

Christ Is Essential

I Peter 3:18

If you are visiting with us, we have been working through the book of I Peter written to a group of churches in what is now modern day Turkey. Peter wrote to them to encourage them to stay strong in their faith in spite of persecution they were experiencing. It's a book about Christian living anchored in the hope they have, that we have in Jesus Christ who is the ultimate example for how to live when experiencing tough times in life. Today we are in I Peter 3.

My initial intention was to take verses 18-22 together and then come back to verse 22, but after spending more time in the text this past week and with the dedication I didn't want to rush through the passage so today we will only look at verse 18.

Another reason for only looking at verse 18 is because it also presents a challenge in understanding some of the passage. We'll see that toward the end of the message.

I also chose to break the passage out because verse 19 presents an evening more challenging interpretation. We'll tackle that next week.

A third challenge is found in verse 21 speaking about baptism and salvation.

So next week we will be looking at verses 19-21 and the following week we will look at verse 22.

This morning I want us to consider that Christ is essential and this verse shows us why He is the perfect example to consider when going through difficulties in life. He is our role model.

Karl Malone, one of the NBA's dominant big men of years past, wrote an article to share from his view what it's like to be a role model as an NBA player and star athlete. In the article he also talked about

his good friend and another NBA star, Charles Barkley. Malone said that one of the reasons they got along so well was that they both spoke their minds even though from time to time they would disagree on a few things. He wrote about a Nike commercial where Charles Barkley emphatically insisted that he was not a role model.

Malone wrote in the article, "Charles, you can deny being a role model all you want, but I don't think it's your decision to make. We don't choose to be role models, we are chosen. Our only choice is whether to be a good role model or a bad one."

In the article Malone went on to talk about how he enjoyed being a role model, not because it got him endorsements and a huge fan base. He truly wanted to be a positive influence for others to emulate. Even though he made mistakes from time to time he still recognized the tremendous responsibility it was to be a good role model for others both on and off the court. He understood that people were always watching him and that some would even copy him. In the end he wanted his good friend to see that no matter what he said, he couldn't get around that he too was a role model.

He raises a good point. We are all role models. The question is, are we a good one or a bad one. That's the message I certainly hoped to convey in our dedication of little Levi. We all set an example to others around us by the kind of character we exhibit and that's the message Peter wanted to convey to those he was writing to. When you're going through a tough time how do people see you respond?

If you lose your job, how do you respond?

If your house sustains damage from a storm, how do you respond?

If you flunk a test or don't pass a class, how do you respond?

If you get into a car accident that was the other person's fault, how do you respond?

If you were diagnosed with a terminal illness, how do you respond?

If you lose a loved one unexpectedly, how do you respond?

If you suffer for your faith, how do you respond?

Peter's advice was to live be a good example so that in your time of suffering people will ask you about the hope you have. And then we come to our text for today – verse 18. While there are many good examples, even some great ones and yes, some excellent examples to follow, Peter comes back to one supreme example. Christ is our ultimate, our only example of someone who suffered for doing good instead of suffering for doing evil. Christ is the perfect example of doing what was right and suffering for it.

In the Greek, the sentence continues without a break so it would read: “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God being put to death in the body but made alive by the spirit.”

There are five important truths in this passage about Christ and His redemption. Redemption is that act by which we as sinners were bought with a price out of the slave market of sin by the blood of Christ who shed His blood on the cross.

Some of you will remember collecting green stamps and when the book was full you would go in and redeem the book for items in the store. Christ exchanged His life for ours.

The Bible is clear that we are all sinners. Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

The Bible is clear that the penalty for our sin is eternal separation from God.

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death.”

The Bible is clear that we cannot earn or merit

eternal life through anything that we can do – not through our actions, not through our attitudes, not even by being religious. When it comes to our trying to earn eternal life, we don't have a spiritual leg to stand on.

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (ESV)

But the Bible is also clear that Christ's death on the cross paid the debt we owed for our sin. He took our place so that our faith in Him and what He did would give to us eternal life.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

If you want to know the simple gospel this verse is it and the gospel is all about Christ and how essential He is in saving us. The first thing we notice about Christ is that His sacrifice is essential.

I. CHRIST'S SACRIFICE IS ESSENTIAL

“Christ died” (NIV, Amplified)

“Christ suffered” (KJV, ESV, NLT)

Now I like the KJV translation because the word “suffered” to me encompasses all that happened to Jesus culminating in His physical death, but a person could look at that word and get the idea that He just went through a lot but in the end didn't die. But then I also like the NIV rendering “died” because that leaves no doubt about what happened. His heart stopped beating and He stopped breathing.

Skeptics want to really downplay the death of Jesus. If it didn't happen then Jesus wasn't really God, and if he wasn't really God then God's Word isn't really true and man can become his own god carving out his own destiny with no eternal consequences. Many skeptics believe that Jesus never died. It's called the Swoon theory. It suggests that all the

physical and emotional trauma that Jesus endured overwhelmed Him to the point where He fainted on the cross. Because of the all night trials and loss of sleep, the loss of blood from the beatings He sustained, the vehement ridicule by the soldiers and Jewish people, the physical fatigue from carrying the cross, the pain from the nails piercing His hands and feet all combined to cause Him to faint. Those around Him at the crucifixion thought He was dead.

