



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 28th October 2018

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews 5:7-11

Subject: Part 12,

who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸ though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," ¹¹ of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The Holy Spirit continues in these verses, to bring before us our Saviour and Great High Priest, The Lord Jesus Christ. And what we have already looked at is amazing, in that, Christ, who has every right to be exalted did not exalt Himself. Here is the co-Creator and Sustainer of all creation, in human flesh, subjecting Himself even to death, the death of the Cross.

As we look at verse seven, the words of Jesus comes to mind from Matthew 26:45

"then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners".

Mark captures the seen exactly in his gospel Mark 14:35.

"He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him"

This "hour" of which we read in these verses and else were in the Bible has to do with his redemptive work, which was the purpose of His incarnation. Others examples include John 2

verse 4 - when Jesus said to his mother at the wedding feast, *“Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.”* or in John 17 verse 1 when Jesus’s hour had come – *“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,”*

Verse 7 gives us the insight to this “moment in time”, the “hour” which is referenced to what took place in the redemptive hours. We continue to see the priestly function in the words “*offered up*”. These verses in reality tell us that Christ Jesus had successfully executed the priestly office.

Verse 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 for His godly fear.”

Christ's flesh cited here, means the human nature which Jesus took to Himself in the incarnation. Hebrews 2:14 and Hebrews 4:15 have already pointed to the true humanity of Jesus who is our high priest, assuring us of His fellow humanity and therefore of His empathetic feeling and compassion towards us and His sympathetic understanding of our human weakness and condition.

The days of His flesh designate the period when "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:22,24; 1 Peter 4:1). Throughout this time on earth it was the custom of the incarnate Son to maintain fellowship with the Father and to express His dependence on Him by means of prayer and supplication, as we see this example in Mark 1:35 –

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

Or Luke 6:12

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

The prayers and supplications mentioned here in verse 7, however, belong to a particular occasion rather than to the general practice of Christ, as they were offered up by Him with “loud cries and tears”, that is, in a situation of extreme anguish.

The occasion which we are reading about in verse 7, is beyond doubt that of Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He faced the awful reality of the cross before Him. Remember, Luke the doctor in Luke 22 verse 44 describes a rare but very real medical phenomenon called *Hemato**hidrosis*, that Jesus suffer in this hour, such was His anguish, He sweated great drops of blood. Jesus sensed the overwhelming horror of the ordeal that lay before Him and besought the Father that, if possible, this cup might be removed from Him (Mark 14:32).

Gethsemane paints for us the intense concentration of the human anguish of the incarnate Son. Yet, He never failed to be moved to compassion in the presence of human need and affliction, remember that he healed the soldier's ear even at His arrest (Matthew 26). We see this characteristic in other parts of the Gospels, for example; His weeping at the tomb of Lazarus which demonstrated the depth of sympathy He has for the individual as well as the sorrows of this world (John 11:33); He cried and was saddened by the blind folly of the people's apathy, for whom He had come to deliver, - Matthew 23:37 & Luke 13:34

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”

It is essential to try and understand the reason for this extreme anguish, for it was something infinitely more than the fear of physical suffering and physical death. Surely, to suffer and die unjustly in ignominy (meaning humiliation, dishonour, embarrassment, shame) is an experience from which any human naturally would recoil from, because it is a bitter affront to the dignity of the person. Consider Christ in Gethsemane, a situation that is completely foreign to our thinking, miles from our human understanding, incomprehensible to our reason, an affront to our feelings, we shudder from considering the implications that was our Saviour's portion in redeeming our souls.

The Gospel writers bear testimony of the time leading up to this particular hour. Jesus was at all times steadfast and courageous, and not least as He repeatedly informed His disciples

that a violent death awaited Him in Jerusalem (**Matthew 16:21; 17:22; 20:17; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; John 10:11,16,17; 16:32**). Christ's way, from first to last, was the way of the cross (**Mark 8:34; 10:45; Luke 9:23**). He was the Lamb of God appointed for slaughter (**John 1:29,36**). He came to die: this was the supreme purpose of the incarnation (**Hebrews 2:9,14**). The cross, therefore, was the fulfilment of His mission, and He moved onward to it with an inflexible determination.

