

Jesus' final human thoughts

What was in Jesus' mind during His final hours as a human being?

This was the intriguing question put to me a few months ago by a fellow member of God's church. As we approach another Passover season, I'm sure that you'll agree that this question is a very appropriate one.

Once in a while, the authors of Forerunner magazine articles receive comments and questions requesting clarification on what we have written. A few months ago I received just such a letter from my aforementioned friend, commenting on one of my earlier articles. I felt that her letter was so insightful and inspiring that it motivated me into an extensive study of her questions. My friend gave me permission to share with our readers an appropriately edited version of her comments and questions, and my responses.

More than just the legal aspect

One of the first things my correspondent wrote that arrested my attention was that "in a legal sense, our sins were laid upon Him" – referring, of course, to our Saviour – "and He paid the penalty for them."

Although articles and even whole books have been written proving that so much of Jesus' trial and execution was illegal from Jewish, Sanhedrin and Roman standpoints, it is still true that our sins were laid upon Jesus and that He paid the penalty for the sins of mankind in a legal sense according to the law, the prophecies and the will of Almighty God:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge my righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12)

The wages of our sin is death and our sinless Saviour paid that penalty. This, in a nutshell, sums up the greatest act of sacrifice ever performed. However, the fulfillment of the legal aspect was only one part of it. As the above scripture and those quoted below illustrate, to look at it from the legal aspect only is almost to sanitize Jesus' great sacrifice.

Phenomenal question

My friend and correspondent then continues with this phenomenal question: "While He was being tortured, hated, and crucified, was He "thinking" of all the dirty sins for which He was dying?"

The short answer to this question is, "No." It is doubtful that, even when they were being laid upon Him, Jesus spent much time thinking of the many individual acts of human sin. We will return to this point later in this article but, if Jesus was not thinking about the individual sins of humanity during His final hours, what *was* He thinking about? Although the scriptures give us many clues as to what some of His thoughts were during His last twenty-four hours of physical life, we will not be able to know all of them until He fills us in on the details when He returns and when we will, at last, have the capacity to fully receive and understand them. With this in mind, here are a few points to consider regarding some of the contents of Jesus' mind during the final days and hours of His physical life.

There are some key words and phrases that are helpful to us for this particular study. What the scriptures tell us that Jesus *knew* during the time that He bore our iniquities from Gethsemane to the stake gives us many clues to what His thoughts might have been. Jesus' thoughts during this time – that is, His *knowledge* – what He *knew* – are extremely important to His brothers and sisters, because it is partly by them that we are justified. Repeating Isaiah 53:11:

He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge my righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

Yes. Jesus was able to foresee the labour of His own soul. As His final human hours approached, He knew – probably exactly – when His torture and execution would take place:

You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified. (Matthew 26:2)

Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; (Luke 22:15)

Jesus knew that, in order for Him to fulfil all things (Luke 24:44), His suffering must take place during the Passover day of the year that we refer to as 31AD, and that it was necessary for Him to be dead and entombed as that day drew to its close. Knowing how much time He had left before His arrest and His separation from His beloved Father, Jesus knew that His final moments of human freedom would be best filled with close communication with that heavenly Parent – that other member of the God Family:

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." (Matthew 26:36)

The writers of the four gospel accounts have left us an accurate record of these communications and we will examine some of them later in this article.

Despised and rejected

Despite His welcome into Jerusalem six days before, Jesus knew that He was despised and rejected:

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. (Psalms 22:6)

Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul. (Psalms 142:4)

Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully; though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it... Because zeal for your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me... Those who sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song of the drunkards... You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; my adversaries are all before you. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. (Psalms 69:4, 9, 12, 19-20)

Yes. Jesus was very much despised. Think for a moment about the meaning of this word, "despised." The Eternal Lord, the very Creator of the whole magnificent universe was regarded as contemptible and worthless. We recoil from the idea that our Elder Brother who gave up so very, very much for us should be the subject of the songs of drunkards. Here are two more scriptures describing His rejection:

**But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.
(Luke 17:25)**

**He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him... He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people He was stricken.
(Isaiah 53:3, 8)**

