

## **THE COMING OF JESUS AND OUR PERFECTION (Hebrews 7:11-28)**

You go to the bowling alley. You find a ball that fits your hand and your fingers. In the first frame, you roll that ball down that hardwood lane, and you get a strike. Your hands go up in jubilation, and your friends celebrate with you. Then, you get a strike in the second frame, and the third. In fact, you get a strike in each of the first nine frames.

You come to the all-important 10<sup>th</sup> frame. You get a strike allowing you to roll the ball two more times both of which are strikes. You have gotten 12 strikes in a row, and then, you wake up from your dream, but in your dream, you got a score of 300—a perfect game.

Let's turn to baseball. Although it is rare, it is possible for a pitcher to pitch a perfect game. A perfect game is when the pitcher doesn't allow a single batter to get a base. He faces 27 batters over the course of 9 innings, and every batter either strikes out, grounds out, or flies out. A perfect game doesn't happen often. There have only been 21 perfect games thrown in MLB since 1903 (the year of the first World Series). The last time it was done was in 2012. Oddly, there were three perfect games that year, but it has been almost a decade since the last perfect game was thrown.

There is no such thing as a perfect game in football. It is possible, however, to have a perfect season. There has only been one team in the NFL to have a perfect record including the playoffs. That team was the 1972 Miami Dolphins. They won all 14 regular season games, won two playoff games, and capped their undefeated season with a win over the Washington Redskins in Super Bowl VII.

The New England Patriots almost had a perfect season in 2007. They won all 16 regular season games. They won two playoff games and headed to the Super Bowl XLII boasting an 18-0 record, which was better than the Dolphins 17-0 record. They faced the New York Giants who didn't even win their division. They lost six games during the regular season and made it into the playoffs as a Wild Card team, but they strung together three victories in the playoffs, all away games to get to the Super Bowl.

No one gave the Giants a chance against the Patriots. After three quarters, the Giants had only managed to get one field goal; yet their defense played well. They were only down 7-3. On the Giants first possession of the fourth quarter, Eli Manning led his team down the field. They scored a touchdown and went up 10-7.

Late in the fourth, Tom Brady engineered a touchdown drive. With only 2:42 left on the game clock, it looked like the Giants would fall short. They didn't because on 3<sup>rd</sup> down with 1:15 left, somehow Manning eluded what looked like a certain sack, he re-oriented himself and heaved the ball downfield. It was a jump ball between Giants' receiver David Tyree and the Patriots' pro-bowl safety, Rodney Harrison. Tyree outjumped Harrison, snatched the ball out of the air with one hand and pinned it against the top of his helmet. When he fell to the ground, he managed to maintain control of the ball, and his 32-yard reception kept the drive alive. After a couple of more first downs, Manning threw the go-ahead game-winning touchdown.

There were only 35 seconds remaining on the clock, and even Tom Brady couldn't

manage a come from behind victory with so little time left.

There are many nicknames for the play that made the Giants' improbable win possible. It is most-widely known as "the Helmet Catch." David Tyree who made the catch thrown by Eli Manning called it, "David and Eliath." The one I like the most is, "the Reception that Ended Perfection." Instead of ending the season 19-0, the Patriots finished 18-1. Their perfect season was no longer perfect.

Adam and Eve were given a perfect place in which to live—the Garden of Eden. They enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. How long did they live in the state of perfection? We don't know, but that perfection came to an end when Adam and Even sinned. When they rebelled from God, their perfect fellowship with God was broken, and they were expelled from that perfect place where they were living. Ever since then, the human race has been strangers to perfection. There are no perfect places to live, no perfect schools, no perfect churches, no perfect families, no perfect marriages.

While we are strangers to perfection, we still yearn for it.

- The Bride-to-be wants a perfect wedding.
- The traveler wants a perfect vacation.
- The diner wants the perfect meal.
- House hunters want their dream house, the perfect place to hang their hat.
- The job hunter wants the perfect position.

It is an odd thing. We have never known and experienced anything that was absolutely perfect, and yet perfection is what we seek. Hear this: The only time perfection and reality meet is in the person of Jesus Christ. That means the search for perfection should lead us on a search for Jesus.

We are going to examine Hebrews 7:11-28 as we consider "The Coming of Jesus and Our Perfection." I want to you to notice three truths that highlight the person and work of Jesus.

### **Jesus Came Because Perfection Was Lacking**

The words *perfection* and *perfect* are used three times in our text—verses 11, 19, and 28 and a dozen times in the entire letter. No other book of the NT comes even close to that many occurrences of the word. The closest would be 1 John which uses the word *perfect* five times.

