

The Work of Christ – part 2

Philippians 2:8 – page 981 in the pew Bibles

Philippians 2:8 *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Last week we began talking about the obedience of Christ in His work of redemption, and we said that there were two types of obedience that describe the work of Christ. Last week we looked at Christ's *active* obedience, which, as we said, was how Christ perfectly obeyed God's law throughout His whole life. We saw how this was absolutely vital to our justification, and that He fulfilled all righteousness as a human being. In fulfilling all righteousness, Jesus accomplished as the Last Adam, what the first Adam failed to accomplish, and we said that by faith we can now have access to Jesus' perfect righteousness.

One thing we said last week was that Jesus dying on the cross, simply by itself, would have meant that we would be forgiven of our sins, and it would have accomplished bringing us back to square one, but it wouldn't have accomplished the fulfilling of all righteousness on behalf of all of God's people, the fulfillment of the requirement to perfectly obey God's law.

But as we will see today, that's also only half the story. If Jesus came to earth and just lived a perfect life, then He would be our great example, but He wouldn't be our Savior, because it is our sin that needs to be dealt with, once and for all. And that is why His obedience in going to the cross was so important. In other words, Christ's obedience not only meant that He lived His whole life in perfect obedience to God on our behalf, but it also means that Jesus obeyed God in and through His death on the cross, as well, thus saving us from our sin. And this is what we call, in theological terms, Christ's *passive* obedience. Christ's passive obedience describes the truth that Jesus willingly submitted to the Father in going to the cross and willingly received the curse of our sin and the outpouring of God's wrath on our behalf.

This is seen in today's passage where it says that "he humbled himself by becoming obedient *to the point of death, even death on a cross.*"

We could spend a whole day, maybe even several days, exploring all that there is to know about Jesus' death on the cross. However, today we're interested in looking at Jesus' obedience, and I want us to look at four ways or reasons why Jesus' obedience in His work on the cross led to our salvation.

Point #1: Christ obeyed the Father in going to the cross submissively.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 26, and we're going to start off by looking at verse 39.

Matthew 26:36-39 ³⁶ *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray."* ³⁷ *And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.* ³⁸ *Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."* ³⁹ *And going a little farther he*

fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

Then again, in verse 42, it says:

⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

Now notice a couple of things here. First, what is the “cup” that Jesus refers to that He was distressed about? Well, it makes sense from the context and from other parts of Scripture that use this term, that the cup Jesus was referring to was the cup of the unmitigated wrath of God. Jesus knew what His mission was and He knew what He had been asked to do, and how He was going to suffer. He knew the agony and horror of what He was about to go through.

We see this fact in what He said in verse 38. He said, *“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”*

Earlier this year when I was going through my bout with kidney stones, when the doctor explained to me all that he was going to have to do and all that I would have to go through, I was pretty sorrowful, too! I wasn’t looking forward to going through that one bit!

And yet that was nothing. The pain and suffering Jesus was faced with was far beyond what any of us could have borne. This was not simply mental anguish. It was a grief, a tempest of pain that pierced His soul.

Notice that as Jesus went to pray, he separated Himself even from His inner circle. No one else could join with Him. That which was before Him was a solo task for which He was the only human being in all of human history who was qualified.

I’m certain that no prayer in human history was uttered with greater agony and intensity as this prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden that night. In Luke 22:44 we are told that as He prayed, “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” Even before the crown of thorns pierced His brow, great drops of blood fell down His cheeks as He wrestled with His sorrow over the suffering He faced.¹

From the heart of Jesus’ human nature came the words which expressed the depth of His agony. *“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”* While Jesus’ divine nature is omniscient, having no “if” in its vocabulary, this prayer was uttered from Jesus’ fully human nature. Humanly, He was staggering in the face of what was coming.

But notice Jesus’ response. *“nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”* And it’s in those words that we see the obedience of Christ. He cared more about loving His Father and doing His will than He did His own suffering.

What we get to see when we look at how Christ willingly submitted to the Father’s plan is the beautiful inter-workings of the Trinity. Although the Bible never mentions these words explicitly per se, it does give us plenty of convincing clues that there was, in the council of the Godhead,

¹ R.C. Sproul. *Matthew: St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 759-760.

before this world was even created, the agreement between all three members of the Trinity that the Father's plan was to redeem a people for Himself, and that the Son would be the one who would willingly go to earth and go through the suffering to make that happen.