Even Pilate was surprised that He had died so soon after the crucifixion had begun. Many of those who died by crucifixion took days not hours. The Romans had perfected the art of a slow and agonizing death for victims.

Proponents of this theory suggest that when He was taken down from the cross they believed He was dead but in the coolness of the tomb He revived. Professor Ernest Kevan who taught at London Bible College, also states that the aromatic spices added to His body for burial helped to revive Jesus from His fainting spell. Kind of like using smelling salts.

I don't know if you have ever fainted. I have. One morning I went into camp to help Mom in the kitchen. I was around 12. My job, because I was short, was to stand on a milk crate and stir a huge pot of tomato soup. At one point all of a sudden I didn't feel well. Things started to get dark, I was hot and sweaty. I did the only natural thing anyone else would do in that situation, I threw up in the pot of soup. No, I'm just kidding. I turned, put my hand over my stomach and called for mom. I don't remember what happened next, but I woke up sometime later lying on the bench of the picnic table in the dining hall, head in her lap with a cold compress to my forehead. I don't know how long I was out, but it wasn't for hours.

Now picture the scene from Scripture and think for a moment about the logic of what this theory supposes happened to Jesus. We just described in a PG kind of way as an overview of what Jesus

endured leading up to and including the cross. The Bible is much more graphic and if you really want to understand the physical trauma to the body of all they did to Him, read a medical doctor's report on what would happen to a person who sustained such a death blow. He didn't faint. He didn't pretend to die. He died.

If He did revive how did He wiggle His way through all the wraps tightly wound around Him? In between each of the layers of 12 inch wide cloth were spices which had been mixed into a gummy substance. Not only did the spices help preserve the body and keep it from smelling it also acted as cement binding the cloth into a solid shroud. In total it was about 100 pounds of spices. Think of paper Mache but on a much larger side.

How was He then in a weakened condition physically able to move a stone which Scripture describes as "very great" that weighed perhaps a couple of tons from the entrance. Even if He could manage to move the stone how did He not alert the guards from all the noise?

If they were alerted, how did He overcome the guards stationed outside the tomb?

In a weakened condition, how could He walk seven miles to Emmaus that same day?

Had He merely swooned why didn't He just tell the disciples at their first meeting?

The fact remains that Christ died. Had Jesus merely fainted, the Roman soldiers who were experts at death would themselves have been put to death for failing to carry out the sentence of a convicted criminal. When the soldiers were ordered to hasten death by breaking their legs because of the request of the Pharisees that the Sabbath was approaching didn't need to do that to Jesus because they saw He was already dead.

His was a physical death.

Romans 5:5 "Christ died for the ungodly."

Romans 5:8 "Christ died for us."

Romans 6:10 “The death He died.”

Romans 8:34 “It is Christ that died.”

Romans 14:9 “To this end Christ died.”

Romans 14:15 “Christ died.”

There are other verses but you get the point - Christ died.

His death was essential to pay the price required by God for sin.

The second important truth about Christ in our passage is Christ’s sufficiency is essential.

II. CHRIST’S SUFFICIENCY IS ESSENTIAL

“Christ died for sins once for all”

The Greek word here “once for all” does not refer to people as it might suggest, but that Christ died once for all time. Jesus would never have to go through the gate of death again. His sacrifice was sufficient because He was sinless.

Under the Old Testament sacrificial system every year on the Day of Atonement a person brought his sacrifice to the priest. He would lay his hands on the animal symbolizing a transfer of his sins to the animal and then he would kill the animal, shedding its blood to cover his sin.

In the Old Testament the idea of atonement meant a covering. The blood of the animal never cleansed the sinner or cancelled the sin, only covered the sin. In the New Testament the word atonement came to mean “at-one-ment” or those once estranged are now brought into agreement. We substitute the word atonement for the word reconciliation. Romans 5:11 says that through Christ we have been reconciled meaning that we are now brought back into a right relationship with God through Christ so that through Him we have been cleansed from sin and able to come before God.

When Jesus shed His blood by dying on the cross,

His shed blood did more than just cover the sin, it cleansed the sinner and cancelled the sin debt.

Romans 8:1-3

Hebrews 9:14

Hebrews 10:1-7, 10, 12

Because His sacrifice was sufficient, His work was finished and He sat down at the right hand of God. There is no need for another sacrifice to be made. Christ could do no more because He doesn’t need to do anything else.

While it means for all time, it is also for any sin we commit.

I John 1:9 “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

There isn’t a sin you can commit that God won’t forgive and it’s not just for any sin, it is for any sinner. Implied in sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice is that it is eternal. God will never change His mind about the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice.

To experience the sufficiency of His sacrifice we must understand that His substitution is essential.

III. CHRIST’S SUBSTITUTION IS ESSENTIAL

“The righteous for the unrighteous.”

