

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

David's Greatest Honor

The greatest honor in David's life was not that he wrote many of the Bible's psalms. The greatest honor in his life was not that he was king of Israel, or that he was given an everlasting throne.

The greatest honor in David's life was being quoted three times on the cross.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Ps 22:1).

"I thirst!" (Ps 143:6).

"Into Your hand I commit my spirit" (Ps 31:5).

When Jesus was in the throes of His agony and looking for language to express the angst of His soul, He reached back to David. He was like, "David said it the way I feel it right now."

David, I need to ask you a question. What kind of a journey would you have to walk in order to write the kind of thing Jesus would *want* to quote on the cross?

David might answer, "I was cast off, perpetually desolate, hewn down, under reproach, with no sign of anything changing and no one knew how long it would go on like this. It was there, in that season, that I wrote the things Jesus quoted on the cross."

David probably couldn't figure out why his crucible was so intense. He must have wondered, *Why does the fire never stop? Why are my pain levels so intense? Why is it that I alone, among all my peers, hurt like this? God, why is my suffering incessant and agonizing?*

At the time, David couldn't make sense of the intensity of his trials. But when Jesus was on the cross, everything must have come into focus for him. I imagine him thinking, *So THIS is why it hurt so badly! My sufferings enabled me to write things that Jesus could quote on the cross.*

I believe in the cross because it offers a God-sized gospel.

At the cross, David's sufferings took on a dignity he couldn't have possibly anticipated.

When we get to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and we're all seated at the table, visiting with one another about the things of the kingdom, there's only one person among all of heaven's hosts who will be able to say, "He quoted me three times on the cross."

Think about the affinity David must feel with Jesus over this. Because that's what the whole thing was about: identificational suffering and one-of-a-kind intimacy. Jesus wants to have the same kind of affinity with us, too. Our flesh might recoil from such suffering in the moment, but a day is coming when we'll have clarity on His holy purposes.

David, you thought you were cast off, hewn down, desolate and forsaken; but, in fact, now you enjoy with Jesus a knowing relationship of unique significance. Your flesh scrambled to avoid this, but now you appreciate the Father's perfect leadership in your life. Suffering was your portal to the highest intimacy.

This helps me understand why the God I love and serve crushes His favorites. This helps me understand His fathering paradigm. It's all an invitation to the identificational nature of the cross.

No angel gets a cross. The cross is an honor too high for angels. No angel gets a cross, and no angel gets a resurrection. But you? You get both. It's your highest dignity.

Suffering Matures Us

God uses suffering to mature and prepare us for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. I can suppose Jesus thinking, *I didn't suffer like that on the cross so that I could marry a spoiled, entitled brat.*

Jesus doesn't want to marry a bride who, on the wedding night, gets out a bunch of play dolls, and then pouts in a

corner while sucking her thumb. He died to gain for Himself an equally yoked, co-equal partner with whom He'll rule the universe forever.

How will He gain such a partner? By giving her the same cup He Himself drank. Adversity will be her way forward into full bridal maturity.

When we're finally joined to Jesus fully and completely at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, let me suggest what the conversation will *not* sound like. The bride will *not* be saying things like, "Jesus, this is our wedding day, a time of happiness and joy. Let's not talk about the cross right now. You know, I never really did connect with that part of Your story. It always struck me as gruesome and morbid. To bring it up now would be a downer, and I want us to enjoy this moment. Can we just not go there right now, but enjoy the brightness of this cheerful moment?"

I think the conversation might more closely resemble something like this:

He: "Let Me tell you about Abba's will for My life."

She: "I also want to talk to You about the Father's will for my life."

He: "I want to talk about the cup the Father gave Me."

She: "The Father also gave me a bitter cup, and I've been waiting to talk to You about it."

He: "When I walked the earth, everything was against Me."

She: "Yeah, everything was against me, too."

He: "I stepped into the battle and came away with scars."

She: "I've always admired that about You. And I incurred some scars myself in the battle."

He: "Here, I want to show you My scars."

She: "Those scars are so precious to me because they brought me Your love. And I also want to show You mine."

If there is no hell, the cross is absurd. If we don't need to be saved from something horrific, then why such a drastic payment?

There's a day coming when I will reach my hand into His side, just like Thomas did in John 20:27, and I will caress the scars that brought me into His embrace.

And then He will reach with His hand, and He will caress the scars of His bride because she also bears in her body the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal 6:17). Our intimacy in that moment will be based upon our common wounds.

Who would even want to arrive at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb without any scars?

There was a time when the wounds were our reproach. But on that day, He'll dignify the scars as tokens of our intimacy and of our identification in shared sufferings. They'll be badges of honor and emblems of our marriage bed.

Suffering Releases Creatives

Amy Carmichael was a missionary who suffered painfully from physical infirmity. Author of many poems, her identification with Christ's sufferings comes through especially in this gripping piece:

Hast Thou No Scar?

Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star
Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent,
By ravening beasts that encompassed Me, I swooned;
Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And piercéd are the feet that follow Me
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has no wound nor scar?

Suffering released Amy's poetic gift, just as it has for many others. Some of the bride of Christ's best poetry and songs have proceeded from her sufferings. The Psalms are prime examples of that because many of them were birthed in a place of hardship and struggle. The same is also true of our contemporary hymns. When you hear the stories behind the songs we sing—that is, the circumstances in which the songwriters wrote them—you're gripped with the realization that some of our best songs were forged through adversity. Songs birthed in tragedy and hardship have often been among the most helpful, historically through the centuries, in enabling the bride to give her heart to her Lord.

