

Jesus' Final Human Thoughts (Part One)

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What was in Jesus' mind during His final hours as a human being? This was the intriguing question put to me a few months ago by a fellow member of God's church. As we approach another Passover season, this question is an appropriate one.

Occasionally, the authors of *Forerunner* articles receive comments and questions requesting clarification on what we have written. A short while ago, I received just such a letter from my aforementioned friend, commenting on an earlier article. Her letter was so insightful and inspiring that it motivated me into an extensive study of her questions. She allowed me to share with our readers an appropriately edited version of her comments and questions and my responses.

More Than Just Legal

One of the first things my correspondent wrote that arrested my attention was that "in a legal sense, our sins were laid upon Him"—referring, of course, to our Savior—"and He paid the penalty for them."

Although whole books have been written proving that so much of Jesus' trial and execution was illegal from Jewish, Sanhedrin, and Roman standpoints, it remains true that our sins were laid upon Jesus and that He paid the penalty for the sins of mankind in a legal sense according to the law, the prophecies, and the will of Almighty God:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. . . . He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:4-6, 12)

The wages of our sins is death (Romans 6:23), and our sinless Savior paid that penalty for us. This, in a nutshell, sums up the greatest act of sacrifice ever made. However, fulfilling the legal aspect was only a part of it. To look at it only from the legal point of view is almost to sanitize Jesus' great sacrifice.

Phenomenal Question

My correspondent then continues with this phenomenal question: "While He was being tortured, hated, and crucified, was He 'thinking' of all the dirty sins for which He was dying?"

In a word, "No." It is doubtful that, even when they were being laid upon Him, Jesus spent much time thinking of the many individual acts of human sin. However, if Jesus was not thinking about these horrible sins during His final hours, what *was* He thinking about? Scripture gives us many clues as to what some of His thoughts were during His last day of physical life.

Here are a few points to consider regarding some of the contents of Jesus' mind during the final hours of His physical life. What Scripture tells us that Jesus *knew* during the time that He bore our iniquities from Gethsemane to the stake gives us many clues to what His thoughts might have been. Jesus' thoughts during this time—that is, His *knowledge*, what He *knew*—are extremely important to His brothers and sisters, because it is partly by them that we are justified. As it says in Isaiah 53:11: "He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge my righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."

Jesus was able to foresee the travail, or the labor, of His soul. As His final human hours approached, He knew—probably exactly—when His torture and execution would take place:

» You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified. (Matthew 26:2)

» Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15)

Jesus knew that, to fulfill all things (Luke 24:44), His suffering must take place during the Passover Day of the year that we refer to as AD 31 and that He must be dead and entombed as that day drew to its close. Knowing how much time He had left before His arrest and His separation from His beloved Father, Jesus knew that His final moments of human freedom would be best filled with close communication with that heavenly Parent—that other member of the God Family: "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray over there'" (Matthew 26:36).

The writers of the four gospel accounts have left us an accurate record of these communications, some of which we will examine later.

Despised and Rejected

Despite His welcome into Jerusalem six days before, Jesus knew that He was despised and rejected:

» But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. (Psalm 22:6)

» Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul. (Psalm 142:4)

» Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully. . . . [T]he reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. . . . Those who sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song of the drunkards. . . . You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; my adversaries are all before You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. (Psalm 69:4, 9, 12, 19-20)

Jesus was very much despised. Consider that the Eternal Lord, the very Creator of the whole magnificent universe, was regarded as contemptible and worthless! We recoil from the idea that our Elder Brother, who gave up so very much for us, should be the subject of the songs of drunkards!

» But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. (Luke 17:25)

» He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. . . . He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. (Isaiah 53:3, 8)

These two scriptures prompt some additional questions and points to ponder: To whose generation was Isaiah referring when he asked, "Who will declare His generation?" How extensive was "this generation" in Luke 17:25? Were these terms, "this generation" and "His generation" limited to the time and place of Jesus' human lifetime only, or do they, as the other verses quoted above imply, extend to the whole world over the six thousand years allotted to man's self-rule? Just six thousand years? Yet, even in the Millennium, will there not be those who despise and reject Jesus Christ and His rule (Ezekiel 38; Revelation 20:7-8)? Isaiah 53 tells us first that Jesus *is* despised—He still is today! He also tells us that Jesus *was* despised. Has not Jesus in fact been rejected by *all* of mankind?

In addition to His awareness of the rejection of the world, Jesus also knew that even His closest friends were very weak, spiritually, despite all they had witnessed during their association with Him. He knew that they would stumble or be offended because of Him, forsake Him, and scatter like frightened sheep:

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" . . . Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour" . . . And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. . . . Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. . . . Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled. (Matthew 26:31, 40, 43, 50, 56)

Worse still, Jesus knew that one of those closest to Him—and He, of course, knew which one—was in the process of betraying Him:

Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" Then He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" He said to him, "You have said it." (Matthew 26:21-25)

Sudden Sorrow

Although Jesus, after the Passover dinner, was somewhat troubled in spirit because Judas' act of betrayal was already in progress (John 13:21), it was not until shortly after the group had arrived at Gethsemane that Jesus—apparently quite suddenly—began to be intensely sorrowful and profoundly distressed:

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me." (Matthew 26:37-38)

The depth of Jesus' sorrow exceeded that of any man, either before or since these final moments of His human freedom:

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the Lord has inflicted in the day of His fierce anger. From above He has sent fire into my bones, and it overpowered them; He has spread a net for my feet and turned me back; He has made me desolate and faint all the day. (Lamentations 1:12-13)

Note the words "all the day." Jesus, on this last day of His human life, would be afflicted with utter desolation and faintness. We cannot comprehend the level of incomparable sorrow and distress into which Jesus descended on His arrival at Gethsemane. Our modern ideas of depression do not even come near it. The words "even to death" in Matthew 26:38 strongly suggest that, had He sunk any lower, He would have died right then and there. But He was determined to stay alive because He knew that the time set for His death had not yet come and that, to fulfill all things, He had to carry the sins of the world for several hours more.

We tend to equate agony with great *bodily* pain, but even though no one had physically laid a finger on Jesus at this point, His time of great agony had begun: "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

But why did our Savior suddenly become so very sorrowful? What was in His mind that brought such agonizing sorrow upon Him? Was it because of the despite and rejection by every generation of mankind? Or that His closest friends were either betraying Him or forsaking Him? Was it because He feared the fast approaching hours of physical torture? Or that He dreaded the blackness of death itself? These may have been factors, but the evidence renders it more likely that the major reasons were these:

- » The humanly unbearable weight and pain of the knowledge and burden of seven thousand years of mankind's sins.
- » The horrifying fact that, as the sins of the world were being laid upon Him, He was *actually becoming* the sin of the world (II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13).
- » The knowledge that His Father must now turn away from Him because of the sin that He—Jesus—bore and was now becoming.
- » The thought of the fast approaching, total separation from His Father.

On this last point, Isaiah 53:8 prophesies that Jesus would be "cut off from the land of the living." He was to be cut off from His human brothers and sisters who were imperfect, who enjoyed a temporary, physical life, but whose sins had caused His suffering and death. More importantly and painfully for Him, He was to be cut off from communication with His perfect, loving, and eternal Father: "And

about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Matthew 27:46)

"Forsaken" comes from the Greek verb *egkataliepo*, indicating that Jesus, in the delirium that preceded His death, was crying out to His Father, "Why have You deserted Me? Why have You left Me behind in this place?"