



“The Father That Suffers”

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While I was scanning my Facebook account recently, I noticed a post about Florian Foerg, a colleague of mine when I was serving in Thailand. We both started teaching at the Bible College at the same time. I was the missionary from the States and he the missionary-pastor from Germany. We were both about the same age as well. While I struggled learning Thai, he excelled and was quickly teaching Old Testament classes in Thai to first-year students.

He helped me with my Thai, by allowing me to sit in on his classes and by giving me the resources he had created. He picked up Thai guitar lessons as well and was even singing Thai folk songs at student socials we held each year. During my time there, Florian was very popular! I asked several of his students who they thought was the best teacher on campus and most of them said, he was. They said Florian was very prepared and organized, but that he was also very open to dialogue with the students. He was interested in what they had to say. I remember Florian as the teacher well-loved by students and staff at the Bible College.

So, I was stunned when I saw the post on Facebook that he had suddenly passed away! One morning, while he was with his family, he had a sudden and massive heart-attack and died. Jo and I instantly felt deep sorrow and concern for Florian’s wife, Katrin, and their young daughter, Judith. We also felt compassion for Florian’s students and the staff at the Bible College because he was so well-loved. At times like these, times of great suffering, it is very easy to ask “Why?” Why Florian, who seemed so healthy and seemed such a great example of missionary service?

The truth is that I have expectations that following Jesus will mean that my life will be continuously filled with victory and success. I may not be rich, but I will continue to grow and prosper in my service. It’s a fiction we create and hold onto tenaciously because we hate to suffer. So profound is my fear of suffering that I fail to appreciate all that God does through suffering. I fail to fully appreciate God’s children mobilizing to support Florian’s family after his death. I tend to only focus on Florian’s death.

But what if following God, meant following Him through suffering? What if our God is a God that consistently walks through suffering in order to save and restore what was lost to Him? In today’s passage we are going to see God perfectly through His Son. We are going to see that following the Father through the Son will mean that we will suffer the unrighteous acts of others. We won’t just be called to suffer and then respond with righteous anger. We will be called to suffer in order that others wouldn’t have to. We will be called to suffer the unrighteous acts of others so they might see their Heavenly Father’s patience and love for them, so they might submit to Him and be restored.

First, let’s look at the context of today’s account. Jesus is praying for his followers in the chapter before today’s passage. He prays that the Father would protect them. He prays that they would be one with the Father. He prays they would be sanctified by the truth. We see in his prayers, his shepherd-like heart. He is the good shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. Today’s passage directly follows these prayers and

will show us his prayers in action. It will show us that what follows will be the results of the prayers for his followers.

1.) Jesus Protects His Followers

In John 18:1–9, Jesus brings his followers to a place they would often go, a garden they would often visit to possibly pray or just ask questions about what Jesus was doing or saying in his ministry. Interestingly, Jesus takes his followers there knowing that he will soon be arrested and crucified. Does he take them to this well-known garden to lessen the shock and impact of what will happen next? It is not clear, but it does seem that the Good Shepherd is protecting his sheep, his followers by bringing them to place of security.

Then Judas appears with a detachment of troops and officers to arrest Jesus. These were given to him by the religious leaders over Israel; the chief priests and the Pharisees. It is important, I think, to remember that the High Priest that year, Caiaphas, who justified the arrest of Jesus as shown in verse 14. Caiaphas says that it is “expedient” that one should die to save the entire nation. What does he mean? Maybe he thinks that it is wise and shrewd as a leader to kill Jesus because he feared Jesus would cause political unrest in Israel. The Roman government reigning over Israel may then turn and destroy the entire nation because of the political unrest Jesus may cause. So killing one person to save many may seem the standard wisdom of leadership.

But, of course, we know that ultimately, in Caiaphas’ heart of hearts lies a hatred for truth, a hatred for God. Caiaphas has the hatred that Cain had for his brother Abel. Caiaphas may think his actions are motivated by wisdom, but the truth is that he desires to kill God’s Son. He is like one of the servants who was given a vineyard by a landowner. The landowner told his son to go to the servants of the vineyard to receive a tithe of the fruits they produced. The servants, seeing the son, murder him. The wisdom they are relying on in order to carry out this wicked crime, “This (son) is the heir (of the vineyard)...Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance” (Matthew 21:38). With similar worldly wisdom, Caiaphas has approved of the Roman troops taking Jesus by force in order to inherit what rightfully belongs to the Son of God.

