait a minute! It just doesn’t seem right that this magnificent person who is described in Hebrews 1:1-3 with such glorious terms and breathtaking phrases should have to “taste death” for wretched, hell-deserving, God-defying men and women like you and me. Does it? It doesn’t seem right or fair or just or reasonable, no matter how you reconstruct and redefine it.

This is where we pick up our author’s story in v. 10. ***“Oh, yes,” he says with complete confidence, “contrary to what you’re thinking and feeling, it was most assuredly ‘fitting’ that he suffer in this way. In fact, had he not suffered as a “man” in the way that he did, we would lose all hope of ever being saved and of ever being brought into glory.”***

A lot of Bible-believing evangelical Christians get uncomfortable when I talk about the ***humanity*** of Jesus in such stark and unapologetic terms. They are quick to defend his deity. They are always prepared to argue that he is God, and rightly so. But to speak of him as human is scary. Many fear that if we emphasize it too much we’ll find ourselves sliding down some slippery slope into the world of theological liberalism and maybe even secular humanism which insists that Jesus was ***only*** a man; a wise and good one, but ***only*** a man nonetheless. But in our

zeal to defend Christ's deity we must not lose sight of the equally important truth that he was a human being.

May I briefly remind you that Jesus had a true physical *body*. The confession that Jesus was Christ come "in the flesh" became the touchstone of orthodoxy. See 1 John 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Luke 24:39,43; Jn. 20:17,20,27. Elsewhere we read that he *hungered* (Mt. 4:2), *thirsted* (Jn. 19:28), *grew weary* (Jn. 4:6), *wept and cried aloud* (Jn. 11:35; Lk. 19:41), *sighed* (Mk. 7:34), *groaned* (Mk. 8:12), *glared angrily* (Mk. 3:5), and felt *annoyance* (Mk. 10:14).

His *soul* was "overwhelmed with *sorrow* to the point of death" (Mt. 26:38). It was to the divine purpose that he subjected his *will* (Lk. 22:42). Just before dying on the cross we are told that it was into the Father's hands that he committed his *spirit* (Lk. 23:46). He had a genuinely human *emotional* life. He *felt compassion* (Mt. 9:36; 20:34; Mk. 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; Lk. 7:13; *love* (Jn. 11:3; 15:8-12; Mk. 10:21); *anger* (Mk. 3:5; Jn. 2:13-17); and *joy* (Lk. 7:34; 10:21; Jn. 15:11; 17:13).

Now we are ready to look more closely what our author says about the way in which God secured our salvation through Jesus. Let's pull this passage apart, word by word, phrase by phrase, and then put it back together again.

Seven Crucial Truths

(1) The reason we know that it was good and fitting for God to do it this way is because ***he is both the origin and aim of all creation!*** This is why our author throws in what at first sight appears to be a doxology that serves no purpose. But it does serve a glorious purpose: it tells us why we should trust **God's** judgment in saying that this was the most "fitting" or appropriate way to accomplish salvation. Don't you think that a Being who can bring everything into existence out of nothing knows what's best? Don't you think a Being for whom all things are designed and for whose glory they are being providentially directed knows what's most fitting when it comes to achieving our salvation? Well, don't you?

(2) The second thing we note is that God's gracious purpose is to ***"bring"*** many sons and daughters to glory. The word translated "bringing" is crucial. It means to "lead" and is an echo of the OT experience of God's people, Israel, being "led" or "brought" out of Egypt in the Exodus (Ex. 3:8, 17; 6:6-7; 7:4-5). ***Language that describes what God did for Israel in the OT exodus from Egypt is used here to describe God's action of leading his people out of slavery to sin and bondage to darkness. In other words, what God has accomplished in Christ is a "new exodus"!***

(3) Yet another important truth here is that our salvation is not merely a rescue mission designed to deliver us from sin, guilt, and condemnation. Praise God that it does that! But God's aim in saving you is also to bring you into the personal experience of that very **"glory"** with which Jesus himself has been crowned (2:9)! The glory that belonged to the Son in eternity past, the glory into which he entered when he was raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand, is your destiny! It's there not merely for you to behold it or sing about it or marvel at but to experience. I'm not exactly sure what that means or what it will feel like, but I'm excited!

(4) Fourth, what was preeminently "fitting" for God to do in order for this to happen was to perfect the **"founder"** of our salvation. The word translated "founder" is best rendered "pioneer". It is used 4x in the NT, always of Jesus (here and Heb. 12:2; Acts 3:15; 5:31). It refers to one who is first, who leads, who breaks new ground, who stays at the head of those whom he leads. Some translate it "trailblazer," or "guide," or "champion." Of utmost importance is that we remember that it is Jesus and only Jesus of whom this is said. No other human, and certainly no angel, is the "pioneer" who has blazed a trail for us through death and resurrection. We will eventually get into that "glory" because Jesus has already gone there before us.

(5) But what could it possibly mean to say that the God-man, Jesus Christ, was ***made "perfect through suffering"***? The "perfecting" in view has to do with Christ's vocation, his calling to be the savior of his people. It was a process by which he was made fully equipped for his office.