In v. 11 we are told that the old priestly order of the Jewish faith was insufficient to bring about what was both desired and needed—our perfection. Not only could the priests do nothing to perfect us, what is worse is that the Law on which the Jewish faith was based was insufficient to perfect us. Look at vv. 18-19.

What we need to understand is that the Law was never meant to save us. That is not what it was designed to do. When I say the Law, I mean the 613 commandments of the first five books of the OT. Of that number 365 are negative commands. We are told what we must not do, and 248 are positive. They tell us what we are to do.

The point is that obedience to the Law does not save us because at some point we have broken God's commands, and once we just break one command, we are a law breaker. No amount of obedience to God's commands will make up for the ones we have already broken.

If I steal a car and then drive the speed limit and obey all the traffic laws, my obedience to the traffic laws will not make up for my having stolen a car. God doesn't grade on the curve. You are not good with God because you sin less than other people do. If you have sinned, you are a sinner, and no amount of obedience will erase that sin and do away with your guilt.

If the Law was never meant as a means of salvation, what then was the purpose of the Law? Consider the following passages of the NT. Let's start with Romans 3:19-20.

Now we know that the Law speaks to those who live under the Law. No one can say that he does not know what sin is. Yes, every person in the world stands guilty before God. No person will be made right with God by doing what the Law says. The Law shows us how sinful we are (NLT).

Notice also Galatians 3:21-22.

If it had been possible to be saved from the punishment of sin by obeying the Law, then being right with God would have come by obeying the Law. But the Holy Writings say that all men are guilty of sin. Then that which was promised might be given to those who put their trust in Christ. It will be because their faith is in Him (NLT).

Finally, listen to Galatians 3:24, "The Law was used to lead us to Christ. It was our teacher, and so we were made right with God by putting our trust in Christ" (NLT).

God didn't give us the Law to save us; He gave us the Law to show us that we need to be saved, that we can't save ourselves, and that we need Jesus to do for us that which we cannot accomplish on our own.

In the introduction of this message, I mentioned that there has not been a perfect game in baseball since 2012, and that year there were three. The first of those three was accomplished by Philip Humber, a pitcher for the Chicago White Sox. He pitched a perfect game on April 12, 2012. He retired 27 batters in a row with no walks.

In November of that same year the White Sox cut him. He was picked up by the Houston Astros. He didn't pitch a single winning game with that club, and that was the end of his career in major league baseball.

*Sports Illustrated* told the story of what led to the end of Humber's playing days—perfectionism. The article's subtitle read, "For one magical April afternoon, Philip Humber was flawless. But that random smile from the pitching gods came with a heavy burden: the pressure to live up to a standard no one can meet." The article continued: "The biggest problem with Humber wasn't his talent. It was, according to those close to him, the unrealistic expectations he set for himself."

Humber admitted, "After the game it was like, I've got to prove that the perfect game

was not a fluke—I almost felt like I had to prove that I deserved to be on that list. I was thankful for it, but at the same time I wanted to make sure that everyone knew that this wasn't a joke. I'm really good enough to do this."

After that game, instead of being perfect, he wasn't even competent. In his next start, he allowed nine runs in five innings. Two outings later he was bombed for eight runs in 2 1/3 innings. Humber began spending more time than ever in the video room. He played with every imaginable grip for his pitches. He threw extra bullpen sessions. He ran more, lifted more. He asked teammates how they dealt with their struggles. He couldn't understand why he couldn't recapture the magic. "I just feel lost," Humber said.

The article ended with these words, "Philip Humber doesn't know what will come next in his baseball story. This he knows: He's done chasing perfection."

If you are trying to become perfect and righteous by your own self-effort, you won't only feel lost like Humber did, the sad fact is you are lost. Don't chase after moral perfection. Don't chase after becoming righteous before God on your own. There are two reasons you shouldn't do that. First, you won't succeed. It will be a fruitless search. Second, even if you could, it would be self-defeating because if you became morally perfect by your own self-effort, you would become proud of what you accomplished. Guess what? God hates pride. The Bible says that God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. If there is anything we need it is God's grace.

Don't pursue your own perfection. Pursue the One who is righteous, the only One who is perfect. Jesus sat down on a mountainside with His disciples, and He said to them. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

### **Because Jesus Came, We Have a Perfect Priest**

Look at the last verse of this chapter—7:28. In the place of Levitical priests who were incapable of getting the job done, God appointed a Son, His Son, to become our priest, and the text says that He "has been made perfect forever." The word *perfect* also means *complete*. In other words, Jesus is the complete package. He's got everything we need. Nothing is missing.

