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This way forward

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF JESUS: MY SOUL IS TROUBLED

John 12: 27-28; Mark 14:32-36

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Soon after Jesus' grand reception, complete with waving palms and adoring crowds, Jesus begins to feel the heavy weight of sin in the world – and carrying that load is almost more than he can bear.

He has felt the sting of rejection by the crowds that he gave so much love to; the authorities have arrested him; his closest friends never truly understood his purpose; and the inexorable weight of his destiny is fast approaching.

Jesus' soul is troubled.

Jesus has more than a destiny and a purpose. He has a heart and it is breaking. Perhaps in heaven he was somewhat removed from the acute pain of rejection. But now he could see it in the faces of the crowds and hear it in their voices. Anyone who has felt such pain knows it feels like razors scrapping layers of agony off your soul.

You and I can deaden ourselves to such experiences, rationalizing it away, or perhaps scars have numbed us. But Jesus could not. His soul was too pure. His heart too filled with love. His mind is completely unable to use our false rationalizations. Jesus would have felt it fully and completely, with no means to diminish it.

A few weeks before, in the midst of this increasing burden, Jesus sets his eyes forward for the task lest his courage falter.

"I have come for this purpose!" He says it like, "I know this will be almost impossibly difficult, but bring it on world! I will face down the very demons of hell to get this done!"

Like the warrior building up their courage for battle through war cries, Jesus is talking himself into this trial.

But he is not the victim here. His sacrifice will be an act of power, not an act of submission that

would let evil triumph and gain power. Jesus is going to unleash his most potent weapon of war in his arsenal, the very principal he lived each moment of his life...to overcome evil with good.

He believes, in the depth of his being, that this is the only thing that can bring down the forces of darkness that have tainted the world with sin, greed, and pride.

Loving someone into submission is Jesus' approach. He will not run and hide. He will not raise a fist against them. He will not even defend himself.

We all know that when we are desperately in the mood to argue and our opponent refuses to engage, it simply infuriates us all the more. But, like a toddler having a tantrum, eventually he tires himself out and then he is ready to listen to mom once again.

To see Jesus never respond in kind, despite all the evil the world hurled at him, makes us pause. It leads us to ask, just as the disciples did, "Who IS this!?" It opens our hearts to the trite but true truth of this world – nothing is more powerful than love.

Jesus was willing to endure the evil and rejection of the world – and love them into salvation. But this could not remove the pain of their hatred.

Still, Jesus needed help. Back in John 12, when Jesus first voiced his pain, God the Father stepped in with words of comfort. Even the Son of God needed it. Or might we say especially the Son of God needed it. Needed it more than anyone ever.

This is one of the most tender moments in all scripture. In that passage we are not only touched by the humanity of Jesus but, dare we say, the very humanity of God. For what is more human than a parent's tender feelings for their child, than a

father encouraging his son and a son looking to dad for support.

Jesus voiced his need to God in the guise of a statement to the crowd. “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – ‘Father save me from this hour?’” At this point, Jesus wasn't asking to have this task, this cup, taken from him, not yet. But any parent with a scrap of compassion can tell he needs encouragement for the task ahead.

The Son of God relies on God the Father for support.

Now some fathers are stern until the moment calls for something else. I remember an instance not with my father but my eldest brother, Steve. Now I love him but, like many older brothers, he sometimes took advantage of his size and strength to get me to do various tasks. I remember one time I was on the second floor of our house and he was in the basement. He called up to me to come downstairs. I shouted back, “What do you want?” He replied, “Just come here!” We went back and forth like that for a minute and I finally gave in and trudged down two flights of stairs to find him lying on the couch watching television. “Steve, what do you want?” He said (and you’re not going to believe this), “Change the channel for me!” This was Steve. Never cruel, but not exactly warm and fuzzy either.

That was our relationship – until one day at my junior high school. It was the eighth grade, end-of-the-year track meet. I had won the 110-meter hurdles and was competing in the high jump (truth be told, I only won because people could only sign up for two events and the best athletes chose others!). I ran up to the high jump bar and executed a perfect Fosbury Flop, claiming victory there as well. But, as I landed, I rolled off the end of the mat and tweaked my knee. I lay there for a few minutes as people surrounded me, trying to figure out what to do. Soon, I heard my mother’s voice as she came by my side. But what happened next completely took me by surprise.

Two hands grabbed me by the legs and the back. Now no teenage boy wants to be carried like

you might hold a baby, but Steve had me firm in his grip, to make sure I wouldn't get hurt further as the whole stadium looked on. You better believe I never lived that down with my friends. But Steve didn't care that it was out of place. He wanted to make sure I wasn't hurt further.

So, even though Jesus didn't ask Dad for support, God the Father was going to give it to him. Like a child in a play who struggles in front of an audience for the next line, God was going to step in, even if it interrupts the scene.

Instead of hoisting Jesus off the ground, God shouts from heaven. God has interrupted this scene because his Son needs a word of encouragement and God offers it, affirming that Jesus' very presence on earth is a source of pride and glory for the Father.

When God says to Jesus, “I have glorified my name”, he is really saying, “Son you make me proud.” A child yearns to hear these words from their father, perhaps even more than the words “I love you”. And, they can make a world of difference even in the harshest of trials.

If Christ needed words of encouragement, think how much others need them, how much you need them. Like Jesus, when your enemies seek to undo you, always return evil with good. Like Jesus, when you need strength, look to God and offer that same comfort to others.

Perhaps Paul understood this better than any other when he wrote,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Amen.