

October 20, 2024 "He Learned Obedience"

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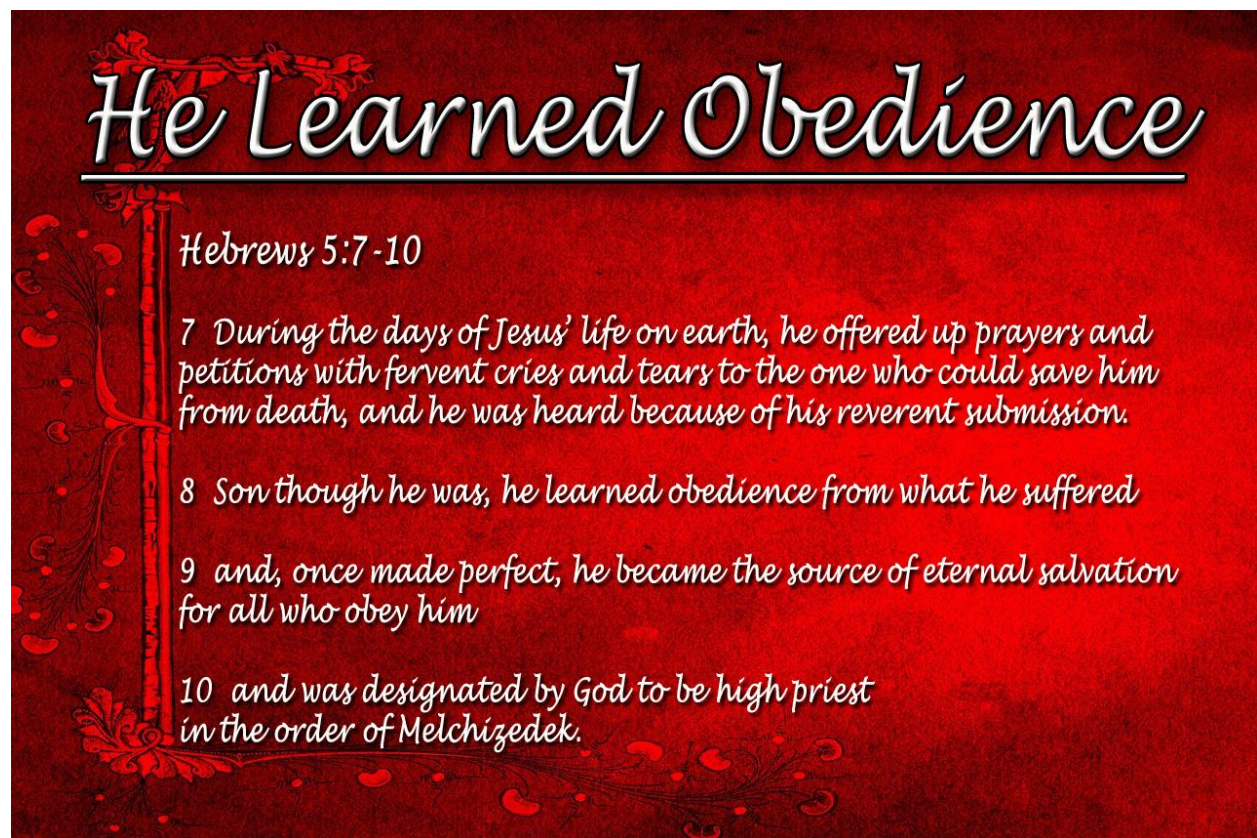
Hebrews 5:7-10

7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered

9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.



Special Music: Yes (Obedience)

David and Nicole Binion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbLqWfyl2QQ>

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY

It was mid-October and Jason Williams was helping his dad clear the twelve acres north of the house to get it ready for the Spring crops. Dancer Williams (Jason's dad) always turned the field in the fall and let it lay fallow until the first signs of Spring. They had already taken the last of the pumpkins and watermelons to market. This field was their "fun" crop. There were two other fields, a hundred-acre field to the west where they grew hay and a two-hundred-acre field to the East which was dedicated to soybeans. Sometimes, they grew turnips and carrots on the ten acres to the south, but mostly they just used it to graze the livestock. Dancer Williams was proud of his place and even more proud of his son who was following in his footsteps.