What Jesus faced was simply not just a painful death but also the judgment of God against sin, our sin. This is the experience of the *"second death"*, hence, the terrible cry of dereliction from the cross: *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Mark 15:34). In a real but deeply mysterious manner, which no words of man can explain, the incarnate Son as He hung on the cross, endured the anguish of being separation from His Father. He took our sins, the sins of the whole world (**1 John 2:2**), upon Himself at Calvary in order that there He might bear our judgment, the Righteous for the unrighteous (**1 Peter 2:24; 3:18**). It was then, on that cross, that

"God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for our sake, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

For this reason, the second death has no power over those who by faith are one with Him because He is our Sin-Bearer. Therefore, for those of us who are found in Christ, the first death, which is the natural death, holds no terror because the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that they too will rise to everlasting life (**1 Corinthians 15:20; 2 Corinthians 4:14**). John 14 verse 19 promises us –

"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also."

John Calvin once explained the dread with which Jesus approached the cross as,

"he saw the curse of God and the necessity to wrestle with the total sum of human guilt, and with the very powers of darkness themselves."

It is clear throughout the Gospels, that the cup He had come to drain was that of His substitutionary blood-shedding on the cross (**Matthew 20:22; 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 18:11**). From the beginning there was but one cup, the cup of the cross, and but

one way, the way of the cross, with the consequence that only he who takes up his cross and follows Christ is worthy of him (**Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27**).

So let us re-read verses 8 and 9 as we move on -

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."

Suffering is a very skilled teacher. In the age we live in, suffering is often seen as a curse and not a blessing. But it is often during times of suffering, that we learn things about ourselves and about others, that can shape us in how we think and how we react. Suffering can also teach us how to be grateful and thankful, and from a spiritual viewpoint, it is often suffering that can bring us into a deeper relationship with God, if we draw near to Him. In fact, the bible tells us that it is suffering that teaches us perseverance and perseverance creates character and character produces hope (Romans 5:3). God wants us to people with character! In other words, suffering, although we do not like it, can serve a purpose, God's purpose.

Jesus had to learn certain things by suffering. He was given no exemption from hardship and pain. Even though He was God's Son, God in human flesh, He was called to suffer as prophesied in Isaiah 53. He learned the full meaning of the cost of obedience, all the way to death, from the things which He suffered, and God therefore affirmed Him as a perfect High Priest.

So why did Jesus have learn obedience? Here we are looking at the humanity of Christ and as such, He sets for us the perfect example. We know from our own experience that obedience to God is not natural in any shape or form. We have to learn it, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in compliance to the Word of God. Hence why in the Garden of Gethsemane with see the theanthropic aspects of Jesus – The Son of Man and God the Son.

Jesus is the perfect kind of high priest we need, one who knows and understands what we are going through yet all the same has set for us the perfect example to follow. When we go to the Lord in prayer and fall on our knees before Him and say, "God, this problem, this loss, this pain is breaking my heart" how wonderful to feel His arms around us and to sense in our hearts that He is saying, "I know, I know".

In His suffering and death, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, therefore, the only source of eternal salvation. Jesus went through everything He had to go through, and accomplished all He needed to, so He could be such a perfect High Priest. He was not, of course, made perfect in the sense of having His nature improved. He was eternally perfect in righteousness, holiness, wisdom, knowledge, truth, power, and in every other virtue and capability. Neither His nature nor His person changed but for *us*, he accomplished these things, so that we could have the perfect example to follow. What perfect Love!!

All the priests, of all time, could not provide eternal salvation. They could only provide momentary forgiveness. But by one act, one offering, one sacrifice, Jesus Christ perfected forever those who are His. The perfect High Priest makes perfect those who accept His perfect sacrifice, and those who obey Him, He reconciles them to God.