1 Peter 1:18-20 *“¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you”*

Eph. 1:4 *“⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”*

Eph. 1:7-10 *“⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time”*

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were completely united in the plan to redeem sinners, and Jesus willingly submitted to His Father's plan to the end. Which also shows us another truth concerning His obedience:

Point #2: Christ obeyed the Father in going to the cross purposefully.

Look again at Matthew 26. After Jesus prayed, Judas Iscariot came along with a band of soldiers, ready to arrest Jesus. Peter took his sword and struck off the ear of one of the High Priest's servants. Look how Jesus responded:

Matthew 26:53-54 *“⁵² Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”*

According to Jesus, He had the ability to call the whole thing off at any time. All He needed to do was to call upon the Father and He would have sent Him more than 12 legions of angels. That's 60,000 angels!!! Far, far more than enough to overcome the motley crew that had been sent to arrest Him.²

But let's be clear. Although He *could* have called 12 legions of angels to rescue Him, this was never even a real option for Jesus since He was perfectly obedient to the Father. But don't miss the reason why He said that, though. He was explaining to Peter that if He wanted to escape, He could have very easily done so, but all that was happening was happening purposefully. It was fulfilling Scripture. It was all part of the Father's sovereign plan.

Time and time again throughout Matthew's gospel, we see him emphasizing how Jesus' words and actions fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. We even see Jesus consciously acting to fulfill prophecies, like when He insisted on riding a donkey into Jerusalem at His triumphal entry. Now

² Sproul, 769.

we see Him preventing Peter from taking a course of action that would have gone against Old Testament prophecies that said the Messiah must suffer and die.³

Jesus had to be arrested. Jesus had to be tried. Jesus had to go to the cross.

God had decreed it and made it known through His prophets, and those prophecies had to be fulfilled. When God in His sovereignty decrees that something will come to pass, it must come to pass. Jesus, being completely committed and surrendered to the Father's plan, was also completely committed and surrendered to obeying that plan.

Even earlier on we see this displayed in Jesus's actions.

In Luke 9:51 we read: *"⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."*

That phrase "set his face" means that Jesus was focused on carrying out His mission, and He knew His mission was in Jerusalem, on a wooden cross. His obedience was *purposeful*.

Even as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with shouts of "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday, His will was set to do His Father's will which was to go to the cross.

1 Timothy 1:15 says, *"¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"* Being obedient to His Father unto death, even death on a cross, which was what Jesus came to do.

And that's exactly what we see in our next point...

Point #3: Christ obeyed the Father in going to the cross sacrificially.

Hebrews 9:22 states explicitly that *"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."*

In order to best explain this aspect, taking a look at two Old Testament examples is helpful.

First, in Exodus 12, we see that God gives the Israelites instructions for the Passover just before leading them out of Egypt. This Passover meal focused on the preparation of a lamb, which was supposed to be without blemish. The blood from this lamb was to be applied to the door posts of each house, and when the death angel saw the blood he would pass over that house.

This Old Testament account is rich in symbolism which points to Christ and His redemptive work. 1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us, *"¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."*

And we know that John the Baptist, in John 1:29, in pointing to Jesus, cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

³ Sproul, 769-770.

But notice it had to be a lamb without blemish or spot, which symbolizes sinlessness, which is what is needed in order to be an acceptable sacrifice to God.

So it's not too difficult to see, then, why Jesus' perfect obedience to God's law was no necessary. In order for the Father to accept His sacrifice on the cross, He absolutely had to be sinless.

But what happened on the cross that was so vital to our redemption?

When we look at Leviticus chapter 16, which is about the Day of Atonement, we see that there were two goats. The first goat, the priest had to symbolically lay the sins of Israel on the goat and then slaughter it, and then sprinkle its blood on the mercy seat. This was to make satisfaction, or what the Bible calls "propitiation," for the sins of all of Israel. When God justifies His people, He does not do it by a unilateral act of forgiveness, because without propitiation, without satisfaction, without atonement, forgiveness would be a complete violation of His justice.⁴ What propitiation accomplishes, then, is the turning away of God's wrath upon a sinful humanity, and the "satisfaction" of God's justice. God's wrath is ever upon sin unless satisfaction is made.