The mention of the word "generation" in these two scriptures prompt some additional interesting questions and points to ponder: Whose generation was Isaiah referring to when he asked, "Who will declare His generation?"? Also, how extensive was "this generation" as recorded in Luke 17:25? Were these terms, "this generation" and "His generation" limited to the time and place of Jesus' human lifetime only? Or do they, as the other verses quoted above imply, extend to the whole world over the whole six thousand years allotted to man's self-rule? Just six thousand years? Nay, even in the Millennium, will there not be those who despise and reject Jesus Christ and His rule (Ezekiel 38; Revelation 20:7-8)? In the above excerpt from Isaiah 53, God tells us first that Jesus *is* despised. Yes. He still is today! Then He tells us that Jesus *was* despised. Has not Jesus in fact been rejected by *all* of mankind's eras and areas?

In addition to His awareness of the rejection of the world, Jesus *knew* also that even His closest friends were very weak, despite all they had witnessed during their association with Him. He knew that they would stumble (KJV: be offended) because of Him, that they would forsake Him, and that they would very soon scatter like frightened sheep:

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'"... Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"... And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy... "But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled. (Matthew 26:31, 40-41, 43, 56)

Worse still, Jesus knew that one of His best friends – and He, of course, knew which one – was in the process of betraying Him:

Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" He said to him, "You have said it." (Matthew 26:21-25)

Sudden sorrow

Although Jesus, after the Passover dinner, was somewhat troubled in spirit because Judas' act of betrayal was already in progress (John 13:21), it was not until shortly after the group had arrived at Gethsemane, that Jesus – apparently quite suddenly – began to be very, very sorrowful and deeply distressed. Severely distressed – even to the very point of death:

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me." (Matthew 26:37-38)

The depth of Jesus' sorrow exceeded that of any man, either before or since these final moments of His human freedom:

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the LORD has inflicted in the day of His fierce anger. From above He has sent fire into my bones, and it overpowered them; He has spread a net for my feet and turned me back; He has made me desolate and faint all the day. (Lamentations 1:12-13)

Note the words, "All the day." Jesus, on this last day of His human life, would be afflicted with a permanent desolation and faintness. We cannot comprehend the level of incomparable sorrow and distress that Jesus descended into upon His arrival at Gethsemane. Our modern ideas of depression don't even come near it. The words "even to death" in Matthew 26:38 strongly suggest that if He would have sunk any lower He would have died right there and then. But He was determined to stay alive because He knew that the time prearranged and set for His death had not yet come and that, in order to fulfill all things, He had to carry the sins of the world for several hours more.

We tend to equate agony with great *bodily* pain but, even though no one had physically laid a finger on Jesus at this point, His time of great agony had begun:

And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

But why did our Saviour suddenly become so very sorrowful? What was in His mind that brought such agonizing sorrow upon Him? Was it because of the despising and the rejection by every era throughout the whole world? Or because His best friends were either betraying Him or would soon be leaving Him? Was it because He feared the fast approaching hours of physical torture? Or because He dreaded the blackness of death itself? Some of these things may have been factors, but the evidence renders it more likely that the major reasons were these:

- The humanly unbearable weight and pain of the knowledge and burden of seven thousand years of mankind's sins,
- The horrifying fact that, as the sins of the world were being laid upon Him, He was *actually becoming* the sin of the world (II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13),
- The knowledge that His Father must now turn away from Him because of the sin that He – Jesus – bore and was now becoming,
- The thought of the fast approaching, total separation from His Father.

On this fourth point, Isaiah 53:8 (quoted above) prophesied that Jesus would be "cut off from the land of the living." Yes, He was to be cut off from His human brothers and sisters who were imperfect, who enjoyed a temporary, physical life, but whose sins had caused His suffering and death. But, more importantly and more painfully for Him, He was to be cut off from communication with His perfect, loving and eternally living Father:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

The word "forsaken" comes from the Greek verb *egkataleipo*, the meaning of which indicates that Jesus, in the delirium that preceded His death, was crying out to His Father, "Why have you deserted me? Why have you left me behind in this place?"

Did Jesus know why?

