*The Suffering Servant*

1 Peter 2:21-25

2/12/23

In our text today we encounter a unique feature of Peter’s writings which make them so helpful. 1 Peter is built largely around commands, teaching us how to live as elect exiles. Yet the preponderance of commands creates the risk that we think God’s favor is earned by what we do. Under this view, the Christian life becomes a formula. Before long, we have a checklist of dos and don’ts by which we gauge our own spirituality and the spirituality of others. If we are not careful, what started as a good desire to live a holy life can devolve into pharisaical legalism.

Our actions matter to God, hence the command to be holy because He is holy. Yet the limitations of our flesh and the subversive efforts of our adversary make the pursuit of holiness hard. This is why Peter constantly points us to the gospel. Christians do not modify their behavior because they want God to accept them. We are accepted through faith in Jesus. Obedience is not essential to salvation. But that does not mean obedience is unimportant. It is very important, for obedience is the fruit of salvation. It is the evidence that we have been born again. God’s commands are about living in the freedom we have received from Christ, enjoying unhindered fellowship with Him, and demonstrating His family resemblance to the world. This is why Peter constantly connects the gospel to our behavior. He is showing us how the gospel works itself into the mundane moments of our everyday life.

Last week we saw Peter telling servants to be submissive to their masters. They were to do this, not only when they were good and gentle, but also when they were unreasonable. But his concern is not that they understand authority structures and keep their proper place in them. His concern is that they display Christ’s character despite suffering as slaves. That is the reason for the shift in focus that takes place in vs. 21.

1 Peter emphasizes doing what is right in the face of suffering. We have seen that many times already and will continue to see this theme as we progress through the letter. Every time we are called to do what is right in the face of injustice and mistreatment. Yet doing so is hard, for it strikes at the core of our selfishness. We tend to value ourselves more than anything else, which is why we get so upset when we perceive a wrong has been done to us. Peter knows this, which is why he points us to the example of Christ’s suffering.

We left our study at vs 21. It tells us that we were called for the purpose of imitating Christ. This means more than imitating His compassion, character, and acts of kindness. It also means following His example when being mistreated. Vs. 22-24 confront us with three examples from Christ’s life that are much harder to imitate.

First, we are to consider the example of His *sinlessness*. Vs. 22 is a quotation of Isaiah 53:9. Isaiah 53 is a detailed description of how the Messiah would suffer for our sinfulness. If He was to be our substitute, sacrificing Himself to pay the penalty for our sin, He had to be sinless. In the law, only an unblemished animal was an acceptable sacrifice. This foreshadowed the need for a perfect Savior. This is Jesus. He lived a sinless life. Every action, every thought, and every motivation were pure. No look, attitude, or deed was tainted by sin. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. In word and deed, He was perfect.

Because Jesus was sinlessness, He could stand as our substitute. Isaiah 53 says that the iniquity of us all was laid on Him and that He bore it in our place. Vs. 24 echoes that language when it says Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross. Colossians 2 tells us that the entire body of our sin has been nailed to the cross of Christ. Ultimately 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that God *made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* Jesus literally became our sin, suffering its consequences and absorbing all of God’s wrath directed towards it, so that we could escape our self-inflicted misery.

Jesus was sinless. We are to imitate Him by laying aside sin so we can walk in the light of His truth. Jesus understands how difficult this is for us to do as broken human beings. He paid the ultimate price so God’s grace could be granted to us. But this grace does more than provide forgiveness. God’s grace is not content to leave us wallowing in sin. It also compels and empowers us to overcome it. We see this illustrated in the story of the adulterous woman in John 8. She was guilty, caught in the very act of adultery. The grace Jesus extends her is two-fold. First, He forgave her, for that is what He did when He refused to condemn her*.* He was releasing her from the consequences of her sin. Most of us think the gospel ends there, but Jesus goes further. He also extended His grace by saying *go and sin no more.* God never winks at sin. Jesus liberated her from the condemnation of sin so she could live the abundant life of obedience. This is the fullness of God’s grace, forgiving sin’s offense, breaking its power, and enabling us to live for God. We are to consider the sinless life of Jesus, and seek to imitate it.

Second, we are to consider the example of Christ’s silence in vs. 23. Jesus faced some nasty accusations during His life. He was accused of loosing His mind, of being demon-possessed, doing the work of Satan, and of blaspheming, to name a few. He was regularly reviled by the religious establishment. Yet in the face of their cruelty, He never responded in kind. He was reviled, but He did not revile in turn. To revile is to verbally abuse someone. Think of how the Jews did that to Jesus at His trial. Yet Jesus refused to respond in kind, causing the godless and cruel Pontius Pilate to acknowledge Jesus’ innocence. Jesus practiced what He preached. He did good to those who persecuted Him and prayed for those who hated Him.

Jesus also remained silent in His suffering. He could have told the crowds who reviled Him on the cross, *I may be suffering now, but your day is coming. I will get even.* He didn’t do that. He uttered no threats, again drawing our minds to Isaiah 53: *Like a lamb that is lead to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.* Instead, He kept entrusting Himself to Him to judges righteously. Two things Jesus did say were *Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do* and *into Your hands I commit My spirit.* He entrusted Himself to God, knowing that God judges righteously. He was content to wait for the day of God’s judgment for the wrongs done to Him to be made right.

