

Was giving up his son easy for God?



Once I was discussing the story of God calling Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, with one of my close friends and she asked me, “*Don’t you think, for God, it was more than a test of Abraham’s faith?*” “*May be,*” she continued, “*if God knew he was going to give up his own son, Jesus, later on, then ... what if he wanted to see how Abraham would react to this difficult plan...?*”

I don’t remember how I responded to her, but what stuck with me was the notion that seeing a member of your family suffer, especially your own child, is absolutely crushing. I had never before thought about **God having an ‘emotional’ reaction to the Crucifixion of his son.**

Later, whenever I would reflect on the passion narratives in the Gospels, these questions very often would catch me by surprise: “*Wasn’t giving up his son easy for God? If God the Father knew Jesus would just rise from the dead, then why was it such a big deal? If he knew the end of the story, it wasn’t such a big sacrifice after all.*” And I would muster up some sort of textbook theological answer at the time. Little did I know life would bring me a more personal experience soon enough!

The other day, one of our parents, who got a 14 years old son, studying in Class IX, visited me. Their son was diagnosed with cancer while he was 10 years old. They were sharing that their entire family went through two awful years of chemotherapy treatments, bone marrow biopsies, numerous infections and many sleepless nights.

The good news is that their son is alive and well, cancer-free since 2022. The father said, “*My wife and I have the happy ending that all parents of kids with cancer dream about. But there is **another part of our lives that our doctors didn’t warn us about.** Even though cancer treatment is over, and I am happy that my son is healthy, **but my heart broken by cancer cannot be fixed.** Any time I hear about family medical problems, especially involving children, I start weeping, almost autonomically. I am suddenly back there again. Anytime I see a pill or needle, or a child with a cancer diagnosis, that past has a way of becoming present again. Call it trauma, call it sympathy, **but it is as if I have a torn heart that can never be mended.** Post-2022, I should be all smiles and sunshine, but I now know there is no going back. The heart is happy but not whole. It has done battle with death and lives with the scars”.*

This sharing of his gave me an **‘emotional lens’ to read the Bible.** So often, I had the tendency to highlight the ‘God-ness of God’; and I very rarely gave a thought to the ‘person-ness of God’. The God who relates, feels, weeps, and responds. I think, when Jesus proclaimed “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8), he had signed up to worship a **God of emotion.**

Oh, we are so blessed to find a God in the Bible, who is capable of being hurt emotionally by his creatures, grieving because of them and for them. Genesis tells us *when the Lord saw the utter wickedness of a rebellious generation, he was full of regret and his heart was broken* (Gen. 6:5–6). Later on, the *Lord feels the sting of betrayal* when he is rejected by his child Israel as their true King (1 Sam. 8:7). **These are the risks of being a parent.**

This same *God who smiled upon his beloved Son* when Jesus was baptized (Matt. 3:17), the *Father who gasped* when Jesus said, “*May this cup be taken from me,*” but *beamed with pride* when Jesus boldly proclaimed in the same breath, “*Yet not as I will, but as you will*” (Matt. 26:39).

Sure, Jesus’ suffering is unique, atoning, because of his person (*Son of God*) and mission (*Messiah*), but I believe, his physical suffering did not have inherent divine powers to it, as if he could endure longer because he was God. On the contrary, until the resurrection, no one thought he was God, because his suffering and death seemed so ‘normal’.

And I can likewise imagine that the more God loved and loves his Son, the more his heart breaks over and over for all the pain and tears shed in the world. We might theologically refer to his sacrifice as

'once for all' (Heb. 7:27), but we also have to believe God lives with the eternal memory of the hurts and sorrows.

Those parents of our student watched their son suffer with a treatment that would hopefully save his life. *But the Heavenly Father let his son die! The ultimate testimony to his eternal love!* **In Christ, God does not 'give up' his Son, but the Father abides with the Son and thus gives himself too.** This is the mystery and power of Trinitarian love.

Friends, of course, the Good News wins out in the end, redemption prevails, the Son reigns over all, and love is the final word, but **let's remember that the Good Friday and the Easter came at a cost.** *"It wasn't easy because he is God, it was DIFFICULT because he is Father".*

If you have lost a loved one, know that you are not alone. I can't tell you why your loved one is gone, but I can tell you that there is a God who loves you and **He knows what it means to lose a son!**

Wishing you a Blessed Good Friday and a Happy Easter Sunday

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