

THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION



Hebrews 5:4-10

I want to hang the message this morning on three words that describe Christ in this passage: *dignity*, *eternity*, and *purity*.¹

But let me direct you to the main point. The main point of this passage (verses 4–10) is found in **verse 9**: *and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*

Christ is the source of eternal salvation—salvation from the guilt and condemnation and power of sin and from the wrath of God and the fear of death and a life of meaningless activity. And it says that all of that salvation comes from Christ. He is the source, or the cause, of that salvation. And it is eternal: "he became the source of *eternal* salvation." It lasts forever. It starts in this life and it lasts through death, through judgment, and goes on forever and ever.

Here's another way to say it. You can ask your friends, "Wouldn't it be an all-satisfying experience if two things were true? 1) If you had a treasure of infinite value—I mean infinite with nothing lacking that is truly valuable; and 2) if you had the guarantee that you could go on enjoying its infinite resources forever and ever with no end and no diminishment?"

In other words, infinite *value* with infinite *duration* is what would bring us COMPLETE SATISFACTION. The best thing possible and never-ending enjoyment.

Then tell them that this is exactly why you are a Christian—because Christ has become the source of eternal salvation because he is the infinitely valuable Son of God.

This is what the book of Hebrews is about. It is what the Bible is about—salvation that lasts forever based on Jesus Christ.

Eternal Salvation. That's the main point of these verses. Everything else in these verses explains why Christ is "suitable" to do that. That's where the three words, Dignity, Eternity and Purity come in:

Christ Is our Source of Eternal Salvation Because of Those Qualities

Now the main point is this: Christ became for us a source of eternal salvation because of his *dignity*, *eternity*, and *purity*.

So let's look at these one at a time. And pray as we go that the effect will be deepened confidence in your

salvation and deeper love in your personal relationship with Jesus.

I. CHRIST'S DIGNITY— AS THE SON OF GOD

Dignity means "worthiness of honor."

A dog has more dignity than an ant; that is, it's worthy of more honor. That's why nobody gets upset when you poison ants, but if you poisoned all the dogs in the neighborhood - another story.

And humans have more dignity than dogs, because humans are worthy of more honor than dogs are. The animal control officers gather up mangy, stray bothersome dogs and puts them in the pound, even mercifully puts some of them to sleep. But nobody would let them do that with humans, I hope (except for the unborn, but that's another subject).

And GOD has much more dignity than humans because he created us and owns us and is *infinitely superior to us in every way*.

So dignity means worthiness of honor. And Christ has *infinite dignity* as the Son of God.

Hebrews 5:4 (NIV) ⁻⁴ *No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.*

In other words, the office of high priest is an office of immense dignity and you can't just decide to have it. God has to call you to it, like he called Aaron in the Old Testament.

Then in verse 5 he relates this to Christ, but what he says is unexpected: **Hebrews 5:5** (NIV) ⁻⁵ *So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But (unexpected part) God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."*

But what's surprising about this verse is that what we expect the second half of the verse to say, "*God made him High Priest.*" Instead, title "Son of God" replaces the title "High Priest." The first half of the verse says that Christ did not glorify himself as High Priest, and But instead it quotes Psalm 2:7 about God begetting Christ as his Son.

The point, I think, is that the role of High Priest is a Dignified role. No one can choose to be the high priest – only God can choose the High Priest. It is worthy of Honor. And god goes one step higher than

an earthly high priest. Therefore Christ, as the Son of God is the *most qualified* to be our High Priest and to become the source of eternal salvation because he is the Son of God.

No other being in the universe has the dignity that was required to obtain an eternal salvation. It took an infinite dignity. No priest of Aaron's line and no angel in heaven could do it. Only one could do it—the Son of God. So we see how important it is to know the *dignity* of Christ.

All hell will break loose at you one day with this one message (especially when you are nearing death): “your salvation is not sufficient”. “How could you believe that a man could die so many years ago and that can satisfy God for all the crud and sinful mess that you created?” Your guilt remains; condemnation hangs over your head; and the wrath of God is not removed.