Two thoughts before we move to a third aspect of Christ’s example. First, when you are maligned for doing what is right, let the integrity of your actions be your defense. Jesus was wrongly accused. Pilate saw it, even though he did nothing about it. The silent dignity of Jesus’ death caused the Roman soldier to say *surely this man was the Son of God.* Three days later, God vindicated His Son when He raised Him from the dead. So keep your behavior excellent and allow God to vindicate you at the right time and in the right way. He did this for Moses, Elijah, Daniel, and countless others. He will do it for you too.

But consider also how we should respond when someone is reviled. Be slow to hear slanderous accusations. Just because the Jews said Moses led them into the wilderness to kill them did not mean it was true. Just because Ahab called Elijah the troubler of Israel did not mean it was true. Any Christian who intentionally practices their faith in today’s intolerant culture is going to be verbally attacked. All too often, these attacks come from within the church because someone is upset. So be slow to judge when someone is undermining someone else to you.

Finally, consider the example of Christ’s sacrifice. Here is the heart of the matter. Slaves were suffering mistreatment. Peter says *in your suffering, look to suffering of Christ!* He bore our sins in His body on the cross. Was that fair? NO! It was a far greater injustice that any slave has ever experienced at the hands of their masters. Yet Jesus endured this injustice so He could carry our sins in His body on the cross. He died bearing our sins so we might die to sin and live to righteousness. It is by His wounds that we are healed from the mortal disease of sin.

Peter is pointing us to the greater suffering of Christ. If Christ was willing to suffer in that way so we could be forgiven, then we should be willing to suffer so that we can display Christ to our oppressors. When we suffer for doing what is right, we are joining in the suffering of Christ. When we suffer like Christ, we point people to the greater reality of Christ’s payment for sin. C*onsider how Jesus bore your sin in His body on the cross. He did that so you would die to sin and its mastery over you. Now we live for Him. He healed you so you could display His glory in this world.* Suffering is never fun, and we do not seek it. But when God allows suffering into our lives, it gives us the glorious opportunity to display the character of Christ and point people to the gospel.

In vs. 25, Peter brings this home to His listeners. Jesus did not suffer for us *after* we had come to Him. He suffered and died while we were continually straying like sheep. Again, Peter is echoing Isaiah 53: *all of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way. But the Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him!* We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Like foolish sheep bent on their own destruction, we abandoned God to pursue our own destruction through sin. That rebellion was the cause of Jesus’ suffering. He became the very evil that we have done, so He could bear the consequences of it in His body, that we might be reconciled to God. He did this while we were still enemies wondering the dark paths of sin.

Now, Peter is writing to Christians, so that is who they were, not who they are. Now, you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your soul. Jesus came into the world to seek and save that which was lost. You were a lost sheep, but He found you and brought you back into His fold because He is a good Shepherd…one who lays down His life for His sheep. And having brought you back, He will guard your soul. He will keep you for the day of salvation. I do not have time to make the connections this morning, but I cannot help but wonder if Peter is drawing on Jesus’ teaching found in John 10, where He is described first as the Good Shepherd who lays His life down for the sheep. Having saved His people, He then guards their souls by holding them in His hand. No one can snatch one of His people from Him. If He was willing to endure the horrors of Calvary to redeem you, He will be unwilling to let you go. What glorious benefits have come to us because Jesus was willing to suffer for our salvation.

Perhaps you are here this morning still in a state of continually straying. It is time to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling. The Bible says that He calls His sheep by name, and they know Him and they follow Him. He leads them and cares for them. Can you not see the love of God? He loved you so much that He crushed His Son on the cross so you, a wondering, sinful sheep, could be reconciled to Him. Jesus has bore the consequences of your sin on the cross. Stop fleeing the light of the gospel and come to Christ. He will welcome you with open arms. He will forgive you, cleanse you, and make you new. Like the woman in John 8, He will not condemn you. He will enable you to overcome the sin that is destroying you. Come to the fountain of Christ and drink of His salvation. Turn from your sin to trust in Christ. Ask God to forgive you and to give you new life. Recognize you are unable to save yourself and that you bring nothing to the table of salvation but the sin that made Christ’s sacrifice necessary. Believe in Him, and God will cleanse you of every evil thing you have done, no matter how great or small, through the blood of His Son. Return to the Shepherd and Guardian of your soul.

And to those of you who have already returned to Christ, look to the example of Christ’s suffering and remember that He did this so you would die to sin and live to righteousness. Consider Jesus’ sinlessness in word and deed, His silence when reviled and wronged, and His unjust suffering so we could be forgiven. If you believe in Him, then *follow Him.* You were saved for this purpose. So do what is right even when it hurts; humbly and quietly endure mistreatment; and count it a joy to suffer for Christ so that others might see Him in you. He endured all manner of suffering so we could be saved. May we be willing to endure suffering so that our oppressors might also be saved.

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*