

Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 7, 2017

1 Peter 2:19-25 (EHV) – ¹⁹For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God. ²⁰For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God. ²¹Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. ²²He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Introduction

What does Jesus mean to you? That question is really important, isn't it? How a person views the person of Jesus has far-reaching consequences. And we can learn a lot about someone based on how they answer the question. Today's Second Lesson deals with that very issue.

Theme: Christ Suffered for You...

Historically, the Fourth Sunday of Easter has been celebrated as Good Shepherd Sunday. That's brought out most clearly in John 10, but the lesson from 1 Peter also fits well. We're going to focus on four words in our text, which are central to these seven verses and answer the question at hand: What does Jesus mean to you? The answer: **CHRIST SUFFERED FOR YOU**. First, **as a favorable example**. Secondly, **as a vicarious Shepherd**.

Part I: As a favorable example.

A number of New Testament letters – including the two written by Peter – talk about some of the problems that believers would face. For the first few decades after Jesus' death and resurrection, the persecutions came *from within* the religious community. The chief priests tried to keep the apostles silenced, and Saul carried out his "murderous threats." Later on, however, the persecutions started to come *from the outside*. There was heavy political pressure against Christians, and many were literally thrown to the lions.

This particular section of 1 Peter is written to remind us that we'll sometimes have to deal with authority figures who are unbelievers. That shouldn't surprise us. But how should we respond to them? Well, Peter asks: "What did Jesus do?" He suffered for you as a favorable example.

"For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God... If you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God. Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps."

It's hard for us to conceive of the exact situation in our text. In the immediate context, Peter's talking about slaves who might be harshly mistreated by their unbelieving masters. Slavery has been abolished in our country, and we have laws that guard against such physical and emotional abuse. But sometimes we can compare the slave / master relationship to the employee / employer relationship.

Have you ever been in a position where an unbelieving boss or supervisor has taken advantage of your Christian ethics or beliefs? Christians are generally hard working individuals. If it sometimes happens that someone is needed to work overtime on this or that project, who gets asked? The well-known slacker who'll whine and complain to no end because he's got an 8:00 am tee-time? Or the always-dependable Adam or Eve Christian, who actually cares whether or not the company succeeds. The boss's sinful nature can quickly get the best of him and start to treat you unfairly. Or maybe he intentionally uses vulgar language or improper business practices simply because he knows it bothers you and you can't do anything about it except quit. Or when a Christian's job makes them part of a labor union that organizes a strike or holdout, the hard-working and financially content worker is scorned and may suffer in all sorts of ways.

Whatever the case, when we're caused to suffer unjustly, the encouragement Peter gives us is to follow Christ's example. He let himself be killed rather than strike back. **"No deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats."**

Obviously in 1st century culture, the slave couldn't just quit and go somewhere else, but our culture is different. You certainly would have the right to look for other employment if you're being oppressed at your job. But abuse never gives us the right to lose control and let go of our Christian principles. The Christian's life is, by definition, full of hardship, and we'll undoubtedly undergo persecution in various forms. Jesus warned that, as his disciples, we should expect nothing less than what he went through.

But Christ's example is hard to follow, isn't it? The sinful part in me wants to tell the other person off. It urges me to treat him the same way he's treating me. At the very least it fills my head and heart with hateful and vengeful thoughts. Jesus **"entrusted himself to him who judges justly,"** but we're too impatient for that. All too often I see myself as very un-Christ-like. And if you're honest with yourself, you'll have to admit the same.

Transition

"What would Jesus do?" is a valid question. There's biblical precedent for asking it. In thankful forgiveness – in our walk of sanctification – we do strive to be Christ-like in our thought, word, and action responses. The motivation for that comes though the other side of what Jesus means to you. Christ suffered for you as a vicarious Shepherd.

Part II: As a vicarious Shepherd.

At the end of the first part of the text, a striking connection is made: **"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. He did not commit a sin..."** That's a pretty high bar, isn't it?

As often as we hold up Jesus as our example for Christian living, we can't help but admit that sanctification isn't a means to an end. If you isolate and magnify the life of a person, apart from the work of the vicarious Shepherd, the only thing that results is a tremendous sense of guilt. To say that we should be sinless like Jesus is a truth the Bible proclaims, but it's an impossible truth to achieve. We just got done talking about all the ways we fail miserably in thought, word, and action. We've earned God's condemnation. Fortunately the Bible doesn't isolate and magnify sanctification as a means to the end (i.e. the way of salvation). Instead, it reminds us of Christ, who laid down his life for his wayward sheep.

"Christ also suffered for you... He did not commit a sin... He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

Every religious group professes some sort of allegiance to a deity. Most also would say that the Jewish Jesus is a praiseworthy example of how to live according to the "golden rule." But Christianity is unique in all the world's religions in that it has a vicarious Savior. Vicarious means substitutionary – he for us. All other manmade religions demand of their adherents to pay their own way. But not ours!

Christ had no sins of his own. The Bible is crystal clear on that. Not one impure thought! Never an unkind word! Zero rebellious actions! No stain of original guilt passed down from Adam and Eve! But in unfathomable love, he **"carried our sins in his body"** and gave his life on the tree of the cross for their payment. Through the wounds of the nails and thorns and whips and his Father's utter rejection, **"you were healed"** completely of your fatal sins. **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us."** The apostles Peter and Paul loved echoing Isaiah's refrain, didn't they? **"He was pierced for our transgressions... The punishment that brought us peace was upon him... We all, like sheep, have gone astray... The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

He for us! Through Jesus – and just like Jesus – we're dead to sins. We want nothing to do with sin. The guilt of sin has no hold on us. We avoid it like the plague. When temptations come our way, we stand firm and resist them with the Word of God. Instead, we go in the exact opposite direction, walking in the paths of righteousness. We walk covered from head to toe in the righteous life Christ lived vicariously, *on our behalf*.

Conclusion

In the very next verse after our Gospel lesson in John 10, Jesus says, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** What a picture! What a Savior! What a substitute! Our Good Shepherd sought us out and restored us to his fold. He's our Overseer. We fear no evil, for he's with us, holding us safely in his loving arms forever. Amen.