The inverse is also true. When life is happy and circumstances are comfortable, fewer songs seem to be written, and those that are don't carry the same depth and punch. For a biblical example of that, consider the sixteen months David lived in Ziklag. That was a season of relative serenity for him, and we have no psalms ascribed to his stay in that city. In calm and comfort, new songs waned. It was when adversity intensified that his songwriting blossomed.

Suffering unlocks songwriters. In times of adversity, "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls" (Ps 42:7). Deep things in us reach for deep things in God. Crucified songwriters supply some of the sweetest songs for the bride of Christ because they're experiencing the identificational nature of the cross.

Jesus Created the Human Body for Crucifixion

Jesus created the human body to experience maximum suffering during crucifixion.

When the Trinity partnered together at creation to fashion the human body, Jesus knew He was forming a body that He Himself would inhabit for thirty-three years on earth, and then forever.

History's greatest race was run by a Man with His feet nailed to a tree.

The following conversation is fictional because it didn't actually happen, but my holy imagination wonders if, during the creation process, the Father might have said something like this to Jesus: "Son, are You sure You want to put all those nerve endings in the hands and feet like that? That's where they're going to put the nails!"

I suppose the Son possibly answering something like this: "Yes, Abba, I know. I want to put those nerves there because I want to connect implicitly with their sorrows and feel them all the way through my entire being."

Nobody has suffered like God. He has drunk more deeply of sorrow and agony than any human being. Now, nobody can look at the cross and say, "You have no idea what it's like to suffer the way I do. You don't understand *my* world of pain." The sufferings of the cross were so intense that now Jesus empathizes implicitly with the pain of the person living in the lowest hell hole. At the cross, God suffered more than anyone and everyone so that He could reach anyone and everyone.

Would you like to know how Jesus feels about you? He feels about you in His scalp, His temples, His cheeks, His eyes, His neck, His shoulders, His arms, His wrists, His hands, His chest, His back, His abdomen, His loins, His thighs, His knees, His calves, His ankles, and His feet. He feels about you from the follicles of His head to the ends of His toes. Love for you runs the entire course of His being.

What's a fitting way for me to respond to such love? Surely He deserves more than just a 45-degree elbow bend in a Sunday morning worship service. He deserves a love that bursts from every molecule of my being!

Jesus, I love You with my head, my hair, my ears, my eyes, my tongue, my neck, my shoulders, my arms, my hands, my torso, my loins, my legs, and my feet. Jesus, I love You with all my body, soul, heart, mind, and strength.

He Withholds Nothing from Me

Whenever I'm suffering, I go back to the cross. When I don't know how to process the difficulties in my journey, I just go back to the cross. When I can't see my way forward, I go back to the cross. When I don't know how to make sense of my pain levels, I go back to the cross.

When I hear that ancient accusation, "He's withholding from you," I just go back to the cross. I hear that accusation from the accuser a lot, actually, because it's one of his most common accusations. That accusation goes all the way back to the garden of Eden when the accuser said to Eve, "God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). The accusation was, "God knows that this fruit would usher you into your destiny, but He's withholding it from you because He doesn't want you to become everything you could be." He used that accusation on Eve, and he's still using it on people today. In fact, it's still one of his favorite accusations against God.

Here's how Satan uses that accusation on me personally. He often says to me things like, "God's withholding from you the healing that would open up and complete your story, purpose, and destiny."

Whenever I hear that ancient accusation, I just go back to the cross because the cross *nails* that accusation. When I look at the cross, I don't see a God who's withholding from me; rather, I see a God who's giving me His *everything*. He's giving me His best—His only begotten Son. On the cross, I see a God who spreads His arms and, with nails in His hands and feet, says to me, "I love you with all My heart, with all My mind, with all My soul, with all My flesh, and with all My strength. I love you with My last breath. I love you with My last drop of blood."

Jesus is our cross-fit trainer, teaching us how to run our race (Heb 12:1-2).

Beholding this love now gives me the courage to stand on *my* nail, spread my arms wide, and say to Him, “I love You with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength. I love You with my time, with my priorities, with my energies, with my gifts and talents, with my treasures, with the words of my mouth, and I do not love my life even unto death. I am Yours and You are mine.”

This is the identificational nature of the cross.

I declare in the presence of the angels and all creation that my God withholds *nothing* from me. He’s already given me His everything. If He should never give me another benefit for the rest of my days on this earth, He’s already given me more than I deserve. He might *restrain* Himself for a while from answering my prayer, but He’s not *withholding* the answer from me. And if He is strategically restraining my deliverance for a season, it’s because He’s got an even stronger story for me than I had for myself.

For Group Study and Discussion

1. Spend a few moments talking about the intimacy and solidarity David must feel with Jesus, after being quoted three times on the cross.
2. Look more closely at the three Davidic quotes. What do those quotes reveal about your own walk with God?
3. *Suffering matures us*: In what ways do you agree or disagree?
4. In what way have you been scarred in the battle? What does it mean to bear in our body the marks of Jesus? (Gal 6:17).
5. Have you ever been tempted to accuse God of withholding Himself from you? How did you walk through that?
6. As you close, let your prayers express to the Lord that you're withholding nothing from Him (Mark 12:30).