

Jesus: Our Beautiful Example

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[0:00] Stephen, the first Christian martyr.! Do you remember his last words? Can you think of what they were?

The stones smashed into him and the men of the Sanhedrin were snarling at him and his last words were these.

They're words that cut your heart. Lord, do not hold this sin against them. So his dying breath was a breath of love and grace for the men who were persecuting him.

It was grace for people who were raging monsters towards him and it was a beautiful heart. Free of malice, free of hatred, free of selfishness.

There was no self-pity there. No small-heartedness. In that moment, he did become like Jesus, didn't he? And he became beautiful.

[1:11] Where do we get a heart like that? I better get this wrong.

No. Where do we get a heart like that? Where does Jesus-like beauty come from? You can find the answer in 1 Peter chapter 2.

You can turn there to 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2.

1 Peter chapter 2. Beginning in verse 18 through verse 25, Peter is talking to slaves who are suffering unjustly. So in some way, they're like Stephen.

They're suffering unjustly and whose masters are cruel and unfair. And he tells them to be patient in their suffering because it's commendable to God.

[2:23] It will be rewarded. God will take notice and accept it. God will reward them for it. And then he tells them where the power to suffer unjustly comes from.

The patience. The love. The grace that you see in Stephen's. The grace you see in the Lord Jesus. Where that beautiful heart comes from.

That even in the midst of persecution is still full of love. Even for the persecutors. And he tells you where.

Beginning in verse 21, he says this. To this you were called. You could just stop there and say that God's sovereignty is involved in their suffering.

And that's something to consider. But we'll go on. To this you were called because Christ suffered for you. Leaving you in an example that you should follow in his steps.

[3:28] So where do suffering Christians need to go back to? They need to go back to Jesus. And that's where Peter takes them back to the suffering of Jesus Christ for them.

And so what is the cross? What is the cross? It's an example for us to follow. The cross is a pattern for us to emulate, to repeat, to follow.

And that is difficult. That is hard to swallow. In a certain way, it's difficult to think about Christ dying for me. But in another way, it's very...

That's one thing. But I don't like thinking so much about me suffering for him. Just for the simple fact that I don't like suffering. But there's never one without the other.

Christ never separates his cross from our cross. They're very different. But where you find one, you're always going to find another. They belong together. Whoever wants to follow me must take up his cross.

[4:36] That's not some sort of providential trial. That is something to suffer on. You can't follow Jesus without suffering, without doing what he did, without following his example. And so tonight, in a certain sense, one thing tonight is about remembering the example that the Lord Jesus gave us.

It's remembering the pattern that our lives are meant to follow. And we need that. Because so often, we want to write stories, we want to write our lives in such a way that it doesn't include suffering.

And so we get off track and we lose focus and we write into dead ends. I remember hearing about J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series.

And she had the whole seven books planned out before she began. And of course, it's quite a task to write that much. And in one season of writing, she really got into it and she got ahead of herself and carried away.

And she was writing and writing and writing. And a hundred or so pages later, she realized, this has nothing to do with my overarching story. This has nothing to do with, I can't fit this in.

[5:56] This doesn't belong with where I'm going. And so she had to throw it all away and start, go back to the place where she got off track and start writing from there.

She had to look at the pattern again and say, oh yeah, that's where I'm going. That's what I'm doing. And we do the very same things, don't we? We start writing the stories of our lives and we lose track of what the story that Jesus is writing and wants us to write of our lives.

And so we start writing these dead-end chapters about money and about success and about a job and about getting that boy or getting that girl or getting this thing established in my life and a lot of things.

Things that, for the most part, are fine in and of themselves. But we pour our hearts into them and we think that's the main trajectory. This is what my life is about. This is what my story is about.

This is the pattern that I want my life to take. And so we pour our hearts into them and the funny thing is that in nowhere in all those stories is a place for suffering.

[7:08] We don't naturally write suffering into our own stories. And so the Lord's Supper it takes us back to this one of to a central feature of our story of our lives.

