



1 Peter 2:21-25

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus!

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed.

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Who actually *wants to suffer*? Certainly not I. My desire to avoid suffering is at least partially responsible for the fact that I have not visited the dentist in over four years. And yes, I know that is a silly decision and one that I will ultimately suffer more for in the long run.

At one time in his life the man who wrote these words Peter the Apostle decided he did not want to suffer either. So when a little maidservant came to him as he was standing in the High Priest's courtyard and said "***You also were with Jesus of Galilee***" Peter denied even knowing Jesus. He even went so far as to swear oaths to that, even though a few hours before he had **sworn** he would follow Jesus to the very end.

Peter, up until that point had looked at suffering as something to be avoided, something that was incompatible with glory, he was so sure of that, that in Matthew 16:21-22 we read "***From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. 22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"***"

Peter was so certain that suffering was not supposed to be part of God's will, that he was willing even to rebuke Jesus when he told His disciples that suffering and even dying was an essential part of his mission.

So how is it that this same Peter who was so opposed to the whole idea of suffering could have written to Christians to tell you that suffering was actually part of your calling. That we have been chosen by God to suffer?

Well the great events that stood in between his rebuking Christ and his betrayal in the courtyard, and these comments that had changed his perspective forever, was of course the crucifixion and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. After Peter had seen those events and finally understood their purpose, his view of suffering was never the same.

Peter knew for instance, that it was suffering that had been the key to his own salvation, not his own of course. Peter knew his own suffering could never save him or even contribute towards it. There have of course been people in history who have thought that, that they are saved by their own suffering, but Peter knew himself to be a sinner, so much so that the first time he realized Jesus was God when Jesus produced that miraculous catch of fish he had cried out ***“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”*** Peter had seen the sacrifices for sin in the temple and he knew he was a rough fisherman, not a spotless sacrificial lamb. All He could contribute to his salvation was debt, for Peter or for me and you to suffer would not be sacrifice, it would be **justice**.

But Peter knew that Jesus was different, he had heard John the Baptist when he had pointed to Jesus and said ***“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*** He didn’t understand what that meant at the time, but after the crucifixion he did. He knew that in that moment Jesus, the Son of God, a man who had committed no sin, a spotless lamb had offered up a sacrifice of infinite value to God, not for his own sins, for He had none to atone for, but for ***our sins***.

Suddenly those verses in Isaiah 53 that Peter heard again and again in the Synagogue and which he quotes here made sense, suddenly he understood that it was this Jesus whom He Loved, whom He had confessed was the Messiah, was the suffering servant was the one who had come to earth and suffered, bearing our sins on the cross, that you who were like sheep going astray might be saved from your sins and reconciled to God.

1) So what is Peter telling you? *He is telling you that the suffering of believers is not a curse it is a calling.* Christians, Jesus has taken the curse out of your sufferings, as Nathaniel Vincent put it so beautifully, ***“And, indeed, when he drank the cup which his Father gave him, he drank out the curse and bitterness of it; so that it is both blessed and sweetened to the Lamb’s followers who are to drink after him.”***

So when you who follow Jesus suffer, know there is a huge difference between your suffering and Christ’s. Both in the extent and the purpose of it. Our suffering is but a drop compared to the ocean of suffering Christ endured for us and what Christ suffered was the pouring out of the wrath of God due for the sins of His Sheep while when we believers suffer, the wrath of God for your sins is no part of it. I want you to understand that, Jesus has paid the price for all your sins, past, present, and future – there is therefore no more condemnation. Rather what you endure is time spent in the furnace, the refining fire by which brothers and sisters, you will never suffer loss, rather the only thing burned up in that fire is the dross.

The suffering of believers in this life works to perfect and purify them and it is a sign that you are his. That is why after they were beaten by the Sanhedrin, the Apostles ***“departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.”*** Every true believer will suffer affliction in this life, that is your calling. And in suffering we are following in the footsteps of our master. In doing that Peter calls Him our example – and once again here the Greek text is so much more rich. The Greek word he uses is only used here in the entire bible. It is a *hupogrammos* that was a perfect example of Greek writing that was given to children for them to trace so that they would learn their ABCs. Your life Peter is saying should be tracing of Christ’s example.

