



"Suffering is unbearable if you aren't certain that God is for you and with you."
—Tim Keller

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Life Doesn't Work on a Balance Sheet (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, [Hebrews 5:7-10](#) describes a facet of Christ's suffering:

. . . who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by [God](#) as High Priest "according to the order of [Melchizedek](#)."

Verse 7 shows that, despite Jesus' beseeching tears, the Father decided that His Son's death was necessary for the outworking of His plan of salvation. Even so, it can also be understood to mean that the Father, in spite of Jesus' death on the cross, did indeed save Him from death through the [resurrection from the dead](#). Our understanding depends on our perspective.

The next verse teaches that even being God's Son was not enough. That prime position did not automatically qualify Him to be our High Priest. It

was through His sufferings—plural—that He was made complete and fully ready to be High Priest. He became God's begotten Son through the Father's actions, yet He qualified to be our High Priest by means of suffering.

In writing that "He learned obedience," Paul does not mean that our Savior was in any way *disobedient* before. [Jesus](#) said clearly and truthfully that He *always* did what pleased the Father ([John 8:29](#)). He obeyed God in every possible way. Paul's intent is to show that Jesus was willing to learn experientially and practically what it means to obey even while suffering. He wanted to learn fully, through sometimes daily events, what it was like to continue to submit to God's will even while undergoing unfair, unjust, and intense pain and hardship.

He became personally acquainted with sufferings to a degree that none of His spiritual brothers and sisters ever will. But in doing so, He became perfect for the job of High Priest because He now has the experience that qualifies Him to build and maintain the bridge between God and suffering man. He can now intercede before God with complete understanding on our behalf. By personally knowing what it is like for a human being to follow the will of God even under the greatest trials of heart and body, He personifies the voice of experience before God's throne, and is thus able to mediate before the Father for us.

The word "obedience" has another aspect that we need to consider. It denotes "adhering to a standard of conduct," but every code of conduct includes a penalty to be enforced when its standards are broken. So, when Jesus "learned obedience through sufferings," He also learned firsthand all of the wretched consequences that result from man's disobedience. While He and the Father were accustomed to living a superior way of life, in the days of His flesh our High Priest learned personally the suffering that follows when people deviate from that way.

Before proceeding, it may help to consider some of His sufferings. The physical agony of [the crucifixion](#) is an obvious one, but His sufferings began long before that. Isaiah describes the Savior as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" ([Isaiah 55:3](#)). His sorrows and griefs did not come

merely from the crucifixion. In fact, John begins his gospel by pointing out that the Word became flesh and "came to His own, but His own did not receive Him" ([John 1:11](#)), a rejection that caused Him great distress.

In addition, He may have felt a measure of sorrow when, as a youth, His human parents could not understand why He stayed behind in the Temple ([Luke 2:43-50](#)), and later, when His brothers did not believe in Him ([John 7:5](#)). He displayed anguish over the stubborn, faithless state of Jerusalem's residents, and by extension, the whole nation ([Matthew 23:37](#); [Luke 13:34](#)). The gospels show Him dismayed by the hardness of heart that He encountered almost at every turn. He grieved over the general state of unbelief, [ingratitude](#), self-centeredness, and rebellion. He certainly felt the pain of being betrayed by His friend and disciple, Judas, and it hurt Him severely when all His closest companions forsook Him.

How about the torment He felt when all the accumulated sins and defilement of humanity fell on His own sinless head? Did not the profane, defiling accumulation of untold sins cause far more *true* anguish and abhorrence in this holy Person than the physical scourging He received?

Then—perhaps worst of all—He felt the unsurpassed misery of being separated from the Father because of His defilement by [sin](#). We cannot imagine the distress He suffered from being severed from all contact with the Being whom He had lived with, worked with, and loved for eternity past. Their oneness was shattered—something They had *never* experienced before. Though Jesus' death was ultimately the result of violence, His overwhelming anguish from the Father removing Himself is unmistakable in His final cry, "My God, My God, [why have You forsaken Me?](#)" ([Matthew 27:46](#), 50).

Have we ever considered that in this present order even the Father suffers? He may not have the same direct contact with humanity that the Word had, but He surely is not immune to a similar anguish. The Hebrew word for "God," *elohim*, is plural in number but singular in purpose, perspective, and nature. If one was grieved for creating man, both felt it. If one was despised, rejected, and reviled by the creation, both endured it.

What father does not feel pain when his children reject him? What master is not dismayed when his servants willfully disobey? Christ had to suffer defilement and rejection by the Father, but the Father had to forsake the Companion that He loved more than anything else, then had to endure the separation of death. Even the Father suffers from the evil effects of human sin.

In Part Three, we will conclude by contemplating why God included suffering in His plan, even for Himself; why some seem to suffer unfairly in this life; and how suffering will finally be abolished for all eternity.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Passover and Hope](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Passover is a beacon of hope in an otherwise hopeless milieu. The book of Job, initially a seeming extended treatise of hopelessness, turns into Job's speculation about a possible resurrection, realizing from his prior experience that God enjoys the company of men and wants men to be like Him. Hope can be defined as "confident, enduring expectation," and the heart of hope is faith in God. The strength of our hope depends upon how deeply we know God. Abraham, after 50 years of experience trusting God, knew He would provide despite the visible circumstances. Jesus provided hope to His disciples at His last Passover, exuding confidence and hope, despite His knowledge of what was immediately ahead. In Hebrews, we are counseled to emulate Jesus, who endured due to the joy before Him. We can have rock-solid hope that God will provide despite the intensity of our trials.

From the Archives: Featured Article

What Does It Mean to Take Up the Cross?

by David C. Grabbe

Beyond the fact that our Savior Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross of some sort, He used its imagery to instruct His followers: He bids us take up our cross and follow Him. David Grabbe analyzes what Jesus' command would have meant to those who heard Him, showing that our Savior is asking us to follow His example of sacrifice in our own Christian lives.

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