

Jesus Took Your Pain

The wrestling match was about to begin. This would truly be  the greatest spectacle of all time. Only a few, however, would witness it: God the Father, Satan and Jesus. Angels were kept at bay; no rescue mission would be deployed.

The disciples were asked to sit ringside, just off the mat. But they became overwhelmed with exhaustion and missed the main event. Jesus would wrestle His opponent alone, sans the fanfare.

Jesus knew going into it that this would be the wrestling match of His life. The name for the arena of His struggle, Gethsemane, means “oil press”—a certain indicator of the pressure He would feel. The conflict was real, the challenger was His own will, and the battle was to the death. Only the winner would get the cup.

I don't like wrestling. It's an intense sport with lots of bodily contact. As a mom I had to sit in the stands and enthusiastically cheer my son on as I watched him get twisted like a pretzel. Skin on skin, arms and legs interlocked, I sometimes wasn't sure who was winning. The flip-flop back and forth was incessant, as the two contestants tried to press each other into submission.

That's what a confrontation with our own will is like. The carnal nature doesn't go down easily. Jesus was engaged in a fierce wrestling match with His humanity.

From the moment He crossed over the threshold into the Garden of Gethsemane, He did so fully human. If He were ever going to identify with the weaknesses and frailties of mankind, He would have to leave His royal robes of deity outside the garden and enter the press “in the likeness of man” (Phil. 2:7, NKJV). The Messiah would have to experience the fullness of excruciating pain, anxiety, suffering and betrayal, all as

a man.

His raw humanity cried out for another way. Jesus petitioned His Father to see if there was another cup less lethal, an alternative to redeem the world. Yet His spirit was fully prepared to swallow the contents.

In our humanity we do the same thing. We avoid pain and suffering, asking God to keep us from experiencing misery. We would rather be rerouted to the path of least resistance.

Fast tracking, however, is rarely offered with God's plan.

Jesus put His flesh in a headlock when He proclaimed, " 'Not my will, but Yours, be done' " (Luke 22:42). The carnal nature was weakened. Drops of blood fell from His brow as the intensity of the contest increased.

Maybe some support from His disciples would strengthen Him. Leaving the place where He was praying, Jesus looked to His small group—James, John and Peter—for support.

But no encouragement came from this impotent prayer team as they lay sound asleep on the ground. Perhaps it was then that Jesus realized there was no other way.

Our fallen nature, exemplified by the spiritually slumbering three, desperately needed to be redeemed. Returning to the place of prayer, Jesus went in for the kill. He pinned His flesh to the mat once and for all and gained the victory when He denounced His own desires and feelings, declaring that He was choosing the Father's will over His own.

Clearly put, Jesus said, "I release My personal ambitions and surrender to Your plan, Father, because I want Your sovereign will to be accomplished in My life, not My own." That decision secured Jesus' place in the winner's circle and won for Him the cup. He would indeed drink it and accept the plan of His Father.

The cup, a Jewish metaphor for sin and wrath, was symbolic of the lot that lay before Him. Jesus agreed to take it on our behalf.

In the cup was our sin. It was brimming over with our brokenness, pain and suffering—all that separated us from a holy God. Jesus chose to take it in our place. He embraced the purpose of the Father and became the vicarious sacrifice for you and me. He drank the cup.

But He refused another kind of cup. It was customary for the accused to receive an intoxicating drink of wine and myrrh before crucifixion. This remedy provided deep hypnotic effects that eased the guilty mind and soothed impending suffering.

But the innocent one refused such a drink. Jesus would not be anesthetized, taking a detour from the road of complete suffering. He would not allow His senses to be dulled or deluded as He freely paid the price of sin and its ravenous impact on you and me.

The blameless Son of God drank the cup of suffering but refused the cup of ease, and, in so doing, forever identified with us. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

Friends, how many times have we been asked to drink a painful cup? The lot of our life suddenly includes swallowing a tough and difficult thing.

Maybe we have been thrown on the wrestling mat because of the betrayal of a close friend or someone’s selfish act, and now we are in a struggle with our hurting humanity. All too often we cry out for instant relief. We are tempted to reject the cup that leads to the crucifixion of our flesh, preferring instead the drink of temporary consolation.

Beware! Don’t be deceived into sipping on the myrrh. The

world's painkillers are plentiful but poisonous. We can temporarily self-medicate by partaking of the supply life has to offer, but if we do, we will be in danger of missing the purpose and destiny God has for us.

Jesus' victory in the garden gives us the pattern for overcoming. As a man He sympathizes with our hurts. He knows exactly what we feel, and yet He conquered by choosing the Master's plan. His determination to do it God's way propelled Him into His destiny.

Like Christ, our example, we may discover that our biggest victory is preceded by our deepest and most painful experience. But if we win the wrestling match against our flesh, we too will gain victory.

One day Jesus asked His disciples, " 'Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' " (Matt. 20:22). They quickly replied, " 'We are able.' " And indeed they had to—and every other follower of Christ must—one day drink from a cup of suffering and pain.

Jesus embraced the will of the Father, declined the wine of the world and endured the cross for the joy set before Him. That joy? You and me. We were the joy set before Him. This Easter remember—whatever challenges you face—endure. For Jesus is the joy set before *you*.

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