

Week 13 - The Significance of the Cross - 1Peter 2:21-25

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:1-4

Introduction

I love it when God works things out as he does

I'm often surprised when I'm told that the passage I have preached on and the theme of my sermon has coincided with what was taught that very morning in Sunday school without Jim and I coordinating it at all

And, occasionally, my the textual section that comes along in an expository series fits so well with the church calendar without it being planned that one has to recognize that God had a hand in it

We have one of those instances this morning as we come to the first Sunday of April and the observation of the Lord's Table matching up with the section of 1Peter that deals specifically with the cross and its significance to the sojourning believers that Peter was writing to

I can assure you it wasn't due to any planning on my part other than simply mapping out the different sections in order when I put my preaching calendar together so it has to be a God thing

Our text this morning is 1Peter 2:21-25

We looked briefly at the first few verses of this morning's text last week when we looked at the Christian employee but this week we are going to take up verses 21-23 along with verses 24 and 25 as we consider the significance of the cross

This message is a bit of an intrusion into the theme of being subject to authorities in various spheres of life but I think it's an important diversion for us to take because of the centrality of the cross and its impact on who we are as sojourners

The cross, when it is understood, is an offense to the world because it reveals the nature of God's righteous judgment and tells people that they aren't good enough

In contrast to human wisdom that says one can do as they please, the cross says in no uncertain terms what God thinks of sin - a fact that is evident in the enormity of God's solution to the problem of mankind's sin - the sacrifice of his own Son

The cross offends and, as people who are associated with the cross, Christ-followers are likely to be seen as offensive during their sojourn here if we hold the cross in proper esteem

But, while the cross has historically been the symbol and badge of those who follow Christ, for many who call themselves Christians, the cross has lost much of its majesty and is just another decoration

Crosses are commonly seen on clothing, as jewelry, and even tattoos on people who give no thought at all to what the cross means - it's just an ornament that has some unspecified spiritual significance that people think is trendy or pretty

Without intending to do so, I fear that many followers of Christ have allowed the cross to become a mundane, common thing simply because churches have failed to keep the significance of the cross in the forefront of their teaching

As I said a few moments ago, the cross is central to who we are as Christ-followers and a true understanding of the cross should have a large influence on how we sojourn here

So, if you haven't already done so, I encourage you to join me in 1Peter 2 and follow along as we take a read through verses 21-25 where Peter, writing to suffering servants says [**1Peter 2:21-25**]:

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. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 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. 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. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The first thing we want to note that makes the cross significant is Christ's suffering

I. Suffering

Peter begins in verse 21 by indicating that Christ-followers have been summoned by God into a condition marked by suffering unjustly according to the example set by Christ

Jesus himself forewarned his disciples in **John 15:18-20** that they would be hated because they were his disciples and the world had first hated him and that the hatred of the world would lead to persecution

And in **1Thessalonians 3:3-4**, Paul says that he was "destined" to suffer affliction and that such suffering shouldn't move a believer

We have been called to suffer because suffering was part of the life of Christ, which we have been called to imitate

When we are suffering unjustly, demonstrating trust in God and being obedient to him aren't easy but the paradox is that trust and obedience are also deepened and strengthened by that same suffering and God is glorified

James writes about this truth in **James 1:2-4** where he says:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

So, while the knowledge that God has actually called us to a life that will include a measure of unjust suffering might cause us some initial dismay, we shouldn't allow it to ultimately unsettle us

And looking to Christ as our ultimate example in the face of unjust suffering should help us to face it in a way that pleases God

So, in verse 22, Peter begins to explain in more detail the pattern of life left by Christ and he begins with his complete sinlessness

When Peter says that Jesus committed "no sin" he means none at all - that is a statement of complete negation

Remember, Peter had lived, traveled, and ministered very closely with Jesus for three years and he affirms that he had never witnessed anything but righteousness from Jesus

Kathy has spent more time with me than anyone else in the world and I know she couldn't give the same report about me - and I doubt anyone who has spent time with any of you would try to make the same claim either

Whether it's difficult times that bring out our worst or times of ease when we let our guard down, if you spend enough time with anyone you will discover that they are not sinless

And even when we don't commit any what we would consider "big sins" who among us can say we were never deceitful in our speech - meaning that we never shaded the truth in any way?

