

March 29, 2009
Lent 5

“Jesus, the Perfect Cause of Your Salvation”

HEBREWS 5:5-7

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.”⁶ And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”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.

This past week an F-22 fighter plane crashed at Edwards Air Force Base in Palmdale. The pilot was not able to eject before the crash took place. You can be sure that when a 150 million dollar plane crashes, the government and Lockheed will do everything they can to find out the cause of the crash.

If your car won’t start, you immediately ask the all important question, “What is causing the car not to start? Is it the battery? Is there a problem with the fuel system?” Or if your child suddenly develops a very high temperature you take the child to the doctor to find the cause of the high temperature and the infection.

This morning we want to ask ourselves, “What is the cause, not of some problem I may be having, but what is the cause of all the blessings that have come into my life? Think of how blessed you are! You know where you are going when you die. You know your sin has all been forgiven through Jesus. You know that God’s love is real and it never changes, even though your life changes. What is the cause or the source for all these blessings? You know it is not you. It is God’s grace. It is his undeserved love that you have come to know in Jesus your Savior. I can’t say that “I am lucky” or that some how I have been better than other people. I can only say with the Apostle Paul, “I am what I by the grace of God.”

This morning we want to use these words read to you from the Book of Hebrews to remind ourselves that the cause of our salvation is already perfect. We do not need to add anything to what Jesus has done for us, for if we try to add to what Jesus has done we will ultimately undermine and destroy what is already the perfect cause or source of our salvation.

Listen to the prayers Jesus prayed

To appreciate how pure the cause of your salvation is, the Book of Hebrews encourages us to listen to the prayers that Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father. “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.” Jesus was so superior to the Old Testament high priests who offered prayers for people, because his prayers to his heavenly Father were perfect and pure.

The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were being influenced by

false teachers who wanted to resurrect Old Testament laws and even the Old Testament priesthood to add to what Jesus had done to make their religion more complete. To illustrate what they were trying to do, let me hold up this bottle of water. I can be reasonable sure this water is safe to drink because it is still sealed. How foolish it would be for me to open this bottle, then take a drink, and then add water from this bottled of stagnant water that I have a from a pail in my backyard. Lurking inside of every human heart is this evil or sinful nature that always wants to try to add to what is already pure for us in Jesus. By adding something sinful to such as an Old Testament priesthood or any human rules and regulations, I would be destroying what Jesus has done.

Let me provide another illustration. A man once told me how he grew up very devout and religious. Even in his teen years, he would regularly go to the priest to confess his sins. The priest would tell him that his sin was forgiven, but then told him he had to also say a certain number of "Our Fathers" and also try to change his life to become a better person. The young man got the impression from the priest that unless he did his part to change the forgiveness he had in Jesus was not genuine and real. He finally gave up going to confession and going to church because he never felt he was good enough. If I begin to think that my changed life, or my tears of sorrow, or my prayers add to what Christ has done, then I adding something impure to what is already pure and complete.

How good is Jesus the source and cause of your salvation? Just listen to the prayers he prayed to his heavenly Father. Jesus prayed these prayers while he was on this earth. The words should be more literally translated, "While Jesus was in the flesh." John 1 says of Jesus, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Hebrews 2 says, "Since 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."

Jesus took on our flesh and suffered the temptations we go through in life but never reached the point of falling into sin. He constantly prayed to his heavenly Father for strength to meet the challenges of each day. The book of Hebrews also tells us "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin." In our gospel reading we heard Jesus say, "Now is my heart troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father save me from this hour!'"

I am holding in my hand a picture of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. I once used this picture in a nursing home to teach about Jesus praying in the Garden. A woman, who could speak only Italian, began shrieking and crying, and even pulling out her hair. Because she grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, she associated pictures of Jesus' suffering, death, and even praying in the Garden with penance she had to show to be truly sorry for her sin and forgiven. Martin Luther said of his trust in good works for his salvation, "Yea, deep and deeper still I fell, Life had become a living hell. So firmly sin possessed me."

Dear Christians when you read these words about Jesus praying, do you not think of him praying in the Garden? Are you not moved by how much he loves you? See him fall with his face to the ground and hear him pray, "O Father if it is possible let this cup pass from me, not my will, but yours be done." Look at his sweat that falls to the ground as great drops

of blood. In Psalm 22, where Jesus speaks about his suffering and death, a thousand years before it happens, we hear the Messiah our Savior, God's Son in the fleshing, speaking these words to his Father, "From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help." Listen to Jesus cry for help from his Father and believe with all your heart that these cries are the evidence he did the perfect job of saving you from your sin. There is nothing you can add to what is already pure and perfect.

Notice it says that Jesus was heard because of his reverent submission. The perfect life Jesus lived on this earth earned him the right to be heard by his heavenly Father. Psalm 24 asks the all important question, "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?" Then it answers the question with these words, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart." Only a pure life has the right to approach our awesome and majestic God in prayer. The perfect life of Jesus earned him the right to go to his Father in prayer with loud cries and tears.

What gives you and me the right to go to our God in prayer? We certainly do not have that right on our own? Our feeble attempts at living good lives, or offering sacrifices or trying our best do not qualify us for having our prayers heard. Jesus did this for us. The perfect obedience that earned him the right to be heard is a privilege he has also earned for us. Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and access into this grace in which we stand." Jesus, who went directly to his Father in prayer because of his purity, said that we can ask the Father for anything in his name and he will hear us.

The mighty Zulu warriors had to bow down in the dust before their king, and squeal in high falsetto voice, before their petitions and requests could be heard. A mother in India steps into the Ganges River, slowly releases her child into the water, and lets the river carry it away, to guarantee that her gods will hear her prayers for more children. Martin Luther once prayed to St. Anne and vowed to become a monk if he was delivered from near death in a thunderstorm. With Jesus you can directly to your Father in prayer, because the pure life he lived earned you the right to speak to God directly. This pure life has been given to you as free gift. This pure life is also the only pure source of salvation for you.

Look at his perfect obedience

As further evidence that the cause and source of your salvation is already perfect, look at the life of perfect obedience Jesus lived. Our text says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and once made perfect, he became the source of salvation for all who obey him." Jesus learned obedience to the Father and obeyed perfectly, even in the worst suffering imaginable when he was forsaken by His Father for our sin. Jesus was made perfect. The word for "made perfect" is the same word Jesus used when he cried from the cross, "It is finished!" It's perfect. It's paid for. As further evidence and proof that the work of Jesus was complete and perfect, the Father raised him back to life again as evidence that Jesus made the perfect sacrifice and provided the pure life we could never even begin to live.

Jesus has become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. The word for source

is used two other places in the New Testament, once at Jesus trial and another time when in the book of Acts when they were trying to find out what Paul had done wrong. In a court of law the judge and jury try to find out the cause of the crime to determine whether he person should be declared guilty or not guilty. When we look at how we lived our lives this past week, we know beyond reasonable doubt the verdict we deserve, a verdict of guilty as charged. But then we see Jesus bring up the evidence that he paid our debt in full. He is the source of our salvation, the reason we are not charged as we deserve. Anyone who believes in this verdict of not guilty has eternal life. Romans 8 says, "Therefore, is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What is the cause of our salvation? Which will it be? Will it be Christ mixed with our dirty works? (Show bottle with dirty water)? Or will it be Jesus, the only pure cause and source of our salvation? You are so blessed to know Jesus as the pure cause of your salvation. Amen.