

Jesus the Perfect Person, Pioneer and Propitiation

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[0 : 00] As you're turning there, I was just telling Trevor earlier that it's so wonderful to be with you this morning. The last time my wife and I were with you was, I think, in 2019, and you didn't even meet in this building.

So it's awesome to see how the church has grown and to just be worshiping the Lord with you this morning. Yeah, so if you're there in your Bibles, I will read the whole chapter of chapter 2 in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Hear the word of the Lord. I'm reading from the CSB translation as well. For this reason, we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away.

For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding, and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? This salvation had its beginning when it was spoken of by the Lord, and it was confirmed to us by those who heard him. At the same time, God also testified by signs and wonders, various miracles and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit according to his will.

[1 : 08] For he has not subjected to angels the world to come that we are talking about, but someone somewhere has testified. What is man that you remember him, or the son of man that you care for him?

You made him lower than the angels for a short time. You crowned him with glory and honor and subjected everything under his feet. For in subjecting everything to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him.

As it is, we do not yet see everything subjected to him. But we do see Jesus, made lower than the angels for a short time, so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone.

Crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death. For in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.

[2 : 12] I will sing hymns to you in the congregation. Again, I will trust in him. And again, here I am with the children God gave me. Now, since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death, he might destroy the one holding the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.

For it's clear that he doesn't reach out to help angels, but to help Abraham's offspring. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. This is the word of the Lord. Shall we pray for a moment? Father in heaven, it is amazing to come and gather as your people and to hear your word.

It is deep, Lord God. It is often difficult to understand. But this morning, I pray that you will not only give us understanding, but that you give us faith.

Faith to believe all that you say about your son. Fill us with your spirit this morning. Empower me, Lord God, to speak clearly and be glorified in our midst.

[3 : 36] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. What do you do when your faith seems to hurt you more than help you?

Have you looked for meaning and purpose outside the Christian faith? Have you tried alternatives that seem to work for others? Have you asked yourself a question like this?

You know, is it all worth it, this living for Jesus business? These are the kinds of issues that the writer of Hebrews deals with by giving his audience what he calls a word of exhortation. He says that in chapter 12, verse 22. Chapter 12, verse 4 and chapter 13, verse 3 indicate that the original audience was suffering persecution. But not yet to the point of dying for their faith. As the writer says, So we know their faith was bringing them grief.

[4 : 42] And as a result, they were tempted to find meaning and purpose elsewhere. They were experimenting with alternatives to the Christian life. They were questioning whether following Jesus was actually good for them.

And it's the writer's burden to plead with them, to warn them, to encourage them, and to convince them that there's no stagnation in the Christian life.

You either move forward or fall short of God's calling on your life. In this life, temptation, suffering, and doubt won't go away.

The original audience had to endure them. And we ourselves need to learn how to endure in the Christian life. That's one reason God has preserved this letter for us.

To help us press on faithfully in a world that is hell-bent on diverting us from the source of a truly fulfilling life. So I want to highlight this morning, especially from verses 5 to 18, three simple ways in which the writer shows us that Jesus actually has given us everything we need to live a truly fulfilling life.

[5 : 59] Firstly, from verses 5 to 9, we see that Jesus is the perfect person. Secondly, from verses 10 to 11, we see that Jesus is the perfect pioneer.

And lastly, from verses 14 to 18, we see that Jesus is the perfect propitiation. Now, if you're like me, you probably forgot that you had that app on your phone until this past week.

That app that tells you about load shedding. Because from Thursday 4 p.m. until 5 a.m. on Friday morning, we had load shedding. A gentle reminder not to take our electricity for granted.

We likely all stopped counting the days since we last had rolling blackouts. We no longer plan our days, cook our meals, and charge our devices around these load shedding stages.

Because we've become so used to having constant power supply that we just take it for granted. Right? And here's the thing. This happens in our spiritual lives as well.

[7 : 03] We can get so used to hearing the gospel, gathering for worship, living in a community of believers, that we start to take it all for granted. We assume we find that our hearts are in the right place until circumstances shake us.

