

Good morning. May the Lord bless you and give you peace. The last time we looked at Peter we considered a very theologically robust passage of scripture. In the last message on this section we considered the immediate context and application of this passage with respect to authority structures. My goal now is to trace the theological underpinning that allows Peter to apply this kind of responsibility to us.

It is within this vein that we have taken time to consider Isaiah 53 as our text reading this morning. It is deeply related to this text. Let me show you how by illustration and by consideration of Peter as a person. First, I pose the illustration. Several years ago, I had the privilege of working with someone who has firsthand knowledge of WWII. This gentleman operated a 50-caliber machine gun on a half-track vehicle and was part of Patton's Spearhead Division. Whenever I had an opportunity to ask him questions about his experiences, I would do so. Thankfully, he was removed enough from those events that he could interact with me on them. When I talked to him about those experiences, he was almost 80 years old, which helps underscore that effects of intense experience and memory. I will never forget one question I asked him, and that was if he still remembered the faces of the men he fought with. He remembered not only the faces of the men he fought with, but of those he fought against. He recounted skirmishes and battles that he experienced as if they had happened.

Flush throughout Peter's writings are recollections not only of his time with Jesus Christ, but of the dark day of Christ's death, and the bewildering amazement and joy of Christ's resurrection. If you recall **1:10-12**, that prophets who prophesied of the subsequent sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow, inquired carefully over these things. Isaiah was such a prophet. He *predicted* the suffering of Christ, but *Peter* lived it. Peter would never forget his boldness in distracting Christ from Christ's purpose when he told Jesus that He must not speak of crucifixion. Peter would never forget those dark moments after the Temple guards arrested Jesus and brought Jesus to their kangaroo court. Peter would never forget the eyes of Christ piercing Peter's soul after Peter's final denial of Christ. Peter would never forget the shredded body of Jesus dangling from a cross, and there before Christ a small band of women emotionally ravished by the sight. Peter would not forget the fear, joy, amazement and adrenaline filling every fiber of his soul as he moved from an empty tomb to the mount of ascension. He would not forget the anchoring joy of the blessed promise of Christ's return to gather His people. He would not forget the unrestrainable power of the Holy Spirit who came down on God's people like fire that kindles an eternal flame. Now here, in the midst of exhorting Christians to seek the glory of God, and the magnification of His excellencies (**2:9**) since they have tasted the power and grace of God in salvation from sins, Peter can exhort them that in whatever station they should find themselves because Christ has paved the way of salvation for our souls. We are stewards of something greater, Peter tells us later on in his epistle, we are stewards of God's grace, **4:10**.

Oh, dear friends, this is such a counterculture, counter-world perspective of how to transform society and magnify the Lord our God. It's as if Peter is saying, if you want to really reflect your love, admiration, and obedience of Jesus Christ, if you want to be more effective in your gospel proclamation, then suffer well! Suffer like Jesus Christ suffered. This is the prickly point of Peter's exhortation. We want the grace without the costs. We want the joy without the tears. The problem is that our Savior unraveled the common sinful thoughts of humanity and He is hated because of it. If He is hated, we will also be hated for our love and faithfulness to Jesus.

So, for the first aspect of Peter's exhortation we will note that Peter exhorts us to suffer like Christ. **V 21**. He underscores this as our calling. **"To this you have been called."** In Peter's epistle he outlines several aspects of our calling as Christians. It begins with **1:15**, we are **called to be holy as God is holy**. Then again in **2:9**, we are all these amazing things because we have been **called to proclaim Christ's excellencies**. Then again in **2:21**, we are **called to suffer**. Then again in **3:9** we are **called to do good and bless**. Finally, in **5:10** we are **called to God's eternal glory in Christ**.

Peter gives us another biblical connection with calling when he underscores in our section that we have come to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. It underscores all the teaching that Peter heard from Jesus identifying Himself as the **Shepherd who calls His sheep by name**, and they hear His voice (John 10:3, 10:27). Peter's teaching of the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls calling us **harmonizes with Paul's teaching in Romans 8:28**, that **"God works all things together for good, to those who are called according to his purpose."**

The calling of God is a life giving, life mobilizing work of God that does more than simply make noise hoping that we will listen. The calling of God **compels** us. The calling of God **draws** us. The calling of God **steels** us to His glorious purposes, and God, through the hand of the apostle Peter, is calling every Christian from every corner of the world, from every culture, **and from every era to suffer like Christ suffered**. It is not an option. It is **part of our identity** with Christ. **"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake."** (Philippians 1:29)

Oh, dear brother and sister in Christ, we are not of those who slink away from the hardships of life. We bear up under the load before us. We bear the pain in front of us. We embrace the burden of our crosses with the resolve that Christ had when he withheld his pleading for deliverance from the cross and cried out to the glory of God and to the joy of our souls, **"not my will, but thine be done!"** God is not abandoning you to your broken and hurting bodies as if He were powerless and out of ideas. He has called you and me to enjoy the glory of being like Jesus Christ. God has not forgotten you in flood of broken lives around you, or the ever-moaning groan of need, He has called you and me to the privilege of reflecting Jesus Christ. He has not tethered you to a sad marriage, or to the longing of unmet and God created hope. He has called you and me to be like Jesus Christ who suffered for His Bride the Church, His family, His people.

