

Hebrews 5:7-10

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2015

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] As I introduced our reading this evening, I made reference to the fact that last Sunday evening we gave some thought to the intense emotional and spiritual anguish endured by Jesus in Gethsemane as He contemplated His impending accursed death in the place of sinners.

And in so doing, we made reference to a passage in Hebrew, the passage that we've read, that seems to describe the occasion, and there seems to be a general consensus that that is indeed what we find in these verses. We have a description of Gethsemane. We're not saying that what the verses declare is limited to Gethsemane, but certainly in the reading of them we can see how they do describe what we read of in the Gospels concerning Jesus as He cried to His Father with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death. But as I commented before reading these verses this evening, we made reference to these verses, but in a very fleeting manner. And what I want to do this evening is to spend a little bit more time focusing our attention on these four verses and what they tell us about Jesus. And if I had to summarize in a pithy way what it is that I want to cover this evening is that I want to show, or I want in some measure to show how these verses describe Jesus as perfect in every way. Perfect in every way. Though we won't be considering how He's perfect in every way, but we will be considering how He is perfect in some of the ways that are made reference to or alluded to in these verses. Now before looking at these verses, we do need to take a step back for a very brief moment and comment on the big message of the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews has as its great theme, the person of Jesus. That ought not to surprise us. We could probably say that of every book in the New Testament, and indeed arguably every book in the Bible. So to be a little bit more specific, it focuses on the supremacy of Jesus over all. The supremacy of Jesus over all. And as we go through the book, and we're not doing that, but if He were to do so at the very beginning of the letter, we see how Jesus is presented as greater than any angel. As the letter continues, He's presented as the one who is greater than Moses or any of the patriarchs. He's then presented to us as our great high priest, greater than any previous priest. And indeed with His priesthood, there no longer is a need for any priest to follow Him. But He's not only greater or superior, He is supreme and perfect, perfect in every way. Now in our passage, we find the word perfect used to describe Jesus, but used in a way that is somewhat intriguing. It speaks of Jesus as being made perfect. We find that there in verse 9, and once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation. I will come to that in a moment.

But with this in mind, and with this word in mind in particular, this word that describes Jesus as perfect, I want to consider the passage. And I want to do so under the following headings, where we'll have this idea of perfection as our constant or recurring theme. And the four headings that I'll employ to help us consider the verses are these, a perfect man, a perfect servant, a perfect Savior, and a perfect priest. Now as we consider each of these realities in turn, it will be important, or certainly helpful, to have an understanding of what the Greek word translated perfect means, or indeed the range of related meanings that the word can have. The Greek word is teleos, and means perfect in the sense of having attained the end or purpose in mind. It describes that which is complete, or mature, or fully developed, that which is perfectly suited or prepared for a particular purpose. And in the passage that we're looking at, we have the word in its verbal form. Jesus was made perfect. And in the Greek, that's the word perfect, but in the form of a verb.

But it carries the same idea as the noun. So with that in mind, and it's important because maybe when we think of the English word perfect, we don't immediately think of these, I wouldn't say other possibilities, but this range of meanings that the word carries. And we need to have that in mind as we use it in the context of these verses. Well, with that in mind, let's proceed and think of these verses under the headings that I've indicated, and begin with Jesus as a perfect man. How does the passage begin, or the verses that we've read, how do they begin? Well, there in verse 7 we read,

during the days of Jesus' life on earth. And this is not only a time reference. It is a time reference. It's casting the readers back to Jesus' time on earth, and then saying something about it. So it is a time reference, but it's not only a time reference. Indeed, it's not most significantly a time reference, but rather a reference to Jesus' incarnate state. Indeed, the literal translation of these words at the beginning of verse 7 would be, in the days of His flesh. The word flesh is found here, the very same word that we find in John's Gospel, where we read the word was made flesh. This is the word that we find here. So the focus isn't so much a time reference, though it is, but on the incarnate nature of Jesus as He lived and walked and served on earth. Jesus is the word become flesh. And with the incarnation, we have the unthinkable, we have God becoming. He became flesh. He became what He was not and had never been. And the point that we want to highlight is that He became perfectly human, or human in every way.

[8 : 05] His was not the appearance of humanity or an experience of humanity where He was spared the full gamut of human experience. He was fully human. He was fully human. He was a man in that sense of fully human, perfectly human. And that involved various aspects, but one in particular that is drawn out or that we are confronted with in these verses is that He experienced the full range of human emotions.

