

+ Hebrews 5:7-10 + He Did It All for You + 5th Sunday in Lent + 25 March 2012 +

When times are tough, when life in a sinful world gets particularly difficult, when it seems like the whole world is against you, or that you're the only one in the whole, wide world dealing with a particular problem, you and I often start asking questions. Maybe they're simply thoughts that run through your mind, but never make it out your lips, but the questions still come.

For example, there's that old, familiar question—"Why?" Why is this happening to me? Why is this happening to my spouse, my child, my loved one, my friend, my family? There's the "How?" questions. How am I going to get out of this? How am I going to handle this? How is this going to affect me or my family? There's the "When?" questions. When will this end? When will we hear good news? Then, of course, there's the endless supply of follow-up questions for the Why's, the How's, and the When's.

For those difficult times, our God has given us many promises in his Word. ***"Surely I will be with you always..." "God works all things for the good of those who love him..." "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me."*** (Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:28; Psalm 50:15) Those are all glorious and beautiful promises, but when times are particularly difficult, when life in a sinful world is especially overwhelming, when your trust in the Lord seems weakest, there's another question that begs to be asked. You hear or read those promises. You look at your life of faith and look ahead to the future, and you're tempted to start wondering, "Does God really understand me? Does God understand the difficulties that I face as a sinful human being living in a sinful world? Does God really understand the trouble I'm facing or the difficulty I've been going through? Does he know what it's like when life overwhelms me or what it's like to feel all alone?"

You take a closer look at your life and wonder how God could possibly relate. When you and your spouse just talk at each other and tension and hurt feelings keep growing, does God understand? When you or a loved one are diagnosed with a serious illness, does God really understand? When you look back on your life and feel guilt for hurtful things you said or for selfish, foolish, ridiculous things you did, can God relate—the One who was never guilty for anything he ever said, thought, or did?

Soon the question—"Does God really understand me?"—quickly snowballs into even more doubt about God's ability to understand. Sometimes that question can even lead to the charge that God actually can't understand what I'm going through, because he's God and he doesn't have problems or difficulties like I do. It's like a billionaire like Bill Gates or Warren Buffett losing a million dollars, and then we're expected to believe they now know what financial hardship is. Now I'm supposed to believe that the holy and almighty God of heaven and earth knows what I, a sinful human being, am going through? By nature, you and I can't help, but be skeptical about that.

Yes, such questions run through our minds, but don't such bold presumptions really attempt to make us judges over God? By allowing such questions to grow in our minds, do we not end up doubting whether God can sympathize with us in our weaknesses? Are we not actually showing the utmost disrespect for God's promises and blessings? Are we not shaking a fist of defiance in his holy face demanding that God meet our expectations rather than carry out his own holy will? Where does such defiance, such arrogance, such doubt ultimately lead? It leads to eternal suffering and death. How hard it is to trust that God can sympathize with us as we struggle with the troubles of living as sinners in a sinful world!

...Yet God does sympathize with us in a far more familiar way than any of us could possibly imagine. He did what none of us could've ever dreamed. God willingly put himself in our place. Jesus Christ, the holy and almighty Son of God, became a human being like you and me, yet without sin.

He didn't automatically become an adult either. He chose to enter the womb of a believing virgin named Mary, developed and grew in her womb, and was born like every one of us. He went through infancy and childhood and the teen years in the home of faithful parents until he reached adulthood. For about three years, Jesus carried out the ministry God had given to him until the hour had come ***"for the Son of Man to be glorified"*** in a way we would never consider glorious (John 12:23). That's where the writer of Hebrews takes us—to the night on which Jesus was betrayed. We find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying intensely in the dark, while his disciples slept nearby. ***"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."***

There in the Garden, we see Jesus wrestling with the reality of what he has to face—betrayal, rejection, beatings, humiliation, ridicule, injustice, torture, more humiliation, and then the cross with long, sharp spikes nailed with precision to cause the maximum amount of pain. Then there's the reality that he will have to bear the full, overwhelming burden of the world's sins—the sins of thought, word, and action for every single human who has ever lived or ever will live. Finally, there's death—the holy punishment not for his own sins, but for the sins of all people that he was going to bear. It's no wonder Jesus cried out to his heavenly Father, ***"My Father, if it is***

possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” That wasn’t a cry of rejection or refusal, but of trust.