At that moment you will need truth about the foundation of your eternal salvation. And one truth that will strengthen your confidence in that hour is the truth that “No, IT WAS THE SON” who died! I have no ordinary High Priest, but one who has the infinite dignity of the Son of God, and he has *therefore* become the source of eternal salvation.”

II. ETERNITY OF CHRIST—HIGH PRIEST FOREVER

Eternity means forever in both directions. Something that has eternity has no beginning and no ending. If something didn't exist and then it was created or came into being, it doesn't have eternity. Eternity means forever—backward and forward.

Next we see the *Eternity* of Christ the Savior “as a priest in the order of Melchizedek.” **Hebrews 5:6** (NIV) -⁶ *And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

Now **Hebrews 7** takes up this Melchizedek idea in detail. So I am going to save most of our thoughts about it until then. But let me give you a summary here.

Do you know how many times this Melchizedek is mentioned before this? Twice (Genesis 14:18 and Psalm 110:4), that's all.

In Genesis 14 he meets Abraham coming back from a military conquest and blesses him, and Abraham gives him tithes. The text simply says, *“He was a priest of God Most High.”* There is no information about his parents or his ethnic origin. He seemingly comes out of nowhere.

Then the mention of him doesn't occur for another thousand years, in the time of David, who is speaking of the Messiah who is to come and says that the Messiah is *“a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”* And that's it. Nothing more about Melchizedek until this writer mentions him here.

The point is this: Melchizedek symbolizes in the Old Testament a priesthood different from the priesthood of Aaron and the tribe of Levi. Melchizedek became a kind of symbolic pointer to a priesthood with no beginning and no ending. That's why **Psalm 110** and **Hebrews 5:6** stress the word *“forever”*—*“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Now we'll come back to Melchizedek in chapter 7 but the point here is this: Not only does Christ have the *dignity* of the Son of God, but he also has the *eternity* of the “priestly order of Melchizedek.” *What Melchizedek symbolized, Christ realized.* Christ has eternity.

That is the second reason he is worthy to become for us a source of *“eternal salvation.”* Not only was his death infinitely valuable and infinitely effective because he has infinite *dignity*, but he goes on ministering the effect of that death for us in heaven forever and ever and never dies. He has *eternity* in the order of Melchizedek.

How is this important to us? This too is for the sake of your *confidence* in the face of fear and doubt and temptation and accusation. Let me put it this way: do you want to become an oak tree saint or a salt marsh (grass) saint?

What psalm tells us how to become an Oak Tree Saint? (Psalm 1:2–3 (ESV)² *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.* ³ *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

This is what the writer of Hebrews is doing. He's taking some of the Old Testament and he's meditating on it as an example for you. Christ has become a source of eternal salvation because he has the *dignity* of the Son of God and because he has the *eternity* of the priesthood of Melchizedek.

Don't be a salt marsh grass saint!

III. CHRIST'S PURITY—HE LEARNED OBEDIENCE

Purity means unsoiled, not dirty. It means that when Jesus suffered and was tempted, he did not give

in to the impurities of anger or bitterness or cursing or self-pity and unbelief. He prayed for help and God helped him stay pure.

So in this passage, there is one last foundation for our eternal salvation. Christ became the source of eternal salvation, not only because of his *dignity* and *eternity*, but also because of his *purity*. Purity that endured through suffering.

There are some phrases that we can find difficult to understand. Let me get at them with some questions:

If you ask, **Did his divine dignity and his priestly eternity give him automatic purity?** the answer is No. It was not automatic. **Verse 8** says, "*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered.*" "Learned obedience?" Could that mean that he moved from being disobedient to being obedient? That can't be.

It means His obedience went from being **untested** to **proven obedience**. Jesus who is eternal, was always obedient. His will was in one accord with the Father. But, in the incarnation, He moved from obeying without any suffering to obeying through unspeakable suffering. It means that his natural purity was put in the crucible and melted down with white-hot pain, so that he could learn from suffering that his purity would persevere.