He does not mean that Jesus was sinfully flawed or that he was morally imperfect and had to be purified and cleansed. We know this because of what he says in 4:15, 7:26, and 9:14. The sinlessness of Jesus has never been in question. The perfection here has to do with completing one's preparation to fulfill a task. He is saying that Jesus fully qualified to make a sufficient atonement for sin and secured for us a righteousness that becomes ours through faith because he faithfully obeyed his Father and offered up a sinless sacrifice for sin. Our Lord demonstrated that he was competent and qualified to be our Savior because he trusted in his Father from beginning to end, even when he suffered horribly at the hands of sinful men.

In Hebrews 5:8 he says that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered." I think the words "made perfect" in 2:10 mean the same thing as his "learning obedience" in 5:8. As Piper has explained, "This does not mean that he was once disobedient and then became obedient. It means that Jesus moved from untested obedience into suffering and then through suffering into tested and proven obedience. And this proving himself obedient through suffering was his 'being perfected'"(from the sermon, *Our Captain Made Perfect Through Sufferings*, June 2, 1996).

Our inclination and habit is to suffer and conclude that God isn't worthy of our devotion or praise. We bail out on him precisely in order to avoid suffering or to diminish its discomfort. Not Jesus. He pressed through suffering in complete devotion to the Father and his saving purpose and in doing so showed himself "perfect" for the job at hand.

(6) Sixth, all this leads our author to affirm the profound and deeply intimate solidarity that Jesus has with his people, with us. We see this in vv. 11-13. The most important of all these statements is in v. 11b. Here we read that ***Jesus "is not ashamed to call" us "brothers."***

Those to whom this letter was addressed were subjected to shame and humiliation because of their devotion to a crucified Messiah. They endured the contempt of society (10:32-34; 13:13-14). They suffered rejection from friends and family and lost jobs and even their lives. But Jesus is happy to be identified with them. ***They brought him no shame and neither do we!***

Vv. 11-13 focus on the solidarity that exists between Jesus and those whom he brings to saving glory. Jesus is the one who sanctifies, that is, who sets us apart from the world and transforms us into his very moral image.

One of the purposes of God in bringing us to salvation and glory is so that ***God might have for himself a spiritual family where all the children, both men and women, are deeply united not only to one another but also to Jesus himself!*** But how could Jesus be one with us and empathize with our pain and distress if he himself never suffered? And how could he ever suffer if he were not a human being, a man, like us? The words translated "one source" in v. 11 refer, I believe, to *our common human nature*. The point then is this: Because Jesus shared our human nature and also our suffering he is one with us; he identifies with us as members together of one spiritual family and is therefore unashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. Although he is God and thus in one sense infinitely different from us as finite creatures, in becoming a man in the incarnation he now shares our nature, a common humanity.

Can you imagine the discord and division and even the resentment in a family if one of its members was exempt from suffering while all the others endured much? When Jesus yielded himself up to suffering, all the way to the cross, he was showing himself to be a good brother!

(7) My seventh and final observation concerns the *three OT passages* that are, as it were, put in the mouth of Jesus himself. If you think Jesus is still ashamed of you and wants nothing to do with you and is embarrassed by you and would just as soon you were excluded from the family of faith, think again. Better still, listen again to what Jesus says about his relationship with you and me.

In the first passage Jesus is portrayed as quoting the words of Psalm 22:22 where the Messiah joins with the people of God to sing God's praises! In the historical context of the psalm, David is the one who leads the people in the praises of God because of the deliverance God has brought to him. But the psalm finds its final fulfillment in Jesus as the heir of the promises made to David. Thus, Jesus' victory at his resurrection and exaltation means victory for all those who belong to him, for his brothers and sisters. Therefore, just as David praised Yahweh in the congregation of the saints, so too Jesus praises God with his brothers and sisters.

Jesus loves nothing more than to tell us more and more about the greatness of God the Father and to join with us in singing his praises.

The second and third OT texts are both from Isaiah 8, the first from v. 17 and the second from v. 18. In these texts we see the prophet in the midst of turmoil and conflict refusing to give up his trust and confidence in God. Together with all the elect children that God has given to the Son he sings praises and declares his trust and faith in God's goodness and promises. As Tom Schreiner has said:

"The victory for which Jesus trusts God is not his alone. It also belongs to his brothers and sisters, to the children whom God has given to him. They will share with Jesus the rule over death and exercise the dominion promised in Psalm 8 to human beings."

Conclusion

Jesus is not ashamed of you! Did you hear that? If not, if it still doesn't register in your heart, if all you can hear are the screams of condemnation and mockery coming from Satan and even from people you know on this earth, turn your eyes and ears toward Hebrews 2:11: Jesus is not ashamed to call you his spiritual brother or his spiritual sister. He is not embarrassed by you. He is gloriously happy to tell everyone: "He's in my family. He's my brother. We are together one. She is my sister. I'm proud to declare to everyone that these Christian men and women are the ones the Father has given to me. They are mine. And I love them."

So, if you still think Jesus is ashamed of you because of how you look or how you talk or because you continue to fail or because you can't hold down a job or pay your bills, if you think Jesus is ashamed and embarrassed because of the silly things you say or because you think you've never accomplished much of value, think again.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself this one question: How much could I actually accomplish by the grace of God if I really believed that Jesus is not ashamed to call me his brother/sister? How often would I openly share my faith with non-Christians if I really believed that Jesus is not ashamed to call me his brother/sister? What would I be inclined and empowered to do in this local church if I really believed that Jesus is not ashamed of me? Think about it. Then thank God that it's true!