

Series: "Hebrews: the Supremacy of Christ"



Christ: Made Perfect Through Suffering

Why Did Jesus Taste Death Through Suffering ?

Hebrews 2:9-13 (ESV)

⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying,

"I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

¹³ And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Behold, I and the children God has given me."

Introduction

Have you done anything dangerous lately? Have you driven down I-95 at 90mph under a full moon and then turned off your headlights? Has anyone ever called you dangerous? Reading the news can be dangerous. But even more dangerous is reading the comments attached to them. Take these comments for example, which I came across this week.

...this radical Christian group. This is an organized group that opposes the rights of homosexuals to marry. Opposes sex between adults outside of proper Christian marriage. These are dangerous people with backward philosophy... dangerous ideas.

Believing the Bible is Dangerous

In the opinion of this commenter, if you hold to historic, orthodox Christian teaching—which Christians have held for over 2,000 years—that God designed marriage to be the life-long union between one man and one woman and that only within that covenant relationship between husband and wife has God blessed sexual union, then you are a "radical" Christian—by which this person means something closer to "extremist," and a "dangerous person" who has "dangerous ideas." If you affirm these biblical truths about marriage and sex, then someone thinks you're dangerous.

I see this kind of thinking more and more frequently. For many years Christian cultural commentators lamented that we had moved from being a largely Christian society to a post-Christian society. However, it appears to me that we either have moved or are in the process of moving *from being a post-Christian society to be an anti-Christian society*. When you see more and more people claiming that if you believe what the Bible teaches, then you are "dangerous," then apparently Christian ethics and theology are not to be merely tolerated, but they should be opposed, for surely one should oppose "dangerous people with dangerous ideas."

Failing to Believe the Bible is Dangerous

Our contemporary culture would say that believing the Bible is dangerous. However, the author of Hebrews would say something completely different. He is crying out that ***failing to believe the Bible teaches about Jesus is dangerous—eternally dangerous***. If anyone is failing to pay attention to this great salvation that God has provided through Jesus, then that person is standing on spiritually dangerous ground and should they die in that disbelief, they would be eternally condemned and lost.

Verse 9 points to two reasons for this. First, because God the Father has handed over to Jesus all authority¹ and dominion. This is evident from the fact the Jesus has been ***crowned with glory and honor***. Jesus has been invited to sit down next to God on his throne.² The fact that Jesus is seated on the throne demonstrates that he now will be the one through whom God will judge the world.³ God has handed over all judgment to the Son.⁴

The second reason mentioned for why it would be dangerous to neglect this great salvation is because this ***Jesus is the one who died to bring life, salvation, and freedom to all who would trust in him***. Jesus stands as a kind of bridge between God and man. If you neglect the only bridge that crosses from sinful humanity to holy divinity, then you have only to walk off a cliff and fall to your death.

Death is one enemy that humanity has not been able to overcome. We have not been able to bring death into subjection under our feet. We have tamed nearly every animal, climbed the highest peaks, and explored the deepest parts of the ocean, but death we haven't tamed. Yet this is exactly what Jesus did. He conquered death.

Jesus Tasted Death

Jesus tasted death for us. He entered death and then robbed it of its power to keep him dead. All humans must die, because all humans have sinned. However, you don't have to stay dead. Jesus brings the dream of resurrection into reality. *Jesus has brought death into subjection under his feet*. Jesus is the only man to have done this. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that is intended in Psalm 8, which is quoted in Hebrews 2:6-8. Those verses explain that Jesus has fulfilled everything in which Adam failed. Jesus is the second Adam. Jesus is God undoing the curse of death that fell on humanity because of sin. Jesus succeeded where Adam failed. Jesus is the beginning of the end of an old kingdom and he is the dawning of a new kingdom. This is why it is spiritually dangerous to neglect such a great salvation.

Jesus Tasted Death that Included Suffering

Jesus achieved this great salvation through death, but not just death, but a ***death that included suffering***. This is the idea that dominates the mind of the author through the end of chapter two. The over arching question is not "why did Jesus have to die?" but rather, "Why did Jesus have to suffer and then die?" Why couldn't he have just died? Why did his dying have to include suffering? If "the wages of sin is death," then dying would seem to satisfy the demands of properly atoning for sin. Then why was it necessary for suffering to accompany the dying? If Jesus was to be our Savior, our Passover Lamb that shielded us from the destroying

¹ Mt. 28:20.

² Heb. 1:3.

³ Acts 17:31.