You see, even as the darkness of the world’s sin wrapped around him and the horror of the world’s condemnation washed over him, even as Jesus looked ahead to the bitter cup of wrath he had to drink to the dreges, he still perfectly trusted in his Father as **“the one who could save him from death”**. God in his almighty power could have saved Jesus from death, but he chose not to because his will was that his holy, innocent Son should suffer and die in your place and mine. So even in the midst of suffering hell, Jesus remained perfectly obedient to his holy, heavenly Father.

Are you starting to see God’s response to that question, “Does God really understand me?” The writer tells us, **“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered...”** This doesn’t mean that Jesus first learned to obey in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was obedient from the very beginning, but instead we see Jesus face what you and I face in our lives. Do you face temptation? Do you fail in the face of temptation? Jesus **“was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”** (Hebrews 4:15) Have you had to deal with being rejected? Jesus was rejected by all of sinful humanity. Have you had to deal with separation from those whom you love? Jesus had to deal with being forsaken by his heavenly Father as he allowed himself to be covered in the awful filth of our sin and guilt. Has God ever answered your prayers in ways you did not or do not prefer? Have you always submitted to God’s will when he answered in a way different from what you preferred? Jesus experienced a different answer to his prayers, but yet he remained perfectly obedient to his heavenly Father.

Have you had to face the reality of death or fear what death could do to you or your family? Jesus willingly faced death, because he knew that he could save you from the fear of death, because **“when he accomplished his task, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”** When Jesus went to the cross and gave up his life, the payment for your sins was made with his holy, precious blood, with his very own life. When Jesus rose from the dead three days later, **“he became the source of eternal salvation”** for all who have saving faith in him—faith bestowed by the Holy Spirit through the good news of our **“eternal salvation”**.

Now in glory, this same Jesus, this same Son of God has become our eternal “high priest”—the One who serves as our Mediator, our Go-Between, who is always interceding for us, who follow him through faith. He is always speaking to the holy God on our behalf by presenting us to our God clothed in his own righteousness. Jesus established peace between us and God.

So what does that mean now for your life as God asks you to deny self and bear your cross for his sake in this sinful world or asks you to pray according to his will not yours or to submit to his will when it would be more tempting to want your will to be done? It means that you can face the difficulties and troubles of being a sinful human being living in a sinful world because you have a Savior-God who has lived in this sinful world too. It means you have a God who knows and understands what you’re going through and has backed up his sympathy with the words and actions of his own Son. It means that Jesus’ perfect obedience to the holy God makes perfect your imperfect actions as a child of God because you’re clothed in his holiness. It means you can trust that God knows what he’s doing with your life and you can remain faithfully obedient to his will, even when life gets difficult.

Because he is your great High Priest, you can be sure that you have an Advocate and Mediator, who is always before the throne of the holy God speaking on your behalf and giving you access where you had none before. It also means that you can be absolutely sure that heaven is yours through your Savior Jesus, because he perfectly completed his task as your Substitute.

Now because you have a Savior-God who sympathizes with you and understands you better than you know yourself, you can faithfully follow in his obedient footsteps in every aspect of your life and trust him who was obedient for your sake. There’s no reason to think God can’t possibly understand you because he’s the holy and almighty God. No, when times are tough and life is particularly difficult, you run back to verses like these. As you hear God’s promises in his Word again in the midst of your difficulty and trouble, see why God really does understand you. For there in God’s infinite mercy and love, you see that **JESUS DID IT ALL FOR YOU**. Amen.