

Heb. 5:8 He learned Obedience Through What He Suffered

Before beginning, I want to mention that this sermon is not the best for taking notes. I do not have points like I normally do, though there will be 3 applications at the end. So, at least for the first half, put down your notes and try and listen, and then you can pick them back up again for the applications. This is more like a long devotion as I try and answer one question: *“What does it mean that Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered?”*

Look at v. 8. ***“He learned obedience through what he suffered.”*** It begins ***“Although he was a son . . .”*** Let’s stop and think about this truth for a moment. To be the “Son” is to be divine. As we’ve seen throughout this Book. ***“In these last days he has spoken to us by the Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. HE is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power . . . having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs . . .”*** and to whom God says, ***“Let all God’s angels worship him.”*** And, of the Son he says, ***“Your throne, O God, is forever . . . You, Lord, laid the foundation fo the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hand, they will perish, but you remain . . . You are the same and your years will have no end.”*** (Heb. 1) These words can only refer to God . . . the Son . . . in his essence, before the foundations of the world. This truth is what makes the rest of v. 8 so difficult.

So, let me ask, *“In his essence, in his equality with God, who does he obey? To whom does He look for help?”* In his deity, if He needed “HELP” this would mean there was some insufficient in Himself. In his deity, does he cry out with ***“loud cries and tears to save him from death?”*** (v. 7) HE DOES NOT! Again, this is the Son, equal in essence, equal in divinity, equal in power, in every way. This is why the next part of this verse is so difficult! ***“He learned obedience through what he suffered.”*** Brothers and sisters, the deity of Christ is under the veil of his humanity. When we see Christ, we see a man in the flesh AS WE ARE. This verse speaks of the son of man, the ONE who took on flesh. Look at v. 7: ***“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”*** Our context today is the incarnation and humiliation of the Son . . . ***“in the days of his flesh.”*** In order to be our high priest, he must be one of us. Do you remember last week? (solidarity) So, *“What does it mean that Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered?”*

Let me begin by saying this subject is a mystery. His obedience was peculiar to himself. Jesus ALONE died on the cross. Jesus ALONE took the wrath and anger and holy terror of God upon himself as our sacrifice. And, Jesus’ suffering was also peculiar to himself. The Son of God took on flesh for the purpose of laying down his life as a sacrifice for sins. We could say, *“Jesus came to die.”* During his life, particularly the last 3 years, the cross was on his mind. Mark tells us: ***“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”*** (Mark 10:45). And particularly in the last 3 years, Jesus’ suffering increased with every act of obedience. His suffering became more intense as time went on, culminating in the Garden of Gethsemane and finally the cross. Think about it like this. As a man, every stage of life all the way to the cross, Jesus experienced NEW sufferings in his obedience to the will of God. In this way, he learned obedience through suffering.

Let me try and clarify with some illustrations. Let's think about different kinds of obedience and their difficulty levels, moving from easy to hard. Kids, if your parents tell you to clean your room, and you clean it, that's obedience. It wasn't hard obedience. It didn't cause anguish in the depths of your soul as you cry out with tears. What about homework? When you do your homework when your teacher gives you an assignment, you are being obedient. Yes, this is obedience. And it may be more difficult and cause you more time and effort in order to be obedient, but it is still obedience. And then as you grow older, you are given more opportunities to obey, whether it is in telling the truth, or how you act with your friends, what you do when you are alone, etc. And then when you get married, and have kids, and continue to obey, life gets harder and harder. And the opportunities for obedience and the suffering that goes along with that obedience only grows.

And, think for a moment about "obedience from the heart." Jesus says if we think evil about our neighbor we committed murder in our hearts. Or, if we look at a woman with lust, we commit adultery in our hearts. Or, if we covet our neighbors wealth or position, we are disobedient in the heart. Every day, All of us are confronted with such obedience to God in the heart. And as we grow in sanctification, we are confronted with more and more difficult situations in life. And with each new opportunity, we grow in our experiences and even in our suffering. We learn and we grow. It was the same with Jesus. His entire life was one of obedience. And with each year, particularly the last 3, Jesus' level of obedience escalated all the way to his death. And this included great suffering. And with every act of obedience, every new act of obedience Jesus learned. And our text says, "through suffering."

