

To Learn Obedience And Be Perfected

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[0 : 0 0] disobedience received its just punishment. How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified, what is man that you're mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him. You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him of glory and honor and put everything under his feet.

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present, we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists should make the offer of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.

So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, I will declare your name to my brothers. In the presence of the congregation, I will sing your praises. And again, I will put my trust in him.

And again, he says, here am I and the children God has given me. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity, so that by his death, he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

[2 : 1 8] For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Your Bibles open at Hebrews chapter 2.

We're beginning to think for the next few weeks about one question. Why did Jesus suffer and die?

Why? We're going to spend the best part of a couple of months looking at that, answers to that, as we find them in the book of Hebrews. I think it's a helpful way for us to prepare for Easter, to reflect on the suffering and the death of Jesus, and to remind ourselves that the Christian life is cross-centered and cross-shaped. So my prayer is that as we think together in different ways of what Jesus has done for us, it will increase our joy, it will increase our worship and thankfulness, and ultimately it will change us to be more Christ-like. So we're going to think over the next few weeks some big thoughts about God. The Hebrews has got a lot of big theology connected to the saving work of Jesus, but it's really important that we find ways to see how this matters for our lives. So I'm going to do my best to make this Monday morning theology, to be thinking about how does this stuff that we're reading in the Bible, thinking about on a Sunday evening, how does this connect to your life and mine, whether we're seven, whether we're 87, whether we're somewhere in between, to see how the glorious gospel speaks to us in our day-to-day life. So we have two big truths that we need to think about, and then we need to think about how practically that speaks to us. So here's the first big truth. We're going to be focusing our attention on Hebrews chapter 2 verse 10. Here's the first thing, Jesus suffered and died to bring many sons to glory. See that there, verse 10, in bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God and so on. So we're thinking about the coming of Jesus and the work of Jesus. Tolkien, J.R. Tolkien, in a letter to his son, wrote about this section of Hebrews as describing the happy corner in the human story. There is this dramatic change that happens in the story of men and women and boys and girls, and it connects to Jesus, and it connects to Psalm 8, as that connects to Jesus. So let's look together at verses 5 to 8, where the author of Hebrews is quoting from Psalm 8.

We didn't sing it, perhaps we should have sung it on reflection, but Psalm 8 presents the human ideal. It reminds us that God has made mankind, and we've been made with dignity. It speaks of us being crowned with glory, made to rule and reign for God under God's rule. So that's the idea. We see it in Genesis, we see it in Psalm 8, but here's the tension. As we think about our lives, as we look around the world scene, is that our reality? Is that our experience as people in the world today? We recognize, I'm sure, I'm sure, along with verse 7, that we are made low, because often we feel low and weak.

But do we see this idea of being crowned with glory and honor? Do we see humanity ruling in this peaceful environment? We're more likely, I think, to see chaos rather than control.

[6 : 50] When we reflect on ourselves as people, along with, I remember this quote from Discipleship Explored, I think it was, talking about people as both the glory of the universe, made to do wonderful things in the image of God, but we're also the garbage of the universe, because we do so much to harm one another and to harm our world. We're supposed to reflect God's love, but we don't do it well. So since Adam's sin, since the fall of humanity, this is not the story that we live in, where we're crowned with glory and honor, and we're ruling and reigning, and everything is as it is to be.

But there is good news in verse 9. End of verse 8, at present, we don't see everything subject to him, that's to people, but what do we see? We see Jesus. And here's what the author of Hebrews is saying, Jesus is what Adam was made to be. Jesus is the ideal. Jesus was made low, left the glory of heaven to become fully human in the incarnation, and now Jesus is crowned with glory and honor.

Jesus, after the resurrection, returns to the glory of heaven. Because, it says, because he suffered death. So he went through, he came low to come into our world, he went low to suffer and die for us, and because of that, he's been raised to a place of glory. And why did God do that? He did it because of his grace. See that at the end of verse 9, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. Jesus has done something for everyone. Jesus has done something for the world as an act of grace. He has suffered and died for us before returning to glory. And what the author of Hebrews is saying to us is that that journey of Jesus from suffering and death to glory, that's the same journey for his people. By faith, where Jesus goes, we follow. Jesus is now crowned with glory and honor.

