

In His Steps

1 Peter 2:21-25

In many ways, last week's sermon was one of the most difficult I have had to preach because the focus was so clear. So pointed. Submission. The spirit of submission. The attitude of the heart. The willingness to subject yourself to the authority of others, even to suffer wrongfully.

The difficulty of that sermon was the danger of becoming moralistic. The danger of urging you to do something that was separated from the promise of the gospel. A call to a certain behavior without reference to Jesus. And that might be discouraging for you, especially you have to endure unjust suffering.

It might also be overly provocative, inciting you to exasperation or rebellion. By God's grace, I hope none of those things happened, and I consciously concluded the sermon last week with an introduction to this week's sermon. And I begin this morning, therefore, by bringing up all that I said last week. In terms of content and organization, it really is one sermon in two parts.

Because the call to suffering is given precisely in the context of considering Jesus, particularly his suffering. Thus the whole focus of the exhortation unto submission and patience even in suffering is with a focus upon,
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So let me re-emphasize,

I. AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE CALLED TO SUFFERING.

That is a very provocative statement, isn't it? Especially in a

culture where personal happiness seems always to be the goal. God calls us to suffering. Specifically, he calls us to be united with Christ in His suffering. He calls us to be united with Christ in his death.

Just consider,

Col. 1:24 "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church."

Or, Rom. 8:16 "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

Paul gives his testimony this way,

2 Cor. 12:9 "And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

I emphasize all this again because it is so foreign to our ears. We want comfort and ease, and we think it our due. We think that God's purpose is to make us happy. But actually, we are to be united with Jesus in his death. We are to suffer, as the very nature of our calling. As I emphasized last week, that includes,

A. The call of submission.

And remember the example. Slaves to masters. Even unjust, cruel masters.

v.20 "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your

faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.”

Beloved, to this you were called!

Mat. 16:24 “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

No profit at all! But if you lose your life, if you take up your cross, if you have fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings, you will be united with him in his resurrection.

And so, it is,

B. The call of endurance.

Endure to the end! The expectation of life is not to escape suffering, but to endure it. To persevere to the end.

James 5:10 “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord-- that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

There is no shortcut. No easy way out.

Rom. 5:3 “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

The purpose of tribulations is perseverance. The goal of perseverance is hope.

Rom. 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

That’s our hope. So blessed are you when you suffer!

Mat. 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled...10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

But today let me put the focus of all of that where it must be. For this call to suffering is,

C. The call of following the steps of Christ.

That’s Peter’s point here.

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His steps. You are to follow his steps. People of God, those steps led to the cross! Do you get the point?

That is our calling. That is your calling. That is your identity as a Christian. It is not an optional commitment, nor is it something to seek to avoid altogether as if your prosperity in life would mean the freedom from affliction. Beloved, there are the steps our Lord

Jesus took, the steps toward the cross. They are the steps which we are to walk in as well. Not literally, as is so foolishly thought to be a blessing by people taking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to follow the so-called stations of the cross according to the example of the Roman Pope. No, the blessing is not in the literal reenactment of Jesus actual footsteps, but rather in the calling of life to be united with him in the fellowship of his sufferings. In other words, enduring suffering as he did.

Paul describes his own life ambitions in those terms in, Phil. 3:10 "...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

With all of that, let's focus much more intently upon,

II. THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS.

It is noteworthy in this to realize that some of what Jesus did you and I will never do. He actually atoned for our sins. He actually paid the sacrifice demanded by God's justice, he was the propitiation for our sins. Our suffering, of course, doesn't atone for any sins nor does it satisfy the judgment of God those sins deserve. Nor are we sinless, as was Jesus, though don't miss the emphasis. We are to be united with one who was sinless. We are to be joined to him, to have fellowship with him, in his...

A. Sinless humiliation.

Just take a look at Jesus,

Heb. 12:2 "...the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

What do you see?

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I have to read the broader context from,

Is. 53:3 "He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief."

Beloved, the one who suffered and died for your sins was himself completely and perfectly innocent. Sinless. And, therefore, immortal. Alive without the curse of death. By contrast we read,

Heb. 7:23 "Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless,

undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever."

It's all about Jesus, the Son who has been perfected forever. "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." That's the example of Jesus.

His is also an example of,

B. Perfect submission.

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As I read from,

Is. 53: 7 "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."

