

Christ Suffered In The Flesh

1 Peter 4:1-2

1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1-6 (ESV))

Today, as we celebrate this most important event in all of human history, the “death, the burial and the resurrection” of the Lord Jesus, we find in our scripture text here in 1st Peter that God is addressing that very same event. Here He uses the words, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh”. And folks, this is no coincidence that we would arrive at these very words on this very day. God allows no “coincidences”. He is too meticulous for that. The “Gospel”, the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ, is skillfully interwoven, in one form or another, into every Book of this Bible. And so, in our ongoing study into this Book of 1st Peter, it should be no surprise that today, Easter Sunday, we find ourselves here at this portion of scripture.

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May we begin by unfolding the steps that brought the Lord Jesus to this point of His “suffering in the flesh”. And as we think about all that He endured, I want us to observe a miraculous power being revealed, a power that is like no other, a power that reaches out from within Him into every one of our souls, enabling those of us who willingly choose to suffer with Him to experience a “freedom” that we have never known before.

May we begin in the Book of Luke, just a short time before His crucifixion, as Jesus and His disciples set their course towards what would be His last trip to the City of Jerusalem. As they journeyed, Jesus began more and more to speak to His disciples about His sufferings that would soon take place. But strangely, though Jesus’ words were clear and the disciples were obviously very intelligent men, they were not able to comprehend His words. Listen, first in Luke 9,

⁴³ . . . Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁴ “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” ⁴⁵ But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.
(Luke 9:43-45 (ESV))

And then in Luke 18, we read,

³¹ And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. ³² For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³ And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." ³⁴ But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.
(Luke 18:31-34 (ESV))

Again, though these were very intelligent men, they could not understand Jesus' words. I am convinced that their lack of understanding was a purposeful provision of love and mercy and grace from God. In each of these passages, it is said that understanding was "withheld", "concealed", "hidden", from the disciples, intended to be revealed to their conscious minds only later on by the Holy Spirit. Had those men fully understood weeks ahead of time all the miserably wretched things that were about to take place, they might have tried, as Peter did, to keep Jesus from His appointed mission.

And I am convinced that God often does such things even with you and me. Our minds are just too small, too immature to handle some of the deeper and more difficult things that are yet to take place. And were we to know about them ahead of time, we might take precautions that would stifle or even prevent God's righteous work from being worked out in us. And because of that, He mercifully guards our minds from knowing about those things ahead of time.

But why then, if Jesus did not intend for the disciples to fully understand His words at the time, did He go ahead and warn His disciples about His soon coming suffering? I'm convinced that it has to do with the prophetic nature of God. Jesus revealed the events ahead of time so that the disciples could look back later, and know with a certainty, that all the things that took place were, from the beginning, part of His divine plan for the salvation of our souls.

And not only that, they would then be able to link these events to other prophecies given hundreds, even thousands of years earlier by prophets such as Moses, Isaiah and David, all confirming that Jesus truly was the Messiah, the Savior.

God has certainly also done the same with me. I can easily see from these words and from the prophecies given throughout the centuries before His birth, His death, His burial and His resurrection that Jesus was and is truly the Messiah, the only begotten of the Father, our Savior.

And so then, as Jesus entered Jerusalem on this last step of His journey, the disciples were not yet able to know for sure the things that were about to take place. When Peter and John went to prepare the Passover meal, they did not know that Jesus would actually become that year's "Passover Lamb", that His blood would not just save their lives, as with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in the days of Moses, but even better, this Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus, would take away all their sins and give them eternal life. And yea, even more, His sacrifice would even take away the sins of the whole world.

Again, as to their not knowing what was about to take place, may I say that God is so wise! He knows what we are able to handle. He knows our level of maturity and understanding. And as a loving Father, He only gives His beloved children what each can handle at any given moment.

These "sufferings in the flesh" that Jesus endured in His last days were truly awful beyond measure, but His sufferings actually began much earlier than this. They began the moment that He stepped out of His sinless glory into the corrupt flesh of men. In Philippians 2 we read

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.
(Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV))

Jesus, the Holy, omnipotent God who reigns over all creation gave up His majestic glory to come and suffer so that you and I could have life, real life, life eternal. His suffering began the first moment He left His mother's womb and continued until the last moment when He gave up His Spirit and died on the cross. Jesus suffered! He suffered in every way possible, physically, emotionally and spiritually. And so, as we see Him kneeling there in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying, sweating great drops of blood, and crying out to God His Father, "If there be any way that this cup can pass from me, please let it be", Jesus continually suffered.