⁴ Jn. 5:22.

death angel, then why not simply slit his throat like they did to the Passover Lambs and be done with it quickly?

Why the suffering?

Hebrews 2:10 (ESV)

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Why on earth was it **fitting** for the founder of our salvation to endure suffering before his death? Isn't death enough?

Why was there a betrayal right in the middle of a meaningful feast? Why the betrayal of one of his closest friends? Why was there hours of agonizing prayer during which blood vessels burst in his head, which no doubt resulted in an dizzying migraine that probably did not abate until he died? Why were his disciples sleeping when he pleaded with them to pray with him?

Why did all of them run from him when he needed them most? Why was he arrested by an armed mob as if he was an international terrorist when everyone knew he was the most peaceful person on the planet? Why the hours of illegal questioning throughout the night? Why the deprivation of sleep? Why the deprivation of food and water? Why all the mockery? Why all the lies and twisting the truth of his teaching? Why the repetition of the same deceptive questions?

Why the beating and the bruising? Why did they spit on him? Why did they pluck out his beard? Why the torturous crown of thorns upon a man who truly is the king of the universe? Why the blindfolding and surprise blows to the face from unseen fists? Why did he have to endure the belittling scorn of brutal soldiers?

Why at the height of his fame did the crowds suddenly turn on him and demand his death? Why was he subjected to the venomous jealousy of the religious leaders? Why did he three times have to hear Peter's words, "I swear to God I don't know him!"? Why the emotional pain? Why the agony of being utterly alone with absolutely no one to defend him? Why did his faithful Father turn his face away?

Why was he stripped naked in front of a crowd? Why the embarrassment? Why did his own people disown him? Why after shaking the city walls with thunderous applause did they only one week later shake those same walls with shouts of "Crucify him!"?

Why the flogging? Why the brutal, bloody, flesh-ripping flogging? Why did the abrasive splintering of the heavy wooden beam upon a bruised and bloodied back bouncing against a scalp pierced with thorns and a mind-numbing migraine? Why spikes driven through his feet and hands? Why lung-burning stretching of arms spread wide? Why did the only means of

soothing the burning in his lungs require searing pain in his pierced feet? Why a public death?

Why the suffering? Why was that “fitting?” Why was a quick death insufficient? Why was it fitting for Jesus to die that kind of death? The author of Hebrews offers four reasons for why Jesus endured “*the suffering of death.*”

1) His Suffering Demonstrates God’s Grace

The first reason is because it is a demonstration of God’s grace.

Hebrews 2:9 (ESV)

*But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that **by the grace of God** he might taste death for everyone.*

Manifesting the grace of God is one of the reasons that Jesus suffered. He was not obligated to endure that suffering. Jesus tasted suffering and death as a display of the grace of God. Something gracious was unfolding in his suffering. Death is required only by those who sin. Jesus never sinned, therefore suffering and dying was not required.

Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,

The nature of God is free from sin. Jesus’ radiance shines with great glory because it is sinless.

Hebrews 1:9 (ESV)

You loved righteousness and hated wickedness;

Jesus passionately loves righteousness, therefore he also passionately hates sin.

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

For 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.

Jesus is completely without sin. He always has been and he always will be.

Hebrews 7:26 (ESV)

For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Jesus tasted the depths of human suffering by submitting himself to the hateful, jealous, unkind, treacherous, brutality of sinful men as an act of grace. He already had an A in the class.

He did not have to take the final exam of suffering. Yet he did it as a manifestation of God's grace towards us.

2) It Was Fitting for the Founder to Suffer

The second reason Jesus had to suffer was because it was **fitting**. In other words, it was **right** for God to save us in this way. It was fitting, that is it fit well into God's redemptive plan.

Hebrews 2:10 (ESV)

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

He, For Whom & By Whom All Things Exist

First, notice that God is the one who is the primary actor. *"For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist..."* The "he" is God the Father. God is **"he, for whom and by whom all things exist."** All things came into existence *for* God and *by* his power they remain in existence. God is the one who has initiated salvation. Saving us is his idea.

He Is Bringing Many Sons to Glory

Second, notice what God is doing. He is *"bringing many sons to glory."* This is a sweet summary of salvation. God is bringing many children home to glory. He is going out into a broken world and through God the Son, he is bring many people to home to himself in his glorious kingdom. He is like a great, gracious king who loves his subjects so much that he sends out his only Son to go out into the world and gather up his people and bring them home to live with him in his glorious castle. God is bringing many sons and daughters home to be with him in glory.

The Founder of Salvation

Third, notice that Jesus is referred to as the *founder of salvation*. The Greek word is *archēgos* (ἀρχηγός). It means "one who causes something to begin—'initiator, founder, originator.'"⁵ Some translations have "captain" (KJV), "author" (NASB), or "pioneer" (NIV). Jesus caused something to begin that had not been before. He initiated something new. He pioneered a new way of getting to God, namely through him. So why would it be fitting for this Founder to suffer?

Whose More Compassionate: A Sufferer or Non-Sufferer?

Who is more compassionate, a sufferer or a non-sufferer? *People who have experienced suffering tend to be more compassionate towards those who are suffering than do those who have never suffered.*

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 654.

Dad and Mom

My dad was almost never sick (up until the final years of his life). I can only ever remember him having a cold two or three times and even then the cold never stopped him. He never missed a day of work. Ever.⁶ He pressed on through all kinds of suffering and it never appeared that physical infirmity hindered him in any way. However, my mother did have a few surgeries which required hospital stays so she better understood suffering and tended to be more compassionate than my father.

So imagine this scene. I'm about 12 or 13. It's 6:15 a.m. I awake with a fever and sore throat. I go softly and quietly to mom. She touches my forehead. "Hmm. Fever." She gets a little flashlight and shines it in my mouth. "Eww. White spots," she says. "Go back to bed and I'll go get some medicine, call the doctor, then come in with a cool rag and sit with you." I obey.

Fifteen minutes later, as I'm just settling back in and getting warm and comfortable again, the light in my room comes on with such brilliance that my retinas are nearly seared. Almost simultaneous with the blinding light is a very firm, but familiar voice, "It's 6:30. Get up." I mumble, "I can't. Strep throat." The reply comes back, "So? Take an aspirin, gargle some salt water, and get up or you'll miss the bus." I murmur hoarsely, "I have a fever." A loving reply comes back, "Wear a jacket." Mom then brushes past him with a bottle of medicine, warm cloths, salt water, and a small bell for me to ring in case I need her.

So when I'm suffering, to whom would most quickly go, mom or dad? Mom understands suffering. Dad? Not so much. Mom is compassionate when I'm suffering. Dad, not so much.

To Whom Do You Go When Suffering?

When you're suffering, to whom do you go? To someone who has experienced the same suffering or someone who has not?

When you come home from school or work after a close friend or colleague has betrayed you, will you be more easily able to pray to Jesus knowing that he too was betrayed? When you come home from school after having been mercilessly mocked all day, will you not more easily pray to Jesus knowing that he too was mocked? When you come home from work after being demoted, will you not more easily pray to Jesus knowing that he went, within seven days, from being praised by Jerusalem to being pierced by it?

When you come home after refusing to lie for your boss and being fired for it, will you not more easily pray to Jesus as you remember him speaking nothing but the truth and being crucified for it? When you collapse into your chair after losing your job, or watching your investment evaporate, will it not help you to more easily pray knowing that Jesus "had no where to lay his head?" Or when you get the news that you have a disease, will you not be

⁶ At least not that I can remember.

able to more easily pray knowing that the Author of your salvation knew exactly what it was like to have his flesh torn apart?

This is why it is fitting for the Author of salvation to suffer. He suffered so that those whom he is taking to glory could more easily look to him and keep their faith because the Founder of their salvation was not exempt from the suffering of this world. It was fitting for Jesus to suffer so that those who similarly suffer could run to him and find grace to help in their seasons of suffering.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)

15 For 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. 16 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.

It was fitting for the Founder to suffer because those he saves also suffer. Because Jesus suffered he is able to sympathize with us as we suffer and struggle with various weaknesses. When we suffer under temptation, we can run to him for grace, because he understands the allurements of every temptation and yet he never gave in. Therefore, he can help us avoid sin and endure temptation. If we draw near to him as we are being tempted and as we are suffering, then he has the power, resources, and the grace to give us what we need to withstand the temptation without giving in to sin. *Draw near to him and he will give you the grace to help in your time of need.*

Made Perfect Through Suffering

This ability makes Jesus the perfect savior.

Hebrews 2:10 (ESV)

*For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation **perfect through suffering**.*

The fact that Jesus is **made perfect through suffering** does not mean that he was *imperfect* and suddenly *became perfect* or that he was previously sinful and suddenly through suffering he became sinless. As we have already seen, the author of Hebrews clearly and repeatedly affirms that Jesus never sinned. He also affirms that Jesus is the “exact imprint of God’s divine nature” and “radiance of God’s glory.”⁷ He is perfect already. He is one with God and all God’s angels worship him.⁸ He reigns the world with perfect power. The heavens are the work of **his** hands. His years never come to an end and since he never changes, therefore he is perfect.⁹

⁷ Heb. 1:3.