One day, that will be true of his people also. So Jesus fulfills what Psalm 8 was talking about. Now, why is that a big deal? Why does that matter for us?

It talks about Jesus being crowned with glory and honor, and it's significant to think about that for a moment. Jesus always enjoyed eternal glory, Father, Son, and Spirit enjoying glory in heaven.

[9 : 39] But there's something unique when Jesus returns to heaven, having suffered and died. Now, he's receiving glory as a man. Now, as one of the old professors of the Free Church College used to say, the dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe. Jesus is crowned, and in him we will share in his glory.

That's the good news of Jesus fulfilling Psalm 8. The early church used to speak of it in this way, the Son of God became a man, so that man, so that people might become the sons of God.

Remember, Jesus is the head of the church. We're the body, so where he goes, we go. So we have, in the story of the Bible, we have the sin of Adam that brought the human race under God's curse. But we also have the story of the gospel, and we see Jesus going low, and we see Jesus going under God's curse for us. But we see him going beyond the curse, a victory beyond death, now ruling in total victory and glory, and united to him. That's our destiny too. So Jesus suffered and died to bring many sons to glory. There's our first big truth. It's huge, isn't it? It has eternal consequence for us.

The second big truth in verse 10 is that Jesus suffered and died as the pioneer of our salvation, or the author of our salvation. Look at verse 10 with me again.

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

[11 : 35] So some versions of the Bible translate that the author of their salvation, sometimes the captain of their salvation, sometimes the pioneer. Let's think about Jesus as author of salvation. Let's think about authors, people who write books. There would be, for example, no Harry Potter without his author, his author, J.K. Rowling. That's hard to imagine. In Edinburgh, Harry Potter is everywhere. But without J.K. Rowling, there would be no Harry Potter. And likewise, there would be no salvation without Jesus.

There would be no story of good news without Jesus, the author of our salvation. He is the chief worker, not us. We get to be part of that story, but only because of God's grace in sending Jesus to suffer and die as the author of salvation. Some translations describe him as the pioneer of salvation. I like that image. You know, the pioneers. Perhaps we can imagine a family, and they're getting ready for one reason or another to move to the new country. And so the dad goes ahead, crosses over the ocean, arrives in the new country, finds the land is swampy, and there's wild animals, and he prepares the ground. He deals with the danger. He makes it safe going ahead of his family. And when all is ready, he says, come and join me now, the place is like home. That's what Jesus does for us as our pioneer. He has gone ahead of us. He's gone ahead of us into suffering and temptation and death, and he's moved beyond that. And he's made all of these things safe for us. When we are in him, we are kept by him. That's a great truth. Why does the author of Hebrews, this is significant, why does the author of Hebrews say that Jesus, the author of our salvation, was made perfect through suffering? People have wondered about that. Jesus made perfect. Does that imply that he was imperfect at some point? This isn't saying Jesus was disobedient and he had to learn how to be obedient? This is not implying that Jesus had some moral fall or imperfection and gradually became perfected. No, the idea is that Jesus is perfect in the sense of being complete. Jesus is the perfect and complete savior for sinners. We need no other salvation. We need no other savior. Why?

Because Jesus became fully human. Because Jesus came to completely represent us. Because we have in Jesus one who can sympathize with us, having identified with us, having walked in our shoes both in his life and in his day. That's why he is a perfect savior. To truly and fully represent us, he must walk our path.

There couldn't be a shortcut from the manger to the cross. Jesus needed to learn obedience. Every stage of testing and temptation, he needed to prove himself faithful. We need the active obedience of Jesus in his life to make up for our active disobedience. He needed that perfect obedience. He needed to become one of us, to taste tears and pain and death. Sometimes people have the idea of Jesus as some kind of Superman figure, that he kind of floated above the ground. That any sort of sense of suffering was imaginary rather than real.

