

“Our Sin Bearer”

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Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Scriptural Foundation: 1 Peter 2:24-25, ESV

Submission to Authority

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

In this study we consider the most central of themes to the Christian faith: the cross of Jesus. There is no Good News apart from the sobering sentence of death Pontius Pilate laid upon Him and more importantly that sentence of death our Savior volunteered to take upon Himself. The Gospel of Jesus is not at all a story of martyrdom, but a story of marvelous grace; the story of a Savior who freely gave his life to ransom sinners from the condemnation and curse of sin.

I feel myself entirely inadequate to communicate the wonder and mystery of the atoning death of Jesus. The more I understand of Jesus work on the cross, the more I realize how much I have yet to learn. This theme keeps expanding to fill the whole of my soul and to far exceed the limits of my feeble mind, so I love to think of the cross of Jesus. With the apostle Paul, I say, from Galatians 6

¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul continues,

²³ ...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles...

J. C. Ryle, in his book Foundations of Faith wrote, “Who can estimate the value of God's gift, when He gave to the world His only begotten Son! It is something unspeakable and incomprehensible. It passes man's understanding. Two things there are which man has no arithmetic to reckon, and no line to measure. One of these things is the extent of that man's loss who loses his own soul. The other is the extent of God's gift when he gave Christ to sinners....Sin must indeed be exceeding sinful, when the Father must needs give His only Son to be the sinner's Friend!”

We take up this subject of Jesus' crucifixion with a profound sense of privilege and wonder. We are looking at Peter's presentation of Jesus in our text. Remember Peter is writing to persecuted believers to encourage them in the faith. He is calling them to live honorable lives, even in the midst of hardship and persecution, among unbelievers when the Day of Visitation comes they will give praise to Jesus. Peter knows the greatest damage to the name of Jesus occurs when believers live lives inconsistent to their calling as members of a royal priesthood and a holy nation¹ and he writes in 1 Peter 2,

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

However, there is a huge problem in our obeying this command: We lack the power to do so in our own persons. We need enablement. There is no way in our own will we would be able to fulfill God's Law in this matter. So Peter fixes our eyes upon the One who provides power so we can effectively say, “No” to sin and “Yes!” to righteousness. We will observe Peter fixes our eyes upon Jesus in three angles. First, Jesus is our Standard. Second, Jesus is our Sin-Bearer. Third, Jesus is our Shepherd.

¹ 1 Peter 2:9

First, Jesus is our Standard; He is our model, our example, the pattern, and the One we look to in our lives to understand what righteousness is, particularly in the context of unjust suffering. Earlier in this chapter we read,

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

This is the only time this Greek word translated “example” appears in the New Testament. In Greek literature this word is used to describe a drawing that is placed under another sheet to be used as a perfect model to be traced so as to trace the picture underneath onto the blank page placed on top.

When I was a boy I quickly observed my older brother, Jim, was a tremendous artist. I envied his God-given talents. He was able to take a blank piece of paper and draw all kinds of images and pictures almost to perfection. I recognized I was not blessed with such talents and that frustrated me as a boy. My mom would give me a picture of an animal or an object and then she, knowing my lack of talents, would give me a blank piece of paper. She would show me how to put the blank piece of paper over the picture and see the image underneath. I could keep the piece of paper fixed on top and I could trace the object, pick up the paper, and I would have a reasonable facsimile, one much better than if I attempted to draw freehand. This is the idea of Jesus as our example. Jesus is the picture and we, as feeble artists, are unable to look at Him, but we must place our lives upon Him as our example and then we are able to trace. He is the picture underneath who represents what is good and right and true and lovely and honorable.

Peter teaches us the purpose of having such a great example when he writes at the end of Verse 21, “...so that you might follow in His steps.” It is not so we can hang His as a picture in the living room of your soul and say, “Look at that. Is that not a wonderful person?” The very purpose of Jesus as an example is “so that we might follow in His footsteps.”

In the late 19th Century a liberal pastor by the name of William Sheldon used this verse to give title to a fictional book. In the book entitled “In His Steps” various characters from different backgrounds are challenged with various ethical situations in which the overarching question is continually asked: “What Would Jesus Do?” It is from William Sheldon’s novel our modern-day acronym “WWJD” originates. I mention this so we notice William Sheldon interprets incorrectly in a couple of important matters. First, while Jesus is a great model for all ethical questions, the point of this text, of following in Jesus’ steps, is following Jesus as our example for the very specific instance of suffering under unjust circumstances. Peter calls attention to Jesus as our model for responding to the misery, pain, and grief we experience in this fallen world. In fact, the apostle suggests our sufferings are not merely the result of unfortunate happenstance, nor of ill-fated accident, but these pains we endure as Christians as we obey Christ are planned and orchestrated by God for His kind purposes, establishing for us a greater opportunity to glorify God in this fallen world to a measure we otherwise would not be able to apart from those difficult circumstances.

