THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION

Hebrews 4:14–5:10

Key Verse: 5:9

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

Have you ever been really desperate? Like you were pinned in a corner with no one to turn to? Usually people rely on themselves in daily life and turn to prayer only if they’re really suffering. But in today’s passage the author says that Jesus, during the days of his life on earth, was constantly crying out to his Father God (5:7). And because this Jesus is now our great high priest in heaven, the author urges us to keep coming to God in prayer (4:16). Why is prayer so important? It’s because of all our weaknesses and temptations (4:15), because we have special times of need (4:16), and above all, because we need to learn to obey Jesus (5:9). Through prayer to Jesus our great high priest we can experience eternal salvation. Through this Bible study may God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words.

In today’s passage the author describes Jesus in very exalted terms: he’s our great high priest; he ascended into heaven; he’s without sin; he’s God’s Son and a priest forever; he’s the source of eternal salvation. But he’s also described in ways that feel so real: he was tempted in every way, just as we are; he can empathize; he cried; he suffered; he learned obedience. Why do we need to know these things about Jesus?

Read 4:14. One of the main reasons we need to know Jesus is so that we can hold firmly to the faith we profess. So many people say they believe in Jesus. But actually their faith isn’t really a part of their daily lives. As they confront life’s problems, they try to handle it on their own, or they complain, or they give up.

But if we profess to believe in Jesus, we need to hold firmly to that faith. The author has already told us to “hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory,” and to “hold our original conviction firmly to the very end” (3:6,14). Now he urges us to “hold firmly to the faith we profess.” In Greek the expression “hold firmly” means literally to “seize” or “arrest.” We need to grab onto our faith in Jesus at every step of our daily lives.

Why? Because Jesus is “our great high priest who has ascended into heaven,” and because he’s “the Son of God.” It means Jesus won the victory over everything, including death. Jesus is above all. Jesus is alive in heaven now. Most of all, Jesus is truly our great high priest. In chapters 1 and 2 the author tells us how Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He says in 2:17: “For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.” Now, in 4:14–10:18, he’s going to expound fully on what kind of high priest Jesus is. Today’s passage shows us how Jesus is both compassionate and our role model.

But if we’re honest, most of us don’t think we really need a high priest. What’s a high priest for, anyway? We may think only of his robes, his fancy words, and that he thinks he’s special and above everybody else. But mainly a high priest is there as a mediator between us and God. Why do we need that mediator? Fundamentally it’s because God is holy and we are sinful. Without a mediator, God’s not even going to listen to us. But through the mediator we can talk. Through the mediator our relationship can be restored. Through the mediator we can gain God’s help and we can even know God better. We don’t need any human mediator between us and God, but we do need Jesus. God himself has provided Jesus to be our great high priest.

Why is he so great? Read 4:15. Jesus is so great because he was tempted in every way, just as we are. 2:18 says, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Because he was tempted, he can understand and empathize with all our weaknesses. An intolerant high priest would just tell us, “Overcome!” But our empathetic high priest is patient with us, shows mercy to us, and can actually help us.

Also, verse 15 tells us that Jesus is so great because though he was tempted in every way, he did not sin. If he *did* give in to temptation and commit sin, he wouldn’t be able to help us. But because he resisted every temptation, he can help us resist, too. 7:26 says, “Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.” Sinless Jesus can really help us.

So what should we do? Read 4:16. The operative word here is “confidence.” In Greek it means to speak frankly and honestly. Sometimes we’re afraid to speak our mind to others, worried that they’ll get mad or hurt. But it’s so nice when we can be totally honest. God wants that same relationship with us. But why would we be afraid to speak honestly with God? Because we think he’s so great, so powerful, so holy, he’ll judge us or be mad at us for what we have in our hearts or what we’re struggling with. But through faith in Jesus our great high priest we can approach God’s throne of grace with confidence.

This is a very important teaching in the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews repeatedly tells us to draw near to God (7:19; 10:1,22) or to come to God (7:25; 11:6; 12:22,23). But we’re sinners. How can we do that? 10:19–21 says, “Therefore, brothers and sisters, 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…” Through Jesus God is inviting us all to really draw near to him, to really come to him. The only thing keeping is away is our own unbelief.

What happens when we come to God’s throne of grace honestly, through Jesus? It says we “receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Have you ever gone to somebody to speak your mind and share your heart, only to leave feeling like nothing changed, like it was totally futile? But when we approach God’s throne of grace honestly, through Jesus, we actually receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. In other words, it works! If we can find God’s mercy and grace by coming to him honestly through Jesus, no matter what we’re going through, why don’t we take advantage of it more often?