Here we read of how, given the circumstances that He was in, there in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed to His Father with loud cries and tears. And then, of course, we could add to that or we could enrich our understanding of that as we turn to the Gospels, as we did last Sunday evening, and see how He's described and how He Himself describes Himself as overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

And He's describing this human emotion that He was subject to as one who was perfectly and wholly and fully human. Now, this is one of the emotions that is described to us here, but of course, He experienced the whole range of human emotions. He knew of joy and elation. He knew of anger and of sorrow and of anguish.

And this passage, of course, points to His experience of anguish beyond imagination. This was, in Gethsemane, the deep-felt human anguish that led to His prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears. Now, when we present Jesus, or it's not that we are presenting Jesus, when the Bible presents Jesus in this way, some can be uncomfortable with this portrayal of the raw humanity of Jesus, and in response, maybe unthinkingly and unconsciously try to sanitize or sanctify His emotions.

And let me just give you an example that I came across in a rather peculiar way. One of the tasks I now have that I didn't used to have, and I'm very happy to have it, but it is another wee task, is to choose one or two hymns for the evening service. And it's much more difficult than choosing a psalm, I have to say. I have to think about, well, do people know it? And, you know, anyway. But I'm not complaining. But that's one of the tasks I have. Now, curiously, as I was looking for a hymn that would be suitable for this evening, given the passage that we have in mind. One that I found in the hymn book is one that you may be familiar with, that I think its title is, I Stand Amazed in the Presence.

[11 : 06] And as I read the hymn, and particularly the second verse, I came across this declaration of the hymn writer. Let me just read for you the second verse. And it goes as follows.

For me, he prayed, that's a reference to Jesus, for me he prayed in the garden. It's taking us to Gethsemane. For me he prayed in the garden and bowed to the will divine. Well, that's all true. But then listen to what the hymn writer suggests, or states. He had no tears for his own griefs, but sweat drops of blood for mine. Now, I certainly concur that he did sweat drops of blood for mine. But to suggest, or to state, that Jesus had no tears for his own griefs is actually to, and I'm sure that's not the intention, but it is to take away from the fact that he was perfectly human, that he experienced the full range of human emotions. We don't need to be apologetic about recognizing that Jesus experienced personal grief, and that when he speaks of being overwhelmed with sorrow, that is a description of his own personal anguish. The cause of it, of course, is our sin and the price that had to be paid to deal with our sin. But this was personal anguish that he endured because he was perfectly, wholly a human. And the hymn writer makes the same mistake. I'm certainly suggesting that he makes this mistake, but he makes the same mistake as is made in the popular but flawed

Christmas carol. Let's go back from Calvary all the way back to Bethlehem, away in a manger. And we have this rather sugary carol that has its merits, no doubt. But in that carol, you will remember,

no doubt, you sang it a few, a couple of months ago, we're assured that the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.

Well, it sounds lovely, doesn't it? But of course, it's nonsense. Of course he cried. And to suggest that he didn't, again, he's really attacking this very important biblical doctrine of the full humanity of Jesus, he was fully human while remaining fully divine, of course. And of course, that's often the struggle that we have in trying to maintain in balance that which is so difficult for us to grasp and to understand. And of course, we don't fully understand. But you see, in trying to exalt Jesus by removing from him those things that we deem to be weakness, what actually happens is that he is made, or at least portrayed, as less than perfectly human, which not only fails to do justice to the biblical evidence, and that would be reason enough not to do it, but would, were it true, make Jesus incapable of being our perfect Savior and priest, as we'll come to in a moment? Jesus, a perfect man, fully man, completely human. How do we respond to Jesus as the one who is the perfect man or perfectly human? As we think of these aspects of Jesus as the perfect man, the perfect servant, the perfect Savior, the perfect priest, we want to also just briefly ponder on, well, how do we respond to this reality concerning who Jesus is? Well, in this case, how do we respond to this reality of who he is?

[15:01] Well, there's much that could be said, but we can certainly say this, that we thank God. We thank the Father for his Son. We thank God for Jesus, the one who knows us as we really are. We approach him in the confidence that he knows us as we really are. And in the matter of the experience and expression of our own human emotions, we are freed to be the emotional beings that God has created us to be. No need for shame and sorrow or guilt and anguish. We can cry out to the Father, as Jesus did, in loud cries and tears.