And we realize, hey, we've been drifting. We've been living without the right focus. Now, the danger isn't just the absence of something obvious like electricity or even missing out on church on a Sunday morning.

The real danger is that we drift away from our source of life and hope, the Lord Jesus himself. We face this danger because of our fallen nature.

It's in our nature to live by what we see. For example, a large part of Western philosophy deals with two ways of seeing reality. Some argue that we know what is real through personal experience. Others argue that we know what is real through our ability to reason. But the writer of Hebrews wants his readers to perceive and interpret reality through the eyes of faith.

[8 : 10] The eyes of faith look to Jesus who, as he says in chapter 1 verse 3, is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature.

The writer had such a Christ-saturated perspective that he reads the scriptures as finding their fullest meaning in Jesus. And so should we. Consider for a moment verses 5 to 8.

Let me read it for you. For he, that is God, has not subjected to angels the world to come that we are talking about. But someone somewhere has testified, what is man that you remember him?

Or the son of man that you care for him? You made him lower than the angels for a short time, and you crowned him with glory and honor and subjected everything under his feet. Now here the writer is quoting Psalm 8.

The Psalm celebrates our special role as God's caretakers of his creation. But there's a problem.

The shoe doesn't fit. None of us have everything under our feet, placed under our authority, in other words, that's verse 8.

[9 : 11] And none of us are crowned with glory and honor. So who does this apply to? The obvious Sunday school answer, Jesus. He's the perfect person for the job.

And you know what? I believe that what sets the Christian faith apart from all other alternatives, both secular and religious, is not only its theology, but also its anthropology.

In other words, the Bible gives us a true presentation both of God and of ourselves. We are created in the image of God. And we also fall short of his glory.

That's the paradox of the human condition that no philosophy, that no religion, can hold together and provide an adequate solution to.

It reminds me of a well-known fable that you may have heard. It's the story of the blind men and the elephant. It goes like this. Once upon a time, several men were led into an Indian king's courtyard.

[10:12] Each man touches a different part of the elephant to learn what it's like. One feels the side of it and says, it's like a wall. Another feels the tusk and says, no, it's like a spear.

Another grabs the trunk and says, it's like a snake. One touches the leg and thinks it's like a tree trunk. Another feels the ear and says, it's a fan. The other grabs the tail and says, it's like a rope. So they argue. And they each are completely convinced that they are right and that the others are wrong. But the king hears this commotion in his courtyard and he steps out onto the balcony and declares to the men that they only are seeing one part of this magnificent creature, which is the elephant.

Chris Hazen, a Christian apologist, says, Ironically, this fable has built into it an element that is not highlighted in traditional interpretations, but may be the most important issue in the story.

How do the blind men discover the truth of what they are encountering? It is revealed to them from above. The king steps out onto his balcony from his transcendent perspective and with his intact sense of sight and communicates to those the full picture of what it is they are actually touching.

[11:32] The more profound real world question that emerges from the fable is, where is our king who can reveal to us the truth that is not accessible from our limited perspective?

End quote. Now you see, without the biblical perspective of God and ourselves, we are like those blind men. That, brothers and sisters, is exactly what the Christian message proclaims.

God hasn't left us in the dark. We don't have to figure out for ourselves who we are or who he is.

The scriptures show us a God who is determined to draw near to us and to reveal himself.

Even to identify with us in the most humbling and humiliating way imaginable. An immortal God, the immortal God, subjecting himself to death.

And that is what I think verse 9 is getting at here. Instead of glory and honor, we carry around with us guilt and shame and the condemnation of sin.

[12:37] So although we have a high calling as humans, made in God's image, we cannot live up to it. But the gospel teaches us that the son of God became a man without ceasing to be God.

And as God in the flesh, Jesus takes up and fulfills our role as human beings. Unlike us, he's not corrupted by sin. Unlike us, he relates perfectly to God and others.

Unlike us, he truly embodies what it means to be human and God. And as the church has confessed for millennia, he's truly God and truly man. And when we say this, when we confess this about our Lord, we are not only saying something we don't fully understand, but we are touching the heart of our faith.