To this you were called because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. That he walked this path and you as a Christian are meant to walk that path as well.

So have you lost track of where you're going? Have you lost track about what you're doing?

Tonight, look again at the pattern. It is not it's not a pleasant sight.

I'll agree with you. But this is the pathway to Christ-like beauty. To that beauty that we saw in Stephen. It's the pathway to Christ-likeness.

We're never going to be like Christ if we forget that we are called to follow in his footsteps. In the footsteps of suffering. Well, Peter has more to say than just follow in Christ's example.

[8:24] Three more times he draws our attention back to Christ in the next few verses. In what he's done for us. We don't see it at least in the NIV. We don't see sort of his grammatical structure here.

But verse 22, verse 23, and verse 24 all begin with the word who. Who. It's talking about Jesus. And each time it's telling us something new about Jesus.

So verse 22 it says who committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. And so we're hearing something about what kind of example was Jesus?

What did he do for us? Well, he was an innocent example. He was innocent. The worst thing about suffering unjustly is that it is unjust.

We understand if we do something wrong and we get in trouble. But it's a whole other thing to be doing what is right and get into trouble.

[9:31] It's not what we deserve and that's where we get hung up. And that's where we easily sink into self-pity and to saying that's just unfair. It's not fair.

I don't like this. And we have ourselves a pity party. Well, how do you get through that? Well, Peter says Jesus was innocent. He was innocent. So do you feel unjustly treated?

Does it seem so unfair well, Jesus was innocent? More so than you were or are. He committed no sin.

There was no deceit found in his mouth. And if you understand the Bible's story and picture about the connection between a mouth and a heart, you realize that if there's no deceit in his mouth, that means that this is also talking about Jesus' heart.

Because there's nothing that comes out of here that's not first in here. The mouth is the overflow of the heart. The mouth is the reflection of the heart. And so, you've seen those mountain lakes with the encircling mountains all around them and the lakes.

[10:38] You can look down into the lake and you can see the mountains above. That's a picture of your mouth and your heart. Your mouth is that lake. It reflects what's around it. It reflects what's in your heart.

And in Jesus' mouth, and so in his heart, there was no deceit at all. It was nothing but light. Nothing but what was right. No bentness, no crookedness, no selfishness. He didn't deserve to suffer. So as you think about the cross, you need to remember again, he didn't deserve to be there. There was no reason at all personally for him to suffer and yet he suffered. Well, verse 23, so remember, Peter's drawing us back again to Christ.

Verse 22 says he's an innocent example. Verse 23 says he was a trusting, yielded, believing example. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate.

[11:49] When he suffered, he made no threats. So he's not agitated, he's not wild, he's not unruly, he's not complaining, he's not lashing out, he's not trying to manage the situation with his anger.

He makes no threats. Instead, instead of doing those things, instead of directing anger towards those who are attacking him and crying aloud in fury about that, instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Jesus was perfect in this, although he had the most reason to cry foul, unfair. Instead, he didn't rage and retaliate like we would have done.

He put himself into God's hands. Will not the judge of all the earth do what is right? Now everything in that situation said there is no God, this isn't right, there's no justice, I'm innocent and I'm suffering and God doesn't care.

Everything looked that way, but he trusted still. His heart still leaned on his father and said, I know my father, he's good.

[13:07] He's right. He's fair. I can give myself to him. And so he gave himself still and not for a moment on the cross did he doubt God's righteousness, God's justice, God's love.

Compare him to Adam. Adam was in a garden and he didn't trust God's goodness when there was God's goodness all around him, when there were beautiful trees all around him.

But Jesus trusted God when he was hung on a tree and the wolves were snarling all around him. He held on to God's justice.

He believed it. He acted on it. He put his trust in it. He put himself meekly and quietly into God's hands like a lamb led to the slaughter.

Quietly, without a fight, he went. And in that he showed us what to do and in that he became our perfect savior because the reality is he submitted, he obeyed, he believed all the way with all of his heart to the very end because time and time again we haven't done that.