Now, the cause of our loud cries and tears may be very different, but we can express ourselves in that emotional way with no sense of shame or embarrassment. That is who we are. We are human, as Jesus was fully human. Jesus, in his pain and anguish, turns to the Father for help, and we're told that he was heard there in our passage. He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard. And we're not going to spend time thinking about that, but simply to note that the answer that the Father gave as he heard this petition, not one that was audibly heard by Jesus in the garden. In the garden, there was only silence. But the answer of the Father was forthcoming. It was forthcoming in Jesus being upheld in the experience of offering himself up to death, but very particularly, he was answered as the Father raised him from the grave and vindicated him and his saving work on our behalf. Jesus, a perfect man. But let's also notice what is touched on.

Here in these verses of Jesus as a perfect servant. His perfect servanthood is touched on in two expressions in our passage, certainly two that we're going to note. The first one is where it speaks of Jesus being heard because of his reverent submission. There in verse 7, he cried out to the Father, and we're told, and he was heard because of his reverent submission, the submission of a servant. And the other expression that we're going to just touch on is how we're told there in verse 8, that although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. He was an obedient servant, and he learned obedience, we're told, from what he suffered. Let's think of these two expressions and how they describe for us, at least in part, a perfect servant. He was heard because of his reverent submission.

Jesus was wholly or completely or perfectly, to use the different ways in which the Word can be understood, subject to the Father's will. And there is no occasion where this is more vividly demonstrated than Gethsemane, the very occasion that the verse seems to have as its backdrop. We know the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but yours be done. What greater evidence, what greater demonstration of reverent submission can we find in the Scriptures than these words of Jesus? And this reverent submission speaks of a deep respect both for the person and the purposes of his Father. Jesus' eternal sonship does not result in a disrespectful familiarity.

And it could be no other way if he was to be our Savior, no other way than the way of reverent submission. Because anything less than perfect servanthood would have disqualified him from his saving work. How can we respond? What can we take from this reality concerning Jesus as the one whose perfect servanthood is demonstrated in his reverent submission? Well, we are to become ever more like our elder brother, Jesus, our elder brother, in this regard, growing in reverence, submission to the perfect will of our Father in heaven. I remember many moons ago pondering a

little on how often as we pray we introduce the words, sometimes we might say we even qualify what we are asking for with the words, thy will be done, but thy will be done. And I remember many years ago thinking about this and being less than satisfied with the introduction of these words into our prayers.

[20 : 08] And somehow I felt, as I look back now, quite wrongly, I thought that this was a bit of a cop-out for a lack of faith. So we didn't really believe that God was going to grant us what we were asking for, and so we could, we had this get-out clause by saying, well, if it's thy will. And then if we don't receive the answer that we had hoped for, well, we know why. Well, how wrong was I to think along these lines? I would venture to say that there is no greater evidence of a Christ-like relationship with God our Father than to pray and to live on the grounds of thy will be done. Certainly understanding what it is we're saying by expressing those words. This is evidence of a mature relationship. This is evidence of a deep understanding of who we are and who God is, that we live on the grounds of thy will be done. And we certainly pray in the light of and with this as the ever-present given, thy will be done. Not my will, but thy will be done. He was heard because of his reverent submission. But then the other expression that we have here that speaks of his perfect servanthood is that we're told he learned obedience from what he suffered. Now, what are we to make of this language of learning obedience? At first sight, it's a little, well, at best intriguing. At worst, maybe just a little bemusing and even disturbing. How can the writer speak of Jesus learning obedience? What did he have to learn concerning obedience? Surely he was ever obedient? Does the language suggest that Jesus was ever anything other than obedient? Well, of course, it doesn't suggest that. It suggests no such thing.

Rather, this language of Jesus learning obedience is part and parcel of what we've just been touching on, part and parcel of his being perfectly human. As men and women, as boys and girls, we learn to be obedient in new circumstances. And this obedience we can exercise only as we are faced with new experiences.

Let's think of Jesus. Let's think of Jesus as a child. Jesus as a child was never disobedient. There was never an occasion where he disobeyed his father. But as a child, there were experiences that he had never faced. And so, obedience that he had never exercised. He had never had occasion to exercise obedience in circumstances that he had never faced. It's obvious. If we think of the matter of temptation, there were temptations he had never faced as he was a child and as he grew into adulthood.