That kind of person could not save us. We need a savior who is truly one of us. And when we read the gospels, we see that Jesus truly felt pain. Two places to think of. First of all, we can think about the garden of Gethsemane. There is Jesus anticipating his death on the cross. There is Jesus anticipating the full weight of the father's anger for sin coming on him. And he cries and he prays with tears and he sweats great drops of blood. Such is his pain in his mind anticipating the cross.

[16 : 48] And then the cross itself, where Jesus truly shed blood and died as the one who is fully God and fully man.

This is not a Superman. This is one who is truly God and truly man. And he came in order to represent us, to go before us, to be the pioneer of our salvation. Perhaps we can think of the story of David and Goliath.

And so David had been anointed the next king of Israel. But at the time when he fights Goliath, he's still a shepherd boy. And he's sent by his father to come to the soldiers of Israel. And they're all cowering in fear. They're all terrified of this great giant Goliath, the champion of the Philistines.

And here's David, the shepherd boy. And he says, I'll fight on behalf of God's glory and honor. I'll fight on behalf of the people of Israel. He fought on behalf of weak, scared Israel. And he won a remarkable victory there as God's glory there as God's king, pointing us forward to the work of Jesus.

Jesus, the greater son of David. Jesus, our representative, our captain, our hero, who goes into the fight against our enemies, Satan, sin and death, conquered on the cross, receiving a death blow for the sake of his people.

[18 : 28] So when we read in the Gospels, the story of the cross, we are seeing Jesus, truly human, dying. We discover Jesus rising, truly human.

We recognize from the epistles that Jesus is still fully human as well as being fully God as he rules in glory. And he is the pioneer who shares his glory with us. He's gone through all that and he declares to us from heaven, it's safe if you will put your trust in me.

So there's our two big truths. Jesus suffered and died to bring many sons to glory. And he suffered and died as the pioneer of our faith. Now we need to think about why does this, why do these big thoughts matter for our Monday morning, for our Wednesday afternoon, for our day-to-day routine? Three things to think about together. First of all, in Jesus, Hebrews is telling us we are adopted as sons and daughters of God. We discover in verse 9 that the suffering and death of Jesus is God's grace to us. Here is a reminder that God freely chooses to love his church, that Jesus in love tastes death and God's curse and experiences hell on the cross for us. And Jesus defeats there the powers of evil so that we are free to become children of God. So that we are free to receive that invitation into the family of God. In verse 11, a great statement, both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. We belong in God's family with Jesus when our faith is in him. Now at this point,

I'm going to do a little album review. Strange segue perhaps. But at a recent conference that Vicki was at, she picked up this. It's called Theology. It's a family worship CD written by the folks at Sovereign Grace.

And it is solid gold. Let me read the chorus from God's great family, one of the standout tracks on the CD, to remind us of this great truth that we belong in God's family along with Jesus. Pick up this CD or listen to it online if you get the chance. It says, no one is good, not even one, but God can make us daughters. God can make us sons. Jesus paid the price when he offered up his life so we could be part of God's great family. That is solid truth right there. That's the truth that through faith in Jesus, we're brought into God's family. When Jesus is our elder brother, our salvation is secure and our identity changes. We're given a whole new identity. I guess politically everything's up in the air with Brexit. Who knows what our passport is going to look like? But for us as Christians, one of the things that we can think about is that spiritually, our passport is stamped with where we are from, and that says citizen of heaven. Ultimately, that's where we belong. That's our home. What's our family name? It's God's name, because that's whose family we've been adopted into. And that's so important for our everyday life.

[22 : 24] When we go to school, when we file a report in the office, when we're planning a shopping list, whatever we are doing, we are doing all of those things, exciting or mundane, as a child of God.