James, after writing that we all stumble in many ways, wrote that the man who never stumbles in what he says is a "perfect man" [**James 3:2**]

Still, while we know that none of us is perfect, we also know that God's requirement for all people is the perfect sinlessness that was achieved by Jesus alone

And Peter tells us that his perfect life is meant to serve as an example and encouragement to us during our sojourn

Part of the example Christ left for us is found in his response to being reviled

To be reviled means to endure insulting and abusive speech and the natural instinct of human beings is to respond whenever we are abused

We see Moses respond inappropriately to being reviled in Numbers 20 - the same term is used in the Greek version of **Numbers 20:3** where it says the people "quarreled" with Moses

And we read in verse 10 [**Numbers 20:10**] how Moses was provoked to respond with a harsh retort and to striking the rock in anger - a sin that causes God to bar Moses from entering the promised land

I said that responding in kind is the natural response to being reviled but that is actually only true for those who are depending on themselves to defend themselves and not actually living in the belief that God has control of the situation

But Jesus's example shows us an alternative as he "*continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly*"

By the way, the word "himself" that we find in 1Peter 2:23 isn't in the original Greek - it's an insertion made by the translators intended to clarify the statement

But it actually serves to overly limit the level of Jesus' trust as Jesus repeatedly entrusted the entire situation and all who were involved in it to God

This is the complete demonstration of trust that is meant when we say someone has faith and faith is a necessary attitude if one is going to suffer righteously

Who would deny that Jesus' ability to retaliate against those who were abusing him was far greater than theirs?

He could have wiped them off the face of the earth with a word but he kept on trusting that God the Father was in control and would handle the situation justly

When we commit ourselves fully to God's justice and turn all matters of abuse over to him we are able to do as Paul says in **1Corinthians 4:12-13**

When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat.

It's important for us to note that Peter isn't commending the supposed therapeutic value of venting one's anger when wronged

Neither is he saying that we should hold the anger in and try to suppress it

Both of those responses are rooted in self-dependence

Rather, he is saying that we are to continuously hand the whole situation over to God and commit it to his hands and leave it there - that's what Christ did and he is our example

The second way in which the cross is significant is found in verse 24 where we read that Christ was our substitution

II. Substitution

One reason we have for not being able to easily endure the wrongs inflicted on us is that God has placed in us a strong sense of justice that cannot easily rest when we believe that there will be no punishment for those who are abusing us

And Jesus is our example but he is truly far more than our example

We have not and, in fact, cannot perfectly follow his example and thereby please God

Therefore, we stand guilty before God but Jesus is also our substitute who suffered for us and bore our sins in his body to the tree so that we might die to sin and live righteously

The fact that Jesus bore our sins means that God the Father counted our sins against his Son

2Corinthians 5:21 tells us:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What that means is that the Father imputed, or credited, our sins to his Son - if you picture a ledger of accounts the Father put our debt in Christ's column

Then the Father unleashed his righteous anger toward sin on his own Son resulting in the separation of the Son from the Father and the consequent death that we deserve

In this way Christ was a substitute for his people - one who stood in their place and took their punishment upon himself

We see this idea of a substitute for sin foreshadowed in the Law of Moses

Look with me at **Leviticus 16: 20-22** and the provision of a scapegoat that bore the sins of the people

And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

And Isaiah wrote not once but three times how the Suffering Servant would bear the sins of the people

Isaiah 53:4 says –

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted

Isaiah 53:11 says –

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

And **Isaiah 53:12** reads –

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Also, Peter's use of "he himself" serves as an emphatic personalization that shows clearly that Jesus voluntarily and without coercion became our substitute

Notice the threefold statement of this fact we find in John 10:14-18 where Jesus says –

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I **lay down my life for the sheep**. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I **lay down my life** that I may take it up again. **No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord**. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

In just a little while we will be observing the Lord's Table and I will read the words that Paul received directly from the Lord found in **1Corinthians 11:24** – "*This is my body, which is for you...*"

And we are reminded each time we partake of the element of the bread that Jesus is our substitute and how he took on the body of a man, took our sin upon himself, and bore them to the cross to bear the Father's wrath on our behalf

As you know, we observe the Lord's Table each month on the first Sunday of the month but as we read in **Hebrews 7:27** Jesus' sacrifice was a one-time thing that was fully effective and never to be repeated

Let's look at that verse together real quick –

*He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this **once for all** when he offered up himself.*

And that brings us to our third way in which the cross is significant - its satisfaction

III. Satisfaction

Let's look again at verse 24 of our passage [**1Peter 2:24**] and pay particular attention to the last half of the verse

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.