That's why the son of God left the presence of his heavenly father. Came down to our world of sin and death, living obedient to the father's will and humble to a point lower than the privileges of heaven's angels.

And suffering death, the torturous death on the cross for us. All to save helpless sinners like us. Now all of us hate feeling helpless, right?

[13:45] Think for a moment about the last time you were in a situation that you couldn't do anything about. Maybe your car broke down in the middle of nowhere, or maybe, even worse, on a busy highway.

You're sitting there, your hazard lights are flashing, cars rushing by, and no matter how hard you stare at the engine or turn the key, nothing happens. You might try to call someone for help, but what if your phone's dead?

Now you're really stuck. In that moment, you realize you can't fix your problem. And it's frustrating because we are most comfortable when we are in control.

We tend to believe that if we try hard enough, think smart enough, push through and sort things out through sheer grit, we can sort things out.

But when it comes to our sin, we can't fix ourselves or take control of our lives. We need external help. As Paul says, Those words sum up our desperate poverty before God.

[14:59] We can't lift ourselves up to heaven by our repentance. God must come down from his glory to bring us up from our shame. You see, without the perspective of God's word, we cannot see our problem for what it truly is.

And if you're like me, when I'm told about how my sin has affected someone, the first thing I do is clench my fist, make some excuse, right? And if I'm humbled after I reflect on it, I say, Well, I'll resolve to do better next time.

But if behavior change is all that's necessary, then what did Jesus die for? You see, God doesn't see my and your sin problem from our perspective.

By nature, we think of sin like the common cold, but it's a cancer. We don't just need spiritual medication. We need our humanity to be renewed and restored unto God.

You and I need a new life, a new way to be human. Athanasius of Alexandria put it this way, Our sin isn't merely a misdemeanor. It is a corruption of nature.

[16:06] Do you hear that? A corruption of nature. And in Christ, God replaces our corruption with incorruption. And until we rest in Christ's perfection, we'll always try to be perfect ourselves and push on to make ourselves what we know we cannot be in ways that will only leave us devastated.

Back when my wife and I stayed in Muesenberg, I would wake up when the surfing conditions were perfect before the crack of dawn and paddle out into perfect conditions if it were just right.

And Graham Hisslop at the back there, he would join me sometimes. We would go out like every other week during wintertime. And it was a lovely times. You know, big swell from the previous day, no wind, hardly anybody around.

You see the sunrise and the water is as clear as glass. But you see, the reality of surfing is that you actually spend more time just paddling in the water, just sitting there.

Rather than catching waves. That's the case even for professionals. You know, because when you're out there and waves come in sets, so you're waiting for those waves to come. You're not facing the beach.

[17:17] You're floating around on your board. Sometimes you're having to duck waves that aren't good enough to surf and dodge surfers who might hit you. And so you don't notice how the current pulls you either to the left or to the right.

So to keep from drifting, you need to keep yourself aligned to a landmark on shore. It could be a light pole, it could be a building, it could be your car.

And if you don't do that, you could actually end up dozens of meters from where you actually started out. And this can even happen to you if you are amongst surfers who also aren't paying attention to their own positioning.

You see, the same principle applies to the Christian life as well. We can be so absorbed by the good times or try to avoid all the hardships of life. We might even try to keep up with other people, just drifting along with the crowd.

So we need to pick our landmark and regularly paddle ourself in alignment with that. We need a gospel focus and perspective to keep us from drifting.

[18:21] And we should have God's perspective on the cross especially. Jesus' interaction with Peter comes to mind. In Matthew's gospel, it says that, when Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and be raised on the third day, Peter took him aside.

And he said to him, he rebuked him saying, oh, no Lord, this will never happen to you. And what did Jesus do? Matthew says, Jesus turned and told Peter, get behind me, Satan.

You are a hindrance to me because you're not thinking about God's concerns, but human concerns. You see, even though Peter's intentions were reasonable, he wanted to save his friend's life.

Jesus still said to him, out of my sight, Satan. And to all who say there must be another way other than the cross to save us, Jesus says the same thing, out of my sight, Satan.

