

# DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

March 17-21, 2008



March 17, 2008    **“A Life of Suffering”**<sup>1</sup>

*“Jesus wept.”*<sup>2</sup>

Imagine that you have been snatched up in a time machine and cast back to live as a serf on an oppressive manor in the Dark Ages. You live now with other peasants at the lowest social strata, malnourished, prone to illnesses caused by lack of basic sanitation or health care and in a dwelling not fit for animals let alone humans. Those around you suffer, but they know nothing better. Your suffering is torment because you have lived differently and you know life should be so much more than this.

This was, in part, why the life of Christ was one of suffering throughout. God the Son became one of us, the Holy One living in a sin-cursed world. In his case, this vastly increased the pain of the common sufferings of the human race. “His capacity for suffering was commensurate with the ideal character of his humanity, with his ethical perfection, and with his sense of righteousness and holiness and veracity. No one could feel the poignancy of pain and grief and moral evil as Jesus could.”<sup>3</sup>

In his perfection, Jesus could never ‘get used to’ the effects of sin and evil on planet earth. Repetition and familiarity with illness, injustice, death and pain could not dull the revulsion, righteous indignation or empathy. Yet moment by moment, God chose to experience this path of suffering...for us!

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<sup>1</sup> We are returning to examine the atoning work of Christ as our High Priest with an examination of his suffering for us.

<sup>2</sup> John 11:35 (TNIV)

<sup>3</sup> L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, pp. 337-338.

March 18, 2008     **“A Life of Varied Suffering”**

*“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.”<sup>1</sup>*

The life of Christ was one of suffering throughout, not only because he was God incarnate, but also because he suffered in a myriad of ways.<sup>2</sup> To quote theologian Louis Berkof at length...

*“The way of obedience was for Him at the same time a way of suffering. He suffered from the repeated assaults of Satan, from the hatred and unbelief of his own people, and from the persecution of his enemies. Since He trod the wine-press alone, His loneliness must have been oppressive, and His sense of responsibility, crushing. His suffering was consecrated suffering, increasing in severity as he approached the end. The suffering that began in His incarnation finally reached its climax in the ‘passio magna’ at the end of his life.”<sup>3</sup>*

These trials of suffering presented unique temptations to Christ at every turn, culminating in the struggle in Gethsemane. Unlike us, Christ had the option to any time cry ‘Cut!’ and walk out of the scene. On the eve of the crucifixion, isolated and alone, facing the most horrible suffering, that real choice was especially intense. Yet still ‘treading the wine-press alone’, he chose to go on suffering for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:2b-3a (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> “That he, all the time that he lived on earth, but especially at the end of his life, sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind...” Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 37

<sup>3</sup> L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 337

March 19, 2008 **“He Suffered in all His Being”**

*“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me....Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.”<sup>1</sup>*

Christ’s experience in the garden of Gethsemane well illustrates what has been the most prominent theme in recent centuries in reflecting on the sufferings of Christ. There he declared, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” and as he prayed “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground”.<sup>2</sup> So theologians have stressed that sin, as a spiritual problem created intense spiritual suffering in Christ then and while on the cross.

The recent film, “The Passion of the Christ” has, however, revived an earlier focus that believers had upon the reality of Jesus’ physical suffering on Good Friday. The mocking, beating, scourging and crucifixion induced physical suffering at its worst. Awful to contemplate, yet historically true. As sin results in physical suffering as well as spiritual, Christ, in the agony of the Passion, “endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body”.<sup>3</sup> In the midst of that,,,

*“He could have called ten thousand angels  
To destroy the world and set Him free.  
He could have called ten thousand angels,  
But He died alone, for you and me.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 22:14, 16 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Mark 14:34 and Luke 22:44 (TNIV)

<sup>3</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith 14:4

<sup>4</sup> Chorus from ‘Ten Thousand Angels’ by Ray Overholt, based on Matthew 26:53

March 20, 2008      **“Christ: The Scapegoat”**

*“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”<sup>1</sup>*

The crucifixion of Christ took place upon the preparation day for Passover. As the yearling lambs were being put to death in memory of God’s great act of deliverance from slavery in Egypt<sup>2</sup>, the blood of the Messianic Lamb of God was being shed on Calvary. His blood adorned, not the doorposts of houses, but the wood of the cross so that the wrath of God might be turned away from all who look to him in faith and that they might dwell in peace with one another in the household of God.

But Isaiah 53 looks to another feast day when it declares that God himself would lay upon the Suffering Servant “the iniquity of us all”. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement,<sup>3</sup> the High Priest would lay both hands upon a live goat *“and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goats head.”<sup>4</sup>* The goat was then driven out of the camp and into the desert that Israel might ‘scape God’s punishment for sin.

Christ himself was both High Priest and sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> God laid upon him all our sins and he suffered the punishment due them in our place. Outside the walls of the city, on Calvary, he became our scapegoat.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:5-6 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 12

<sup>3</sup> See Leviticus 16

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 16:21 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 6:26-27; 9:11-28

March 21, 2008     **“Death - Rejected by God”**

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from the words of my groaning?”<sup>1</sup>*

Of the words of Christ spoken from the cross, *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*<sup>2</sup> are arguably the most poignant and indicate the height of his spiritual suffering.

We usually see death as separation of soul from body. Biblically, death is first of all separation from God: “God’s withdrawing Himself with the blessings of life and happiness from man and visiting man in wrath”.<sup>3</sup> This death was visited upon Adam and Eve on they day they rebelled against God<sup>4</sup> and it was experienced by Christ as he voluntarily received upon himself the punishment for our sin.

Jesus’ separation from God, though lasting but a few hours of our time, encompassed the penalty of eternal death for every human. It was infinite in its import and intensity because, in some inexplicable way, for the first and only time in all eternity God the Son ‘died’ or was ‘separate from’ the Father and Spirit. Though seemingly impossible, this was the experience of the God/man as Christ hung upon the cross and it was felt as ‘God-forsakenness’ by his human consciousness.

This death and the subsequent death of separation of soul from body paid the price of sin. Yet, even in the midst of this greatest suffering, Jesus did not despair, for his prayers on the cross continued to be lifted up to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 22:1 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34 (KJV)

<sup>3</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 338-9

<sup>4</sup> See Genesis 2:17 and Genesis 3