And why does this give us hope and not desperation? Why is this not some masochistic, religiously sycophantic approbation of Christ's command? Why isn't this crazy talk? **We are committed to this not only because of reward from God, but because God's glory is most brilliant when what is broken is redeemed.** He looked at you and me who are caught in an unrelenting and unescapable cycle of sin, and in Christ Jesus He broke the power of sin. **"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might tie to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."** 2:24 This is not crazy talk because it is the means of identifying with Christ as a God glorifier through the redemption of what is broken by sin – those like us who bear the image of God.

Our salvation requires our magnification of God's excellence. It means that we will experience the same kinds of suffering that Christ experiences in His goal to magnify the excellence of God the Father, His Holy Spirit, and His own nature as God's eternal Son who is full of grace and truth. We are called to this.

Peter underscores the means that Christ used to help us undertake this calling. Jesus left us an **example**. The word translated example is a **Greek term that describes a pattern** that is traced by school children to learn how to **write** or **draw**. Peter then adds that **we are to follow in Christ's steps**. So, **two thoughts** are given, **trace Christ's pattern** of life, and **step in His footsteps**.

What do these exhortations demand of us? They demand that we actually know what Christ did on this earth. How do we know that? Well, it means that we are actually studying the life of Jesus Christ. We look at the gospel accounts to read the teaching of Jesus and see how Jesus fits into the prophecies of the Old Testament. We look at the historical accounts of the New Testament, and the epistles to study how Christ led His apostles, and the Church in applying what He taught. We read the last letter of John, Revelation, or **Apocalupsis**, from where we get our word **apocalyptic**, to learn **what Christ will do to consummate** His work of magnifying the glory of God through the redemption of sinners like you and me. **How can we expect to reflect Jesus in our suffering when we do not know what He suffered?** He wasn't rejected and hated by men because of His kindness in healing and feeding people. He was rejected and hated by men because of what He taught. Jesus confronts our belief systems and destroys them. That's why, outside of His grace, we hate Him.

We cannot reveal the excellencies of God without declaring them! His excellencies mean that we display His truth in a world that makes its own truth. We cannot reveal the excellencies of Christ without also displaying them. Jesus Christ obeyed the Father perfectly. As Christians we are not perfect yet, but God has promised to glorify us. The declaration that we have died to sin and live to righteousness will finally be lived fully when we stand before God. That being said, Christ's work in salvation has given us the power to say no to sin. What once was a sinful desire that we participated in without thought, is now recognized as sin, and we fight against it in seeking to be obedient to Christ who gave us so much. **How is your obedience, and mine, being displayed in our lives?**

Here I want to present one important challenge given our current global crisis. I begin with the steps that Jesus took to save us. The O.T. prophesied of the LORD's coming. The gospels tell us that Jesus Christ fulfilled that, which not only underscores Christ's deity, but His identification with us. **Think of what Christ left in heaven?** **Philippians 2** tells us that the leaving of Christ's glory in heaven was a great humiliation that culminated in His death and ultimate resurrection from the grave, an act which would enthrone Him above all other names. But to whom did Jesus come? He came to His Church. He came to give His life for His bride. Jesus Christ loves His people, so much so that Peter underscores the unity of this glorious body. We are one nation. We are living stones being built up into ONE spiritual house. **Loved ones, our obedience is first seen in loving, sacrificing for, and honoring what Christ has established, His Church!** There is a lot of confusion abounding in this which Satan sows to bring discord, but ultimately His Church is an organized gathering of His people to worship God. We are *PART* of His church. A Christian in isolation is not obedient to Christ.

Let's apply this to how we are interacting with the Church during this crisis. I know that there is wisdom in taking precautions with COVID-19. I am not telling you not to take precautions as the Bible is clear that we are not to test the Lord. But faithfulness to what God has called is to do is not testing the Lord. In fact, isolation and quarantine in the O.T. law was only demanded when people had symptoms, otherwise God expected faithfulness to daily activities, which on one day of the week, the Sabbath, included one day of focused personal and corporate worship. We never have the right as Christians to ignore the command to gather together for admonition in the word and to sing songs, and hymns, and spiritual songs to one another, singing and making melody to the LORD. (**Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16**). It is not enough to catch us online. **Your soul needs some gathering of God's people for the purpose of glorifying God in Christ and encouraging one another.** Will there be risk? There was risk to Christ, but you and I are here because Christ obeyed God. But let me press in on this.

What are we saying to the world about the most important aspects of our lives when worship as God desires it is optional? We are saying that obedience to our Christianity is optional given the right combination of events. My friends, the church gathers in countries where their lives are at stake just for being a Christian, much less to gather to praise Him. How unloving and disobedient are we when we ignore their example, and the example of Christ, and cower in disobedience because a sickness might get us, and it might kill us. We are all going to die. That is why we love Christ. He gives us hope of living with Him. No, I don't want to die of some strange virus, but I want Jesus more. I am not saying you have to be here in our sanctuary, but you need to be with God's people somewhere with the express purpose of worship and mutual edification, otherwise you are not following Christ's example.

And the hardest pill to swallow of all of this, how is it that we are so weak? We have the freedom to gather, on some level, to worship our Savior, and yet we hide in our homes during times of worship, but gather for work and family events, we buy groceries where people that are contagious have been, and we fill our cars with gas with pumps that have been touched by thousands of people, but we don't gather when we have the freedom to. How much less obedient will we be if we are told we can't worship. What then? If it is too much of a risk when it is our choice to gather, how much more will it be when we don't have a choice to gather?

Dear friends, the obedient steps of worship that we take to honor God are what keep us sane in an insane world. Will we be obedient though it costs us our health, our livelihood, or our lives? To this you have been called, to suffer as Christ has suffered. Amen.