So all of life is now infused with this incredible dignity. Everything that we do matters to our Father. Everything that we do is a chance for us to bring glory to our Father, whether it's doing our sums really well in school, whether it's preparing a family meal, whatever that might be. And all of it also gives us the chance to witness to God our Father, to testify in the way that we conduct ourselves to the good news that we have in Jesus. It reminds us, too, of our most basic identity, that we are not our job. If we happen to be good at school or happen to be good at sport, that doesn't ultimately define us. Here is something more basic and more fundamental, that in Jesus we are adopted into the family of God. There's a security in that. There is a love in that that never ends for us as the people of God.

Another reason why this truth matters for us, one of the ways that the author of Hebrews goes on in verse 11. So we read the first part of verse 11, but look at the next part. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers or to call them brothers and sisters. When we're in God's family, Jesus is not ashamed of us. Now you and I, however old or however young we are, we know what it is to feel ashamed.

We know what it is to have done something wrong and we desperately want to hide ourselves and to hide that thing from others. There are things in our lives, things in our past that we have said and done that we would hate to have anyone discover. They cause us shame when we think about them.

And there are things that other people perhaps have said and done to us that have brought shame upon us. We know what shame is and we know how shame feels. I wonder if you've ever thought to yourself in the heat of the moment perhaps, I can't believe I just said that. I can't believe I just did that.

[25 : 08] Maybe perhaps we have found ourselves to be shocked at just how bad we can be sometimes. Maybe especially with the people that we love the most, our family and our close friends.

Sometimes we lash out in frustration and we say and we do awful things. We love to take them back and we can't and they cause us shame. And we find that we are surprised perhaps by the sin that lurks within.

Do you know there's good news for us in the gospel? Because Jesus was not surprised by those moments that take us by surprise.

Jesus will never be surprised by anything that we ever do wrong. Because Jesus has seen it all, he knows our darkest sins, but still in grace loves us and died for us.

He has never and will never be ashamed to call us family, to call you a brother or a sister when your faith is in Christ.

[26 : 15] Sometimes the fact that Jesus is remote can make us wonder whether his character has changed. Perhaps he's moved on, he seems distant perhaps.

Thomas Goodwin, one of the Puritans, wrote a book to remind us that the character of Jesus that we find in the gospels, the person that we meet in the gospels, is the same person who loves us in heaven.

That kindness that he showed to his disciples, that patience that he had with them when they misunderstood, when they messed up, when they ran away in fear, when Peter denied even knowing Jesus.

That forgiveness that was extended to them, that compassion that was shown, is the same mercy and love and patience and forgiveness that is for us, from Jesus, our Savior in heaven.

He hasn't moved on from his church. He hasn't sort of decided, I know that I'm up in heaven and I've got the angels and I've got the saints in glory, that I've got better company, I've got better people to worry about.

[27 : 31] Not at all. He remains completely committed to keeping and saving his family. And this is extremely good news for us.

Let me share for a couple of minutes my early Christian experience, maybe especially with the boys and girls, just so that you don't have to go through the kind of mental wrestling that I went through perhaps.

So I became a Christian when I was about 11. But I remember distinctly those early months of trusting in Jesus. Every time that I messed up in a significant way, I thought to myself, I can't believe I sinned again.

I can't really be a Christian. There's no way God would have me in his family when I've just done that thing and when I've just said that thing. So I spent months on this cycle of asking Jesus into my heart to forgive me and to be Lord, then messing up and thinking I was awful, thinking that I had to do the whole thing again.

So I was asking Jesus to be my Savior, to come into my heart time after time after time. And what the problem was, I kind of had the idea that I had to perform for God.

[28 : 55] That I didn't think of him as a father, so much as I thought about him as a headmaster. And I needed to perform really well, otherwise it was expulsion.

I didn't understand this truth, that when we trust in Jesus, we are adopted into his family. We're sons and daughters, we're not servants.

And God never kicks his children out of the family home. So yes, you and I, we do mess up.

Yes, absolutely, we will fail. We do sin. But Jesus is not ashamed of the people he came to save. And so we confess freely, we confess humbly, and we seek to live for him, but we do that insecurity.