Turn if you would to Luke 9:23

23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

25 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?

26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.

One of the worst things about getting a “bargain” are the hidden costs. I remember joining a military book club as a kid because I read “get 8 books for 1 penny” – and then found out I had signed a contract to buy 1 book a month at full price for the next 24 months. Well one thing about the Christian faith is that Christ does not hide the cost of discipleship from his followers does he? He tells you right up front, being his follower means taking up your cross, it means enduring the hate of the world, it means following his example in bearing your own cross. Which was something many of his apostles and followers literally did.

But suffering for Christ is a bargain. The sufferings of believers here on earth are light and momentary as Paul put it in **Romans 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** and ultimately for our good, **Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.** And you can endure suffering if you know that, I’ll prove it to you, **anyone here who wouldn’t be willing to endure a few moments of pain to remove a skin cancer that otherwise would metastatize and kill you?**

Well, with all that in mind let me close by asking you two things:

First, if you are believer, are you taking up your cross daily, have you suffered for your faith? That is after all your calling, as Peter and Jesus have told you, and as Paul said to Timothy: **Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**

A Brother gave me an example of that principle recently –

Example of X giving his testimony and being mercilessly made fun of.

Brothers and Sisters – in those moments, imagine that mighty host of witnesses looking on, there is the moment of decision, **what will he do? She do?**

Heaven rejoices when you make the decision to stand for Christ in spite of suffering.

But what is the result when there is a compromise...

Brothers and Sisters, would you rather be Peter in the courtyard or Peter before the Sanhedrin?

I know there are many who try to make excuses for compromising their faith to avoid suffering. “Its just that my faith is very personal, my relationship with Jesus is a private thing I keep it to myself. That’s why I don’t feel comfortable telling people I’m a Christian or talking to people about Him. Friend, apply that standard to your wife. Oh I never tell anyone I’m married or talk about my wife. *Hi can I speak to Bob this is his wife. That’s funny, Bob never told us he was married and he’s worked here for 10 years. Well uhhh honey its not that I don’t love you, its just that our relationship is very private and personal...* Give it up, the relationships you don’t tell people about are the ones that are either:

- a) non-existent
- b) not important enough to you to mention
- c) the ones that you are ashamed of.

And do I need to remind you what Jesus said about those who are ashamed of Him? You cannot love and follow the example of Jesus and never talk about Him. The pain of persecution or just embarrassment that you avoid by compromising, is never worth it. Its like my teeth, my avoiding the dentist isn't worth the cost. Bunyan reminds us, there is no way to heaven, but by the way of the Cross:

"Take heed of being offended at the cross that you must go by, before you come to heaven. You must understand, as I have already said, that there is no man that goes to heaven that does not go by the cross. The cross is the standing way-mark by which all they that go to glory must pass by. 'We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God' (Acts 14:22). 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (2 Tim 3:12). If you are in the way to the kingdom...you will come at the cross shortly – the Lord grant you do not shrink away from it, so as to turn back again. 'If any man will come after me,' saith Christ, 'let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me' (Luke 9:23). The cross stands, and has stood, from the beginning, as a way-mark to the kingdom of heaven. You know if someone asks you the way to such and such a place, you, for the better direction, do not only say, this is the way, but then also say, you must go by such a gate, such a bush, tree, bridge, or such like. Why, so it is heare; are you inquiring the way to heaven? Why, I tell you, Christ is the way; into Him you must get, into His righteousness, to be justified; and if you are in Him, you will presently see the cross, you must go close by it, you must touch it, nay, you must take it up, or else you will quickly go out of the way that leads to heaven, and turn up some of those crooked lanes that lead down to the chambers of death"

For those of you who aren't compromising, don't grow weary in well doing.