But the book of Hebrews reminds us in chapter 10, verse 4, that the blood of bulls and goats cannot atone for anyone's sins permanently. The whole prescription of killing animals and sprinkling their blood on the mercy seat never saved anyone, because there was no inherent value in the blood of bulls and goats to effect propitiation. All of the observations and rituals in the tabernacle and later in the temple pointed beyond themselves to the future reality of Christ's blood being shed that would satisfy the demands of God's righteousness and justice.⁵

1 John 4:10 says, "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.*"

The second goat, again had to symbolically have the sins of the people laid upon it, but this goat was to be let out into the wilderness never to return. This symbolizes what is called *expiation*, which is the removal or cleansing of our sins.

Psalms 103:12 tells us, "*as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*" That is the picture of expiation.

Not only does Jesus' sacrifice turn away God's wrath, but it also removes our sins and cleanses us.

But how does all this get applied to us? So Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. What causes that to be counted to us? Again, we want to raise this diamond up to the light and turn it around and look at yet another facet of the beauty of Christ's work.

Point #4: Christ obeyed the Father in going to the cross vicariously.

⁴ R.C. Sproul. *The Work of Christ*. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2012), 148.

⁵ Ibid.

We talked last week about how Jesus, acting as our substitute, or Last Adam, accomplished what neither the first Adam, nor any other human being, could accomplish. His perfect obedience fulfilled all righteousness. I also said that there was a great exchange that happened. That's what we'll see here as we see Jesus as our vicarious sin-bearer.

2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, *“²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Galatians 3:13-14 *“¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”*

What does it mean when it says, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles...”*?

It means in order for people to be able to receive the blessing that was promised to Abraham and to his seed, which is the redemption of our souls, sin had to be punished and dealt with. And so the sinless Son of God, came to earth as a man, and went to the cross. And the curse of sin which was upon all of us, was taken by Christ. On the cross, all of the sins of all those who would ever come to Jesus throughout all of history...were transferred to Him.

I want us to turn our attention to Isaiah chapter 53 as we wrap this up this morning, because in this chapter of God's Word, we see a beautiful picture of what happened as Jesus willfully and obediently surrendered to the will of the Father on the cross.

In verse 4-6 in Isaiah 53 we see that transfer taking place, where Jesus took upon Himself all of our sins.

Isaiah 53:4-6 *“Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”*

What we're talking about this morning is called “substitutionary atonement.” That's a fancy name which communicates the idea that Jesus went to the cross as our representative, our Last Adam. In other words, he died on the cross on our behalf, or in our place. Or, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake.”

But notice what it says in the following verse of Isaiah 53, verse 7:

*⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.*

What a wonderful picture of Christ's obedient submission to the Father's sovereign plan, which called for Christ to become our substitute. He who was without sin, who did not Himself deserve punishment, who did not Himself deserve to receive the Father's wrath, who Himself did not deserve the curse of sin, bore it all for us, in our place, for our sake...and He did so willingly, out of obedience and love for His Father and out of love for us.

I'm reminded of a story about a certain man who's name is Christian, the central character in John Bunyan's classic allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Shoulders hunched, the man plods through life, straining with every step to carry the great burden on his back. It has been his night-and-day companion. Not once has he known relief from its merciless weight.

In one moving scene from the book, Christian finds the path to salvation. Up the hill he staggers until he reaches the peak. There he sees a wooden cross and, just below it, an empty grave, or sepulcher. As he nears the cross, a miracle happens. The straps binding the massive weight to his shoulders loosen, and his load tumbles away into the sepulcher's waiting mouth, never to be seen again.

A feeling of lightness comes over Christian's body, and joyous tears of relief stream down from his face. Three Shining Ones approach him. The first announces, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," the second strips away his rags and dresses him in splendid clothes; the third hands him a sealed scroll, which he is to present upon entrance to the Celestial City.

Overwhelmed by his new freedom, Christian sings:

Thus far did I come laden with my sin,
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,
Till I came hither. What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden fall off from my back?
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
Blest Cross! Blest Sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me!⁶

Once again we end where we began, with Philippians 2:8:

⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 129.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

It is in the totality of Christ's obedience, in both His life and death, that our redemption is accomplished. We have but to come to Him in faith, trusting in what He has accomplished on our behalf. We trust in His perfect obedience in His life, fulfilling all righteousness, obeying the law of God perfectly. And we trust His perfect obedience on the cross in taking our sin upon Himself, bearing our punishment and the wrath of God that was rightfully ours.

It was on that cross, with His last breath, that Jesus uttered three words that would perfectly sum up the comprehensiveness and sufficiency of His work... "It is finished!"

Would you pray with me?