Back to our question: **Did this come automatically?** No. **Verse 7** says that it was prayed for and begged for and cried out for and wept for with tears. This was no fake test of Christ's purity. Everything in the universe hung on this test.

Was it Brief? Some take **verse 7** to refer only to the battle in Gethsemane when he sweat drops of blood and pleaded with God. I don't think so. Notice the word "days" in verse 7—"*In the days of His life on earth (flesh).*" Not just a night or a day, but during ALL the "days of his humanity" he was wrestling and praying and begging and crying out and weeping. It was not brief. It was a lifetime of calling to God.

And WHAT was Jesus mainly praying for with agony and fervor?

Was he praying not to suffer and die? Again that seems very unlikely. Jesus came to die, so he did not pray constantly for the days of his life on earth NOT to die.

Verse 7 says that he prayed but it also says he was heard: *and he was heard because of his reverent submission.* That means God gave him what he asked

for, and **verse 8** describes the effect of that answered prayer: *he learned obedience.*

Hebrews 5:8 (NIV)⁸ *Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered*

Jesus was praying for OBEDIENCE—or opposite—to remain pure from sin.

In other words, Jesus knew that there was a death worse than death. Much worse. Physical death is bad enough and yes, in the garden, he humanly desired that there be another way to do the Father's will than to die on the cross. But far more horrible than dying on the cross was the impurity of disobedience. That was the great and horrible threat. FOR IF HE SINNED, EVEN ONCE, THERE WOULD BE NO SALVATION! That was what was at stake.

So he prayed all his life against that that instead of caving in to sin, he would remain pure through the suffering and NOT SIN. "I fear sin, not being able to lay down my life as suitable sacrifice for the world. Ok God don't let me sin!" *And and he was heard by his Father!*

And Jesus Christ fought this thing every day and he came out victorious. He became a source of eternal salvation - because of his *dignity* as the Son of God and his *eternity* in the priesthood of Melchizedek and his *purity* in the crucible of incredible suffering. Meditate on those things.

CONCLUSION – ARE YOU SAVED?

Which leaves one last question: Do you have this eternal salvation? Not everyone does. **Verse 9** tells us who does: "*And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.*" Are you obeying Jesus? Or are you living in disobedience to his will? Those who are obeying Jesus have the eternal salvation that he obtained for us. Without obedience you have no cause to believe that you are saved.

Please listen carefully. Obedience in the book of Hebrews is first and foremost obedience to trust in the promises of God (3:18–19). To hope in him. In the first nine chapters of this book there is not one moral or ethical command. But there are plenty of commands *to believe*, *trust him*, *to hold fast to our hope* (3:6), *to guard against a heart of unbelief* (3:12), *to hold fast to our confession* (4:14), and *to draw near to Christ for help* (4:16).

So the first thing you hear when you hear "obey" is to hear the command, "TRUST ME!" "Will you not

trust me? Have I not enough DIGNITY? Have I not enough Eternity? Have I not enough Purity that when I lay down my life so you can have forgiveness and salvation forever, that you can come to me and trust me as your Savior and Lord?”

Every other kind of obedience, according to Hebrews, flows from this this root act of obedience (10:34; 11:8, 24–26; 13:5–6, 13–14)

Let's Close in Prayer

Are you willing this morning, right now, to look at the promises of sin. Got them in your mind? Got some sins planned this week? Because the only reason people sin is because sin makes promises.

And look at the promise of sin and say “You are a liar.”

And then look at the promises of God and say “You are true.”

Repent and to stop putting your hope in the promises of sin and to start putting it in the promises of God. Hope in them. Bank on them. Trust them. He is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, that is, to all who hope in his promises and live like it.

ⁱ I owe almost all of this message to John Piper, whose excellent study on this passage I leaned on almost exclusively.