Where does Peter say that? Notice the first few words Peter uses, “For to this you have been called...” To what have we been called? We have been called to bring glory to God by suffering patiently. This is the context and this is what God calls us to experience in the midst of an unjust and wicked world and to respond to that injustice differently than unbelievers respond to it.

Paul will write in Philippians 1,

²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.

Our calling from God is to be mistreated for doing what is good and right and to respond with grace and patience and endurance. Later, in 1 Peter 3, we read,

⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

When we give praise to God we are the ones who receive the blessing from Him. Our joy multiplies! God's joyful blessing always connects us back to our supreme purpose in life, namely, to advance the honor of Jesus' name. The trials we endure as a result of other people's sins and injustice set us in a position to advertise God's greatness and grace all the more.

The principle we observed in the previous study and which we will observe again is: It is more joyful for us to advance God's name through patient endurance than for us to be treated fairly. It is more valuable for us to bring honor to God than for us to be relieved of our pain. What a change of perspective that is.

R.C. Sproul eloquently writes, "Suffering becomes bearable when we understand that we are in that state by the providence of God, and therefore, at that time, it is our vocation." The word "vocation" means, "calling" from the Latin root "*voco*". There is nothing worse than to suffer pain or grief for no reason, which is why those who are without Christ are without hope.

As a Christian we acknowledge the suffering and pain God designs, orchestrates, and brings to our life always has purpose. If you are a Christian and you are suffering as a result of other's sins against you, know God has a kind providence and eternal purpose in view. This is, I acknowledge, one of the hardest biblical truths for us to embrace, but it is one of the most necessary. We look to Jesus as your example! Did He not acknowledge the pain He experienced was purposeful and orchestrated by the sovereign hand of His Father? He suffered with grace and patience, leaving us an example to follow. And now, what has happened to Christ? God the Father, who called Him to that kind of suffering, then raised Him up and seated Him at His right hand in glory.

Notice God's promise to us at the end of this letter, 1 Peter 5,

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

What lines are we to trace as we place the paper of our suffering lives over His pattern, His model, and His example? Peter tells us in our text,

²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Is it not hard to sin when others sin against us? Is this not a natural response when we hurt because other people are hurting us in wrongful ways? Look at Jesus; He is our model for this!

Is Jesus only our example? By no means! Were Jesus only our standard, we still would be left without sufficient enablement to live righteously under persecution. No person could possibly follow Jesus as his/her example until they first know Him as their Sin-Bearer and Savior! What use would a good example be to people who are already condemned by their own sin? Jesus is not merely our standard, but also our substitute and our Sin-Bearer,

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

I read that and I feel faint under the weight of this mighty verse! There is so much God is communicating to us. In writing Verses 24 and 25, Peter is giving us a New Testament commentary on an Old Testament passage: Isaiah 53. Peter is meditating and it is clear as we read what Peter writes and what Isaiah wrote centuries before,

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 crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with 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.

Peter is meditating upon that, he is amazed by it, and he writes of it.

The amazing truth God reveals is: when Jesus died upon the cross, He died bearing our sins FOR US and in our place. There are a few more words which will help us understand more of Christ's dying as our Sin Bearer. The first word is "substitute".

1 Peter tells us, "He bore our sins in His body". When Jesus died, He died in our place as our substitute. This is the very sum and substance of the Gospel. Every other truth found in the Gospel revolves like planets around this great Son. Paul writes about this theme as well in 2 Corinthians 5,

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul writes to the church in Rome, in Romans 5,

⁸ ...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Let us not move quickly from this marvelous truth with a quick affirmation, but let us linger over Christ's substitutionary death for a moment. In infinite justice and righteousness, God determined sin must be punished. That is the kind of righteous God He is. Not one sin could be left unpunished without the great Judge of the universe being charged with judicial neglect. God judges all sin as it rightly deserves, but our God also determined to save sinners who merited His judgment. How could He accomplish both? How could He judge every sin ever committed and yet save those who deserve His judgment?

In divine wisdom, God devised a plan in which God the Son would take on human flesh and thereby represent us and rightfully act as our Substitute. His Son would fulfill the Law, sinning not once and being a perfect Son of man and yet being Son of God able to bear under the wrath of God's eternal judgment against sin in time. Suffering God's rightful judgment for us, in our stead, Jesus bore that tremendous weight of our sin upon His sufficient shoulders. There is a great exchange in which our sin was taken off of us and placed on Christ, so when we come to faith in Him we would bear our sins no longer, but they would be born by another and Christ's righteousness would be transferred from Him into our own soul so we would be treated by God as those who have fulfilled the Law's demands.

