

1 Peter 2:19-25

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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.

Dear chosen people of God,

“Prepare to be amazed!” That is a common tagline, a common advertisement for magicians and magic shows. And really, that’s why magicians and illusionists can draw in large crowds — because they perform stunts and feats that are amazing — that seem to be impossible. They can make people vanish and then reappear. They can saw people in half. They can even levitate off the ground! It is amazing! Isn’t it?! Amazing, that is until the trick is revealed to you!

Maybe you remember, a few years ago, there was a television special where a masked magician unloaded the trade secrets. He explained the illusions. He showed the different components—the trap doors, the sleight of hand, the magician’s use of misdirection — the lights, the smoke, the camera angles, the pretty assistants that get you to look away at the important part. After the magic trick was explained—it wasn’t so impressive. It wasn’t very amazing at all. You realized that you had been duped by tricks and gimmicks — you were led to focus not on what you should have been focusing on, but on what they wanted you to focus on instead.

In our text today St. Peter tells us to pay attention to one man — Jesus Christ. Not because his resurrection was a trick, but because of who he was and what he has done for us. Jesus tells us, “Pay attention to me! What I have done wasn’t a trick! What I’ve done, I’ve done for you!” Yet, what happens? Do we pay attention to Jesus as we should, or do we find that all too often we get caught up in the distractions of this world? Our spiritual enemies — the Devil, the world, and our own sinful nature — try very hard to distract us from Jesus so we don’t realize, or so that we fail to see the great love and mercy that He offers us. Those spiritual enemies use their smoke and lights — they use the pretty assistants to try and divert our attention away from the important thing — Christ. To make us aware of this, Peter encourages us in our text to always focus on Jesus — who guides us and protects us as we journey through this life. He encourages us:

Theme: Let Us Keep Our Eyes On Jesus!

- 1. He is our example**
- 2. He is our Shepherd**

When we look at what Jesus did, we really are amazed — filled with awe. From his very first cry as a baby until his last breath on the cross he lived a perfect life — a point Peter brings out in our text when he quotes the prophet Isaiah: **“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.”** Jesus led a life of perfect obedience, and yet, in spite of his perfect love, in spite of his sinless life he faced hardships, persecution, suffering and death. Yet, when he faced these difficulties he didn’t act as we would act — his reaction to that suffering and injustice was right in line with the rest of his perfect life—as our text says: **“When he was reviled, (when they hurled their insults at him,) he did not revile in return (—he didn’t retaliate); when he suffered, he did not make threats back.”**

Jesus was a perfect example because he perfectly practiced what he preached. Remember how he taught his disciples: **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Luke 6:29)** Isn’t this exactly what Jesus did — how He lived? He quietly suffered all the mockery, the abuse, the beatings, the whippings, the agony of crucifixion — all at the hands of his enemies, and yet, He did not strike back. He did not call down an army of angels to destroy them. He didn’t zap them with his divine power, striking them dead. He endured the suffering out of love for them. He didn’t breathe out hateful threats upon them, but cried out, **“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!”** Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience and genuine love. And God wants us to act the same.

We hear in our text: **“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly...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.”** God wants us to do good even though we know we may suffer for it. In this way, we imitate Christ’s example in our attitude and in our actions.

The Greek word that is used for “example” which literally means a “copy master,” “pattern,” “model” to be followed. If you’re drawing, it’s not just a picture that you look at to get the idea of it and then try to draw it freehand. No. It is a picture to be copied exactly—a picture that is placed under your page so you can trace the lines accurately. Jesus is that original “copy master” and we are called to be duplicates in our attitude, our behavior and our actions. Christians are to pattern their lives after Christ’s life. To live as he lived. To love God above all else—with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our soul. To love our neighbors. To imitate Christ—his obedience, his humility, his tolerance in suffering. We are to follow his footsteps—to step where he stepped no matter where it leads or how difficult it may be. And we are to do this at all times.

No one said this was going to be an easy task. We will not only face the difficulties, the realities, of everyday life—the sickness, disease, injury, pain, violence, and death, but we will also face the additional suffering that will go along with our Christian faith. There is a constant battle going on between our New Man of faith and our Old Sinful Adam as the sins and distractions of this world surround us. Our lifestyles will be contrary to what our society, our culture says is appropriate. We will be the minority. People will oppose us, mock us and attack us for our faith. Like Jesus we ourselves may face pain, suffering and persecution for our beliefs.