The air was a little chilly and there was a storm brewing to the southwest coming up from the coast. Jason had rigged up a large wooden sled and hitched it with a rope to the tractor. When he found any sizeable rocks in the field, he would pick them up and put them on the sled. The sled was almost full of those heavy rocks and the tractor was beginning to strain under the load. It was time to take the load to the ravine near the pond on the south field.

Now, Jason respected his dad and was pretty good at listening to his advice. After all, his dad had taught him everything he knew about farming, including driving the tractor, Jason had become proficient at maneuvering that mechanized beast around the property and had a good understanding of various attachments. His dad had told him on more than one occasion to avoid the low

side of the pond because it was usually pretty muddy. Getting a tractor stuck in the mud was not only problematic, but it could also be embarrassing and possibly dangerous.

Jason was in his last year of high school, and like most teens his age, he felt like he had been farming with his dad long enough that he could cut a few corners now and then without compromising his chores. After all, who was going to know? He was anxious to dump the rocks and get on with his work on the field. Skirting the edge of the low area would save him some time as well as letting him place the skid closer to the ravine so that he didn't have to carry the rocks more than a few steps.

His dad waved to him as he started up the tractor and headed for the wash. He carefully kept the wheels of the tractor to the outside of the low area. He felt he had made a good choice rather than going all the way around the pond and coming in from the dry side. "This was a smart move," he thought to himself. "Dad will see that I have what it takes to make a great farmer!" His mind wandered to what was going to happen in the coming year when he left for college. He had already been accepted at A & M to study horticulture and was looking forward to the experience. His dad was going to struggle while he was gone, but he still encouraged Jason in his pursuit of higher education. "A smart farmer is a better farmer," his dad would tell him and then give him a gentle slap on the side of the head. Jason would smile at the token of affection.

The autumn air was cool, and the trees were starting to turn which encouraged Jason in his reverie. He even closed his eyes for a minute and took a big sniff of the autumn air. Life was good!

Jason was pulled from his thoughts as the tractor rocked and one of the tires started slipping. He looked down and realized that when he had let his attention wander, the tractor, weighted down by the sled, was now having to navigate through mud. He was too close to the low area. Jason turned the wheel to the right to try and maneuver back onto high ground, but the tractor started slipping to the side and the left rear tire no longer had traction in the muddy grass. "Well, this is embarrassing," Jason thought to himself hoping his dad couldn't see what was going on. The harder he tried to drive the tractor back to hard ground, the deeper he sunk into the mud.

Realizing that his efforts were in vain, he stepped on the clutch and brought the tractor to a halt. He put the tractor in neutral, turned off the engine and stepped down. The mud came up past the ankles of his boots, and the slime sucked him farther down with every step he tried to take. Stopping for a moment, he pondered his situation. "Well, let's see. The first thing I should do is unhitch that heavy sled. Maybe then, I can get the tractor back up onto high ground. I can always reattach the sled once the tractor is safely on a dry ground."

He made his way around the back of the tractor and unhooked the sled. Without the weight of the tractor and any forward momentum, the sled began to inch its way further into the bog. "This is not good," he thought, "Not good at

all!” Before he could react, the sled was buried in the mud with just a few rocks left exposed.

Without thinking, he grabbed the rope that had been attached to the tractor and tried to keep the sled from sliding even deeper, but the rope was already muddy and slipped through his gloved hands, causing him to fall backward into the muck. Struggling to get up, he managed to stand, knowing that he must look a sight. The mud had now gotten into his gloves and his boots making his hands and feet extremely cold and uncomfortable. Believing that he might still manage to salvage the situation, Jason pulled himself up on the back of the tractor and felt his left boot suck off into the mire. “This just can’t get any worse, can it?” he muttered to himself trying to wipe the mud from his face with his dirty glove. He managed to climb up the hitch and over the seat to mount the tractor. Starting the engine, he engaged the tractor in an attempt to move it to a dry spot, but since he had left the tractor in neutral when he had climbed down, it had managed to slide in deeper and both tractor wheels were now spinning, causing the body of the tractor to swivel.