The weight of our sins and its guilt are so great it nearly crushes the Son of Glory, but He endures and perseveres under it for our sake. One theologian, A.H. Strong, writes: God requires satisfaction because He is holiness, but He makes satisfaction because He is love. This is a huge answer to our biggest problem which is spiritual and it is our own sin! If we do not have a substitute then our sins are still upon us and must be born by us and they must be carried not only throughout our lives, which painful and difficult enough, but we must also bear them to the Day of Judgment when we stand before God as our righteous Judge to give an account of our lives. How awful to think of the prospect of standing before Him whom we know is so holy He judges every sin with great severity and He sees everything and knows everything about our lives. Without a Substitute who stands there under judgment for us, this fearful prospect is our certain expectation. If Jesus does not suffer for us, then we must suffer for them, but what joyful hope the Gospel brings in that, as Peter tells us, He Himself bore our sins in His body. We are not left without remedy, but we have One who offers to bear our sins for us, not only in time, but throughout all eternity, as our Substitute and be treated by God the Father as though He Himself committed those acts and be treated by the Father in that way for us, in our place, and as our substitute.

This truth of substitution is mocked by those outside of the church of Jesus and it is denied by many of those within the church of Jesus, but we hold it as precious for us understand if we set aside this doctrine of the substitutionary atoning death of Jesus, we rip the heart out of the Good News and are left with a powerless shell and a certain prospect of judgment.

The implication is: Let us glory in this great exchange by which our sins were placed upon Christ and Christ's righteousness was placed upon us. Martin Luther once wrote to a friend, "Learn to know Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to him, and say, 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and given me what is yours. You became what you were not, so that I might become what I was not.'" Is that not a marvel? Let us glory in it!

The second word to consider is: Voluntary. Peter writes, “He, Himself...” and that is an emphatic. The idea is, “He, Himself did this, unprompted and unsolicited.” The Son did not have His death forced upon Him by a Father who made Him do what He did not want to do, nor by the will of wicked will of men like Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders of the 1st Century. Jesus volunteered for this work.

He would say in John 10,

¹¹ *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...”*¹⁸ *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”*

Jesus could not have been a substitute for sin were His death not completely voluntary. Jesus could have readily escaped such a death, but this was the very reason for Him taking on human flesh in the first place, so He might be our Substitute.

As an aside of application, how does this truth of Jesus' free and joyful willingness to bear our sin impact our service to Christ? Would we really have to be one of those believers who have to be cajoled, convinced, argued, and arm twisted into service to the King of Glory? Must we truly be that kind of person when we have One who willingly, voluntarily, freely, and joyfully says, “This I will do for you.” No, not when we are Gospel-centered men and women.

Jesus' life was not taken from Him, but He freely gave it. The cross compels us to joyful service and the implication we learn from His voluntary sacrifice is: Let us delight in God's unfailing love for us.

The worth of a love-gift is measured both two criteria: first, what it costs the giver, and secondly, how much the recipient deserves it. When I was a young man, thinking of asking Kimberly to marry me, I willingly laid down over two months of my salary in order to purchase a ring. My salary was very small and I am sure she would have rather had four or five months because I was a seminary student at the time. But, I willingly did that because I wanted to buy the best engagement ring I could give because this woman deserved it and she was that valuable to me.

That was no great sacrifice on my part because the value of the one to whom I was giving the ring. She was truly worth it! However, consider Jesus, in bearing our sins, God did not give merely two months of earthly wages, but He gave His very life, willingly to be separated from the Father with whom He had prior eternal fellowship. He did it for those who were His enemies, not people of great value, but people with no value apart from Him.

The message of the cross is not, “Look how valuable we are because God sent His Son to die for us. How valuable we must be!” The message of the Gospel is, “Look how great the love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we, sinners, should become children of God through the atoning work of Jesus on our behalf.”

The third word is: Punishment. “He, Himself bore our sins in his body” The word “bore” means to carry a massive, heavy weight. What weight did Jesus carry? The answer is found in the Old Testament. The Old Testament uses this word “bore” over and over. An instructive illustration to help us understand is in Numbers 14. The context is Israel has been delivered by God out of slavery in Egypt. They are instructed by God to send out twelve spies to spy out the Promised Land for forty days. Ten of the spies come back and gave the people a bad report: The land is good, but the people are giants and they were like grasshoppers in their sight and if they attempted to go into the land all would be slaughtered. The people despaired at that point and said, “O, if we would have died in Egypt. O, that we would have never left there.” They took a vote and said, “Let us get rid of God's appointed leader and let us choose a new leader. Let us go back to Egypt.”

