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Jesus' Intentional Suffering

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Luke 9:51-56, 22:39-46 (ESV)

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.

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And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

In our Bible overview, we find ourselves looking at the life of Christ. We have looked at his early life and his middle life, and now we're coming towards the end of his life.

Continue to open the Scriptures because there's power in God's Word. And when we let God's Word speak to us, it can transform us. There's some sort of supernatural work in the Word of God. That's how the whole creation came to be, and that's how human hearts are regenerated, renewed, and brought into the family of God.

And so we're in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the start of the New Testament—which contains the recordings for us of the life of Jesus. Now, Paul tells us that all that was written before that—and we've gone through a lot of just the overview of the Old Testament—all that was written before that was written to teach us so that, through the endurance that's taught there and the encouragement we find there, we might have hope.

You and I might live with an unquenchable optimism, a hope that comes to us from outside of this world. And when we read through the Old Testament, we see the history of God's work in our world. When we understand that, believe that, and let that settle in on us, it stirs in us the idea that God is alive, he's at work in our world today, and there's always a reason for hope.

The Old Testament was written for that reason—to encourage us, to give us perseverance in living with an unquenchable optimism in life, without despair, without playing the victim, but constantly having hope.

Now, when we turn to the gospel writings, the recordings of Jesus, there are many reasons that these were recorded for us. But the writer of Hebrews says this: when we look at the life of Jesus, it's good to do so because, as we consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, we ourselves can be stirred not to grow weary or lose heart.

So that we don't become discouraged or grow weary and tired ourselves. There is something supernatural about fixing our minds and our hearts and considering the life of Christ. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that as we gaze upon him, we are transformed by him. And so it's good to look at Christ by faith. Look to Christ by faith.

And so we do this. Now, we're looking at the end of his life. We've talked about him being born into this world, growing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man, and then starting his ministry at his baptism. He went around doing a number of things. Then, Luke 9 says, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face towards Jerusalem."

As Adrian read earlier, the Message version tells us this:

Here you have the whole Testament, the life of Christ. He's walking here on the earth, he's doing his ministry, and then all of a sudden, he turns his face. He'd been to Jerusalem before, but he turns his face back to Jerusalem when the time drew near for him to be taken up.

The Message version interpretation says this: "When it came close for the time of his ascension to go back to God, he gathered up his courage and steeled himself for the journey to Jerusalem."

Gathered up his courage and steeled himself for the journey.

I think in the Bible overview, it's good to just consider some basics about the things that we're seeing in Jesus' life. There are many descriptors—words we can use to describe him. Many people love to describe Jesus as very compassionate and kind. That is probably the highest value lifted up about Christ in our world today. He was compassionate, patient, and kind.

And he was. He was gentle. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, the Bible says.

When we think of the life of Christ, some of the things that we don't often acknowledge about him are that he was a very persevering and strong man. He was tenacious in his spirit. He was not easily caught off track. At times, he was very confrontational.

These were characteristics of Jesus as well. This man is hard to put in a box.

A couple of words near the end of his life that would be descriptive of him: one would be *intentional*. He was very intentional in his life. Another would be *passionate*. We're talking about the passion of Jesus, the passion of the Christ.

So what does it mean to be intentional? To be intentional is to be purposeful or deliberate, to be focused on a goal, to move with intent. One definition says it's a mental state that causes a person, in their being, to be directed toward or focused entirely on some goal or achievement.

The word *intentional* wasn't used that much in our world until about the 1950s. Then it started to get used more and more. Now, the use of the word *intentional* just goes off the charts if you research this, because we understand now the power of intentionality.

I don't know if you've ever been around a very intentionally focused person—especially sometimes men. Maybe some of you women will attest to this.

You've seen your man—if you have a husband or other men around you—watching something on TV. They're very focused. My wife says this: when we're watching TV, sometimes we don't hear anything else going on around us.

We're intentionally focused on watching something. This is intentionality. You're blocking out other things, and you're heading towards a specific goal.

When I was younger, my dad kicked into intentional mode once a month for sure, if not more often. When it was time to send the pigs to market, he would let us know that the next morning we were going to sell pigs and that we needed to get up a little earlier on that day.

What he would do intentionally is get things ready. He would pull out a truck and park it in our yard. It was a straight truck, an International truck, and it would hold about 30 to 32 hogs that were ready for market. Then, he would hook up a trailer to his tractor, get everything ready for the morning, and come down early to wake us up, saying, "Guys, it's time to sort hogs."