And it was only as he faced them that he learned and exercised obedience. He ever and always responded to the challenge. He was ever able, as we're clearly told, able to resist temptation. But there was this learning process as he grew and matured as a man from a child to a teenager to a young man to an adult. He learned obedience. And then very particularly, the passage speaks of one circumstance, not necessarily one occasion, but one circumstance through which he learned obedience. And that is precisely in the matter of suffering. As we've already made clear, these verses in Hebrews have as their backdrop, their backdrop, Gethsemane and Calvary indeed. And when they speak of Jesus as having learned obedience from what he suffered, they're speaking of this very particular way in which he learned obedience. In and through the experience of suffering, perhaps the most difficult circumstance in which to be obedient as he suffered deeply as he endured the anguish that he himself describes in the Garden of Gethsemane. But even in such circumstances, even in the face of such suffering, he was obedient. And this was obedience that he learned in the school of suffering.

The eternal Son of God was eternally obedient to his Father, but he could never have experienced or demonstrated obedience in the face of suffering had he not become wholly human, which is precisely what he did become. How do we respond to Jesus, the perfect servant, to pray to God with reverent submission, who learned obedience from what he suffered? Let me suggest two ways, two responses to this reality.

[25 : 36] The first is that we are to be encouraged. Jesus has been there. Whatever your trial, whatever the intensity of your anguish or suffering, you have in Jesus one who has been there, one who has experienced indeed beyond what you are experiencing. He has been there. He learned obedience through what he suffered.

He learned obedience in the furnace of intense anguish and suffering. He understands. Of course, we'll come back to that, and that reality is particularly fitting to consider when we think of Jesus as the perfect priest. But even at this point, we make reference to it. So be encouraged that such is

your Savior, but also be challenged. You see, we too, like Jesus, are called to learn obedience. Now, we are very imperfect pupils in this matter of learning obedience. We fail. We fall short. We disobey. But the challenge remains for us to learn obedience. And what we discover in life is that there is no better school, a painful school, but no better school than times of testing and suffering, where we, like Jesus, can learn obedience. So a perfect man, a perfect servant. But then, more briefly, let's touch on the other two headings that we mentioned, and the third being a perfect Savior. Jesus is a perfect Savior who has secured for us a perfect salvation. It follows, doesn't it, that a perfect Savior would secure a perfect salvation, but it's worth making the point and explicitly saying so. A perfect Savior. A Savior fully equipped and perfectly suited to save us. Remember, that's the meaning of the word perfect that is employed here. One who is fully equipped, fully prepared, perfectly suited for the task that he's been given. And Jesus was and is a perfect Savior. By his life of reverent submission and sinless obedience, he was, to use the language of our passage, made perfect, holy suited as the complete and perfect sacrifice for sin. He would not die for his own sin, for he had none. And so he would die for our sin. And because of his perfect obedience, our salvation involves not only forgiveness of sins, but also the gift of his righteousness. We're reminded of the words of Paul as he writes to the believers in Rome, for justice through the disobedience of one man, the many were made sinners. So also through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous. For Jesus, to do that for us, it was necessary for him to be made perfect through his learning obedience in and through suffering. A perfect Savior. A perfect Savior who has secured for us a perfect salvation.

Only a perfect Savior could do so. And that is what Jesus has secured. To use the language of the passage, he became the source of eternal salvation. Unlike the sacrifices that were offered time and time again by fallible and sinful priests, sacrifices that were incapable of securing lasting forgiveness, the sacrifice of Jesus has become the source of eternal and perfect salvation. His saving work is perfectly suited in every possible and conceivable way to our need as guilty and estranged sinners.

A perfect Savior. A perfect Savior. How do you respond to Jesus, your perfect Savior? Well, the only suitable response, the only possible response, the only reasonable response, perhaps not the only possible response, but certainly the only reasonable response is to put our trust in him as our Savior.