[14:23] We didn't do that. We suffer and we rage and we retaliate. We complain and we curse God and Jesus was there to save us.

So every wrong thing that we did he made up with the right thing. And that's what you see in verse 24. Here you see that Jesus' example is more than an example.

And this is so important. It's more than an example. If you have a cross stitch pattern or a sewing pattern it won't empower you to cross stitch.

It won't give you the ability the grace the string the thread the needle to stitch it up. If you have a recipe it won't set you free it won't put ingredients in your hands it won't help you to cook.

If you have a die men at work it won't stamp out the part for you. But and if Jesus' death was just our example then it wouldn't do us any good.

[15:30] If it was just an example it would leave us exactly where it found us. Unable to do anything about it. Any way of change. It would leave these slaves exactly where they were suffering unjustly and unable to do anything different except rage and retaliate like everyone else does.

It would leave us just as it found us. But verse 24 tells us that Jesus' example actually sets us free to follow his example. And so again it starts with who.

Our focus tonight is Jesus Christ and Peter is bringing us back again. Now let's learn what he has to say. Who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds we have been healed. This is Peter's commentary obviously on Isaiah 53. And here's the good news.

Here's hope. Here's something that you can depend on, you can trust in, that you can give yourself to when you are called into suffering. The gospel is never just go and be like Jesus.

[16:44] It's never go and do what Jesus did. It's good news that actually sets you free to be like Jesus. It's good news about what Jesus did for you and the results of that.

And so what did Jesus do? This verse tells us Jesus showed you grace. He showed you grace. He showed you mercy when you didn't deserve any mercy.

He didn't treat you like your sins deserved. And so instead of judging you, so instead of him coming down and judging you, instead of him dropping the hammer on you, instead of turning in cold fury on you and cursing you all the way to hell like you deserved, blighting you and ruining you all the way until you were absolutely and utterly ruined, Jesus didn't do that.

He took your sins upon himself. So instead of sticking your sins to you and saying now off you go, he instead takes our sins upon himself and he was holy and pure and righteous but he took our sin to himself.

Yes, everything about your sin repelled him. Repelled him and it was revolting to his holy nature.

[18:12] Moms, you've never changed a dirty diaper that was so disgusting as our sin is to the Lord Jesus and yet he didn't throw you away or throw it away, he took it to himself.

He took the guilt and he took the shame, the embarrassment of it, the falling short, the not measuring up. He took the shame, he took the evil that you did and he called it his.

He owned it all. And he bore it to the place of the curse. Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. God said to ancient Israel, make sure that you don't leave a man tied up to a tree overnight where the whole land will be cursed.

Because cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. That's the place of judgment. That's the place where God's wrath falls. When an ancient Israelite did something really wrong, they would tie him to a tree and stone him, they would kill him, and that was the place of God's wrath breaking out against someone.

And that's exactly where Jesus took our sin. To the place of punishment. To the place of the curse. To the place of ruin. ruin. Where God undoes everything you do and ruins you.

[19:33] That's what it means to be under the curse of God. Where he ends your life in misery. So where do we get Christ's heart?

Where do we become like Jesus? It's when we remember that he did that for us. He did that for us. You see, in the gospel story, we weren't the innocent sufferers.

We weren't the innocent ones. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice calling out among the scoffers. If you listen closely, you can hear your snarls in the crowd.

God in Mel Gibson's movie, Passion of the Christ, he only shows up one time and all you see of him is his hands nailing Christ to the cross.

And I think he was trying to say something. He was saying it was me. It was me that did this. And so remember the next time that you suffer unjustly.

[20:39] Yes, this is unfair. no one is denying that. It is unfair. But there should be something that fundamentally changes your attitude about the whole situation.

And it's simply this, that I did that to my Lord. What they're doing to me, I did to him. And he died for me so that I wouldn't have to die.

And he took the curse so I wouldn't be forever ruined. And so you are forgiven. That's the announcement. You're forgiven. If you bore your sins to the place of punishment and receive the punishment your sins deserve, then you are forgiven.