Jason stomped on the clutch and managed to put the transmission into neutral before he lost his balance and was tossed from his seat landing face down in the mud. He turned over just in time to see the tractor slide back and pin his right leg under the left wheel. He heard a snap and let out a pain driven yelp. That is when he finally gave up, knowing that he would have to lie there until his dad came to find him.

It didn't take long. Dancer had watched the entire scene unfold. As soon as he saw the tractor headed for the low area, he knew what was going to happen. He just didn't know what the extent of the damage would be. Arriving in within minutes of the incident, he called out, "Jason! Jason, are you alright? Where are you, son?"

Jason was almost too embarrassed to answer. His father was never going to let him live this down. "Down here, dad. My right leg is pinned under the tire and I think it may be broken. It certainly feels that way. Do you think you can give me a hand?"

Looking down at his mud-covered son, Dancer found himself somewhere between the worry and agony of seeing his son in this predicament, and to trying to keep from laughing hysterically at the sight. What a mess! He reached over and turned off the tractor. There was no way he would be able to get his son out of this situation by himself. He shook his head and said as calmly as he could, "Hang in there, son, I'm calling 911 now."

Jason could hear his father talking on the phone, "Yes, he's buried in mud and the tractor wheel may have broken his leg. Please come as quickly as possible."

Now everyone would know of his Jason's stupidity! Some of life's lessons are learned only through our struggles which can be humbling, to say the least. But what happened next taught Jason an even bigger lesson. Having ended his call and hearing the sirens in the distance, Dancer made his way around through

the mud and when he reached Jason, he plopped himself down in the mud next to him, making sure that he knew that he wasn't alone as they waited together for help to arrive.

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It is often easy to forget that Jesus was just as much human as he was God. He came to earth to walk in a human body, to do human things, to experience what it means to be human. We tend to think that Jesus was a perfect child who never caused his parents any grief. But in order to fulfill his purpose on Earth, he had to experience the full range of what it means to be human. I'm not talking about sin here. I am talking about all the little things that we all did as children enabling us to learn how to survive and thrive.

Kids will be kids. Some will listen to their parents better than others. But every child has to struggle through the process of learning. And sometimes those lessons can be painful. Most children touch a hot stove at some point. Some will stick a paperclip into a light socket. Some will hurt themselves doing things that they were told not to do. I'm not sure that it can be considered an act of intentional disobedience, but more of a "Mom told me not to do this, but I really don't believe it will hurt me. So, I am going to try it myself." "Dad told me that

doing something this way is the smart way to do it, but I think I can do it differently and save some time.” It’s a matter of testing boundaries and learning trust. Experience is often the best teacher. After all, you only have to touch that hot stove once to learn that it isn’t a very smart thing to do.

In many ways, Jesus had it tougher. He had two fathers trying to teach him the lessons of life. And yes, as parents, it can be extremely difficult watching our children struggle, but we know that sometimes that struggle is necessary in order for them to learn valuable lessons. Take studying for example. Parents may explain to their children about learning good study habits while teaching them that those habits are going to help them succeed. But there are times when parents need to let go so that the child can learn from experience that studying helps them to do well in school and lack of studying has undesired consequences.

As Christians, we want to believe that Jesus didn’t have to go through any of those kinds of things. After all, he is perfect, isn’t he? God the father could have protected his from all disparaging childhood experiences. He could have made it so Jesus never stubbed his toe, never got lost, never fell out of tree, never got bullied, never experienced pain or disappointment, never found himself hungry or thirsty. But wouldn’t that have been self-defeating. Jesus had to know what it was like to live a human existence, where pain and struggle was an important part of growing up. He did not live a charmed life. He could have been born to rich parents and never have seen any of his needs go unmet. But wouldn’t that have been living an unhuman life rather than a human one? How

could Jesus sacrifice his life for all of humankind if he didn't understand what it meant to be human? How could Jesus talk to us about living an eternal life without understand what it means to survive from day to day as a body like ours?