So, my brother and I would go out into the hog lot and begin working. A lot of times, Dad would say, "Let's say a prayer so we can get it done." If you've ever worked with livestock, you know it doesn't always go as planned. My father would say a prayer, and then he would run the hogs out of a building, down a chute, and yell, "Keep or sell."

If it was a keeper, we had to swing a gate one way to keep it in a pen. If it was a seller, we had to load it onto a lift so it could be hydraulically raised, allowing Dad to put the pigs onto the straight truck.

We were so focused on these mornings because getting this done before school started took some intentionality. We would load the hogs, Dad would take off for market, and we would head off to school.

I've learned that Jesus' life—his whole ministry life—was a lot like this. He was. If you read through his life, he was focused, very intentional, and didn't do anything haphazardly.

Luke records this about his early life:

"At daybreak, as he often did, he went alone to pray—intentionally—to gain strength from God. He went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him, and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also because that is why I was sent.' And so he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea."

He didn't bow to what the people wanted. He stayed on task for the mission for which he was sent. He was very intentionally focused from the time he started his ministry up to the time he turned towards Jerusalem—all the way to the time of his ascension.

God was living on purpose here, and you and I are called to do the same.

Peter says this about Jesus in Acts:

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God sent him to do this. God was quickening him to do this."

So, in our text, we see:

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. He gathered up his courage and steeled himself for the journey."

John Maxwell says this in his book *Intentional Living*:

"When you live each day with intentionality, there's almost no limit to what you can do. You can transform yourself, your family, your community, your nation. When enough people do this, they can change the world. When you intentionally use your everyday life to bring about positive change in the lives of others—"

A good description of Jesus.

"—you begin to live a life that matters. That matters. No one has influenced the world more than this man who lived very intentionally."

So, what happened when he turned his face towards Jerusalem?

He sent messengers ahead of him to do the planning. They went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations. They basically went—since they didn't have cell phones and such—to get a hotel room or some place to stay for that night while traveling.

But the people did not receive him, it says, *"because his face was set towards Jerusalem."*

This is very interesting. Why would people reject him because he was on his way to Jerusalem?

The Samaritans didn't allow him to stay with them when they heard he was on his way to Jerusalem. We know from our Old Testament overview that God's people were divided into two. There was a southern nation and a northern nation. Then, they went into exile, and God brought the southern nation back home to Jerusalem.

But those in the northern kingdom didn't get returned, and so they just sort of melded together. This was Samaria.

There was division in their past, and so in the present time of Christ, there was tension between the Samaritans in the northern kingdom—all those who ended up settling there—and the Jews in the southern kingdom.

We have this in our world today. This is human nature, okay? They were arguing over whether you should really have to worship in Jerusalem or whether you could worship somewhere in the northern kingdom.

I don't know if you've experienced some of this tension, but we experience it in our house sometimes because we have some Hawkeye fans and we have some Iowa State fans. And so, we have this little tension.

Matter of fact, my grandson came to the table the other day and said that a friend of his in school cut a little deal with him. My grandson was going to get a little something from his friend as long as he would cheer for Iowa State.

He was telling us this at the dinner table, and my son, who played for the Hawkeyes, was listening. He listened to his son say, "You know, I'm going to—so I have to cheer for Iowa State."

My son looked at his son and said, "Well, that's fine, Clay, but you see that barn out there? You're going to have to sleep in that barn."

We sometimes have these funny tensions in our world.

I can tell you, when my wife and I moved to Cedar Falls a number of years ago, it didn't take long for us to learn that there's some sort of sense of this around Cedar Falls and Waterloo. This is humanity—creating divisions and measuring ourselves against each other.

This is how this cropped up. The northern kingdom and the southern kingdom didn't get along because of their history. So when Jesus was in the north, heading down towards Jerusalem, they had to go through Samaria.

They went in and said, "Hey, do you have a place we could stay?"

And the Samaritans asked, "Well, where are you heading?"

"We're headed to Jerusalem."

"No, we don't. We just don't have a place for you."

Fascinating.

But this didn't bother Jesus.

Look at the humanity of his disciples. When James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? I mean, do you want us to call fire down from heaven?"

