Why Did Jesus Have to Suffer?

“As we survey Jesus’ earthly life and death, we are constrained to ask, “Why did Jesus have to suffer the way He did? Why did He have to endure the rejection, the beatings, and the cross?” These questions must be addressed in the face of the clear testimony of the Scriptures. Jesus told two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus that it was “necessary” for the Christ to suffer before He entered into His glory (Luke 24:26). Hebrews 2:10 says that it was “fitting” or “proper” for Him to go through “sufferings.” Therefore, let us reverently ask, “Why was it essential for the Christ to suffer?” For our answers, we will go to the Book of Hebrews.

First, the writer of Hebrews said that Christ had to suffer because God required that man have a Savior who had lived perfectly as a member of the human race. Hebrews 2:14 says, “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same.” To fulfill the human requirement of the Father, Jesus had to become a man. Taking upon Himself the flesh and blood of humanity would necessitate suffering. Living as God in flesh would involve facing the full force of temptations, experiencing the difficulties of the human struggle, and being subject to death. Hebrews 2:9 says that Christ “was made for a little while lower than the angels... so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.” God required humanity, and humanity requires suffering.

Jesus had to qualify Himself to be the kind of High Priest that God wanted us to have. Hebrews 2:17 further says, “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Even in Old Testament times, God had willed that the people’s high priest be chosen from among them. The man who represented the people had to understand their situation and their needs. This enabled him to serve them as a merciful and faithful high priest.

As Jesus prepared Himself to fill the office of High Priest, He was made perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:10). As He faced the tempter, the common trials of life, and the rigors of humanity, He never committed a sin (1 Peter 2:22). He did not need to become perfect in moral integrity or in sinlessness, for He already had that kind of perfection. However, He became perfectly qualified to intercede for us before the Father by demonstrating His perfection in the context of true humanity. He was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15b).

Second, the Book of Hebrews says that God required a Savior who could taste of death for every man. Jesus was sent from the Father to bear the sins of the human race. That burden was so immense that He would need the character of God Himself in addition to His humanity to carry it. A perfect human and divine sacrifice was necessary: “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (2:14).

The weight of the world’s guilt could not
be carried by a human being alone. The holy
counsel of God decreed that a member of the
Godhead would have to come to the earth, be-
come totally and fully man, and offer Himself as
the perfect sacrifice for our sin. Jesus’ death was
the greatest event of all time and eternity.

No angel could have borne the sins of the
world as Jesus did. We are told by the writer
of Hebrews, “When He had made purification
of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the
Majesty on high, having become as much bet-
ter than the angels, as He has inherited a more
excellent name than they” (1:3b, 4). Angels are
mighty celestial beings, but no angel is as great
as Jesus. He is God the Son, the Creator of the
angels and all other beings and things.

No angel could His place have taken,
Highest of the high though He;
The loved One on the cross forsaken
Was one of the Godhead three!1

Third, the writer of Hebrews emphasized that
God required a sacrifice that could be rejected and
spurned. In this ultimate manifestation of divine
love, God extended His compassion to all the
people of the earth, offering them a way of sal-
vation through the cross. However, He chose
not to intrude upon the free will of man. Even
though an eternal sacrifice has been made, a
sin-offering that tasted of death for every man,
God allows each member of the human race
to accept or reject it. He permits multitudes of
people to “crucify to themselves the Son of God
and put Him to open shame” (Hebrews 6:6b).
The divine Savior placed before the world evi-
dence that would convince any honest heart of
His deity and what He came to do, but He will
not coerce or manipulate a sinner.

When we understand more about why
Jesus had to come and why He had to suffer,
we are overwhelmed by the thought of it. We
bow our heads and cry, “How great a love the
Father has bestowed on us, that we would be
called children of God” (1 John 3:1a). We can-
not understand all that Christ did, but we can
and must believe it and stand on it!

Eddie Cloer

1W. Owen, “O Listen to the Wondrous Story,” Songs of
the Church, comp. and ed. Alton H. Howard (West Monroe,

God, in His divine wisdom, chose for Jesus to
come to the earth and pass through sufferings. God,
in His great sympathy, decreed that Jesus should
suffer so that He could understand our weaknesses
and become our advocate at the Father’s throne.