The obedience mentioned in verse 9 of our text, is not in relation to obeying commandments, laws, rules, and regulations. It is "the obedience of faith" which Romans 1 verses 5 and 6 explain –

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

God wants us to obey Him by firstly believing in Christ and secondly following his words. True obedience, just as true works, is first of all true believing.

"This is the work of God," Jesus said, "that you believe in Him whom He has sent"
(John 6:29)

Trust in Jesus Christ is the work of faith and the obedience of faith.

Sadly and tragically, all people do not believe in their hearts, they may have acknowledged it verbally and even mentally but not with their whole heart and soul. Whoever does not believe does not truly obey, no matter how moral, well-meaning, religious, and sincere they believe they are. In both letters to the Thessalonians, Paul spoke of the only two responses to the gospel. In the second letter he told the Thessalonians of God's retribution on those who "*do not know God*" and who "*do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*" (1:8). In the first letter, by contrast, he praises the missionary work of the faithful Thessalonian Christians in Macedonia and Achaia(1:8). Their obedience in the faith brought others to obedience to the faith, and to the gift of eternal salvation.

Now we come to verse 10, which I won't go into right now because when we get to chapter 7, it will come up before us. So, I'll move on to verse 11.

Verses 11

“of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”

Let's remind ourselves firstly that the book of Hebrews is written to Jews that were mostly on the fringe between Judaism and Christianity, the unsaved Jew in Judaism and the redeemed Jew in Christianity. As we have already noted, interspersed throughout Hebrews are several warnings to the intellectually convinced Jews who were on the edge of decision but had not yet come to faith in Christ. Some may have made a shallow profession of faith but not actually believed. They were close, yet so far away. These warnings could also function in the context of encouragement and counsel to those Jews who had trusted Christ but were being tempted to turn back into Judaism because of doubts, criticism, and, for some, even persecution. They are told of the dangers of not claiming the blessing of the New Covenant, apart from which they cannot have eternal life.

Goodness knows we have so many people in churches and even whole churches like this, near and yet so far away, because the truth is not being preached. Many make professions and wonder why their lives continue to be a mess so they give up on Christianity, believing it did not work for them. The professions they made, were only that, professions; the formulated words of salvation, you know the “say these words after me and you're in?!” which we know in Scripture, do not exist. Unfortunately, there is no explanation of the true gospel or discipleship, no encouragement or spiritual feeding for these people or in these churches.

The first warning in Hebrews chapter 2:1-4, was about their neglecting the gospel, and the second was in chapter 3:7-19 which was about hardening their hearts to it. Verse 11 leads into the third warning of this book concerning the dull of hearing.

There are many exhortations in the New Testament for immature Christians to grow up. Throughout the history of the church there has been need for such counsel, especially for today I'm sure you would agree, but I don't think that is what is given here. He is saying to hesitant Jews still hanging on to Judaism, "Come on to completeness, to maturity in the New

Covenant". The warning and the appeal to win them for Christ as before, is evangelistic. The maturity being called for is not that of a Christian's growing in the faith, but of an unbeliever's coming into the faith and into the full grown, mature truths and blessings of the New Covenant. It is the same maturity or perfection as in Hebrews 10:1 and 14, which can only refer to salvation, and not to Christian growth.

The Old Covenant was the spiritual alphabet. The Old Covenant was the baby talk, the letters and the sounds of a child's first vocabulary. You do not use an encyclopaedia to start teaching a child to read. God's revelation to man progressed in a similar way. The Old Testament was His elementary foundational teaching. It began with "pictures", or shadows of the future. God was saying, in effect, "This is a feast you are to celebrate. This is a sacrifice you must make. These are the clothes a high priest should wear, and this is a ceremonial washing that is required for certain occasions." Each had its own purpose and benefit for the times for which it was given. But primarily, they were pictures of things to come, which the people were not then ready to understand. They were symbols and shadows of realities in Christ and the New Covenant (Colossians 2:17). Now that the New Covenant had come in Jesus Christ, the writer of Hebrews is saying to his fellow Jews, "Leave the pictures, the milk and the baby food of the Old Testament. Come to the fulfilled realities and the solid food of the New Testament. Leave Judaism and come to Christ."