In this regard, consider Jesus' obedience to the will of God on the cross. In this case, obedience to the will of God as priest, as the one who would "offer himself" and lay down his own life, to become "sin" for us, to be a "curse" for the sins of his people, how much more difficult was this obedience. And further, it wasn't just "laying down his life" and dying, it went even further.

The obedience of Christ our priest was to "make propitiation." Look back at 2:17: **"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."** His obedience included PROPITIATION. What is this? To propitiate in this regard is to take the displeasure, the anger, the wrath of God away sinners. And the only way to do this is to lay HIMSELF down on the cross. For there is **"*ONE mediator between God and sinful men, the man Christ Jesus*"** (1 Tim. 2:5). This means that, in order to completely "propitiate" the displeasure and wrath of a holy God for sin, Jesus, our high priest had to endure ALL God's punishment including separation and hell. There is great mystery here. But, Jesus did take it all, EVERYTHING the law of God demanded as punishment for sin.

How difficult in comparison to cleaning your room, or even being obedient to Mosaic Law! Do you see how far the obedience of the Lord Jesus took him? And, do you see the extent of his obedience? Kids, you might think you are suffering when you have to mow the yard or clean your room, or you may find it hard to do your homework. And any of us who are struggling with sin and obedience know at times how hard it is. But, with our great high priest, he was obedient

all the way to the suffering and death of the cross and the truth from Is. 53:10, he knew ***“It was the will of God to crush the Son.”*** So, this is how he learned obedience through suffering.

I believe this text teaches that throughout his life, **“he grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man a man”** (Luke 2:52). He obeyed his parents. He made his bed and worked around the house. He learned the trade of his earthly father Joseph. He sat in the temple and listened to the priests teach. He was kind with his siblings and with his neighbors. He loved those around him. And as a man he grew, so did his wisdom as a man. And at the age of 30 as he entered his formal ministry, his afflictions and his sufferings in the flesh grew. As he confronted the unbelieving and the poor and the suffering and the religious leaders of his day, so the intensity of his suffering increased. And as v. 7 says, through it all, he **“offered up prayers and supplications”** as he obeyed the will of God in every way. And finally on the eve of his death in the Garden of Gethsemane, his cries to God became even MORE intense and the difficulty as a man to obey grew exponentially as drops of blood came from his brow as he considered the great pinnacle of obedience coming the next day. In this way, from a child, his obedience grew with the intensity of his afflictions and with the levels of obedience all the way to the cross. In this way, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.

Many read this verse and they believe that it means that Jesus had to learn obedience as Greg’s cat has to learn from suffering not to get on the table or climb the screen door. Some think this verse teaches that Jesus had to “learn” obedience like a dog learning not to chew the trash or go on the floor. This verse does not teach that Jesus was ever disobedient. But, in doing the will of God throughout his life with all the afflictions and sufferings as a man, he grew with each difficulty, all the way to the ultimate suffering on the cross (which, by the way, as Christians, we do not and will not ever have to do. In this way, our obedience will always fall short. This is why we need a high priest to be our mediator!)

Let me say it another way. As he grew from a child, in all his situations of obedience to the will of the father, he grew . . . he “learned obedience” . . . from obeying his parents, to obeying the law of Moses, to being obedient to death, and ultimately to being obedient as he laid down his life on the cross and exposed himself to ALL God’s wrath . . . for us. And I believe this explains vv. 9-10, which says, **“and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”**

Let me end with 3 applications that will be helpful to us.