Did Jesus know why His Father had to turn away from Him on His last day of human life, or didn't He? Of course He did! Jesus knew better than any other how limitless is the repulsion between God and sin. We might compare this repulsion to that between the like poles of two colossal electro-magnets (not that there is anything "like" between God and sin).

Try to imagine the torture of our Saviour, to whom sin had been a totally unapproachable thing for all eternity, having every sin ever committed forced onto His perfect head and into His perfectly pure blood! Try to imagine His desolation as His Father, by necessity, had now to turn away and leave Him to finish the job on His own!

And yet every detail of it had been planned, agreed to, and prearranged by them both. Jesus was quoting His own words, which He had inspired His servant David to put into writing a thousand years before this day (Psalm 22:1). When Jesus repeated it as He hung on the stake, He was exclaiming that this prophecy was being fulfilled right then and there. The absolute peak of the agony that He and His Father had planned and foreknew had arrived. Yes, even in His delirium, the utterances of the Logos were solidly based upon His own Word! In another of his psalms, David had been inspired to prophesy of more details of Jesus' agony at this separation from His Father:

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. (Psalms 69:1-3)

Note the words, "while I wait for my God." Even though their separation was only to last for a little more than three days (the actual period depending on which instant the Father found it necessary to turn away from His beloved Son), and even though Jesus was only alive and conscious for less than a day of this time, *any* separation at all was almost unbearable for them both. This was certainly *the* prime case when, with the Lord, one day – His last human day – felt like a thousand years (II Peter 3:8) and, to God the Father, this three and a half days of separation felt like three and a half thousand years. It is likely that Jesus' human patience was never tried more than during these hours when He had to wait for His reunification with His Father. O that we – Jesus' brothers and sisters – might develop even a fraction of His desire to constantly be with the Father and to have the Father constantly with us! O that we would cease shutting Him out of so large a portion of our thoughts, our words, our deeds... our lives!

David's prophetic verses picture the human Jesus as losing His footing and sinking in the filthy, putrid mud of the world's sins. We don't like to think of our perfect Lord in this low condition: weary with crying, throat dried out, eyesight failing Him. It must have taken every ounce of Jesus' strength to continue His human sojourn through to the very end. But He bore this agony knowing that He must wait for the playing out of the final acts of His human saga before He could be reunited with His loving Father.

The cup

Returning to Gethsemane and to Matthew's gospel account:

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will... Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away from me unless I drink it, your will be done"... So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44)

What was "this cup" that Jesus asked might be passed from Him if it were His Father's will? Was He asking His Father in a moment of weakness to prevent Him from going through the coming hours of physical torture? This is doubtful when we consider once again that Jesus, with the fullest knowledge and foresight of all the horrible details, had spent His whole human lifetime, and millennia prior to it, in preparation for this day.

A brief word study on these verses might be helpful here. The English word "cup" is translated from the Greek word *poterion*, which can mean the liquid contents as well as the drinking vessel itself. It is obvious, of course, that Jesus drank the contents, not the vessel. *Poterion* is derived from an equivalent word *pino*, which means "to drink."

The English word "pass" is translated from the Greek verb *parerchomai*, which can refer to the passage of time. From this, we can deduce that Jesus may have been asking His Father to make the time it would take to complete this awful "drink" pass as quickly as possible; but even then, only if it fit in with His Father's perfect will.

Have we not all at some time had to drink some horrible-tasting medicine and, although we knew that it was beneficial for us to drink it, the procedure still seemed to take an eternity? By prior agreement with His Father, Jesus was at this time voluntarily drinking an enormous cup of spiritual liquid, which was ultimately to be a healing medicine for mankind but was, at the same time, a deadly poison to Him. This liquid was a mixture of two ingredients that could not have been more repulsive to them both. One ingredient was the sin of the whole world. The second was their separation from each other. Jesus' spiritual poison did not just taste horrible. It racked His body and His mind with stinging agony (I Corinthians 15:56 and Luke 22:44). Perhaps, in agreeing to drink of this cup, He even accepted a taste of the fiery fate of those who would never repent as, through the prophet Jeremiah, the One who would become Jesus Christ foretold that the poison was like fire that had been injected into His bones (Lamentations 1:13, quoted above). Despite His foreknowledge of the effect, Jesus knew that it was necessary for this poison to enter His circulatory system so that it could be *poured out* along with His life-blood:

