

Being God Forsaken by Pastor Marty

This newsletter is dedicated to Sebastian along with all those that we have lost

Recently, I have been rereading some books by Leanne Payne again to refresh and improve my understanding of incarnational reality. The incarnation, the physical manifestation of God entering into our plane of existence, was not just a historical event that took place 2000 years ago; it is the basis of all good Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Jesus came to us where we were and took our place so He could lift us out of darkness and bring us into the Father's perfect family. I have often heard it said that sometimes we focus so much on His divinity that we actually forget His humanity—or vice versa. I am not sure it is that we forget it as much as simply not understanding it. Those who are not Christians tend to dismiss His being God while those who are Christians tend to minimize His being a man. There are many theologies that suggest that He was omniscient and omnipotent while He walked the earth; they and others like them dismiss not only His own words but also of the choice He made, which Paul explains in his letter to the Philippians. He became 100% completely and fully human in every way—except for sin—so He could be our substitute and Redeemer. He could only be that by experiencing every evil that we experience. We cheapen what He did when we try to make Him less human than us.

We cheapen what Jesus did for us when we try to make Him less human than we are.

Christian theology has always affirmed and accepted that Jesus was tempted in every way like us, but He never sinned. This is absolutely true. The problem is that we have a tendency to minimize what it means. We probably would not say it, but on some level we define “temptation” different for Him than for ourselves. In our lives, there are times when we are tempted after something, but we are able to make a good decision without excessive struggle over it; however, most of us have experienced the much darker times when temptations are either so strong that we literally feel that we do not have power to resist or so insidious that we give in before we recognize the real egregiousness of the sin. In both cases, temptation has a strength in our lives that seems so controlling that we often admit to not being able to go a single day without sinning in some way or another. This mindset is dangerous when it predisposes us to giving in to sin, but it also reflects the reality of our situation when we are not in a regular habit of practicing the Presence of God in our daily lives. The problem is that when we say Jesus was tempted in all ways like us, we often think that except for Gethsemane, He largely floated through life. We somehow think that His being God made Him immune to feeling overwhelmed. We categorize His temptations as being about the same as going through the checkout line at the grocery store and not buying a bag of candy because it is unhealthy. If this is our impression of His humanity, we do not understand what it is that He did for us or the extent that He took on flesh to become our substitution.

When Jesus lived as a man in human flesh, He experienced all of life just like we do.

The Bible is very clear that Jesus experienced all the weaknesses and temptations as we do, but He did so without giving into them. This was NOT because He was God. It is very important that we are able to understand that. Paul tells us in Philippians that when Jesus chose to become a human being and live among us, He laid aside every single aspect of His Godhood. He put all of it on a shelf and came to live entirely within the limitations of being human. All the miracles He did were through the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon Him; they were not through His being God. His body was a normal body with muscles that tire, feet that get sore, emotions that get stretched, and feelings that fluctuate. Yes, He was 100% God and 100% man at the same time, but His being God did not negate His being a man

any more than His being a man negated His being God. Fully experiencing humanity meant that He was acutely aware of how strong temptation was and how weak the human body was—including emotions, feelings, stress, tiredness, and desires for comfort and relief. The writer of Hebrews tells us very clearly that Jesus is our high priest precisely because He can completely and entirely relate to our weaknesses.

Hebrews tells us Jesus is our high priest because He fully relates to our situation.

The primary difference between Jesus' humanity and our own is that He was born without sin. This is a big thing. Ever since Adam and Eve's sin, everyone is born into this world with a sinful nature that predisposes us to sin without necessarily even being aware of it. Not having this sinful nature did not make Jesus immune to temptations or negate the pull they had on Him; it simply made Him aware of every single one as they came. He was never oblivious to what He was doing or to what was taking place in His heart, but He still felt them as much as we do. The primary difference is that as He walked through life, He did not carry the weight and guilt of prior sins committed. Now, this is no small thing, and I am not saying that this did not make a huge difference in His life, for it certainly did. However, He has made this same experience available to us through the forgiveness and cleansing offered to all who believe in Him and follow His commands. As John says, His blood cleanses us from ALL our sin, and we are able to receive complete forgiveness and freedom from guilt and shame. Paul makes it clear that we can walk away from the cross with the realization that we are as clean and pure as if we had never sinned. What is different for us than Jesus is that we have good memories and bad theology: our memories remind us of all the times we sinned and how easy it is to do it again, and our theology tells us we are going to sin every minute of every day. We are essentially reinforcing a predisposition to sin.

We are essentially reinforcing the fallen nature's predisposition to yield to temptation.