So before they could possibly understand the significance of Jesus' priesthood being like Melchizedek's, the readers needed to get beyond their limited, immature understanding of God. A key mark of that immaturity was simply put as **dullness of hearing**, spiritual fatigue.

An example of this dullness of hearing, is that there are many children that are brought up in church. They hear the same story time in and time out of the gospel but it becomes just that, a story. Why? Because they become dull of hearing of its significance for their own lives and their own eternities. But how can we make it significance if it is not a daily reality to us! The truth has purpose and we should have passion about it.

The relation of Melchizedek and his priesthood to Christ, is rich and meaningful, and important to the flow of the book, but it cannot be understood by unbelievers, even ones who intellectually accept the gospel and know history.

"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

These borderline believers were being told that there was no use going into the deeper things of the New Covenant at that time, because they had become dull of hearing, they were no longer listening with interest.

Dull comes from the Greek word *nothros*, which is made up of two words, one meaning "no" and the other meaning "push". Literally it means "no push" or slow and sluggish. When used of a person it generally means intellectually numb or weak. In the context of this passage, it indicates to spiritual dullness.

When a person is spiritually dull, he is difficult to teach. These Jews had been lulled into sleep because of neglect and hardness of heart. They would have to awaken and become alert if they were to appreciate the truth, its significance, and the necessity of the New Covenant. They could not truly understand the gospel until they put their trust in the Bearer of the gospel. To be able to see its importance, they had to spiritually "wake up and pay attention."

These lethargic unbelievers have many counterparts today. People hear the gospel and are stirred and excited. Spiritual understanding appears to begin, but the more they hear it without accepting it, the more spiritually sluggish they become. They neglect to act on the truth they know and become more and more hardened to it, often while claiming to admire and respect it. They become more and more insulated from spiritual truth and understanding, and from spiritual life itself.

Even though this passage is not addressed to believers, the same principle applies. When we do not trust and act on any part of God's truth that we know, we become hardened to it and less and less likely to benefit from it. Or when we avoid delving into the deeper parts of God's Word, being satisfied with the "basics," we insulate ourselves from the Holy Spirit to that extent. From a somewhat different perspective, a teacher or preacher can suffer spiritually when he does not bother to teach and preach the deeper, and sometimes harder, truths of Scripture—or is afraid to do so. The more he resists or neglects to teach his congregation, the less these truths will mean to him. Paul was able to say that he did not fail to declare the whole counsel, or purpose, of God (Acts 20:27). He would not skip over or neglect any part of

God's Word. No faithful servant of God will accommodate his teaching for the dull and lazy Christian.

The implication of verse 11 is that those who were dull of hearing had once been alert and interested, perhaps even eager, to learn more of the gospel. They did not start out dull; they became that way gradually. These were doubtlessly among the ones who had "once been enlightened" and had "tasted of the heavenly gift" (6:4). At one time they had been stirred and moved and open. They were once on the brink of salvation. By now, however, they had sunk into a rather settled state of spiritual stupor.

No doubt as you have listened and read down the verses, there are many lessons not only for the people of that day or in the church today, but even for ourselves. Acknowledging perhaps defects in our own mind and heart. We need to be prepared to own up to our spiritual neglect and perhaps, are hearts dulling from time to time. We need to be honest before God and allow the Holy Spirit to move in our hearts if we really want true revival in our soul. Remember 2 Chronicles 7:14 –

if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

It can be all too easy to point the finger at another but we need to take stock of our own souls.

If we reflect through the verses we have examined today, we see –

Verse 7 – The Man and our Intercessor

Verse 8 – The Man and our Example

Verse 9 – The Messiah and our Saviour

Verse 10 – The Messiah and our High Priest

And finally, Verse 11 – Mankind and our problems.

May God bless his Word to our hearts.

Amen.