Why? You see, from God's perspective, it was necessary that Jesus should suffer because it perfected him. Let's read verse 10. It says, for in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

[19 : 46] Your Bible may say that he is the source or the founder or the author or the leader or the captain of our salvation. The point is that if Jesus hadn't made the way of salvation clear, we would still be lost and we would drift further from God.

He is the only reliable guide and pathway to God. He doesn't just say to us like other religious leaders, follow me on this path and perhaps you may find salvation.

He walks with us in our suffering and leads us, as it were, by the hand to a restored relationship with God. In other words, our Lord's suffering prepared him and qualified him for his calling to save us.

That's what perfection means here. Jesus didn't need moral perfection because the writer says in chapter 4 verse 15 that he was tempted in every way, yet without sin. His suffering made him the perfect sympathizer with the human condition.

That's what verses 11 to 13 mean when we read them. They say, For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one father.

[20 : 59] That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, I will proclaim your name, that is God's name, to my brothers and sisters. I will sing hymns to you in the congregation. Again, I will trust in him.

And again, here I am with the children God gave me. He died a lonely and forsaken death on the cross for us. And it was on that cross he cried out, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Quoting the beginning of Psalm 22, the same psalm that's quoted here in verse 12. With the eyes of faith, the writer of Hebrews sees that the righteous man suffering here in Psalm 22 is Jesus.

And he links this psalm to Isaiah 8, verse 7, 17 to 18. The other text that's also quoted here, because both texts speak about those people who belong to the righteous man who trusts in God. Jesus is the righteous man who receives from God a family. The writer is telling his readers that they are the family of Jesus. It's amazing, because you know the Christmas story tells us that God gives a gift to us, his son.

[22 : 11] But this adds to it, saying that God gives us to his son as a gift. We are precious to God. You and I are precious to him. He will never use, misuse you, or abuse you.

But before Jesus could inherit us as his brothers and sisters, he had to die. And again, from a human perspective, his death on the cross looks like a failure, a complete loss of something that could be glorious.

But the Bible repeatedly teaches us that Jesus' death means life for us. His loss of life is God's gift of freedom. But how exactly should we understand freedom?

In what way are we not free? The French political philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I like saying his name because it just rolls with the tongue, argued that by nature, we are born good. But society corrupts us. He claimed that the introduction of private property led to inequality as those who owned property gained power and created laws to protect their interests, resulting in unjust systems that divided people into the haves and have-nots.

[23 : 23] Therefore, he said, a fundamental fact of life is this, that man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains. Man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains.

Now, is that true? Is that all that there is to human freedom? Someone else said of human freedom, we are not economically free, we can't afford what we want, we are not morally free, we can't do what we want, we are not geographically free, we can't go where we want, and we're not temporally free, we can't live as long as we want.

So, what kind of idiot believes in the concept of human freedom? End quote. Now, from a human perspective, I can't disagree with that. But God's word teaches us that our chains aren't only physical.

They have a deeper and tighter grip on us than we realize. As verses 14 to 15 read, Now, since the children, that is the children of God, have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.

Some of us fear the loneliness of death. Some of us fear dying a painful death. Some of us fear losing our quality of life and suffering before we die.

[24 : 55] Some of us fear not accomplishing important goals before we die. Some of us fear for the well-being of our families who will remain alive after we die. And some may even be uncertain about what will happen to us after we die.

Death, as you may have heard, is the great equalizer because the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the foolish and the wise, every single person dies.

But there's also a deeper issue at play here with regards to our fear of death. And it has to do with guilt before God. As the writer says later in the letter, it is appointed for people to die once and after this judgment.

chapter 9, verse 27. And the enemy of our souls, the devil, loves to play on these fears. And his power works in this way. He tempts us to sin and then he accuses us of guilt.

And then he threatens us with God's anger against our sin, blinding us of the salvation that God provides through Jesus. But again, according to verse 14, Jesus destroys this power by dying.

[26 : 10] He shares in our flesh and blood. He knows our weaknesses because he himself has experienced the torment of temptation. He was like us in every way and he took on himself our death penalty for sin.