⁸ Heb. 1:6; cf. 42:8.

⁹ Heb. 1:12.

Think of this as the author saying, *Jesus became the perfect kind of savior through suffering.* He is the perfect kind of savior because he suffered and thus he is able to help those who are suffering.

Furthermore, he endured *through* suffering and never sinned. He was perfect before he suffered and died, but now that he has tasted suffering and death and yet he still remains sinless, he has shown us that, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, suffering and death have been defeated and can be defeated. Jesus went from being perfect without having suffered and died to remaining perfect through suffering and death. Prior to his suffering and death he possessed an *untested* perfection, but now, being on the other side of suffering and death, he possesses a *tested* perfection. Jesus is a perfect savior in every way.

3) Jesus Suffered Because His Family Suffered

Lastly, the third reason it was fitting for Jesus to suffer is because his family suffered. Those whom Jesus came to save are his family, his own brothers and sisters and he chose to suffer along with them. We first get a hint of this in verse 10.

Hebrews 2:10 (ESV)

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

However this becomes clearer in 11,12, and 13. Look at the first half of verse 11.

Hebrews 2:11 (ESV)

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.

"He who sanctifies" is Jesus and **"those who are sanctified"** are the **"many sons"** and daughters **he's bringing to glory.** It's those who are being saved. The author then points out that both Jesus and those whom Jesus saves **"all have one source."** The Greek literally states that they are **"all of one."** This points to the common ancestry of both Jesus and us, whom he will save. He truly is "one of us." The author is emphasizing the humanity of Jesus. Don't forget that Jesus is fully human. He shares a nature like ours. He experienced every desire we experience and he suffered with the temptation to twist those desires into sinful actions. But he never did. He has the same flesh and blood as we do. He is a fitting and perfect savior because he is truly and fully human and thus he can help us in all that we experience. However, he does not merely help us, but he calls us **family.**

Hebrews 2:11-12 (ESV)

*For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,
12 saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."*

¹³ "Behold, I and the *children* God has given me."

The Greek word translated "brothers" in verse 11-12 is *adelphōi*, can, depending upon the context, refer to both male and female siblings in a family. It is fitting for Jesus to suffer because his brothers and sisters suffer. It fit well into God's plan of salvation that the Son who would save them should also experience the same suffering that they experience. God truly does not show favoritism. All of his children have tasted suffering and so he himself tasted the same suffering and death that we experience.

The imagery here is that Jesus is our elder brother and we are his younger siblings. Big brothers take care of little brothers and sisters. It is biblically permissible to think of Jesus as a wise older brother to whom you can go to for advice, wisdom, and help. Jesus suffered because his family suffered. It was fitting for God the Father to perfect Jesus through suffering because all of his brothers and sisters experience suffering.

Conclusion

He is our example and role model. Just as little brothers and sisters look up to big brothers, so too should we look up to and model our lives after our big brother. And what do we see him doing? Putting his faith and trust in God.

Hebrews 2:13 (ESV)

And again, "I will put my trust in him."

The author of Hebrews is most likely quoting Isaiah 8:17. The verse in Isaiah is written at a time when Isaiah describes God as "*hiding his face from Israel,*" and yet he says, "*I will hope in God and put my trust in him.*" The author of Hebrews prophetically puts these words on the lips of Jesus, our Savior and elder brother. So hear the word of God, "Put your trust in God." No matter what your situation is, put your hope in Him. Whether you feel like God is smiling happily down on you or whether you think he is frowning on you or even hiding his face from you, put your trust in him.

The world tells you it is dangerous to trust and obey Jesus. The author of Hebrews tells you it is dangerous not to. He is gracious toward you. Jesus tasted death for you. He did this because he loved you, not because it was his duty. He suffered because it was fitting. It was fitting for Jesus suffer because we suffer. It was fitting for Jesus to die because we die. He is the Founder of our salvation. He has gone before us clearing out a trail that will lead us safely home to glory. Jesus does not call us to walk down a road that he himself has not already gone down. It was fitting for Jesus to suffer because his family suffers. He became a perfect savior through suffering. Therefore, he is perfectly worthy of all our trust and praise.