"By his wounds you have been healed" is a quote from Isaiah 53:5 and the Greek word for "wounds" is literally "battle face" and means a black eye or a welt or a scar – a mark that is left by an injury received in battle

The King James Version translates this same word as "stripes" which brings to mind the whipping that Jesus endured but Peter's meaning goes beyond the lashing to include the wounds received at the cross

And the idea here is that, by his suffering as he did, Jesus saved us from the wrath we deserve

As I pointed out earlier, we know deep down that transgressions must be atoned for

And even though our consciences may deceive us and tell us that our transgressions against God too minor to matter our sense of justice, what I refer to as our judicial sentiment, knows better

Ask any thief if stealing is wrong and they might well come up with all manner of reasons why their stealing is okay

But try and steal something of theirs and you will soon learn how they really feel about stealing - that's judicial sentiment

The point is, we know our transgressions whether they are active or passive through failing to do what we know is right, have a price that must be paid to satisfy God's righteous judgment against sin

There was a price to be paid to redeem us from our slavery to sin and the kingdom of Satan and that price was set by God the Father

We see that in 2Corinthians 5 – let's look at verses 17-21 [**2Corinthians 5:17-21**]

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And the Father was satisfied with Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice

Whereas we would have to suffer for all eternity and still not be able to make ourselves right with God, Jesus was able to bear all the wrath of God against our sin and bear it to the end

And when Jesus knew that he had paid the full penalty - when his wounds were sufficient to heal us - he uttered the words, "*It is finished*" [**John 19:30**] and gave up his spirit

Look back with me again at Isaiah 53 and verses 10-11 [**Isa. 53:10-11**] –

*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. **Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied**; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*

And since Jesus has satisfied the righteous wrath of the Father against sin for all who will put their trust in his payment, we can say as Paul did in **Romans 8:1** "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

The fact that the substitutionary sacrifice of the Son has fully satisfied the Father has a couple of implications we don't want to miss

First, there is no reason for anyone to suffer for their sins for all eternity

The price has been paid in full - God the Father is satisfied with the substitutionary suffering of the Son

The only reason anyone still suffers eternally is that they didn't accept the sacrificial payment made on their behalf and therefore they continue to be a sinner by nature with no way to make themselves right before God

God has provided the way for anyone who will to turn from their sin and to him as benevolent Shepherd and Overseer and there so there is no reason anyone needs to suffer for their sins and only those who refuse his offer will do so

Second, the fact that Jesus paid the price for our sin in full, there is no debt for us to pay

The penalty has been paid - God the Father is completely satisfied - we can stop worrying about God requiring something more from us in regard to our sins

When God the Father looks at a true follower of his Son his Son is all he sees

God imputed our sins to Christ and Christ voluntarily accepted them and bore them to the cross

Then, when we believed, God imputed Christ's righteousness to us so we need not fear his wrath because he no longer sees our sins - our debt has been paid

Our righteousness before the Father comes from our devotion to the Son and the fact that God is well pleased with his Son and the sacrifice he made on our behalf

Conclusion

As we prepare to observe the ordinance of the Lord's Table, let me ask you, how do you view the cross?

My hope is that when you see a cross you see more than a symbol of unspecified spiritual significance or even as the church's logo not much different than the Nike swoosh

The cross is the means of our reconciliation to God and Peter says it's the pattern for our lives

Jesus told his disciples in **Matthew 16:24** –

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

And Peter says that the suffering of Jesus is the pattern we should follow as we face suffering

Because Christ suffered innocently for our sake we must be willing to suffer for his sake and thereby bring glory to our heavenly Father

Who knows, by our suffering as Christ suffered we just might provide an example to someone who needs to know Christ

The cross is significant because of the suffering, substitution, and sacrifice of Christ that happened there

And the Lord's Table is about our remembrance of the One who suffered on our behalf as Jesus told his church "Do this in remembrance of me"

Let's pray and ask God to bless the symbols of the body and blood of his Son as we prepare to partake of them and remember what Christ has done for us

Hebrews 12:1-4 (page 1008)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.