

Christ's Suffering Defines Our Suffering

1 Peter 2 and 3

Good Friday

April 2, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Eager to point to the meritorious sacrifice of Christ our substitute, we sometimes prefer to speak of the *death* of Christ rather than the more complete term of the *suffering* of Christ.

But, we should be careful to recognize that Christ himself often speaks of his *suffering*. On Easter night, walking on the road to Emmaus, he asked the two disciples, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should **suffer** these things and enter into his glory?" And, no more than a few hours later, the risen Christ said to the disciples locked in the upper room, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should **suffer** and on the third day rise again."

But, it's not just those two well-known passages: On the night he was betrayed, Jesus said to the Twelve, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I **suffer**." And, we could quote Matthew 16, 17, Mark 9, Luke 9, Luke 17... all referring not just to Jesus dying, but *suffering*. Likewise, Paul is described twice in the book of Acts as proclaiming that the Christ had to **suffer**; the Apostles Creed confesses, "He **suffered** under Pontius Pilate," and the Nicene Creed echoes that "He **suffered** and was buried." Indeed, even the root word for the term *Paschal Lamb* – that root word

πασχω means “to **suffer**.” And that all is consistent with the first gospel, way back in Genesis 3, God promising the Christ He sends will crush the serpent’s head, but the serpent will *crush his heel* – victory through **suffering**.

Indeed, the whole world knows that Good Friday is about Jesus’ suffering. But it’s always cringe-inducing to read or listen to the various commentaries teaching Christians how to make use of and meditate upon the suffering of Christ... almost as if they don’t know the redemption and comfort of his meritorious death! ... especially in a world that no longer believes in God’s judgment upon sin, has no awe of standing naked before the Almighty... a world that thinks it hate-speech to even mention the concept that one is objectively wrong before the objectively true Judge... a world that refuses to speak of sin, has no need of a savior, and thus must redefine the purpose of Jesus’ suffering. Most often, his suffering is pictured as the blueprint on how to suffer, the example for us to follow, the great energy that enables and inspires our willingness to suffer. As churches are filled with misunderstanding about Christ’s suffering and its relation to any suffering we endure, we ought consider the Scriptures carefully.

1 Peter helps us, for it uses language that challenges our Lutheran ears, the same language the world appeals to but interprets so poorly. Peter says in the second chapter:

“For to this [suffering for doing good] 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.”

Again, in chapter 3, Peter summarizes,

“It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”

Now, there’s a lot in those two passages to unpack, including the glaring truth that Peter specifically says that Christ’s suffering left us an example. And we will get to that... but, we must follow Peter’s train of thought correctly. First, that Peter must teach us there even is such thing as suffering for *good*.

We sinners instinctively know that suffering comes from doing evil... how the Israelites who grumbled against God were punished for their wickedness; how St Paul says they were an example for us, that we might not sin like they did and they died in the wilderness!

We dread the punishment of suffering our sins deserve. We crouch in defense and must be commanded or encouraged to repent. We know the threat of not just temporal suffering, but

eternal suffering: “I justly deserve Your wrath and eternal punishment” we confess to God every Sunday. And how often in daily life are we reminded of sins by the *suffering* that results from those sins? I *do* evil; I bear the *consequence* of that evil. Misbehaving children are rightly punished by their parents. Adults who break the civil law are rightly ticketed or imprisoned. Sins against marriage lead to divorce and broken homes. Intruding on the marriage bed *before/outside* marriage leads to a diminished desire for the *true* blessing that is the marriage estate. The list goes on and on, our sins ever imposing upon us the weight of guilt, the shackles of shame, and the sense that our enemies will always overcome us as punishment from God. Our sinful Adamism absorbs all this with pride or despair: in pride, we defiantly refuse to repent, and we believe our cause is just and without need of a savior; in despair, we believe repentance will fall on deaf ears, our lot is irredeemable, and we *have* no savior.

But in Peter’s epistle, the language of suffering and of ‘Christ our example’ is surrounded by language of ‘Christ our substitute’... Christ our substitute in suffering for evil, as payment for sins! Hear Peter’s words again in chapter 2:

“To this [suffering for doing good] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you... 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.”

Notice, the notion of suffering for punishment and payment for evil is far removed from the one who lives at the foot of the cross, because there on that cross Christ bore your sins in his body. He suffered *for you, for* the sinner you are and evil you've done, enduring the punishment you deserve... suffering and dying for your sins and the sins of the whole world... shielding you from the radiance of the Holy, Holy, Holy (consider how our altar paraments, confessing in their various colors the seasons of Christ's life, veil that "Holy, Holy, Holy" *for you*)... and He reconciled you to the Father and made peace between God and man by the blood of his cross. Yes, He suffered *for you, on your behalf*, so that by his wounds you have been healed.

In the same way in chapter 3, Peter says "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." There it is again! Christ suffered for us men and our salvation... God showing his love in that he gave his righteous One to die for us unrighteous... and, by atoning for us with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death, that Son has reconciled us to the Father – or, as Peter says it – He suffered once for sins... *that he might bring us to God.*

Christ has done the suffering for evil. I deny Christ if I believe that my suffering makes amends. All atoning suffering has been placed on Christ. "Thus, it was necessary that the Christ should suffer," Jesus says... for sins *need* to be paid for, and Christ took all of

those sins upon himself and bore them on the tree, that you might be reconciled to God, at peace with God, one with God. And Jesus did all of this because He knew it was the Father's good and gracious will that His Messiah suffer for you.