[30 : 04] And yet, in presenting that as the reasonable response, we're somewhat faced with a difficulty when we see what the passage actually says. Because notice what it says concerning what we are to do. Because then in verse 9 we read, And once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

We might have preferred the passage to say for all who trust in him, for all who put their faith in him. That's the language we would perhaps be more comfortable with. But that's not what it says. It says he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Well, what do we make of that? Are we to understand that the author is placing obedience as a requirement to enjoy and profit from this eternal salvation? Is this the way we can gain or merit our salvation by our obedience? Well, by no means. When we look at this passage in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture, we know that that would be a conclusion that we could not possibly come to. What we have here is not a condition for enjoying this eternal salvation, but what we have here rather is the distinguishing characteristic of those who do trust in Jesus. We obey him. What is the evidence that we are trusting in Jesus? What is the evidence that we have placed our faith in Jesus? Well, the evidence is to be found in our obedience to him. If we claim to trust in him and yet are wantonly disobedient, then there would be good reason to question the reality of our profession. This eternal salvation is indeed for all who obey him, but it is those who obey him that give evidence that they are trusting in him. In the words of the chorus that children sing, and we would do well to sing, we are to trust and obey and to do so in that order or in any case in parallel, trust and obey for there's no other way. Now, it's also true in pondering on this matter of the verb that the author here employs of eternal salvation for all who obey him. It's also true that trusting in Jesus is, in a very real sense, an act of obedience. We are commanded to repent. We are commanded to put our trust in Jesus, and so even our putting our trust in Jesus is, in a very real way, an act of obedience, and that's possibly what the author has in mind. I think what we said just a moment ago is perhaps a more likely way of understanding the language used. Obedience is evidence that we are those who have put our trust in Jesus, a perfect Savior. But then finally, a perfect priest. The passage ends by speaking of how

Jesus was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek, there in verse 10. [33 : 11] Now, what that means, this rather mysterious designation of Jesus as a high priest, in the order of Melchizedek, this theme is picked up again by the author at the end of chapter 6 and through into chapter 7. Now, we're not going to do that. We're not going to see what he says about that.

All we're going to say is that this designation of Jesus is a designation that seems to follow his saving work on the cross and so points to his continuing permanent and present priesthood on our behalf. When we think of the work of Jesus, we mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that it's all in the past. It's what he's done in the past. Yes, there is so much that he has done for us, so much that he did once and for all in the offering of himself in our place. But his saving work is a continuing work, and it's a continuing work very particularly as our priest, so designated by the Father.

Of course, when we think about his work on the cross, that was a priestly work. He both offered the sacrifices that was needed, and indeed he himself was the sacrifice offered. It was a priestly work that he was engaged in.

But he remains a priest. He is today seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. When we prayed earlier on in the service, there would have been no purpose in doing so had it not been for the fact that Jesus is our present priest, that he is interceding for us even now. A perfect priest, perfectly suited to our need as sinners, for one who would intercede for us, one who would be our mediator between us and a holy God, a perfect priest, wholly suited to our need. How do we respond to our perfect priest? Well, the book of Hebrews is replete with descriptions of Jesus as our perfect priest, and if we were to spend time considering them, we would be able to think of many ways in which we should respond. Very particularly, Jesus, given what we've already seen concerning his being perfectly human, given what we've already seen of how he has been tempted in all ways as we are, for all of these reasons, Jesus is presented as the one who is able to sympathize with us, a priest who can sympathize with us, having been tempted in all ways as we are yet without sin, having suffered in the manner that has been described. And so, we are urged and invited to respond in the following terms, and I end simply by reading words that we find in this letter to the Hebrews, where we are encouraged and invited to respond and to approach God in the light of the one who is seated at his right hand. In Hebrews chapter 10 and at verse 19 and following, we read, therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

That is how we respond to the reality that in Jesus we have a perfect priest. We can draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. So, let it be. Let us so draw near to God. Let us pray.

[37 : 17] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Son. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for who he is. We thank you for all he has done. We thank you that in the Bible we are given such a rich portrayal of his person and of his work, and we're so conscious of our limitations in doing justice to the richness of the portrayal we find, even in these few verses that we've grappled with in some measure this evening. And as we would extend our sight further across your Word, there is so much for us to consider and delight in and learn from. Help us so to learn, and so that we would deepen our understanding of who Jesus is. But we pray very especially that this would serve not simply to give us more knowledge, but that it would lead to us responding to the invitation that is made to us with which we have closed our message this evening. This great invitation where we would encourage one another to draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith, knowing that we are welcome, knowing that we are accepted, knowing that the way has been opened up, knowing that in Jesus we have one who intercedes for us and in whose name we can approach you. And all of these things we do pray in his name. Amen.