To help us, the author reviews the high priesthood in the Old Testament. Look at 5:1–6. A high priest was appointed to represent the people, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He could deal gently with his people who were ignorant and going astray because he himself was subject to weakness. In fact, he had to make offerings for his own sins and then for the sins of the people, to remind him that he was the same as them. And nobody could pursue the high priesthood out of their own ambition for self-glory; God had to appoint them. The author says our great high priest Jesus is the same in many ways. He represents us to God. He deals gently with us when we are ignorant and going astray. Most of all, he was appointed our great high priest by God himself (5,6).

But then he goes on to describe how Jesus is so different from high priests in the Old Testament. Read 5:7. Jesus didn’t just offer prayers at the temple once in a while; all throughout his days on earth it says “he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears.” It’s the most vivid description of Jesus’ prayer life in the Bible. When’s the last time you cried when you prayed? Jesus cried often in prayer. Why was he crying? Maybe it was because he was being tempted. Maybe it was because he was brokenhearted for people who were so wounded and lost. Maybe it was because he really wanted to please and obey God. Sometimes prayer can seem so boring. Many people think they have to recite a perfect kind of prayer in order for God to hear and answer. But Jesus’ prayer life seems so raw and so real. He brought his heart and all his emotions to God. Why does the author tell us this? He’s emphasizing again how much Jesus can understand all our struggles. But he’s also showing us how our prayer life should be when we say we believe in Jesus. We tend to want to share with people, but really we should be pouring out our hearts to God in prayer.

Look at 5:7 again. It says “he was heard because of his reverent submission.” Emotion alone was not what moved God’s heart; what moved him was Jesus’ reverent submission. “Reverent” means he had deep and awesome respect for God; “submission” means the point of all his struggle in prayer was to obey God. Some people think prayer is a means to get God to do what *they* want. But actually prayer is the way to get *us* to do what *God* wants. The author tells us how Jesus’ prayer was heard because he wants our prayers to be heard, too. How can our prayers really be *heard*? God hears our prayers through our faith in Jesus, but especially the faith that seeks to revere and obey him like our Lord Jesus did. But how much do we pray to really obey God? We can’t obey God with our human strength or will, but we should pray and ask God to help us obey him through faith in our Lord Jesus.

Read 5:8. This is an amazing statement about Jesus. Though he was the Son of God, he humbled himself to learn obedience. He let go of all his privileges as God’s Son and made himself vulnerable to real suffering. What did he suffer? Jesus suffered many things, the Bible says. Throughout his life he was “despised and rejected, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” (Isa53:3a). But mainly the obedient suffering mentioned here refers to his death on a cross (Php2:8). Jesus our great high priest suffered more than we can imagine when he was crucified. It wasn’t just physical pain, shame and humiliation; he even suffered separation from his Father God in order to bear our sins and take them away from us (Mt27:46). “‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed’” (1Pe2:24; Isa53:5).

What was the point of it all? Read 5:9. “…and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” What does it mean that he was “made perfect”? God made him perfect through what he suffered on the cross (2:10). In fact, he became “perfect forever” (7:28). Not only was he made perfect, but also through his suffering on the cross, he made us perfect. Hebrews 10:14 says, “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (cf. 11:40; 12:23). Why was Jesus made perfect? It says, “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (9b). Jesus our great high priest is the only source of eternal salvation (cf. Ac4:12). We can’t ever save ourselves, but Jesus can save us. He can save us from all our sins, from death and from God’s judgment through his death on the cross. There’s only one condition: it says “for all who obey him.” In Hebrews, faith and obedience are equated (4:2; 5:8,9; 11:8). If we really believe, we’ll express our faith through obeying Jesus (cf. Ro1:5; Jas2:17).

Why is the author telling us this? He’s emphasizing how we need to imitate our Lord Jesus. As our Lord Jesus suffered so much in order to obey God, we need to learn to obey our Lord Jesus. As he struggled in prayer to submit himself to the Father’s will, no matter what the suffering, we need to struggle in prayer not to just get what we want, but to really learn to obey Jesus in our daily lives.

Read 5:9 again. May God helps experience his eternal salvation in Jesus our great high priest. May God inspire us to come to him in prayer, learn his compassion for those who are struggling, and learn how to obey him practically.