God responded, as God does toward sin, with anger. Moses mediates for them so God does not wipe them out completely, but consider what effect that sin had upon them,

³³ And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. ³⁴ According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure. ³⁵ I, the LORD, have spoken.

What does it mean when He Himself “bore” our sins? It means one bears the just punishment for sin and one bears underneath righteous response of a Holy God to sin, and God said to the children of Israel, “You will bear your sins by suffering and dying in the wilderness those forty years. That is my just decree.”

When Jesus bore our sins He bore underneath the punishment of God on our behalf and His punishment was not merely the physical pains of nails, thorns, and crucifixion, but the greatest pain was spiritual in which He bore the eternal response of God the Father and that is the reason why He cried out upon the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”² He knew the answer, even in the cry of anguish, because He was bearing “the sins of my people and I must punish those sins.”

Isaiah 53 tells us,

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief...

The LORD, the Father, in love sent his Son to satisfy His justice, that Christ would die for sin in our place.

The third implication we have for this is: If Christ bore my sins for me, I need never bear them. I need never fear being punished for my sins. My sins cannot be both on my back and His at the same time. They are on one or the other, but not on both of us. Our sins cannot be in two places at the same time. We have the benefit of Christ’s death through faith in Him. Have you trusted in Christ as your Savior so He bears your sins?

The last word we will use is: Purpose. From our text we read,

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

Notice Peter is not saying, “...so we might avoid Hell and go to Heaven,” nor did he say, “...so we might feel peace in our troubled soul.” Both of these are affects of the Gospel and I glory in those affects, but the amazing affect Peter harps on here for believers is the affect of the cross in transforming the way we live. That is the glory of God at work in us through the Gospel.

God’s kind purpose for us is sin’s power over us is broken and we live lives that reflect God’s holiness. The purpose is not merely to remove the guilt of our sin, but it also to bring about the cleansing, sanctifying work in our life, that we might be like Jesus. Any Gospel which does not radically change the way a person thinks, talks, and behaves is not the Gospel delivered to us by God.

There are some who hear the Gospel and learn of the Gospel’s purpose of providing us a home in Heaven and think, “This is good news. The Gospel is preached, ‘Here is how you get to Heaven,’ and I want to go to Heaven.” Then they hear God sent His Son that we might no longer continue existing and living in sin, but that we might live a new life, a life of righteousness and holiness. With this, they say, “That is not good news to me. I do not want that. I like the way I am living right now. I enjoy my sin. That is not good news to me.” Such a person often becomes convinced they can choose “this part” of the Gospel without choosing “that part” of the Gospel. They cannot. If it is not good news to you that the Gospel liberates you from a life of sin so you might live a life of righteousness, then the gospel is not the Gospel to you and you do not believe it and your soul is imperiled.

What a great news we have to have been redeemed in such a way and provided for in such a way the benefits of Christ’s work is not only positional before Christ, but it is real and it affects how we really live in this world. What a joy that is.

The third angle of this text is: Jesus is our Shepherd,

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

² Matthew 27:46b

Peter continues to echo Isaiah 53,

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way...

This is the natural nature of every one of us. We are all like sheep and each one of us has turned to our own way.

I remember a pastor I grew up under during high school, Dr. Bruce Dunn. He talked about Isaiah 53 and said, “Notice Isaiah does not say each one of us has turned after the way of the drunkard, after the way of the adulterer, after the way of the thief or murderer.” That is not what Isaiah says. Sin does not only turn us toward particularly kinds of vile sin, but the great and grievous affect of our sin is it turns us toward our own way. Our own way could be very self-righteous and religious and upstanding and respectable by this world, but it is your own way and it is apart from God. That is the point.

When Peter talks about “returning”, he is saying this is a response, “How do I get Jesus be my sin-bearer and my Shepherd?” As we return, we turn from this life which is your own way and you turn toward Christ. That is how He becomes our sin-bearer; it is through faith.

Oswald Chambers wrote, “We trample the blood of the Son of God if we think we are forgiven because we are sorry for our sins. The only explanation for the forgiveness of God and for the unfathomable depth of His forgetting is the death of Jesus Christ. Our repentance is merely the outcome of our personal realization of the atonement which He has worked out for us. It does not matter who or what we are; there is absolute reinstatement into God by the death of Jesus Christ and by no other way, not because Jesus Christ pleads, but because He died. It is not earned, but accepted. All the pleading which deliberately refuses to recognize the Cross is of no avail; it is battering at a door other than the one that Jesus has opened. Our Lord does not pretend we are all right when we are all wrong. The atonement is a propitiation whereby God, through the death of Jesus, makes an unholy man holy.”

Praise God for God’s Gospel.