You're forgiven, brother. You are forgiven, sister, because he bore your sins. And he became a man of sorrows to take away your sorrows. But there's more.

There was a reason for the cross, verse 24 tells us. There was a purpose. It was to accomplish something in your life. Something more than just forgiveness, as great as that is.

[21:44] It was so that we could die to sins and live to righteousness. The cross is meant to do something in your life right now, not just forgive you of your sins, but in order to sever that relationship between you and your sin, the mastery that sin has over you, in order that you might live for righteousness.

And so Jesus' death not only takes away our guilt, there is now no condemnation. In order for God to condemn you, he would have to ignore his son's death.

He would have to reach his hands through his son's blood to get to you and count your sins against you. You've seen those crosses on the road, have you?

Where somebody's child died, some young person died, and they put up a cross, the parents put up a cross there, so that everyone could always remember, can you imagine a parent driving by there and not thinking about that cross, about that place, that this is where my son died.

In order for God to condemn you now that you have found refuge in Jesus Christ, he would have to totally dismiss the cross and say, that death was nothing, and I could care less about it. You are forgiven.

[23:00] But it is more than that. Jesus died in order that we would die to sin and live for righteousness. righteousness. And so Jesus' death effectively severs the mastery that sin has over your life.

And furthermore, through Jesus' death, you rise to a new life. And so that's the problem. So you're not a slave to sin.

You are not a slave to sin. sin. Not because you made some sort of fabulous, wonderful choice. Not because your commitment is so great. Not because you've sworn an oath and vowed a vow never to do that again.

That never set anyone free. But this is what will set you free and has set you free. The cross has severed the mastery of sin over you. And that's the problem with Christians saying, hi, my name is Jason and I'm an addict.

Addict means slave. Did you know that? That's the Latin word for slave. Someone handed over because of their crimes to slavery. If someone was won in a contest, they were an addict.

[24:18] They're a slave. And you are not a slave to any sin, Christian. Because Jesus' death set me free from sin and made me alive to righteousness.

By his wounds, I am healed. You are healed. We are healed. Notice past tense. He does it. Sin is death and disease and Jesus' death is your life.

Jesus' cross is your birth. Jesus' blood poured out is your first breath. It is your healing. And so tonight, we celebrate our resurrection into a new life with righteousness as our master.

Our life, a new direction. So why and how could Stephen say to the men who were persecuting him, don't hold this against them. Forgive them for what they're doing.

Because Stephen had that, this happened in his life. he became alive from the dead through Jesus' death, through Christ's death.

[25:23] And so why can you say no to every sin and yes and yes to every bit of righteousness and love that God calls you to?

It's because Christ died to heal you, to rescue you, to set you free. And so by his wounds you have been healed. So why can we follow Christ even into suffering?

Because we are forgiven. We are freed. We are healed. And so tonight we look again at the pattern. This is what we are called to do.

We are called to follow this pattern of Jesus into suffering. But it is more than that. Tonight, again, you do take part in his life, in his power, in his mercy, because tonight if you are in Jesus Christ, you have fellowship with Christ in his sufferings.

You say, he did this for me. This was for me. And if he did this for me, let me live for him.

[26:35] Let me even die for him. Well, may God bless. preaching of his word. Let's pray.

Our Lord Jesus, we thank you for the forgiveness of sins. Thank you that through your life poured out unto death that you have washed away all of our sins.

sins. You've taken what we ruined and you made us clean. You made us righteous.

us. And we thank you and it's sweet to be forgiven. So good to be free. our chains cut and to be released.

We thank you that you've made us alive to God. And just as you rose from the dead, we also have risen and will rise to live new lives.

[27:49] us. But what a cost for yourself. How great your love for us.

That you were assigned a grave with a wicked. And in your death you were counted as an evil, a wicked, a rich man.

So we thank you. Thank you that you have loved us. Thank you that you took our sins upon yourself and poured them to the tree. And I pray that that kind of love would win our hearts and that we would go out and live for you.

Happy and holy for your glory. Amen.