We have such trivial divisions in our world—Samaritans and Jews, fans of football teams, Democrat and Republican, Baptist and Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran, Catholic—all of these man-made divisions.

And what does Jesus say?

He turned and rebuked them. One version says, *"He turned to them and said, 'Of course not. Of course not.'"*

See?

"For God so loved the world."

Everyone. Samaritans, Jews, Gentiles, fans of any team, people from any religion, any background, any nation, any tribe, any tongue, any color of skin. He loves them all, and he's inviting them all into a family with him.

"Do you want us to smote these people?"

"Of course not. Of course not."

And then, it simply says, *"They went on to another village."*

He was intentional, heading towards Jerusalem. He didn't let this little distraction get in his way. But he was also passionate.

The Passion of the Christ.

You know, this word *passion* is a word we often use to describe intense emotion in our world.

But this is different.

The *Passion of the Christ* has come to mean something different. The actual word *passion* comes from the Latin word *petai*, which literally means *to endure* or *to suffer*.

In regard to Christ's life, when we talk about his passion, generally speaking, we mean the last week of his life. Theologians mostly point to the time of his suffering, which probably began in his prayer time in the garden and culminated the next day—over a period of 24 hours—when he was crucified on the cross.

This was after his arrival in Jerusalem.

We pick up our gospel text here:

"He came out and went, as was his custom—still intentionally beginning his days in prayer with the Lord—to the Mount of Olives."

Now, at the end of his day, he went again to the Mount of Olives.

They had arrived in Jerusalem and were staying somewhere in the city. But Jesus went out to the east side of Jerusalem, near the temple, up to the Mount of Olives—a place filled with olive trees just outside the city walls.

This was likely a quiet place in nature where he could talk with God.

"He came out and went, as was his custom, onto the Mount of Olives. And the disciples followed him there."

When he came to the place, he said to them, *"Pray that you may not enter into temptation."*

Then, he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and began to pray.

He said, *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me."*

God asked his Son, and they agreed together for him to do something that was very challenging.

"If you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

Then, there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.

The grace of God came to him again.

In this time of prayer, God sent an angelic being. The Bible traces both the physical seen world and the unseen world. Here, an angel from heaven appears and strengthens him in his spirit for the task that lies ahead.

And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.

The Passion of the Christ—the intentional suffering of the Christ—is beginning.

Here we have someone who is intentionally suffering for the world.

This is the kind of leader we want—one who will pay a deep price, no matter what opinions are around him. One who will sacrifice greatly to do things on behalf of those he is leading.

Here we have Jesus, the servant leader, preparing to suffer greatly—not only for you and I, but for the whole world. Intentionally suffering.

We can call him compassionate. We can call him kind.

Let's also call him strong and persevering. Let's call him controversial. Let's call him intentional. Let's call him passionate.

I began this sermon with a story intentionally about my father sending hogs to market because the Scripture tells us this is basically what was happening to Jesus.

These hogs, in our day, went to market and sacrificed their lives for the sake of our family. You see, that's how my dad got paid, how food got put on the table, and how we were provided for in one way—by God—through the sacrifice of those animals.

The prophet Isaiah says this about Jesus:

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, he did not open his mouth."

We're talking about the life of Christ.

He's headed towards Jerusalem.

Next week, we're going to look at the actual death of Christ. Then, we're heading into Ash Wednesday, into the Lenten season, and towards Easter.

And what a great time it is to begin considering *him who knew such opposition from sinful people, so that we might not grow weary and lose heart.*

I don't know what God is asking you to do in your life today.

I don't know what kind of burden he's asking you to bear, what kind of cup he has for you.

But I want to encourage you—if it's heavy, if it's hard—consider him who knew such opposition.

Consider how he handled it with prayer and the grace of God that came upon him.

Consider how he continued in doing what God was asking him to do, even though it was hard.

May God give you strength just as he did Jesus.

In this time, let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your Word.

We thank you for recording this and inspiring it in the writers some 2,000 years ago so that we might continue to gaze upon your Son.

We might continue to be reminded of—or even experience for the first time—his nature and what he was like.

We do thank you for his compassion and his kindness, his healing ministry.

We thank you for his teaching ministry.

But above all, Father, we thank you for his intentionality—his persevering spirit in heading towards the cross, where he would do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves—pay the penalty for our sins against you.

Thank you, Father.

And as we consider him, would you work this strength in our hearts and our souls as your people as well?

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.