

Title: The Example and Work of Christ
Date: November 4, 2018
Subject: Christ sets an example for us to follow even in the manner of our suffering.
Scripture: 1 Peter 3:15 - 22

Let's plunge right into our text.

READ 1 Peter 3:15 – 22.

The premise is that people who do good face only a slight possibility of suffering for doing good. Contrary to what many people and many Christians think, suffering for doing right is considered a blessing, active in the process of the suffering. How are we to respond to situations where we suffer for what is right?

I. Responses to suffering vv. 15 - 17

A. Be committed to Jesus Christ. "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord." Give him first place in our lives. Live by his priorities, instructions. Remember that he is in control.

Lehman Strauss had been married for 50 years and in the ministry for 45 when his wife had a stroke. 2 ½ weeks later the neurologist told him nothing more medically could be done. She was going to be moved to a rehab facility. Strauss told his wife this and reassured her that God was in control. Two months later she was discharged with little recovery, still paralyzed and needing Lehman to care for her 24 hours a day.

Nine months after the stroke he wrote a book about the experience. He admitted he initially had a difficult time and was hurting. "At that particular moment my mind was not capable of rationalizing the majesty of God's sovereignty. When I was told the seriousness of Elsie's condition, I realized that some cherished plans would have to be canceled. Quite frankly, I could not understand God's reason for this turn of events...I was affected emotionally to the point where I couldn't articulate an intelligent prayer...I needed time for in-depth study and personal application of the truth of God's sovereignty. I needed to draw near to God, not to update Him on Elsie's condition and our needs. I needed to draw near so that He could speak to me and give me the assurance that He was in control. I had just told Elsie that God was in control. But at that moment, I was being controlled by an experience that perplexed me. So I drew near to God through His Word."

One Scripture he read was Psalm 119. "I was greatly impressed and encouraged with David's personal testimony of the blessings he received from the afflictions he suffered. First, he bore witness to the sovereignty of God when he was afflicted. "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me" (v. 75)... Second, David testified that affliction was a learning experience for him. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes" (v. 71)...Third, David testified how his affliction benefited him spiritually. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (v. 67).

Later Strauss wrote, "I am learning that there is a large gap between studying truth intellectually and knowing that truth by personal experience...God is the creator and controller of the universe and all that is in

it, whether animate or inanimate. Any use or disposition He chooses to make of any part of His creation is His sovereign right. God is accountable only to Himself. He reports to nobody. He is not required at any time to give to any person any explanation for anything He says or does. He is the superpower above all powers in every area of His creation. We do not expect to understand fully the purpose for our trials until our Lord calls us home to be with Him. But we do know that He loves us too much to harm us, and that He is far more concerned with our welfare than we are” (God is in Control, From the series: In God's Waiting Room - "Learning Through Suffering" -- bible.org/seriespage/2-god-control).

B. Be prepared to give an answer. A defense of the faith, Making Our Case for Christ like we’re learning in Sunday School. The answer may be given during a time of suffering as a person may ask why we continue to believe. It may be given when suffer at the hands of governments. It may be given when someone asks because a noted Christ-follower like Billy Graham has died. It could come up in ordinary conversations. “What is it about you Christians? What makes you tick?” We are to speak out about Jesus. Give an answer for our hope.

It calls for preparation. Read the Gospels that describe the historical accounts. Read the rest of the New Testament that helps to clarify what Jesus did and why he did it. Think through what Jesus has done for us and how we can express it.

C. Be gentle and respectful. Some consider the second aspect to be directed toward God as reverence for him. It’s accomplished by presenting him properly, being clear about who he is and how people can obtain the gift of eternal life he offers.

Gentleness and respect are to be companions of Christ followers. How many people would listen to our answer for our hope if we’re harsh, disrespectful, arrogant, or bombastic? “I know something you don’t know and if you’re lucky enough, I might tell you...I don’t know how anyone in their right mind would think the way you do. How can anyone be so dumb and wrong? I mean, I’ve seen dumb and I’ve seen wrong, but rarely in the same place at the same time... Jesus is better than all the garbage in your life.”

The way we state our case figures heavily in its reception. Like flowers attracting bees, we are to attract people by our spirit of gentleness and respect.

D. Keep a clear conscience. Our inner being is to be impacted by God’s Word and infused with the Holy Spirit. We present ourselves to the Lord to have him fill us. We maintain clear consciences by not acting in ways, saying or doing things, we regret.

When the Lord had Peter write these words, I think the apostle relived the terrible moment of denying the Savior. He becomes the perfect example of what not to do in the face of suffering. He’s presented with three opportunities from people he assumed were unsympathetic toward Jesus to say he was one of Jesus’ followers. He didn’t put Christ in first place. He put his own hide on the throne. He wasn’t prepared to give an answer. He denied having any connection or knowledge of Jesus. He wasn’t gentle, respectful or reverent. He vehemently denied knowing Jesus using oaths, curses and swearing. He didn’t have a clear conscience. After the third denial, the Lord looked at Peter and the apostle remembered what Jesus had said (Luke 22:61).

Daniel in the middle of godless Babylon is a positive example of giving an answer. He was respectful of those in authority. He lived such a good moral life as he followed the Lord that his enemies couldn't find any fault. They believed their only recourse was a scheme that would force Daniel's hand in regards to his faith in the Lord. They maneuvered the king to sign a law that everyone had to worship the king only for 30 days. When Daniel heard about the law he merely continued doing what he had been doing – praying in his house with his window open. Initially, it didn't look good for Daniel as he was thrown into the lion's den. However, the Lord protected him. His accusers met their untimely deaths when they were thrown into the den for falsely accusing Daniel. The king proclaimed that everyone in the land must fear and reverence the God of Daniel (Daniel 6:26). Things worked out happily for Daniel.