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. (John 19:34)

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matthew 26:28)

The English word "remission" in Matthew 26:28 indicates that the sins flowed out with Jesus' blood. This word is translated from the Greek word *aphesis*, which can also mean "release" or "liberty," as in the release of blood previously contained by the body's arteries and veins. This word *aphesis* stems from the word *aphiemi*, which means "yield up" or "expire." The word *aphiemi*, in turn, stems from the words *apo* and *hiemi*, which together mean "let go" or "sent forth by separation," as in a violent separation of the blood from the body's pressurized circulatory system (which, in Jesus' case, resulted in His complete separation from His Father). When God the Father laid the sins of the world upon the head of His beloved Son, they passed into and contaminated His blood. They remained in His blood until they were poured out with it.

So again, it is doubtful that Jesus was having second thoughts about accepting the terrible events of the hours which were ahead. A week before that Passover night, "Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?'" (Matthew 20:22) And just minutes after He had concluded His Gethsemane prayer, "Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?'" (John 18:11) Before His Gethsemane prayer, after the prayer, and consequently, during the prayer, Jesus knew – He was firmly convinced – that He must imbibe and retain every drop of the poison that had been prepared for Him by His Father.

Throughout His great trials, Jesus knew that if the agony would have become too much for Him, He just had to say the word and He would have been instantly rescued from His enemies:

Or do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He will provide me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?... But all this was done that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. (Matthew 26:53-54, 56)

But Jesus forced this knowledge to the very back of His mind because He knew that if He had chosen this alternative, it would have been "game over" for every single one of His human brothers and sisters. If He had chosen this option, His Father would have removed our sins from His Son's blood, our guilt would remain on our own heads, and our future would be a hopeless one of eternal death. But, as we have already seen, Jesus knew that He had planned all of this with His Father many, many nights before this one, that He had revealed their plan to His prophets and disciples, that He had come into the world for the very purpose of suffering, and to pay the death penalty for the sins of the people of the world.

Quiet resignation

The gospel accounts indicate that, after His agony at Gethsemane, Jesus seemed more resigned to the barbarous events of His last hours. Referring back to our original question once again, it is doubtful that He spent much time thinking of individual acts of sin during this time. After all, why should He think about sins numbers 343 and 5,276, but not about numbers 12,345,678 and 876,543? Before coming to earth as a man, had He not been able to actually witness four thousand years of human sin? And had He not the ability to foresee the balance for the remaining three thousand years of man's time on earth? Rather than thinking on individual acts of sin in His valuable final human hours, the scriptures reveal that, with a level of empathy impossible for any but the Son of God, He suffered the *results* of those seven millennia of sin. He strove to overcome the physical torture and the pain of the spiritual poison which He now carried in His blood, with thoughts of His soon-coming reunification with His Father and with the knowledge that, one day, His enemies – hopefully repentant by that time – would see Him seated at the right hand of God the Father:

Jesus said... "Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:64)

There is no mention of any further complaint from Jesus' lips. Just a quiet resignation throughout the unjust and illegal trials and throughout the inhuman torture and execution.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly. (Matthew 27:12-14)

No complaint until, in the very last minutes of His human sojourn, He cried out twice in extreme agony at the pain of separation from His loving Father:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"... And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. (Matthew 27:46, 50)

And so the human thoughts of our wonderful Lord came to an end. Although God the Father would suffer from the separation for another seventy-two hours, Jesus' wait was over. His tortured body and His marvellous mind lay stone dead and inactive for three days and three nights. On the Night to be Much Observed this year, as you rejoice with your physical and spiritual families, take a moment to think on the almost unbelievable fact that on this very night in 31AD, your Saviour – the very Creator of this universe – was dead!

But Jesus' Father did not leave His soul in the grave (Psalms 16:10; Acts 2:27). He raised up His beloved Son and restored to Him the incomparable mind, thoughts and knowledge that they had shared for eternity before Jesus' human sojourn. One day very soon, astounding as it may seem, their thoughts will become our thoughts as they willingly share that same perfect mind with you and me.

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