Every moment of every day, Jesus walked through this earth with the full experience of human weakness and temptation. However, He kept His focus on the Father, continually listening to what the Father was saying and looking to see what the Father was doing. Paul tells us we will not give in to the deeds of the flesh if we walk by the Spirit. He would not have told us this if it were not possible. He told us how to do it because it is possible to do it. He understood why Jesus made it clear that He only said what He heard the Father saying and only did what He saw the Father doing: Jesus was showing us how to walk by the Spirit so we could resist fulfilling the desires of the sinful nature. Jesus successfully lived a life of walking by the Spirit and not giving into the sinful nature so we would have an example of how to do it in our own lives. He showed us how to practice the Presence of God every minute of every day. When we confess our sins before the Father and truly receive the full forgiveness He offers to us, we rise up freed from the weight of past sins and guilt; and when we get into the habit of focusing on God every moment of every day, listening for what He would have us say and do, we begin to go longer and longer periods of time without giving in to the desires of the sinful nature. This is true discipleship.

As we practice the Presence of God, we walk in the Spirit and become true disciples.

In His life on earth, Jesus showed us how to walk in the Spirit so we would not fulfill the desires of the flesh. However, that only gives us a pattern for resisting temptation and breaking the power of sin in our lives. This fallen world confronts us with a great deal more than just temptations. We also experience death, loss, and grief as well as having to cope with other people who may sin against us. Jesus commanded us to forgive, and he certainly provided an example of forgiving others. Forgiveness helps us with the latter, but we need something for the former. If Jesus came to experience all of the issues of human life so He could be our substitution, so He could take all our fallen-ness into Himself

and give us His life, then He had to also experience grief, sorrow, and loss as we do. It is easy to think that there is much He never could have experienced because of His situation: He knew who He was, He knew the Father loved Him, and He knew how things were going to turn out in the end. However, what we actually see is that Jesus experienced grief, sorrow, and loss very much the same way we do now.

Jesus experienced grief, sorrow, and loss very much similar to what we experience now.

Often, we think of His experience from Gethsemane to the cross as a short period of sorrow. At the most, this was only three day—and that is only if you count two days being dead! Those of us who have lost loved ones or had other traumatic losses in life find it hard to relate to someone who's period of loss was counted in hours instead of weeks, months, and years. However, we need to realize there is another dimension to Jesus' sorrow. The Bible says that He was slain before the world was created. What does this mean? The crucifixion is an event that extends outside time itself. All sins from Eden to the end of this world flowed into Jesus while He hung on that cross. It may have been only hours in our human time, but from His perspective, He received into Himself the sins of billions of people over thousands of years. The Bible also tells us He took our sorrows and grief, and this began while He was in the garden of Gethsemane. It is important that we realize that the sorrow He experienced was more real to Him than most of us have imagined, and His responses show us how human He really was then.

His sorrows were more real than we may imagine, and they show how human He was.

Jesus told Peter that He could stop the whole thing if He wanted; He could call for a legion of angels, and they would have delivered Him from it all. Instead, He chose to go through with it because of the love He and the Father had for Their creation. Paul tells us He did so for the joy He could see on the other side. However, we need to realize that this did not make the grief and suffering any easier for Him. In Gethsemane, the anxiety, sorrow, and dread kept Him up all night, and it was almost more than He could bear. He fully experienced the grief that comes before the worst has even happened yet. However, the most important point to notice is how He responded on the cross. It tells us He cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" This is very important. Jesus was doing more than just quoting Psalm 22 here. He never said anything lightly. When He said this, He really meant it. This raises an important point we might not have realized: Jesus Himself asked "why" about suffering when He, more than anyone else in all of eternity, knew exactly and precisely "why" . . . and He experienced this grief entirely willingly. He knew the end from the beginning, that all would be restored, that He would be reunited completely with the Father, and that it was necessary so that all creation could be saved. Still, knowing all that, He asked why the Father had forsaken Him. The question "why" is rarely factual.

Asking "why" in the context of grief, sorrow, and loss is rarely a fact-based question.

There is something about grief and loss that affects the human species in a very specific way. It prompts us to ask "why" because we were not originally made to experience such things. When man and woman were created, they were designed for eternal life in a perfect garden with God Himself for company. The experience of fallen-ness in any form is foreign to original human nature—which is why we are constantly in conflict with the sin and death that has attached themselves to our nature. Asking why we are experiencing something—or more specifically, why something has happened—is not a sign of losing faith or lacking trust in God; it is a sign of being in touch with what it means to be human. If God Himself asked why when He not only knew every single aspect of the answer but also chose to go through with it willingly, then it is hardly inappropriate for us to ask why when we are overwhelmed. Of course, we do not want to get stuck there, but sometimes asking the question leads to the answer.