Rather than resisting the lies and unrighteous persecution to come, Jesus approaches those who have been used as pawns to arrest him. He says, “Whom are you seeking?” Maybe they imagine this one coming to them will help them find and capture Jesus. They say, “Jesus of Nazareth.” When Jesus replied that he is the one they seek, they are shocked and scared. Maybe it’s because they know of his miraculous power and his favour among the masses in Israel. Jesus had shown so much power, maybe they thought he would use that power against them!

Jesus asks them again, “Whom are you seeking?” When the soldiers reply again, “Jesus of Nazareth,” he responds in two ways: 1.) he submits to their authority and the task to which they are there; 2.) he protects his followers. How he protects his followers shows that he retains power from his Father. Jesus says, “I will go with you, but leave my followers alone.” We know this is not a just a request or plea, but a command from the Father. We know this because Jesus says that his Father’s Word would prove to be true when it said, “Of those whom you gave me, I have lost none.” Jesus commands the troops not to touch his followers and it was so.

2.) Jesus Corrects His Followers

In John 18:10–11, Jesus continues to watch over this followers even as he begins to go through this allotted time of suffering. Jesus is ready to follow his Father into suffering. His followers don’t understand this. Peter’s response highlights their confusion. Jesus is being taken by the troops and it appears to them that God has not intervened to help. So Peter, taking matters in his own hands, does what he thinks is best. He attempts to save Jesus by himself probably thinking that God would give him victory.

After all, Jesus did tell his disciples, just before he prayed on the Mount of Olives, to sell some of their belongings to purchase a sword. The disciples respond saying, “See, Lord, here are two swords” to which Jesus says, “That’s enough!” So it wasn’t wrong for Peter to have a sword with him. But in our account, Jesus tells Peter to put the sword away. Then why tell the disciples to bring a sword. While it is not explicitly said, it does seem to highlight an important truth regarding Jesus’ ministry.

He tells his followers that two swords are enough. Clearly this isn’t enough to create a band of fighting warriors. Instead it seems to represent a token. Though having swords, having a means to resist oppression, Jesus is telling Peter, his follower, that he is wilfully submitting to persecution. Jesus is humbly receiving the unlawful attack upon himself. He is not resisting even though he has a symbolic means to do so.

This is illustrated more clearly in Matthew’s Gospel of the same account of his arrest. There Jesus tells his followers, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 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?” Jesus has come wilfully to this point with his Father and the symbolic presence of the swords underscore this point. What is Jesus’ lesson to his followers? The Father will call them as well, one day, to follow Him into unlawful persecution for the sake of restoration.

3.) Jesus Enters Into His Father’s Suffering

In John 18:12–14, Jesus has protected and corrected his disciples and now he reveals the timeless truth of the Heavenly Father, He submits to unrighteous suffering from His children in order that He might restore them. God takes upon Himself the sins of the world. His love moves Him to receive unrighteous punishment and give forgiveness so that His children wouldn’t have to be. God doesn’t long for punishment in the way we do. He longs for restoration so much that He daily receives the afflictions of our wickedness while working to win our restoration.

Jesus is depicted alone, surrounded by troops, government officials, by those who think he is an enemy. But we know that he isn’t alone. We know that he is walking with the Spirit and doing everything that the Father shows him. Jesus is showing his followers who the Heavenly Father is and what it means to follow Him.

What is our application for today?

1.) Seek to be fully mature in Christ – Reveal God’s suffering even through unrighteousness in order to serve and save.

Our natural tendency is to demand justice. Of course, justice is a good thing. But we have to be careful because if we demand justice as defined by God, we would be condemned every day. Jesus told us what our relationship is to justice. He said to his disciples, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away” (Matthew 5:38–42).

Jesus is calling us to follow him, to be changed by his life by the power of his Spirit in order that we would look more like him. Jesus is calling us to turn the other cheek, not with the goal of seeing how much punishment we can take, but with the goal of serving others with the gifts God has given us. God has given to each of us a gift from heaven that can reveal to those around us, God’s power to save. We aren’t supposed to

use these gifts on our own like Peter tried with his sword. We are to use the gifts we are given as we follow Jesus through the daily guidance of God's Spirit.

Is there anyone of us that is demanding justice for something we suffered? Are we holding a grudge, are we angry and hoping those that hurt us, will be punished? Are we walking in the flesh, like Peter, hoping to wound those that are oppressing us? Now is the time to realize that the Spirit has been guiding us, calling us not to act in the flesh, but to walk with him. How is the Spirit guiding us? He is calling us to greater maturity in Jesus. His desire is to glorify the life of Jesus within us through faith. He is leading us to serve others that they might be restored to God through Jesus. And he is leading us to that goal through great suffering. How can we bear it? We can bear it because Jesus gives us grace, he restores us to the Father so that as we trust Him, as we follow Him, He reveals the glory to and through us to the world.