

What God Values Most

*Bible Commentary by Joseph F. Harwood
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When we consider the question of what God values most, let us start by considering the life of Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Jesus is our example of a life lived in perfect obedience to God the Father. The Bible tells us that He was tempted in all the things that we are, yet He was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote in chapter 11 about the hardships endured by the Old Testament saints, and then beginning in chapter 12 we read:

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ***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.” (Hebrews 12:1-2, emphasis added)

The Apostle Paul also exhorted believers with a similar teaching when he wrote:

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, ***He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross***. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11, emphasis added)

In Hebrews 12 we read that Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame”. In Philippians 2, Paul wrote that Jesus “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” And then Paul wrote that “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name”. In both of these passages we see the “cross” mentioned, which is a direct reference to the crucifixion that Jesus endured according to His Father’s will for His life, in order to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

On Calvary’s cross Jesus atoned for the sins of all those whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37), those who are beloved of God, called as saints (Romans 1:7). Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God, without sin or blemish, who laid down His life, sacrificing Himself by dying on the cross according to His Father’s predetermined plan and purpose (Acts 2:23), in order to bring “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

The cross was universally recognized as an instrument of death in Jesus’ day. It was a shameful, humiliating, and painful way to die; it was a punishment meted out to evil doers, and not anything deserved by the sinless Son of God.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when the time of His crucifixion was upon Him, Jesus said to His disciples: “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” (Matthew 26:38) Then He prayed to His Father, asking Him to take away the up of suffering that He knew He was about to drink: the scourging, the mocking, the burden of having to bear His cross, and finally His crucifixion and death at Calvary.

He knew that all things are possible with His Father, and He prayed to Him three times that the cup of suffering He was about to drink might be taken away from Him. But at the same time, He yielded Himself to His Father’s will for His life when He also prayed: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; *yet not as I will, but as You will.*” (Matthew 26:39, emphasis added).

Jesus soon had the answer to His prayers when Judas appeared with a large crowd bearing swords and clubs, who had been sent by the chief priests and elders of the people to arrest Him. It was not His Father’s will that this cup of suffering be taken from Him, but that He drink it, according to His Father’s will, plan, and purpose for His life, whereby He would atone for the sins of His people.

Jesus was faced with overwhelming suffering at this point in His life. He knew that God His Father was sovereign over His creation; He knew that His Father could take this cup of suffering away from Him if He so willed. And yet when it became clear that His prayers to have this cup of suffering taken away from Him were not going to be granted, Jesus still *obeyed* His Father.

Jesus said: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, *he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*” (Luke 9:23, emphasis added). Again, Jesus said: “And whoever does not *carry their cross* and follow me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:27).

The cross for Jesus was a physical reality, an unjust punishment and death that the sinless Lamb of God bore to atone for the sins of His people, according to God’s will, plan, and purpose for His life. It was the supreme act of *obedience* to God in the midst of undeserved suffering that He endured according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.

Most believers will never be required to suffer physical crucifixion or death for the cause of Christ. But we will all be required to “take up our cross daily” and follow Jesus, which means that *we are to continue to walk in obedience to God’s commands*, even in the midst of hard and painful circumstances, which we know He could have spared us from, and which we know He could change at any time.

Jesus Christ is our example of all that God values most. From Jesus’ life we learn that what God values most is that we obey Him, and continue to obey Him, even when we are facing hard and painful things, and we know He could change our circumstances and deliver us from our suffering if He so willed.

Through the circumstances and conditions that manifest themselves in our lives after we have prayed to our Father to have our cup of suffering removed, we also, as Jesus did, will receive God’s answer to our prayers. And many times, it is God’s will that we also, as Jesus did, must drink our own cup of sufferings. These are not sufferings that come about as a consequence of our own wrongdoing, but nonetheless sufferings that God allows to touch our lives, according to His plan and purpose for each of us.

In such times, we also, as Jesus was, will be called upon to continue to obey God through our hard and painful circumstances. In these times, we will be called upon to take up our cross and follow Jesus, to drink the cup that He drank, to be baptized with the baptism of suffering that He was baptized with (Mark 10:35-40).

And through such sufferings we will share in His sufferings, bearing fruit to the glory of God (John 12:24-26), in order that we may also share in His eternal glory (Romans 8:17-18).