That is what we are called to imitate, as I emphasized last week. "He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth." He didn't fight back. He didn't demand his rights. To the contrary, he gave them up. As we read,

Phil. 2:5 "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

But Jesus did something more than that. Something much more. To use a rather technical term for accuracy, Jesus' work was that of a,

C. Vicarious atonement.

Now vicarious just means substitutionary. It refers to the proper use of a substitute to perform and accomplish what you are unable to do yourself. Jesus satisfied the demands of divine justice. He paid the penalty for the sins of his sheep. That's atonement. And he did it as a perfect substitute for you and for me. That's vicarious.

Look how Peter puts it.

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Now what were his stripes? Literally, the word refers to a wound, a welt, that draws blood. It is the wound or the bruise left by either a blow from the fist or the lashing of a whip. In Jesus' case, this is an obvious reference to the welts left by the gruesome and horrific whipping he endured. The stripes literally cut into his skin by a Roman whip prior to his crucifixion, stripes which themselves could often cause the death of the victim even without being nailed to a cross.

It was by those stripes, those welts, it was by the infliction of that punishment, that your sins were atoned for.

Again the reference is,

Is. 53: 5 "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Now, to be sure, the physical whipping was actually not the most grievous torment Jesus experienced. That came not at the hand of a man but at the hand of God. So it is that the penalty for our sins was not a cruel and inhumane whipping done by a man, but the justice of God himself. God the Father cutting off his only begotten son, as is recorded in that terrible Psalm Jesus himself quoted upon the cross,

Ps. 22:1 “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? 2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. 3 But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. 4 Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. 5 They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed. 6 But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. 7 All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8 "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" 9 But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. 10 I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. 11 Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help. 12 Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. 13 They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. 16 For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. 18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.”

Beloved, that was Jesus' experience of hell. That was the experience of Jesus which healed you of your sins that you might live for righteousness. Those three hours of darkness upon the cross when Jesus was forsaken by his father, that was the time when he accomplished the atonement for our sins. That was when he took our sins upon himself, in his own body, and as our substitute, endured the wrath and curse of God the Father.

Now, why think about all of this? Why does Peter bring this experience of Jesus into view right at this point? Pastorally, for the encouragement of his readers. For that experience of Jesus brings about the reality of what Peter writes in,

v.24 “...that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.”

We died to sin. We died to its curse. We died to its condemnation. We died, therefore, to its power. And so, in Christ, we are now alive. Freed from the curse and from the dominion of sin. Indeed, by his “stripes you were healed.”

And what that really means for Peter's readers, what it really means for you who believe in Jesus Christ, is that what Jesus accomplished is nothing less than your salvation, causing you to turn to him in faith and repentance.

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III. TURNING TO JESUS.

We fix our eyes upon Jesus, we think about his work, so that you might no longer be sheep going astray!

Instead, you now return to Jesus. And so it is I plead with you this morning. If you are not a Christian, if you don't know what it is to trust in Jesus for your salvation, then this is what you must

know. This is what you must understand. Jesus did all of this that Peter has described. And he calls you to return to him. To turn to him. To repent. To turn away from your sin. To confess your sin. To ask for his forgiveness. So turn to,

A. Jesus the Shepherd.

The Shepherd of your soul. The pastor who cares for your soul. The good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep.

Don't go astray any longer. Don't be that wandering sheep, don't turn to your own way. Turn to Jesus, and trust in him for your salvation.

And if you are a Christian, then turn to him also! Don't turn to your own way in your own headstrong, stubborn autonomy. Don't turn your own way in rebellion. But submit to him, to Jesus. Turn to him, who will care for your soul.

Turn to the one who is the overseer of your soul. The governor. The Bishop.

B. Jesus the bishop.

In other words, the Lord Jesus. The ruler of your soul. Turn to him, submit to him, bend your knee to him and confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord."

Isn't this marvelous. Your Lord, your ruler and master, is also your shepherd. The one who claims the right to be your overseer, your Lord, is the one who loves you as a shepherd loves his sheep. Your Lord, the bishop of your soul, is the one who laid down his life for your sins.

Beloved, turn to him. Don't go your own way. Don't be like dumb sheep who ignore or cannot see danger. Turn to your

shepherd. And if you suffer, when you suffer, even unjustly, entrust yourself and the care of your soul to that same shepherd.

This is what that good shepherd will do,

Is. 40:11 "He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young."

And this is what we know about that shepherd,

Is. 40:28 "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint."

How can that be? Because,

Ps. 23:1 "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever."