

## Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE  
EXPOSITION OF  
THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### The Redemptive End of Christ's Suffering 1 Peter 2:21-25 (698)

On certain occasions and in certain places silence is appropriate. It would not be unusual for a man to be silent as he views the stunning natural majesty of the Grand Tetons; for a mother to be silent as she gazes at her sleeping infant; or for a visitor to be silent as he enters one of the great cathedrals of Europe. We have come to a portion of the Word of God that compels us to stop, to be silent, and to reflect with utmost care and reverence upon the words in front of us. Here in 1 Peter 2:21-25, with simplicity and yet with power and majesty, our suffering Savior is set before us. Here we touch the heart of the gospel.

It is the same gospel heart touched by the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament:

**Isaiah 53** <sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried ... <sup>5</sup> He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. <sup>9</sup> ... He had done no violence, nor was

*there any deceit in His mouth. <sup>11</sup> ... the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> ... He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.*

Peter was saturated with these words from Isaiah as he wrote Chapter 2, verses 21-25 of his own letter. *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, <sup>22</sup> who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; <sup>23</sup> and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; <sup>24</sup> and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*

Surely it is here that the greatness of our Savior is most clearly seen. Surely it is here that we are shamed that any complaint in difficulty has ever passed our lips. Surely it is here that we see the depth of the love of Christ for sinners most clearly. Martin Luther said of these verses, "Whoever reflects on this must be a stone if it does not move him" (p. 129). Surely it is here that that we see the ugliness and horror of the guilt of our sin. Listen to the third verse of Thomas Kelly's great hymn, *Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted*:

Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load;  
'tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.

Beginning with 2:11 Peter is stressing the Christian virtue of humility and the duty of submission to our superiors even when we are treated harshly by them. But it is here that the model of and motivation for such submission are set before us. We find both in the suffering of Christ. Peter encourages us today by presenting three pictures of Jesus Christ (see Wiersbe, p. 62).

**Christ is our Example in this life (2:21-23). For you have been called.** Beloved, we are among those who have been called by God into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ (**I Cor. 1:9**). Peter has a lot to say about this call. In Chapter 2 he says we have been called out of darkness into light (**2:9**). In Chapter 3 he says we have been called to be heirs of God's blessing (**3:9**). In Chapter 5 he says we've been called to God's eternal glory in Christ (**5:10**). But here Peter focuses on another implication of God's call into fellowship with Christ.

He says, *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.* Beloved, we are called that we might follow Christ, particularly that we might follow Him in His suffering; that we, like our Savior, might patiently endure unfair suffering, unjust suffering, harsh treatment for doing what is right.

Verse 21 says that **Christ suffered for you**. This is the glorious and consistent message of the gospel. **Romans 5:8**, *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* The words "for you" and "for us" mean that Christ's atoning sacrifice was vicarious in nature. As I have shared with you time and time again at the Lord's Table, there is a difference between personal and vicarious atonement. Personal atonement is when you

yourself suffer eternally the penalty affixed to the transgression of God's law. This is what God might have required in strict justice, and would have required, if He had not been moved by love and compassion for the sinner.

Instead, God appointed a representative in Jesus Christ to take your place, and this One atoned for sin and obtained eternal redemption for sinners. The Bible clearly teaches that the sufferings and death of Christ were vicarious in that He took the place of sinners and that our *guilt was imputed* and our *punishment transferred* to Him (see Berkhof). But Christ's was an entire life of sufferings. Peter presents this life as a pattern for Christians.

**Leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.** When I was first learning to write cursive letters. We had lined pads with the letters of the alphabet printed on them very, very lightly. The idea was to learn to write by tracing over these letters. This is the image behind the Greek word for "example." We are, so to speak, to trace the pattern of our Lord in the face of the most difficult opposition and hardship. Behind the Greek word for "follow" is the image of "a child placing foot after foot into the prints of his father in the snow, following a sure trail broken for him" (Davids, *I Peter*, p. 110).