Christ followers might feel it'd be absolutely wonderful if our accusers and tormenters were thrown into a lion's den. That's not the promise we have in Peter. Those who speak maliciously and slander us will be ashamed of their bad behavior because of our good behavior. It seems like the shame will take place in the present though it's possible the shame will come at the judgement when they see they're on the wrong side.

Verse 17 brings a summary statement. If God's will sends or allows suffering, it's better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. This thought is expended in chapter 4.

The connective word “for” in v. 18 leads to what we can learn from Christ's example of suffering. The majority of translations further emphasize the relevance of Christ's example by saying that Christ “suffered” for sins. What are we to understand that will help us in our suffering as we imitate Christ?

II. Christ's example of suffering vv. 18 – 22

A. The unjust nature of His suffering. If anyone suffered for doing good, it was Jesus Christ. He was completely righteous. He had never sinned in any way, shape or form. He suffered for others, the unrighteous, so they wouldn't have to. He was a substitute. If he suffered unjustly, his followers should expect similar treatment. And it definitely was God's will that he suffer.

B. The scale of his suffering. It was of far greater magnitude than anything people face. The one who knew no sin became sin. He took on the sin of every person, all the billions and billions and billions who has ever lived. His suffering required the giving of his life, not just being mistreated by someone. It was a complete and sufficient sacrifice as it was once for all.

C. The purpose of his suffering. He suffered so that he could bring people to God. He was the only one who could repair the rip in the spiritual spectrum. He died for sins so the sin penalty amassed by all of humanity could be paid. The text moves on to give a quick overview of the work of Christ.

III. The work of Christ.

A. He was put to death in the body. Some detractors of Christianity say he was only a spirit, that he didn't have a real body, so the whole death and resurrection thing was basically smoke and mirrors. The Bible unequivocally asserts that Jesus was an actual physical human being who ate food, who could be touched, who touched people, who could be killed. Spirits don't do those things.

B. He was made alive. Opponents of Christianity say Christ didn't rise from the dead. Their theories range from the cross and tomb are just fables to Jesus' spirit left before the body was placed in a tomb to someone stole the body to people went to the wrong tomb. The Bible again is unambiguous in its assertion that Jesus rose from the dead. It brings forward witnesses who wouldn't die for something they know is a lie. It's central to the teaching of Scripture.

C. Interruption in the thought. There's a pause of the recitation of salvation history. It continues in 22 so the thought would progress from the death to the resurrection to the ascension and present work of Jesus.

The parenthesis is considered by many Bible scholars as one of the toughest to understand. Martin Luther simply said that he didn't know what it meant and left it at that. The first issue is Christ preaching to the spirits in prison. There are various interpretations, some quite fanciful, as to the identity of the spirits. One includes Jesus giving people from the time of the Flood a second chance after death. That can be ruled out. There's also differing views of the content of Christ's preaching which are made to fit the identity of the spirits.

I think the best sense is Jesus went into the depths of hell to the spirits in prison who are awaiting their full punishment to announce his complete victory over them. He proclaimed his triumph over death. He affirmed he is God and they're doomed. Preaching doesn't always mean the giving of good news. It's proclaiming or announcing. He bore witness during dark times and gave an answer to the spirits.

The second issue is baptism. The water in Noah's day accomplished two things. The Flood was the mechanism for saving the eight who entered the ark. It was a kind of baptism as they were placed into the water of the flood and saved. The water served to judge the sin of those who chose not to enter the safety of the ark.

Water continues its symbolism as judgment for sin was placed upon Christ when he died. Those who come to Christ for salvation are placed into him. NIV Study Bible is helpful at this point. "Baptism is a symbol of salvation in that it depicts Christ's death, burial and resurrection and our identification with him in these experiences. In reality, believers are saved by what baptism symbolizes—Christ's death and resurrection. The symbol and the reality are so closely related that the symbol is sometimes used to refer to the reality. The act of baptism is a commitment on the part of the believer in all good conscience to make sure that what baptism symbolizes will become a reality in his life. In the final analysis people are saved not by any ritual, but by the supernatural power of the resurrection" (NIV Study Bible note on 1 Peter 3:21).

A person's choice to follow the Lord in baptism is a witness to people. It's one way to give an answer to people about the reason for the hope that we have.

We resume the depiction of salvation history in 22. D. He has gone into heaven. After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples for 40 days and offered many convincing proofs he was alive (Acts 1:3). He talked with them (Luke 24:36-49). He ate with them (Luke 24:40-43). He taught them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He entered the room the disciples were in even though the doors were locked (John 20:26).

At the end of the 40 days he ascended to the heavenly Father. He's there to prepare heaven for us. He's currently ruling on the throne with all powers and authorities placed under his feet. He's waiting for the

time for him to return to earth and gather those who belong to him and bring them to their heavenly reward and where everything will be completely under him.

Ironworker Frank Silecchia helped to recover bodies after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. He noticed two steel beams in the shape of a cross standing upright in the middle of all the debris. Appointing himself as the steward of the striking symbol of God's love, he often took heartbroken visitors to see it. Many were comforted by the silent testimony to God's presence in the worst of tragedies. When journalist Barbara Walters came with tearful friends who'd lost a son in the catastrophe, Frank simply led them to the cross.

That's our mission – to lead people to the cross, to the Christ of the cross. Even in the middle of suffering for doing good.