Jesus expressly told us what we were getting into: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).** Taking that cross will be difficult, but as Jesus carried his own cross to Calvary, so he tells us we must carry our crosses. And as we do, we will carry out our Christian roles, our responsibilities in this life. We can endure sorrows, hardships, even persecutions without retaliation or threat. When someone else annoys or does something to us that we could complain about, we can put down the temptation to speak out about it, we can, let it

ride, we don't have to make a stink about it because we look to the example Jesus gave us in his life—because we too can act in Christian love.

Peter tells us to keep our eyes focused on Christ for he is our Example. But be careful that you don't merely see Jesus as a moral teacher who promotes the golden rule so we can live peacefully among our neighbors. We don't follow his example to claim we are better than others—then we'd be Pharisees, wouldn't we?

The temptation is for us to say: “Yeah there were wicked people who persecuted and killed Jesus and there are still wicked people who persecute us good Christians.” But we can't forget that we too are wicked people. It was also our sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. We follow Jesus, our Example, not because we are better than the other “evil” people of this world but because Jesus has called us to himself. Lovingly Jesus gathers us, who are but sinners, around him to be his flock. And he redeems us with his blood, as he himself said **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11)**. The purpose of Jesus' life was not just to be an example for us, but to save us, to lay down his life for us—and for this reason we keep our eyes on Christ, for he is our Good Shepherd.

2. Christ is our Shepherd

If Christ is our Shepherd that makes us his sheep. If you have any experience with sheep, you realize that isn't very complimentary to us. Sheep are pretty helpless animals. They really have no defense against predators; nor are they very smart either. They will eat and drink whatever is in front of them even if it is harmful or poisonous. And without direction and guidance, they will follow this or that, walk off cliffs or into ravines or wander away and get lost. And we're called sheep! But before we get offended and resist such a label, look at that the truth of the matter.

On our own we are absolutely defenseless against our predator Satan, who is “a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” He will jump at any chance to catch us, and sadly, we give him plenty of opportunities. We give him such chances when we do what God tells us not to. When we do or say things that get us or others into trouble, things that cause pain and harm. We follow after the ideas and actions of our fellowman rather than the Word of God. We chase after the things of this world and fall into the sins of the flesh. The truth is, we are like sheep, and on our own, we don't stand a chance. Our very nature steers us in the wrong direction and Satan is there, ready and waiting to devour us.

But Jesus knew this and so he became our Shepherd. He offers us his divine guidance and to care for us. He gives us his Word to direct our paths in life. He is there to protect us and comfort us when we suffer, when we face the difficulties of this world. We can be confident that no matter what the trouble, God has not withdrawn his caring hand from our lives. And just as a shepherd will protect his flock from any predator, at any cost, Jesus protects us from our predators—including that great predator, Satan himself.

Just think of the extreme that Jesus went to in order to protect his sheep! He gave up his life for us! As we heard in our text: **“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.”** Jesus, our Good Shepherd, laid down his life to save all mankind from the punishment of hell that our sins deserved. His life of obedience was lived on our behalf; the suffering, pain, and death he faced was in our place! Through his life and death, he took away our sins and bore them for us—and in his rising to new life, he has now wrapped us

in those new clothes, covered in his righteousness. No longer are we hideous black sheep—but we are clean and holy because of our Savior. As Jesus said (in our Gospel Lesson) **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10b).**

First and foremost Jesus came to be our Savior, to be our Good Shepherd who brought us back to himself—into his flock as we were wandering away in our sins. Without him, we have no direction. Jesus himself had told his disciples just before his arrest, **“You will all fall away...for it is written: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter” (Mark 14:27).** And isn't this exactly what happened after Jesus' death?! The disciples were lost and afraid, hiding in secret locations, behind locked doors because they thought that they had lost their Master, their Shepherd. But then what happened?! He appeared and brought them comfort, saying, “Peace be with you!” He gave them the assurance of his care and then directed them to be his messengers.

Jesus still gives us this same assurance and direction in his Word. He wants us to also share the good news of our Savior, our Shepherd. Through his Word, he enables us to follow his example by bringing us back to the fold, by placing us into a new life, he “creates in us that new heart,” a heart of faith.

And with these new hearts we want to follow our loving Shepherd — with our actions, with our attitude, with our whole life. We are thankful for what our Good Shepherd has done for us and so we respond with love and praise. We seek to model ourselves after him. And what better person is there to follow than our loving Shepherd?

Prepare to be amazed! When we look to Jesus, we see no magic trick. We see our Savior! We see the life, death and resurrection of God's own Son, and we are truly amazed at the love he would show us and the lengths he would go to make us his own. Don't get sidetracked by the distractions in this world but keep your attention on the One who is truly important. For when we keep our eyes focused on Christ, we see our Savior who is our Good Shepherd and our Great Example. All Glory Be to Him! Amen.