Our tendency, however, when being treated unkindly or unfairly; our tendency when wronged is to fight back and demand our rights. We, like Peter, are ready to pull out a sword and chop off somebody's ear (**John 18:10**). But how vastly different was the response of our Lord. At verse 22 we reach the point of departure. We reach the point in the path past which no man can venture. We reach the point past which only the Author and Finisher of our faith is able to go.

**Verse 22. Who committed no sin.** Peter is not launching into a theological treatise on the sinlessness of Christ. His point is simply that Christ's sufferings were entirely undeserved; entirely without warrant. Peter is saying that our Lord did nothing to merit such abuse and suffering. Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. Christ was free from any actual transgressions of God's law. Christ conformed to both the letter and intent of the law perfectly. Nevertheless, Christ paid the penalty without having committed the sin.

**Nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return.** Note Peter's use of words having to do with speech – *mouth, revile, uttered*. What is the significance of these words? The Bible makes a connection between a man's mouth and a man's heart. In **Matthew 12:34** Jesus said, "*You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*" When we are treated harshly or unfairly our impatience, anger, discontent, and hatred make their way out of our hearts through our mouths in complaints, profanity, and threats. What we say is the discharge of the vileness that fills our hearts. But with Jesus there was no deceit in His mouth because there was no evil in His heart. There was no filth or sludge in the recesses of His heart that oozed out of His mouth. There was no boiling anger, no resentment bubbling deep in His heart that, like a volcano, erupted in red-hot words of scorn.

**While suffering, He uttered no threats.** Sometimes we utter no threats because we know we couldn't do anything about a particular situation even if we wanted to. It is not so with Jesus. Jesus could have escaped it all. He could have threatened with infinite power to back it up. These people dared to get "in the

face” of God - to challenge Him, to dare Him, to provoke Him, to mock Him, to strike Him, to torture Him, to shame Him. Here they were in the face of the One to whom all authority had been given, the One who created the universe, the One who could have summoned 10,000 angels to his defense, the One who could have incinerated the whole lot of them, the One who rained down the plagues upon Egypt, the One who commanded waves and wind, the One who opened blind eyes and raised the dead, the One whose threats would not have been empty, idle, or contingent were they to have been voiced.

This One was provoked and yet He was silent. Indeed, He **kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously**. He was silent because of His utter reliance upon His Father in heaven. He remained silent because He was assured that God would deal with those who abused Him in His time and in His way; that God’s judgment would be the one to count; that God would raise Him up; that His submission was God’s will and that it pleased Him; that God would recognize the injustice of it all; that God would indeed act on His behalf; that God’s wisdom was allowing it; that God was good in allowing it. We are called to reliance on the same heavenly Father.

How may we rightly account for this extraordinary manner of the Savior in suffering? Did Christ want to lash out but did not simply due to a higher level of self-control than the average guy? Did his hatred boil inside but He just put a lid on it? Did revenge burn in His soul and He just smothered it? In other words, was it merely the external response of Jesus that was different? No, beloved, He responded as He did because all that resided in His heart was love. Surely it is here that the real meaning of **I Corinthians 13** is explained for us - *Love is not*

*provoked. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered. Love bears all things. Love endures all things.*

There is no doubt that Jesus came to show us the way of servanthood. In **John 13**, after washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus Himself said, *“For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (13:15)*. Here in I Peter Jesus is put forth as an example of patient endurance in the face of unjust suffering. Some have suggested that the primary reason for the life, suffering, and death of Christ on the cross was to serve as an example; that Christ saves sinners by revealing to us the way of faith and obedience as the way to eternal life, by giving us an example of true obedience both in His life and in His death, and by inspiring us to lead a similar life. I tell you we are not saved by following Christ’s example. This brings us to Peter’s second picture of Christ in verse 24.

**Christ is our Substitute in His death (2:24).** *And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.* Jesus suffered and died to actually accomplish the redemption of His people. He came to bear our sin.