Look at how v. 26 describes our priest. Our High Priest is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Has it ever seemed odd to you that doctors see sick people all day, people with communicable diseases, and yet they rarely get sick? Constant exposure to germs and sickness have given most doctors an incredibly, powerful immune system.

Pastor Kent Hughes wrote, "Jesus walked through the muck and mire of this world for 33 years but was never stained by sin. His character rendered Him immune." Unlike doctors, His immune system was based on His perfect, sinless character

In addition to being perfect in His character, Jesus is perfect in His ministry. Look at vv. 23-25.

Josephus was a first century Jewish historian. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in AD 70. Josephus claimed that there were 83 High

Priests that served between the time of Aaron and the final destruction of the temple by the Romans. It was a little over 1500 years between those two events. That means each High Priest served an average of just over 18 years. That is an average. There was no term limit. Their service ended at their death, and then another man would begin to serve. Since Jesus was resurrected, He will not die again. That means He will always be our High Priest.

As our High Priest, Jesus prays for us. Since He is God, Jesus is omniscient. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your secret thoughts. He knows your true needs. Because of that, He knows just what to pray for concerning you. Jesus' prayers for you, by the way, will always be answered. What you pray for may or may not be answered. What Jesus prays for will be.

According to v. 25, Jesus will save us to the *uttermost*. That word means completely, absolutely, totally, and eternally. That also means you don't have to supplement your salvation. You don't have to help Jesus out. He's got this, and He's got you.

Living as we do in our age of technology, one of the most common forms of crime is identity theft. Today, if the wrong person gets ahold of your social security number or bank account information, they can take your identity. They can use your personal information and engage in fraudulent activity. Very likely, several of you have been the victim of identity theft.

In her book *Because He Loves: How Christ Transforms Our Daily Life*, author Elyse Fitzpatrick wrote:

The surprising reality . . . is that Christians are, by definition, people who have someone else's identity. They're called "Christians" because they've taken the identity of someone else: the Christ. Not only have you been given an identity that you weren't born with or that you didn't earn the right to use, but you're invited to empty the checking account and use all the benefits this identity brings! This is so much better than identity theft—it's an identity gift!

We have a perfect priest. He has gifted us with His identity. Use it. Use it for all it's worth.

### **Because Jesus Came, We Have a Perfect Hope**

Let's go back to v. 19, and let's focus on the latter half of that verse. We have a better hope. There is that word *better* again. It keeps showing up in Hebrews. It appears again a few verses later. Look at v. 22. We have a better hope, and it is based on the fact that we have a better covenant.

In the previous covenant, the old covenant, God promised to bless us if we obeyed Him, and He warned us that we would face His judgment if we disobeyed Him. It became quite clear that we are lousy at obeying God, and we are experts at disobeying Him. No one had to teach you or me to disobey God. We are naturals at doing that.

Just before his briefer book Lamentations in which Jeremiah laments the judgment his

people are experiencing due to their disobedience, Jeremiah wrote a longer book which bears his name. In that book, the prophet foretells that God is going to establish a new covenant, a new agreement with His people. Listen to Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the NLT.

“The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the LORD.

“But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the LORD. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the LORD. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

In the previous agreement, there were things we had to do in order to be the people of God. We demonstrated that we weren’t able to do our part. Therefore, God chose to enact a new agreement. In this new agreement, God says, “I will do it for you.” This new agreement was established when Jesus died for us and then rose victoriously from the grave.

Look again at v. 19 in our text. We have a better hope. That hope is no longer based on what we do. Our hope is based on what God has done. Because of that better hope, we can draw near to Him.

Prior to the Civil War here in America, a northerner went to a slave auction where he purchased a young slave girl. As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, “You’re free.”

She asked in amazement, “You mean, I’m free to do whatever I want?”

“Yes,” he said.

“And to say whatever I want to say?”

“Yes, anything.”

“And to be whatever I want to be?”

“Yep.”

“And even go wherever I want to go?”

“Yes,” he answered with a smile. “You’re free to go wherever you’d like.”

She looked at him intently and replied, “Then, I will go with you.”

The Bible says that we have been bought with a price. It says further that God has set us free. Now, out of gratitude for what He has done on our behalf, we have every reason to go with Jesus wherever He goes. He is our perfect hope.

In what are you placing your hope? In whom are you placing your trust? Draw near to Jesus.