

R12.2 November 2022 Blog Identification and the Gospel

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."
Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)

The Bible is replete with stupendous statements. This is just one of them. In Greek mythology, the gods generally viewed mankind with contempt, indifference, or as playthings. Their main attitude toward human beings was detachment. Not so with the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of Jesus' primary ways of dealing with mankind is to *identify* with them. Therefore, in the divine incarnation, God took on flesh and dwelt among us. Moreover, He dwelt among us, not as one who came to be served, but as one who came to serve.

Suffering is common to all mankind, every era, every culture, every ethnicity, and every nationality. Suffering is universal – no one completely escapes suffering. To demonstrate that He identifies with us, Jesus voluntarily took upon His divine and sinless person the suffering of sinful humanity. Human suffering is generally involuntary. But Jesus, seeking to identify with us, agreed to submit to the will of the Father, whose will required that His only begotten Son be treated terribly, beaten, and then crucified. The above verse is better understood if read this way: "Although He was a son, He *experienced firsthand the price of obedience* through what He suffered." No-one can ever say to Jesus: "You don't understand my situation." He understands because He has *experienced* suffering. He does not stand aloof and apart from us. That is why He calls His followers "friends." How often have people said to their critics: "I wish you could walk in *my shoes*." The meaning is that, if you walked in that person's shoes, you would understand him or her. Jesus elected to walk in our shoes, and He unequivocally demonstrated that by His suffering.

Jesus did not suffer for His sake. He suffered for *our* sake. Jesus did not suffer so that He could come to know us. After all, He created us. He suffered so that we would come to know Him and understand that He identifies with us. He can thereby free us from our suffering for eternity. By suffering, Jesus showed us in the most incontrovertible way that He identifies with us, He understands the weakness of our flesh and the sins to which we are prone. He understands our broken hearts. He understands physical pain. He understands what it means to be alienated and ridiculed by those who should love us. He understands what it means to be misunderstood. He understands what it means to have one's good efforts cruelly mischaracterized as evil. He understands what it means when family members mock us. He understands what it means to grow up without a father. He understands what it means to be betrayed and abandoned by friends. He understands what it means to be tried by a corrupt tribunal wrongly seeking our destruction. He understands what it means to be brought before the chief magistrate who callously orders the death of the innocent to further the magistrate's own political career. He understands what it means to be abandoned by friends in one's loneliest, most terrible hour. And, finally, He understands what it means when the Holy Father, God Almighty, El Shaddai, seems to turn His back on our

suffering. "And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹ Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22:1 (ESV): "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus does not refer to God as "Father." Why? Because Jesus is our Divine Substitute; He stands in *our* place. Our sinfulness and rebellion deny us the right to call God "Father." Therefore, Jesus, our Substitute, had no right to call God "Father." The Father turned His back on Jesus so that He could turn His face upon us. The Father rejected Jesus on the cross so that He could adopt us as sons and daughters.

Jesus endured all these things so that we could know that *He knows* the reality and depth of our suffering. Jesus identifies with us because He loves us. Because He loves us, He gave himself up to be crucified so that we could be saved in Him and through Him. Jesus understands our darkest hour and laid down His body as a bridge from mortality to eternal life, from alienation to adoption by the living God.

Application (questions for self-reflection and sharing with others in your sphere):

1. Put on your *eternal* glasses and consider the following verses:

"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

Hebrews 9:27-28 (ESV)

2. Do you believe Him? If so, why?
3. Will you thank Jesus for taking on your sin and receiving the penalty you deserve?
4. In light of the following verses, how are you living your life?

"For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

Hebrews 2:2-3a (ESV)

- a. What does it look like in your life to ensure you are not neglecting so great a salvation?
5. If you do not believe Him, will you receive His salvation today?

¹ Matthew 27:46 (ESV)