Application 1. Every act of obedience is important. There are no “little obediences.” Every opportunity given by God to obey or disobey is important. Why? First, obedience to the commands of Christ is obedience. Second, The extent to which we obey in this life is the extent to which we “learn obedience.” And when we obey in the little things, God prepares us for future obedience. In the days of his flesh, Jesus grew in stature and wisdom. And as he grew from a child to a man and then entered his formal ministry, he “learned obedience” with every subsequent opportunity for obedience leading up to his ultimate suffering on the cross. Jesus training ground of “faith” is the same for us. He was “perfected” through obedience in his humiliation and sufferings in this life, until the day when the ultimate act of obedience came to

him. In the same kind of way, we obey in little things and then we are prepared for greater steps of obedience down the road.

With children and parents.

With our congregation (consider acts of obedience; evangelism, prayer, reaching out to someone in counseling, obedience at work as we take a stand on moral issues, etc.)

With our elders (See 1 Tim. 4).

Application 2. Suffering (affliction, trials, testing) – These are gifts of God given for our growth. Jesus' example is ours. We learn obedience through suffering. And as we obey little by little, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, etc., we grow. And particularly important are times of suffering and how we obey during such times. These times are stones that pave the way to assurance and joy in our lives. They lead to maturity. James 1:2-4 says, **“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”**

It is my opinion that many Christians don't like to think about suffering. Yet, the Bible is clear. There is nothing accidental in suffering. God declares the **“end from the beginning”** (Is. 46:10). He **“works all things after the counsel of his will”** (Eph. 1:11). Lam 3:38 says, **“Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?”** God is fully in control of every situation of pain or suffering that we encounter. I think one of the ways we minimize the sovereignty of God in suffering is to say, *“God allows it.”* It's as if to say, *“God is not directly orchestrating our suffering; He just allows it. And, by the way, it is for our good,”* as we love Rom. 8:28. But consider Job and his suffering. Satan comes to God not even noticing Job and God says, **“Have you considered my servant Job.”** Let me ask, **“Who is in control of Job's suffering?”** God told Satan who to choose, and Job has no clue what is coming. And through all his suffering Job says things like: **“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord”** (Job 1:20-21). And, **“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”** (2:10). And, **“Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?”** (12:9) And, **“For he will complete what he appoints for me . . .”** (23:14). And with so many words like this does Job speak. (See especially cp. 19). And at the very end, as Job and his friends look for a good answer to the problem of evil and suffering in this world, the ONLY answer they find is that God is sovereign and He has every right to do as He pleases with anyone.

And the greatest example of all is the cross of Christ. Is. 53:10 says, **“It pleased the Lord to crush the Son.”** This was no MERE “allowing.” Now, is it ok to say, *“God allows?”* Of course. But, it is the understanding behind these words that matters. And personally, I think we are better off using Scriptural language to express our thoughts and emotions towards evil and suffering in this world. And at the end of the day, all suffering, but particularly suffering that comes from being obedient to God's commands, produces in us great character. And these times are “gifts,” working in us until his coming. In this way we also learn obedience through suffering.

3. Fighting for faith and enduring through difficulties is necessary in our sanctification. This life of faith is not to be lived on auto pilot. We learn obedience through what we suffer. This means

we don't have people walking an aisle and getting baptized and making a profession, and then go and live life just like the world. Life is war. If anyone could have lived on autopilot, it would have been the Son of God. But, he took on flesh; his entire life was one of suffering. He was a man of sorrows. Our Lord Jesus fought all the way to the cross. And He says to us, "***Come and follow me.***" And, "***If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.***" As Jesus approached the cross, what did he do? He cried out with tears to God. He sweat drops of blood. As a man, he pressed on throughout his life all the way to the cross. And even when He prays, "***Let this cup pass before me,***" He still presses further to say, "***Your will be done.***" He learned obedience through what he suffered. Brothers and sisters, life is war! It is one long road of suffering and obedience, suffering and obedience, suffering and obedience. And with each one we learn obedience through our sufferings. Through it all, we fight. And through it all, we are being sanctified. If you are not fighting for faith and enduring through difficulties, we are not being sanctified.

Therefore, in closing, let me read Heb. 4:15-16: "**We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**"