

The Cross of Christ

Lesson 4: The Suffering Servant Fulfilled -- 1 Peter 2:21-25

There is a moment in many great stories when a long-awaited promise finally comes true, and the reader who has been paying attention feels a thrill of recognition. The prophecy spoken in chapter one is fulfilled in the final pages, and everything clicks into place. Last week we stood with Isaiah seven hundred years before the cross and watched him sketch, in astonishing detail, a Servant who would be wounded for our transgressions. This week we turn the page to the apostle Peter, who stood at the foot of an actual cross, and we hear him say, in effect: that Servant has come, and his name is Jesus.

Peter writes to Christians who were suffering for their faith, and he does something remarkable. To comfort and instruct people in pain, he points them to the cross. Christ also suffered for you, he says, leaving you an example, that you might follow in his steps. Then he reaches back into Isaiah 53 and applies it directly to Jesus: he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth; when he was reviled, he did not revile in return; he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. The portrait Isaiah painted from a distance, Peter now signs with the name of the One who fulfilled it.

But notice how Peter holds two things together that we are often tempted to pull apart. On one hand, the cross is our example. Jesus shows us how to suffer without bitterness, how to entrust ourselves to God who judges justly, how to refuse to repay evil with evil. On the other hand, the cross is far more than an example. 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. Before the cross is ever a pattern for us to follow, it is a sacrifice that saves us. We could never follow his steps at all if he had not first carried our sins.

So read these five verses as the meeting place of prophecy and fulfillment, of doctrine and daily life. Here the suffering Servant of Isaiah becomes the Savior who bore your sins, and the Savior who bore your sins becomes the Shepherd of your soul. Peter ends with one of the gentlest lines in all of Scripture: you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. The wandering sheep of Isaiah 53 have a home. The Lamb who was slain is also the Shepherd who gathers. Let this passage settle two things in you at once: deep gratitude for the sins he carried, and a quiet resolve to walk in the steps of the One who carried them.

Group Discussion: Peter comforts suffering Christians by pointing them to the cross of Christ. Why do you think the suffering of Jesus brings such comfort to people who are themselves suffering? How is the comfort of the cross different from simply being told that things will get better?

Personal Reflection: Peter says Christ left us an example so that we might follow in his steps, and yet also that he bore our sins so that we could be healed. When you think about the cross, which comes more naturally to you, treating it as a model to imitate or a sacrifice to receive, and why does the order matter?

Read 1 Peter 2:21-25

Study Questions

1. Peter says, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (v. 21). What does it mean that Christ's suffering is both for us and an example to us, and why does Peter say that we were actually called to this kind of following?
2. Peter writes to believers who were suffering unjustly. When you face hardship or unfair treatment, do you tend to ask first how to escape it or how to follow Christ through it? What would change if you saw your suffering as a place to walk in his steps?
3. Quoting Isaiah, Peter says Jesus "committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth" (v. 22). Why is the sinlessness of Christ essential to what the cross accomplishes, and how does it tie this passage directly to the spotless Servant and the unblemished lamb of the sacrifices?
4. Peter says that when Jesus was reviled, "he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten" (v. 23). Where in your life are you most tempted to revile, threaten, or retaliate when wronged, and what would it look like this week to respond as Jesus did?

5. Jesus, when suffering, “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (v. 23). How does entrusting ourselves to God free us from the need to defend or avenge ourselves, and what does this reveal about how Jesus endured the cross?
6. Think of a specific wrong you are still holding onto, a hurt you keep replaying or a score you want to settle. What would it mean for you, this week, to entrust that situation to the God who judges justly rather than carrying it yourself?
7. At the center of the passage Peter declares, “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” (v. 24). Explain how this verse moves from substitution (he bore our sins) to transformation (that we might die to sin), and why the cross aims not only to forgive us but to change us.
8. Peter says the goal of Christ bearing our sins is that we would “die to sin and live to righteousness.” Where is God calling you to die to a particular sin and come alive to a particular act of obedience, and how does the cross give you the power to do it?
9. Peter closes by saying, “You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (v. 25). Explain how Peter takes the straying sheep of Isaiah 53 and shows the cross bringing them home, and how this presents Jesus as both the Lamb who was slain and the Shepherd who gathers and guards his people. What does it mean that he is the Overseer of your soul?

10. Look back across 1 Peter 2:21–25 as a whole, where the Servant Isaiah foretold becomes the Savior and Shepherd who bore your sins. Name one specific way this passage deepens your gratitude for the sins he carried, and one concrete step you will take this week to follow in his steps.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 53:4–6, the prophecy Peter is quoting and applying to Jesus; Romans 6:11, consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus; Matthew 11:28–30, come to me and find rest for your souls; John 10:11, I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep; Hebrews 13:20–21, the great Shepherd of the sheep brought back through the blood of the eternal covenant.