I appreciate the way the Heidelberg Catechism explains this. Explains Jesus' death for us. It reads, quote, Jesus must truly be human and perfectly righteous because God's justice requires that human nature that has sinned should likewise make satisfaction for sin.

And someone who is himself a sinner cannot satisfy for others. And Jesus must be truly God so that by His divine power He can sustain in His human nature the burden of God's wrath against sin and obtain for us righteousness and life.

End quote. Now our language and our creeds have limitations on them but what I think the Catechism gets right is that it doesn't lead us into thinking that God has to buy us back from the devil.

The devil doesn't own us. He never has. It is God Himself who according to Hebrews is satisfied by Christ's death on our behalf. Jesus absorbs the power of sin by drinking the cup of God's wrath against us.

[27 : 26] We can think of our problem in this way. God is our judge. The devil is our jailer who keeps us in prison. Jesus' blood is the only payment that the judge will accept for our release.

And when the judge receives the payment in full He orders the jailer to let us go. And the devil is powerless to resist. But Jesus' work on our behalf doesn't end here brothers and sisters.

We've all sinned in the past. We all still sin in the present and sadly we will continue to sin until we pass through death unto glory. That is why as our representative Jesus made propitiation or atonement for our sins.

He fully paid for our debt. Have a look with me at verses 16 to 18. For it's clear that Jesus doesn't reach out to help angels but to help Abraham's offspring.

Therefore He had to be made like His brothers and sisters in every way so that He could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

[28 : 35] For since He Himself has suffered when He was tempted He is able to help those who are tempted. These verses tell us that from the context of heaven Christ applies the gospel to us like a priest.

According to chapter 1 verse 3 He is seated at this moment at God's right hand the Father's right hand and I can just hear Him saying to the Father I died for them. Look at my hands look at my feet look at my side look at my blood stained robe look at my crown of thorns look at my people look at what they will be not what they are now look at how far I've brought them look at the plans I have for them look at them being sanctified through suffering look at their trust growing in me as they turn away from the lies of this world.

Now who stands ready to contradict Him? Paul says quote who shall bring any charge against God's elect it is God who justifies who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised and who is at the right hand of God interceding for us.

End quote all our needs are and will be met in Christ past, present and future. Now this morning we've covered up covered a lot in a short space of time and I want to sum it up for you by asking you this question again what do you do when your faith seems to hurt you rather than help you? How will you endure disappointments grief even persecution in this life? The solution the writer of Hebrews gave to his audience was one of perspective.

[30 : 24] Those who endure to the end faithfully were those who kept the right perspective. Namely that the Lord Jesus is perfection in a person which helped them to resist their tendencies to perfect themselves.

That Jesus is perfection in providing us with salvation which reminded them that he's the only one worth following for purpose in life. And that Jesus perfection is the only payment that God will accept for our debt of sin which assured them that they themselves didn't have to atone for their sins.

If you feel as though you don't have what it takes to press on and endure I can count at least three criteria from these points that you may find yourself meeting this morning.

Number one we need to be imperfect people. Jesus didn't come to save angels either literal angels or those who pretend to be angels but people human beings like us. Number two we need to forsake all alternative saviors.

Jesus has paid the only way of salvation and we have every good reason to believe so. And number three we simply need to let Jesus do his job for us as priests.

[31 : 40] God saves sinful people who look for purpose and meaning and life and salvation in Jesus. Will you do that today? Let's pray.

Father to know that you are a God who has always had his heart towards us never against us and to know that you have demonstrated this in the most powerful profound and even humiliating way by sending your son to take our place.

Oh Lord that's so amazing. That's so humbling. Thank you for that. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for what he has done for us and what he is doing for us now at present Lord.

And this day as we continue and as we go about our week Lord I pray that you would impress upon our heart the perspective we need to keep the sight we need to have of Jesus always to endure and also to find all sorts of joy all sorts of peace all sorts of love that we can receive from you and show to others Lord God.

Thank you for your son. Thank you for the fact that he is for us and not against us. In Jesus name. Amen.