

Our Gospel: Sin-Bearing

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. The first reading today is an Old Testament lesson from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 53, verses 4 through 6.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The grass withers and the flowers fall. The word of our God stands forever.

[1 : 14] And the New Testament lesson is a reading from the first letter of Peter, chapter 1, verses 18 through 22, and chapter 3, verse 18.

For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, the lamb without blemish or defect.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

[2 : 22] For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the spirit. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. It's kind of crazy that we're one month into summertime here.

It's hard to believe. I know some of you are brand new, not only to Christ Church, but to this area.

We want you to know that we're very glad that you're here. We warmly welcome you.

You should know that I'm about to go on vacation tomorrow morning. So I look forward to getting to know you, but later. Later. And some of you, I know, are moving away, which breaks our hearts always.

But to good things, new school opportunities, new job opportunities. And I would love a chance to say a proper goodbye if that's you after our service today.

[3 : 31] I'm really just on a personal note happy to report that this is the best I've felt going into summer vacation in the last five years. And so I want to thank God for that.

We've endured a lot. And I thank you for praying for me and for Christ Church. And it's just so good to be in this place. These past two months, we've been looking at this letter from one of Jesus' apostles.

He was the leader, really, of Jesus' band of 12 disciples. His name was Simon Peter. And Jesus took this ordinary fisherman and he transformed him into an extraordinary witness of the gospel, the good news.

And in our text today, Jesus gives us several nutshell summary statements about what the gospel is all about. And so I want to talk about that under three headings today.

I want to talk about the centrality of the cross and the meaning of the cross and the result of the cross. The centrality, the meaning, and the result of the cross.

[4 : 40] First of all, let's think together about the centrality of the cross. If you were to open your pew Bible, and you're welcome to do that, and you look at the first sentence of this letter that the apostle Peter writes, he says that he's writing to people who have been, quote, unquote, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

It's a striking statement. And then he goes on, as we read in chapter one, he says, you've been redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus. In chapter two, as we read, it says that he bore our sins in his body on the tree.

And then in chapter three, Christ suffered for sins to bring us to God. So it's pretty clear that the cross is central in Peter's mind to the message that he has to give to these people.

And if you know the story of Peter, the centrality of the cross here in his letter is quite astounding. Because when Jesus predicted his sufferings and his death, Peter protested.

Jesus said to his disciples, he said, I must go to Jerusalem, and I must suffer and be killed, and on the third day, be raised. And Peter was brash enough to take Jesus aside, and to immediately and vehemently contradict Jesus and rebuke Jesus.

[6 : 01] And he said this, he said, far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. Never, Peter said. So how did Jesus respond to Peter?

Well, you can read this episode in Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew chapter 16, but Jesus rebuked Peter, and he said, get behind me, Satan. Now, if Jesus ever says that to you, that's just not a good thing to hear from Jesus.

Okay, get behind me, Satan. You are not setting your mind on God and the concerns of God, but merely on human concerns.

And so Jesus tells Peter that if he will not embrace the cross, then he's just not aligned with God, and he's not aligned with the concerns of God.

And so what sort of impact, what kind of effect did this have on Peter? Well, Peter came to understand that the cross of Christ is the center of the Christian faith.

[7 : 03] And how did that happen? Well, Peter encountered the resurrected Jesus on Easter Sunday. He saw the nail marks in Jesus' glorified body, and over those next 40 days, he heard the risen and living Lord giving this giant review session and going back over all the teaching that he had given over the past three years.

And somewhere in there, I think it all finally clicked for Peter. For example, think about this sign and this symbol of the Lord's Supper that we have put in front of us.

You can think about all the means that Jesus could have given to us to remember him and to experience him. And Jesus could have said, you know, when my disciple community, when my church gathers together, make sure that you pull out a replica of my manger so that you remember my birth and the incarnation.

Or he could have said, you know, make sure you pull out a hammer and a chisel to remember that I was a builder and to remember the value and dignity of human labor. Jesus could have said, well, bring out a little model of a boat because that will signify when I got into the boat and taught all the people on the land.

It will signify my teachings. Or he could have said, everybody pull out a towel. Pull out a towel and remember that moment where I washed the feet of my disciples. Or we could have doves in here as a symbol of the Holy Spirit that was operative in the life of Jesus.

[8 : 33] Jesus had many, many symbols available to him as the means for which his disciple community was to remember him and to experience him.

But what did Jesus choose? He chose the bread and the wine. And he chose the bread and the wine so that Peter would know and so that we would know that the Christian faith is primarily the faith of Christ crucified.

Right? The bread and the wine, they don't signify the birth of Jesus or the life of Jesus or the words of Jesus or the works of Jesus or the resurrection of Jesus or even the coming again of Jesus.

The bread and the wine signify to us Jesus' body broken and his blood poured out on the cross.

Jesus made it super clear to Peter and all the apostles before he died and after he was raised from the dead that the reason he stepped out of eternity and into time was to die on the cross.

And Peter came to see that without the cross, there is no salvation for human beings. There's no hope in this world without the cross. So if you're exploring Christianity, you may be wondering, gosh, there's so much about the Christian faith.

[9 : 50] Where do I focus my attention? And I want you to know that, you know, without the resurrection of Jesus, his cross would be meaningless. So you have to deal with the substantial evidence that we have for the resurrection of Jesus.

But I would also say at the same time, you've got to deal with the way that Jesus' followers spoke about his cross. Take, for example, Saul of Tarsus. Saul was this zealous Jew.