There – Christ trusting the Father's good will – *there* is your example in suffering. Christ is no example in teaching you how to earn salvation; he has purchased it *for* you, bearing your sins in his own body, that you might not bear them in your body. And, if you now no longer need suffer for sins, then in such salvific suffering, Christ is not your *example*, but your *replacement*. Indeed, his suffering was so perfect and complete that he not only endured death for you, he transformed death for you. Martin Luther's *Little Prayer Book* says, "Christ died and was buried to put my sin to death ... and, moreover, he slew human death, transforming it into something that does no harm." And just as Christ destroyed the sting of *death*, making it now merely the portal to life immortal, so also Christ's suffering has transformed your *suffering*... no longer as a suffering for relishing evil, but a suffering for cherishing good in an evil world. Again, from Luther's *Little Prayer Book*: "Christ bore his suffering and cross and thereby *transformed* all suffering and every cross into a blessing."

How can such suffering and cross be a blessing except that it is borne by those who share in Christ's suffering through their baptism and now trust the good and gracious will of the Father, so

that even in times of unjust suffering, we may say, “Nevertheless, I am baptized into Christ!” *There* is how Christ has become your example: your example in trusting the Father’s good and gracious will even while you suffer for doing good. In fact, guess what immediately follows the words we’ve considered in 1 Peter 3? - listen to them again: “For it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” – and what comes immediately after that? Peter continues into a discussion of *Baptism*. You who have been baptized into Christ share the glory of his cross and the transformative nature of his death. St. Paul asks, “Do you not know that all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death?”: so that (1) we may no longer walk in evil, but a newness of life; and (2) he who transformed death will give those who share in his death a share in his resurrection. Christ upon the cross has redeemed you and has transformed your reason for suffering. No longer do we delight in doing *evil* that brings with it suffering, but now we delight in our adoptive heavenly Father, whose will is always good, even if it means suffering for that good. Isn’t that the point Peter is making when he says,

“For to this [suffering for good] you have been called, because Christ also suffered **for** you, (also then) leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin ... but **continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**”

There's your example. Because Christ has gone before you and achieved the great salvation willed by the heavenly Father, who placed his judgment upon Christ so that he may not have to place it on you, therefore you may continue entrusting yourself to the heavenly Father who judges justly ... who will not engage double jeopardy and unjustly punish for evil those who hide at the foot of the cross, those who live with repentant baptismal joy in redemption by Christ's blood and thereby desire the good and holy will of God. Indeed, Christians may still suffer with their Savior at the hands of the world, but we no longer need fear suffering *as if* our own insufficient Savior, for Christ has sufficiently fulfilled that promise of Genesis 3... he has conquered sin, death, and the power of the devil, crushing the serpent's head in victory, while "having his heel crushed" in suffering for the sake of that victory.

Certain that Christ has won the victory *for* you, you may seek his help in wrestling against temptation, repent openly and be forgiven of all sin, and you may gladly suffer for good in a world of evil. In fact, that's actually the context of our text... the context is "submission to authority"... even authority that causes the Christian to suffer for holding to "good."

At the hands of a pandemic, we've known a year of suffering, which always reminds us to repent of sin, despair of ourselves, and cling to Christ. But, if that year of repentance now gives way to years of suffering for holding to God's good, do we not properly know how

to meditate upon and gain courage and strength by seeing Christ on the cross?

In two weeks, we'll reach the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's famous "Here I Stand" moment. But it's a far *less* celebrated occasion that his closest confidants probably found *more* comforting, an occasion not of boldness in confession, but of the Word of God preached in anticipation of Christian suffering.

It was 1530, and the lowly Lutheran confessors had neared Augsburg, ready to make their confession before the strongest antagonist of their day – Emperor Charles V. They gathered in a nearby sanctuary on Holy Saturday. Presuming that imprisonment, persecution or martyrdom was about to befall those who were going before the Emperor, Luther preached his Holy Saturday sermon on Christian suffering in the shadow of the crucified Christ. Luther said,

"In time of great fear and trouble you will be able to say: Even though I suffer long, very well then, what is that compared with that great treasure which my God has given to me, that I shall live eternally with him? Look what happens then: the suffering [becomes] sweet and easy and no longer an eternal suffering, but only a small portion which lasts only a short time and soon passes away." In short, Let the world preach Christ crucified as the great enabler; we will forever preach Christ crucified as our great redeemer and defender.

What is the world against God's Anointed when that same Anointed has already defeated every power and principality of darkness, indeed sin, death, and hell itself? In the face of my enemy, my self-

reliant suffering would be never-ending, but in Christ the Shepherd and Overseer of my soul, all my suffering becomes light and bearable, for what is my enemy before me when I can hide in the shadows of the cross of Jesus my Shepherd and Overseer? His suffering overpowers them all, undoes them all, and sends them reeling. What is any temporal enemy before me when Christ has destroyed my *eternal* enemy, my *greatest* enemy – my own sin – and has freely given me by Baptism a share in his conquering... or, as Luther's beloved Catechism says it,

“He has purchased and won me, with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death, that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness... just as he is ris-”

-- well, we'll wait these three solemn days to declare *that* victory and rejoice in our hope's vindication.

In the Name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Holy Spirit.
 + AMEN +

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 April 2, 2021