We want Jesus to be divine so much that we refuse to let ourselves think of him as also human, struggling with all the human frailties that we experience ourselves. We want to hold the child Jesus to such a perfect standard that we don't allow him to be a child.

The second chapter of Luke tells us the familiar story of when Jesus was twelve and went to Jerusalem with his parents for Passover. But on the way back, Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus isn't with them, and they go to look for him. When they find him in the temple listening and asking questions, he says, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" We tend to stop reading when he says this. But verse 53 says this, "Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them." I won't say that this implies that Jesus was a disobedient child. But this was a learning moment for him. He was learning about how his actions affected other people. Jesus did not realize how worried his parents had become when he did this, but that obedience to his parents was important. That in his desire to spend time in the temple, learning from his elders, he had brought about anxiety and worry to his parents.

The simple fact is that Jesus needed to learn what it means to be human just like the rest of us. To deny his humanity and the struggle that goes with it is

to deny his desire, and ultimately his ability, to understand us and why he would give his life for us mere mortals.

Even satan recognized the human side of Jesus as he brings the temptations in the wilderness, pushing Jesus to deny his humanity and embrace only his divinity. He tells Jesus that he doesn't need to suffer human temptations because even he, the master of sin, can recognize that Jesus is the son of God, and as such can avoid all the temptations just by calling on his Father and his angels. But Jesus, understanding what satan is trying to accomplish, faces the trials without sacrificing his humanity.

8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered

For Jesus, the learning process was a burnishing process that allowed him to become perfect, to become what he needed to be: a living, unblemished, untarnished source, ready to give his life for our eternal salvation. Because of this process, God designated him to be the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Who in the world is Melchizedek? We truly have very little to go on here, though Theologians often extrapolate about who he was from various writings. The first time Melchizedek is mentioned is in Genesis 14:

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (There's a communion sermon there that we will leave for another time.) **He was priest of God Most High,**

19 and he blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

Creator of heaven and earth.

20 And praise be to God Most High,

who delivered your enemies into your hand.”

That’s it. That is the story of Melchizedek. But we know from other ancient texts that he was a revered high priest at the time of Abram. We also know that his stature was such that an entire order of priests came about because of him. When the Order of Melchizedek is mentioned in Psalms and multiple times in Hebrews, it is from the legacy of Melchizedek’s priesthood. Some preach that Melchizedek is, in fact, an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament to establish this order of priesthood. When we read in our scripture today that Jesus **“was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek,”** the writer of Hebrews is saying that the authority of Jesus as a priest comes from his place as the high priest in the Order of Melchizedek, designated by God the Father. And the only way that Jesus accomplishes this is through the learning he gains through his human conditioning. This is Jesus’ path to the priesthood through his human side, which can then engage with his divinity.

The question before us then is not “Is Jesus God?” But instead, “Is Jesus human?” How does our personal theology engage with this? Are we able to allow ourselves to see the humanity of Christ as he grows into this blended figure of God and man? What is our takeaway on this? It’s challenging. It’s difficult to engage with. All because we don’t want to acknowledge the humanity of Jesus.

It's just easier to say that he's God and move on. Humans are frail. Humans are obnoxious. Humans are unkind. Humans are proud. Humans are selfish. And Jesus isn't any of those things. But, unless Jesus overcomes all those things before beginning his ministry, he can't become the Savior of humankind.

During his time on earth, Jesus was flesh and blood. So much so, he died on that cross not because of some curse or because satan did something to cause it. God didn't kill him. Judas didn't kill him. Pontious Pilate didn't kill him. No! He allowed himself to be sacrificed on the cross. His frail human body was killed by human beings, but only because he gave up his life willingly. He could easily avoided all the pain and suffering of being a human by calling on God to save him, but he knew dying wasn't his purpose. His purpose was to be a human sacrifice for all of humankind. And in doing so he took on the sins of the world, our sins, so that we might be with him throughout eternity.

In the end, Jesus learned to be human so that we, in turn, can learn to live to be like him.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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