The guiltless for the guilty

The sinless for the sinner

The just for the unjust

Our sin caused the sinless Christ’s death.

Think for a moment how you would feel if you had amassed such a large debt that you could never pay it back in a million years. You would feel such overwhelming stress at the thought of such a huge burden. How would you feel though if you found a person who would gladly take your debt, a debt that wasn’t His and pay it off for you?

That’s what Jesus has done with our sin debt. We can never pay it back and so we deserve the penalty

which is death, eternal separation from God and Christ stepped in and said He would take that debt on Himself and pay it for us. II Corinthians 5:21 says that He who had no sin, became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God.

To pay for our sin debt we needed a substitute. That's what the animal pictured in the Old Testament. In theological terms we call it substitutionary atonement or simply the death of one on behalf of another.

I Thessalonians 5:10 "He died for us."

Romans 5:8 "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Isaiah 53:5 "But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him."

I John 2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

He took our place as a substitute dying the death we deserve to give us the eternal life we don't deserve. Without His substitution we are still dead in our sin.

His substitution on our behalf is essential, which is essential for the next important point where we see Christ's settlement is essential.

IV. CHRIST'S SETTLEMENT IS ESSENTIAL

Exactly what did His death accomplish for us?
"To bring you to God."

We already touched on this briefly, but once again consider that the sacrifice of Jesus was what enables us to be brought to God. It's clearly stated in Romans 5:8 that God was our enemy. But Christ's death changed all that. We can now come to God and Hebrews 4:16 tells us that because of Christ we can come boldly into God's presence. A settlement was made to make it possible for us to come into God's presence. We find that in the next statement about Christ. Christ's surrender is essential.

V. CHRIST'S SURRENDER IS ESSENTIAL

"He was put to death in the body but made alive in the spirit."

We come back again to His death and the fact of His death in the flesh, that death was something Jesus really experienced as a necessary part of His coming to earth. His death was voluntary on His part. He chose to leave the splendor of heaven and be born to live among us in order to die for us. It was a full and complete surrender to the Father's will for Him to be the atoning sacrifice through shedding His blood on the cross. Galatians 2:20 tells us an important reason for His surrender in death. About Christ it says that He "loved me and gave Himself for me."

Never forget that He did it for you because He loves you. Think about such love. There is no greater love Jesus said, than for a man to lay down His life for His friends, and then He called us His friends.

He left the splendor of heaven
Knowing his destiny
Was the lonely hill of Golgotha
There to lay down his life for me
If that isn't love
Then the ocean is dry
There's no stars in the sky
And the sparrows can't fly
If that isn't love
Then heaven's a myth
There's no feeling like this
If that isn't love.

Love was when God became a man,
down where I could see, love that reached to me.
Love was God dying for my sin;
And so trapped was I, my whole world caved in.
Love was when Jesus met me now it's real.
Lovingly He came; I can feel he's real.
Love was God; only He would try to reach,
to love one such as I.

That is how much He loved us.

But it is in that last phrase that there is a challenge of interpretation. Some might even see it as a controversy.

Some translations refer to “spirit” with a capital “S” making it the Holy Spirit that brought Christ back to life. Other translations refer to the spirit with a lower case “s” speaking about Christ’s inner spirit.

It is not referring to a dichotomy or schizophrenia between the human and divine natures of Christ that the body is referring to His human nature and the spirit is referring to His divine nature. Jesus was both God and man at the same time, not God one minute and then man the next.

Biblically sound and godly scholars differ in opinion about this. The truth is that the Greek word can refer to either the Holy Spirit or to Christ’s spirit. Let me tell you what I believe of which you may differ in your understanding and that’s okay.

What we see in the sentence is a contrast. Some see this as referring to both the physical and the spiritual realms. They say in the physical realm you have the death of Jesus and in the spiritual realm you have the Holy Spirit. They continue by saying that you have the Holy Spirit then acting in the physical realm to bring the human form of Jesus back to life. So they look at this verse as referring to His resurrection, raising Jesus from the dead.

If Peter had meant to refer to the resurrection here, He would have stated it this way: “He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the flesh.”

Then there are those who believe that the contrast isn’t between the physical and spiritual realms, but rather speaks about the body which does die and the spirit of a man which does not die.

I’m not going to be dogmatic here but what John MacArthur has written helps me understand it.

“The phrase made alive in the spirit is a reference to Jesus’ eternal inner person. The Greek text omits the definite article, which suggests Peter was not referring to the Holy Spirit, but that the Lord was spiritually alive, contrasting the condition of Christ’s flesh or body with that of His spirit. His eternal spirit has always been alive, although His earthly body was then dead; but three days later His body was resurrected in a transformed and eternal state...Peter’s point here must be that though Jesus’ body was dead, He remained alive in His spirit.”

And that is our case as well. When we die the body is in the grave, but our spirit continues to exist because we read to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. (II Corinthians 5:6)

To wrap this all up, Jesus gives us the perfect example of someone who suffered for doing good. His purpose was to bring us to God.

Christ died for you because He loved you. His death on the cross is essential for you to come to God.