

Jesus – Obedient to Death!

Four at the Crossroad:

Philippians 2:5-13; Luke 19:37-40

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Wesley J. Gabel

Your family gathers. You play some games. There's lots of laughter and stories. The food is terrific. Then near the end, a dispute breaks out. Emotions are raw. The party ends with no resolution to the dispute. How do you feel? Are you energized? Are you ready for another gathering? When will you re-engage the family?

Palm Sunday followed that pattern. In the 38th verse of Luke 19, we read how a crowd praised Jesus as a delivering king. They cried:

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. (Luke 19:38, NIV)

However, in verse 39, Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke his followers, and in verse 41 Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

Jesus experienced many moments of triumph that ended in dispute. God would heal or free a person through him, and then he'd be accused of having a demon. After hearing stories about him, his family was convinced he was crazy and tried to take charge of him. On one occasion a crowd tried to kill him. For Jesus, much of his life was an emotional rollercoaster; yet his obedience was not. It was steady. Paul writes:

Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:8, NIV)

Although the Bible teaches that Jesus lived a sinless life, it also affirms that he was tempted just like you and me. Consequently, he knows what it takes for you and me to overcome in our struggle.

Let's regress for a moment. For more than a month, we've been learning from *Four at the Crossroad*. We all face decisions that take us down a path. It can be as evident as the choice to marry or as innocuous as a third glance at cross traffic while stopped at an intersection.

We considered how Judas harbored secret sin, erupted in anger and succumbed to remorse. The cross testified against him. We pondered Pilate's choice to save his career and his pretense of innocence. The cross was his conviction. We looked at Peter's choice to save his skin, his return to Christ, and his service of those he weakened with his desertion. For him, the cross became his hope and life. The crossroad for Jesus was no less emotional. The Bible says:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 5:7-8, NIV)

Jesus learned obedience by what he suffered. Obedience and faith don't truly show themselves until there are attractive reasons to not believe and to not obey. Faith by its nature is risk. Obedience that is meaningful must overcome temptations.

Suppose I tell a child, "Be sure and eat your dessert." If the child eats the dessert, can I conclude that this child will obey me, that this child trusts me, and that I can trust this child?" As long as my views align with that of the child's, the child only trusts himself and obeys his whims. Similarly, we show no faith in Christ, regardless what we say, until there are compelling reasons to abandon such faith; and then instead of abandon it, we believe and obey.

Do you know why Jesus believed and obeyed his heavenly Father? If you answer because he was sinless or because he was the son of God, then you probably don't think he was *that* tempted and you probably don't understand what Paul wrote in Philippians 2. Jesus emptied himself of his divine abilities becoming completely human like you and me. He had to rely upon the Spirit of God exactly like you and me. He had to wait upon the Father just like you and me.

In the last week of his life, while staying in the village of Bethany, Jesus suffered intense hunger pangs and had no food. He saw a fig tree leafed out, but he had no sixth sense or divine radar to know whether there were any figs on it. He had to walk over to the tree; and just like you and me, he examined with his eyes and found it had none, and experienced the same feeling of disappointment.

Jesus trusted and obeyed his Father because he learned from the Scriptures and from his experience that his Father truly loved him, was all powerful and was with him. The night Jesus was betrayed, his soul was so full of grief that his little blood vessels, called capillaries, burst and bled into his sweat glands. He told his disciples that he felt sorrow to the point of death. Jesus was learning obedience. Jesus was learning faith.

He drew upon the Scriptures. He drew upon his experience of the Father's love and power. He chose to trust what he could not see. He chose to believe that his Father had a plan for good. This is exactly what he calls you and me to believe.

That is why, after much suffering and heartache, the Apostle Paul writes:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, NIV)

Can you look back and affirm this? Can you affirm, despite the pain, the sorrow, the disappointment, that God is in charge and is working for your good?

You do realize that Jesus' obedience led to death, but didn't end in death, don't you?

(Jesus) became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11, NIV)

Can you believe when everything else tells you not to, that God will deliver on his promises? Can you believe both in God's love and judgment? Must you ignore one to believe

in the other? Do you see his mercy for you, or are you just a poor victim, getting beaten around, and you need to fend for yourself? That's what Judas believed. That's what Pilate believed. That for a painful moment is what Peter believed. That is what Jesus refused to believe. Jesus understood he was a beloved son. Do you understand that?

The Holy Spirit says to us:

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3, NIV)

Growing weary and losing heart is exactly what three at the crossroad did. However, Jesus persevered. He laid down his life for you and me believing it would change our destiny, and that his Father would not desert him.

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. (Hebrews 12:4-7, NIV)

Understand then that God your Father is reaching out to you right now. Your Father is active in your pain and disappointment, in your grief and in your failures. You are being disciplined so that an amazing harvest of righteousness and peace will flow out of you... just like Jesus.

God so loves us that he didn't send a program or a plan or a principle. Your Father sent a person. Persons affect persons. The person Jesus took away your condemnation when you repent and believe, and he baptizes those who repent and believe with the same Spirit that animated him, that empowered him, counseled him and kept him pure. That Spirit reaches out to you now. You are at the crossroad. What will you choose?