“The background for Isaiah’s prophecy and I Peter 2:24 is the symbolism of sacrifice that God appointed for Israel. Sin was portrayed as a burden to be placed upon the head of a sacrificial animal before it was killed (**Lev. 4:15, 24, 29, 33**). Death was the penalty for sin; the sacrificial animal died in the place of the sinner, who confessed his sin with his hands on the head of the animal. That action graphically pictured the transfer of the weight of his sin from himself to the substitute. The sprinkling of the blood of the sacrificial animal marked atonement; the penalty of sin had been paid. Isaiah describes the mysterious

tragedy of the righteous Servant of the Lord: his astonishing agony, his scornful rejection, his submissive meekness. Then he discloses the meaning of the apparent tragedy. He was stricken with death for the transgression of his people. His soul was made an offering for sin. He bore the sin of many" (Clowney, p. 120).

**He Himself bore our sins in His own body.** This means he bore them personally. "The wood of his cross could be put upon another; the weight of sin was his alone to bear" (p. 121). If the infinite, perfect, worthy Son of God Himself had not borne our sin we would have no one to offer a sacrifice of infinite value; no one to render perfect obedience; no one to satisfy the infinite justice of God. We would be without hope.

What happened on the cross not only *was* personal but we must take it personally. He bore *our* sins. Notice the shift in pronoun from "you" in 21-23 to "our" and "we" in 24. It was *my* sin ... *your* sin. It was *my* guilt ... *your* guilt. Unless you acknowledge and confess that Jesus bore *your* sins on the cross you shall not be saved.

What was the end, the goal, the design of Christ's sufferings? Peter says it was **that we might die to sin and live to righteousness**. Certainly one of the most important theological concepts of our faith is that in Christ we have *died to sin*. This does not mean that we do not sin anymore or are unresponsive to sin. It doesn't mean that the inclination to sin is removed, that the desire to sin is gone, or that the temptation to sin has been neutralized. It means that we are free from the penalty of sin. **Romans 8:1** says, *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. It means that we are free from the dominating power

of sin. Indeed, we are now free to offer up ourselves in gratitude to God; to live according to His will. The enslaving power, the dominion of sin has been broken.

And this blessed condition is ours on account of the suffering of our Substitute. We were ruined in Adam. Adam as our representative fell and we fell in him. Jesus Christ is the second Adam (**Rom. 5**). Christ, as our Representative, the Captain of our salvation (like David dealt with Goliath for Israel), dealt with sin for us. As Christ is dead to sin so are you. As Christ is alive to God so are you. Indeed, ours is the joy and the obligation to submit ourselves *to* the Father, to delight ourselves *in* the Father. We now have a hunger for His word and seek to conform to His will. We have an interest in His honor and glory in our lives and among men. We are alive to righteousness.

This blessed condition is ours on account of His suffering. **For by His wounds you were healed.** There are those who argue that this refers to physical healing. But the text speaks of *sins* (24) and *souls* (25) not diseases and bodies. We are healed (restored to health) from the deadly, lethal wounds of sin. “Here again is the idea of the punishment of a substitute: the punishment deserved by us Christ took on Himself and thus made us (spiritually and morally) well” (Grudem, p. 132).

**Christ is our watchful Shepherd in heaven (2:25).** *For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.* Who can miss the connection to **Isaiah 53:6**, *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.* *Continually straying* describes your condition before you became a Christian. Now you have returned, been

converted (turned around) to Christ, the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls, to the one who recovers the strayed sheep and cares for them. Conversion to Christ completely reverses the aimless straying; the purposelessness of the unregenerate life" (Hillyer, p. 87).

I want to close these reflections on our great Savior with these familiar words of the hymn writer:

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood,  
Sealed my pardon with his blood: Hallelujah! what a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we; spotless Lamb of God was he;  
Full atonement! can it be? Hallelujah! what a Savior!

**Benediction** (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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### THREE PICTURES OF JESUS CHRIST

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**Leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps**

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