



Hebrews 12:2

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Aching muscles don't wipe out a runner's high. Exhausted parents reading "one last story" still delight at their child's pleasure. Joy hovered right next to my tears when two dear friends recently entered heaven. Sometimes suffering and joy coexist.

We don't think much about the pairing of suffering and joy. Our focus tends to be more compartmentalized: suffering *or* joy, not suffering *and* joy. Joy of course comes when suffering stops; joy also can be present while suffering continues – Jesus knew that firsthand.

Speaking from the Cross

Six hours on the cross. Seven times Jesus speaks. Six long hours and less than 50 words, but what words, for these words reveal His heart. They also form a literary pattern.

The first three times Jesus speaks He reveals His utter commitment to the welfare of others.

- He speaks to His Father: ***Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*** And those who nailed Him to the cross are lovingly forgiven.
- He speaks to a criminal: ***Today you will be with me in paradise.*** And a thief is lovingly promised joy.
- He speaks to Mary and John: ***Behold your son! ... Behold your mother!*** And Jesus lovingly arranges for His disciple to care for His mother.

When I'm in pain, I focus on myself. Jesus focuses on others: soldiers, thief, friend, and family. He lives out the commandment to love your neighbor (the people around you).

The last three times Jesus speaks He lives out the commandment to love God. His words reveal His utter commitment to His Father's will.

- Jesus says to the onlookers: ***I am thirsty.*** And so fulfills God's prophecy in Psalm 69:21.
- He announces to all present: ***It is finished.*** And so completes what He agreed to in Gethsemane.
- Then He speaks again to the Father, voicing final words of trust: ***Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.*** And Jesus breathes His last.

But it's His words at the center (the fourth time Jesus speaks) which highlight what the cross is all about: ***My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*** This, the only question Jesus asks, occurs not only in the middle of the seven times He speaks but also in the middle of the three times He talks to His Father. The placement is significant. In biblical writing, putting something in the center emphasizes it – akin to our underlining it, putting it in bold, and using all caps. It means it's important. What's so important? These words connect Jesus' pain and Jesus' joy.

We would expect Jesus to focus on His physical suffering or His shame. But no. Instead He agonizes over being forsaken. To Jesus, separation from the Father and Spirit brings excruciating *personal* pain. The agony of lost intimacy shows us how precious this intimacy is to Jesus. But Jesus endures the agony for a reason – for the joy set before Him. What joy? The joy of gaining intimacy with us.

**For the joy set before Him Jesus endures the cross.
What is the joy set before Him? Us. Us! We are His joy.**

Jesus is forsaken so that we will never be forsaken. In Hebrews 13:5 (using the strongest language in the whole New Testament) God literally promises ...*I will never, never let you go, and I will never, never, never forsake you.* It's set in concrete: we can't forsake Him and He won't forsake us. Believers never have to say "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" What happened to Jesus won't ever happen to us; it happened to Him instead of to us. For anyone who asks, intimacy with God is a sure and eternal thing. And that brings Jesus (and us) great joy.

Something to Ponder

How open are you to intimacy with God?
(He's most open to intimacy with you.)

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