And then, as the soldiers came for Him, we see the prophecy that He had given them in Luke 18 coming to fruition.

³² For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³ And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." (Luke 18:32-33)

And again, though Jesus actually “suffered in the flesh” from the moment that He was born, this last “suffering in the flesh” would be His worst. After the soldiers beat Him so badly that His flesh was stripped from His bones, then followed the crucifixion.

You and I will never be able to fully comprehend such suffering. Yes, men in war do suffer terribly, and their suffering is uniquely miserable to them. But I am convinced that no amount of our “suffering in the flesh” can compare to the “sufferings of Christ”. Why would that be so? It is because, the physical pain that we identify with was only the surface misery of Jesus’ suffering. Beyond the physical suffering, deep within His Spirit and His soul, Jesus took on a whole other different kind of suffering. As He hung there on the cross, all the sins of the world were poured out upon Him. “He who knew no sin, became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God”. He took upon Himself all of our sins, mine and yours, and every other person’s sin that has ever lived or ever will live, removing them from us. Both the guilt of our sins and the power that they have over us was taken completely away.

That folks is the most important thing that will ever take place in a person’s life, to have our sins atoned for and removed from us completely, both the penalty for our sins and the record of them. That is what the word “Justification” means, “just as if we had never sinned”.

And as if that were not enough, Jesus also graciously removed the insidious power and control that sin has over us. And it all had to do with His sufferings. There was a “power” like no other power that flowed out from His sufferings, completely removing every vestige of sin from our souls.

But, with that being said, we might immediately question, “But what about the wretched sin that I still experience every day”? And the answer is, “God reserves a part of this process for you and me, His beloved children”. That is the second part of these words in our text. Listen!

1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1-2 (ESV))

This is the part that we spoke about in last week’s message. This is the sufferings that you and I must experience. This is the “working out of our salvation with fear and trembling.”

But we say, “Oh, but I have been a Christian for so long now and I still keep falling flat of my face!” “How do I get past this wretchedness”? And the answer to that cry and to every other cry that we will experience as a Christian must refer back to the first part of these words,

1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh . . . (1 Peter 4:1 (ESV))

Folks, something so miraculous that we will never comprehend it took place there in Christ’s sufferings. It’s the part that we most often forget. In His sufferings, He actually defeated the “power” of sin. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He was resurrected completely free from all of the sin and the power of sin that He had taken upon Himself. And listen carefully . . . part of what He took upon Himself was the sin and the power and control of sin that once had possession over you and me, personally. And whether you and I can comprehend it or not, by surrendering our soul, our spirit, over to Him, that transaction actually takes place. The power and the control of our sin nature has been removed from us and He has cast it into the pit of hell, no more to plague us and control us.

And again, though these words are ever so difficult to comprehend, they are real, and really true. We actually join with Christ and become a part of His resurrection, rising from our dead state of being into a brand new life, one that is completely freed from the power and the control of sin. May I read some of those words from Romans 6!

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:1-5(ESV))

Verse 11

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14 (ESV))

Folks, these words are filled with miraculous “power” and they have a whole multitude of joyous truths interwoven within them, if we will only allow them to “sink into our ears”.

The problem with most of our understanding of these words is that they are “mysterious” and “Spiritual”. How is it possible for me, for you to identify with Christ in His death? And then, how can we identify with Him in His resurrection? Those are such mysterious words. But folks, we must begin to believe them, believe them so strongly that they actually will become true!

Is that not the essence of the meaning of the word “faith”? Listen to these few simple words!

¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV))

These words tell us that, through the power of God, our faith will cause those things “hoped for” to actually become “real”, absolutely “real”. And in this case, the sin nature that once controlled our personality, our behaviors, our very thoughts, no longer has any power over us. We can “flick them away” just as easily as Jesus “flicked” satan aside when He commanded “get thee behind me satan.”

But make no mistake in your thinking about this matter! This does not come about by simply walking down an isle some place and praying a “sinner’s prayer”. Yes, that is part of the process! But that is not the “power” that it takes to completely remove the power and the control of our sin nature. No amount of our praying and our believing and our crying out to God can make that happen. And though we can access it through faith, that kind of “power” comes only from the “sufferings” that Christ suffered as He shed His precious blood on that cross and then was raised from the dead. That is why, “There is no other name given under heaven by which you shall be saved!” It is through Christ and Christ alone. There is “wonder working power” in blood He shed!

So then,

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1-2 (ESV))