

JESUS DESERVES THE SPOTLIGHT

In the next two weeks, what name will be in the spotlight more often than any other time of the year? It's the name Jesus. Some might argue and say that you hear the name Jesus at Christmas time as much or even more than you do during Holy Week and Easter. They may have a point and yet, at Christmas there are so many distractions and so much commercialism. You hear songs about Frosty, Rudolph and Santa Claus. There are decorations and trees to set up, presents to buy and wrap. Holy Week and Easter don't have that. Oh, there's the coloring of Easter eggs and Easter egg hunts. You can visit the Easter Bunny at the mall. Yet, there are hardly any secular Easter songs. People aren't as busy and what many people are getting excited about is spring. Less distractions than at Christmas so that means through movies about Jesus like the Passion of the Christ, through TV specials and documentaries; through special services being held throughout the world on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the name Jesus will be in the spotlight.

One of the questions that many people will ask is who is he? Everyone believes that Jesus existed. Historical books not connected in any way with the Bible speak about a Jewish teacher by the name of Jesus who lived in the early first century, ticked a lot of people off and was crucified by a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate. That's a historical fact. After that, opinions and beliefs about who he was go off in all kinds of different directions. Was he more than just a good teacher? Was he the Son of God? Did he really rise from the dead? His name will be out there a lot in the next two weeks but sad to say, many will hear the name Jesus and it will mean nothing to them. It will simply go in one ear and out the other. By the grace of God, it means something to us. We know who Jesus is and what he came to earth to do. His name will be in the spotlight and as the writer of Hebrews points out, **Jesus deserves the spotlight.** Why? He is the submissive Son of God and the only source of our salvation.

The main theme of the book of Hebrews is keep your eyes fixed on Jesus; not to abandon him but to remain faithful to him in spite of the struggles and the persecutions the people faced. Emperor Nero had outlawed Christianity and began his persecution of the church. The Jewish religion based on good works and obedience to the Ceremonial Laws was legal and under state protection. There was no danger of them being arrested or executed. In other words, it made life much easier for them. There was great pressure on the followers of Jesus to turn away from him and some already had. "Was following Jesus worth it? God doesn't know how hard it is and the suffering we are going through. He's up in heaven where it's nice and safe and we are down here in the trenches. What if we are wrong about Jesus? Maybe we should just quit and go back to our former beliefs." The temptations were real and very strong to abandon ship. The writer of Hebrews strongly encouraged them not to by reinforcing who Jesus was and what Jesus went through to win their salvation.

In the chapter prior to our text, we read these words. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin.* When Jesus came into this world, he submitted himself to a life filled with temptations and pressures, pain and sorrow just like any of us. His life of submission finally led him to the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death. What happened there is what the writer of our text was referring to when he wrote. *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.* What was that night exactly like for Jesus? It was not easy to say the least. Look at the words that are used to describe it. He offered up prayers, petitions, strong requests. There were loud cries of agony that brought tears to his eyes. The Gospel writers added words like sorrowful, troubled, deeply distressed. Jesus spoke the words.

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. It is impossible for us to fully understand the agony Jesus experienced. Think about it. As true man, to know what was going to happen to him, the beating, the torture, the whipping, the blood, the nails, his body stretched out on a cross, that picture made him shudder and moved him to say, ***Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.*** In other words, if there is an easier way to save the world, let's take it. Who could blame him? To be tortured mercilessly by terrorists in the form of Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers and that wasn't even the worst torture. He would experience a pain unlike any known to a living person not at the hands of a terrorist but at the hands of his own heavenly Father. God would curse his own Son about whom he had once said, ***This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*** God was going to turn his back on his own Son and make him suffer the pain of hell. Why? Jesus, the obedient and submissive Son, would be cursed by his Father because every single sin of every person who has ever lived was piled on the sinless Son of God. ***Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*** Talk about agony!

Imagine for a moment that God let you see into your future and showed how you or one of your children was going to die at the hands of a terrorist. You could see in detail the pain, the torture, the blood, the whole slow and agonizing process leading to your death or the death of your child. How awful! Talk about agony! I don't know what I would do knowing there was nothing I could do to stop it. Jesus had the power to stop his suffering. He could have said, "Father, why should I go through all that pain and suffering for people who question your love and your will when something happens that they didn't want to happen; for people who get angry with you; for people who often do what they want and not what you want? They don't deserve my sacrifice. They don't deserve to live with us in heaven. I'm not going to do it. I'm coming back home right now." Who could have blamed him? He was right. We don't deserve his sacrifice. We don't deserve his love. We don't deserve life with him in heaven. What we do deserve is death in hell with the devil. Jesus knew that but his love wouldn't allow that. That showed at the end of his prayer in the Garden. ***Yet not as I will but as you will.*** The last thing Jesus wanted to do was to defy and disappoint his heavenly Father. All he wanted to do was to please and obey him. So God the Father heard his prayer because of his reverent submission and answered him but his answer was that Jesus could not avoid the suffering and death. He had to ***humble himself and become obedient to death, even death on a cross.*** Jesus obeyed his Father's will right to the very end.

Jesus was the obedient, submissive Son who deserves the spotlight. Because he was, the writer goes on to say. ***Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*** The words translated "once made perfect" literally means to reach the goal, to complete a mission. It is the same word used in Jesus' triumphant cry. "It is finished." Jesus finished his mission of paying for the sins of the world. Everything was perfect. Everything was done. Jesus perfectly obeyed God's commandments and offered the perfect sacrifice for all the sins of the world. It is finished.

Sir Leonard Wood once visited the King of France and the King invited him to dinner the next night. Sir Leonard arrived at the palace late afternoon. When the king saw him, he asked Sir Leonard why he was there. Sir Leonard answered. "Didn't you invite me to dinner?" The King said, "Yes, I did but when you didn't answer my invitation, I didn't think you were coming." Sir Leonard bowed before the king and said, "A king's invitation is never to be answered but only to be obeyed." My friends, we have the greatest invitation from the King of Kings, an invitation he wants us to obey. ***Come to me you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life.*** Jesus is the only source of our salvation. That's why we read in our text that ***he became the source of salvation for all who obey him.*** Obeying Jesus means to believe in him as your only

Savior from sin, a faith the Holy Spirit works in our hearts through the Gospel. Just think what that means for your lives. You carry with you the comfort of God's promise he made through the prophet Jeremiah. ***I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*** Every sin you commit is gone from God's memory, washed away in the blood of Jesus. You have the comfort of knowing without a doubt that God loves you and calls you his child. Yes, God loves you. You have the comfort of knowing that your heavenly Father will never leave you or forsake you not even at your deathbed. For he will be there to bring you safely in his arms to your heavenly home.

My friends, Holy Week will soon be upon us and the name Jesus will be in the spotlight and his name deserves to be in the spotlight. For by the grace of God, we know that he was not just a good man and a good teacher who was unjustly executed. Jesus was the submissive Son who came to earth to do his Father's will. He did just that by sacrificing his perfect life on the cross of Calvary to pay for the sins of the world. In doing so, he became the only source of salvation. Believe that with all your heart. Find comfort in this truth. Also take the opportunity during this special time of the year to put the spotlight on Jesus by inviting unbelieving family members or friends to our church services; by sharing with them the message of who Jesus is, that he is their Savior who lived for them, died for them and rose again. Yes, Jesus deserves to be in the spotlight and not just now but throughout the year. Let's do what we can to make sure that happens. Amen.