And knowing that he holds on to us. He's not ashamed of us. And when we stand before God on the judgment day, if our faith is in him, he'll not be ashamed of us on that day either. He will stand by us, and he will defend us.

[30 : 03] Our elder brother is for us, always. Always. Here's the last thing to mention for Monday morning that we need to understand about Jesus.

Jesus leads us, as his people, to worship and trust God. Verse 12 is a quote from Psalm 22 that the author of Hebrews attributes to Jesus.

Jesus says, I will declare your name to my brothers. In the presence of the congregation, I will sing your praises. So what does Jesus do according to Psalm 22?

Jesus leads us to praise God. Jesus leads us to share the same joy in God the Father that he always has. In fact, the picture there is that Jesus comes among his church.

He comes to be in the middle of us, causing us to praise him, to trust him, even in suffering, even in trials. The author of the Hebrews says, Jesus prayed Psalm 22.

[31 : 17] When do we know for certain that Jesus prayed Psalm 22? On the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Psalm 22, verse 1. Jesus identified himself as the righteous sufferer who endured opposition and attack, the one who trusted God always, even in the darkness.

And he comes alongside us so that we might do the same. So there'll be times in our lives, I guess, where we feel isolated, perhaps because of our Christian faith.

Maybe we're the only person who goes to church, the only Christian in our classroom, maybe. Maybe in our workplace. There are very few, if any, other Christians. And the conversation can become hostile or challenging.

Maybe you have faced rejection from friends or family who can't understand your faith. We need to understand that Jesus has been there.

[32 : 24] And Jesus is with us, standing with us, supporting us to help us to keep trusting, to keep praising, even in those situations. And then positively, when there's times where we feel like we want to share our faith, but we're afraid, where we want to live on mission, but we're not sure how to, and we need wisdom, we need to remember that Jesus is there then too.

He helps us with that. He gives us the joy in God that overflows in our lives. He gives us his spirit to help us and to share the good news with others.

Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation, and he is bringing many sons and daughters to glory. Let me finish with some more applications, some more truth, some wise words from three different Johns to finish.

Johns are wise people. First, John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace. This week, I came across a section of one of his letters where he was encouraging a Christian friend to persevere in his faith.

And to paraphrase Newton, he said this. He said, To view Jesus by faith, to look and to reflect and to meditate and to see Jesus as having lived for us, to see Jesus as dying for us, to recognize that he is right now reigning and ruling for us, interceding and governing for us, Newton says that will enable us, when we catch that vision of who Jesus is and what he's doing for us, that will enable us, Newton says, to endure any cross, to withstand any temptation, and it will cause us to run to obey his commands with a joyful heart.

[34 : 14] When we see the glory of Jesus, when we see the significance of what he's done for us on the cross, what he continues to do for us in heaven, when we catch that glory, that's when we're able to live the Christian life with joy and with obedience and with hope beyond suffering.

So it's John Newton. Then John Owen wrote a really helpful book a long time ago called The Glory of Christ. And in that, again, to paraphrase Owen, he said, when we read the Bible, what should we do?

Every time we read the Bible, what should we do? We should look to meet Jesus in his word. Every time we read the Bible, we should be looking to see and discover the good news of Jesus, to see more of his glory.

He said that we should think about the glory of Christ often so that it causes us to worship. We should consider the beauty of his life and death for us to meditate on that reality so that it would melt our hearts, that it would transform our character.

He said a wonderful thing. He said, whenever you're reading the Bible or whenever you're even just walking along the street and a verse from the Bible comes to your head, as soon as you stop and you start reflecting, Owen says, Jesus comes to meet you in his word.

[35 : 38] To commune, to enjoy friendship with you, to strengthen you in his word. So as we look to see more of the glory of Jesus, look to find it in his word.

Make time to read and reflect and enjoy his beauty. And then to finish, words from John, the friend of Jesus. See what kind of love the Father has poured out on us that we should be called children of God.

You're right. Thank you. We should continue on the Lord. He's calling the Lord. To address it, you're not a sensual character, but I will. I'll tell you about how good God you are at all.