He was adamantly opposed to Jesus Christ until he had this encounter with Jesus, this life-transforming encounter with the risen and living Lord.

And then Paul began to speak in this way. This is what he says in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. He says to this church, we preach Christ crucified.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now that does not mean that Paul devoted himself to ignorance about other important matters.

[10 : 51] Paul was educated. Paul was brilliant. But it means that all Paul does and all that Paul teaches is tied to the cross. And it means that we can understand nothing about Christian doctrine, Christian ethics, Christian worship, Christian fellowship, or Christian mission unless the cross is at the center of all of those concerns.

So as you explore the Christian faith, if that's you today and you're reading a Christian book or you are hearing a Christian message, you're engaging with a Christian group, and it's not fairly obvious within a reasonable amount of time that the cross is central to that message or that group's vision of who God is and of what God has done.

And if something else has been substituted in the center other than the cross, then you know that you're probably not dealing, you're probably not engaging with genuine historic Christian faith, but rather some sort of counterfeit version instead.

So if you're exploring Christianity, that's my encouragement to you is to think about the centrality of the cross for Peter, for Paul, for Jesus himself who gave us this symbol to remember his cross.

Let's think for a minute too, not only about the centrality of the cross, but also the meaning of the cross. The meaning of the cross. Look at verse 24 where Peter says these words.

[12 : 27] He says he himself, Jesus himself, bore our sins in his body. He bore our sins in his body. And what Peter's talking about there is that the eternal God became flesh.

The eternal God took a human body and he assumed our human nature. Why did he do that? Well, Peter says it's because of, quote unquote, our sins. What is this archaic, nasty little three-letter word sin mean?

Well, in the Greek, it's actually a seven-letter word. It's hamartia. And when you read Homer and you read the Iliad or the Odyssey, Homer uses this word hamartia to talk about throwing a spear but missing the mark.

or shooting an arrow but failing to hit the bullseye, falling short of your target. And then if you keep reading on, and Aristotle and the Greek dramatists, they use this word hamartia to talk about a character's tragic error, a fatal flaw, some sort of blind spot that leads to their downfall.

And that's basically what Peter's talking about as well, that we were made to hit the bullseye of loving God with all that we are. We were made to love God from the center of our being, to find our deepest identity and our deepest value in our relationship with God, in our service to God.

[14 : 00] And what Peter's saying is that we've missed that mark. We've failed to hit that target. We've fallen short of the bullseye of God's design and His intention for us.

And what Peter's suggesting is that sin is seeking to become yourself. Sin is seeking to get your identity apart from God in something other than God.

And that's why the ancient theologians talked about the human condition as we are, all of us, homo incurvatus in se, which means that we are human beings curved in upon ourselves.

That self-centeredness and self-absorption and self-interest has somehow poisoned all of us. And that is why, Peter says, the eternal God took a human body.

And that's why Jesus voluntarily offered Himself up to God the Father. He says Jesus came to bear our sins in His body.

[15 : 04] And where exactly did Jesus do this? Now, I have a little quibble with the translation that we just read this morning because the Greek word is He did this on the zulon.

He did this on the wood. He did it on the tree. It doesn't say He did it on the staros, the cross. And I don't know why the translation committee did that.

So we need to write them a letter. But I'm pointing this out because it's a really important difference. Why does Peter actually say He bore our sins in His body on the tree?

In the Acts of the Apostles, we get multiple sermons from Peter. And in two different sermons, Peter says that Jesus was put to death by people hanging Him on a tree.

He was hung on a tree. And then here He uses the same language. He bore our sins in His body on the tree. That's a very odd way of speaking.

[16:03] Why in the world does He put it this way? Why would you go out of your way to emphasize the tree? Well, Peter's referencing Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 21, verse 23.

And Moses says this. He says, Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. Anyone who's hung on a tree is under God's curse.

So that word tree is deliberate shorthand that means that Jesus died under the divine curse. And of course, Peter does not think that Jesus deserved to be accursed by God.

He says in verse 22 that He committed no sin. No, it was the divine curse that was on us. The divine curse that was hanging over me.

And hanging over you that Jesus came to bear. And now notice how Peter refers not only to Moses but then to the prophets. He refers to the prophet Isaiah and he quotes Isaiah 53, verse 5.

[17:09] And he says this. By his wounds, you have been healed. And that's a deliberate reference to the whole of that passage, which I want to read to you one more time.

You can look at Isaiah 53, starting at verse 4. This is talking about God's servant that He's going to send. And it says that, surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering.

Yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions. And He was crushed for our iniquities.

And the punishment that brought us peace was on Him. And by His wounds, we are healed. And do you see all that back and forth that Isaiah is doing there?

What he's talking about is some sort of substitution, some sort of exchange, some sort of transfer that this servant of God is going to come and He's going to take the place of sinners.

[18:14] He's going to bear their sin instead of them and on behalf of them and in the place of them. And so why is Peter marshalling Moses and Isaiah and the whole of the Old Testament?

What in the world is His point for us? It's just this. That the Creator of the universe stooped down and that He humbled Himself and that He took our human nature to Himself in His birth and then He took our guilt and our shame to Himself in His death.

Sinless Himself, Jesus came and He bore our sins. Innocent Himself, Jesus assumed our guilt. And immortal Himself, Jesus died our death.

And why did He do it? Well, He did it out of sheer selfless love that we can barely even begin to understand that Jesus wanted to bring us out of that cursedness that we were living in.

He wanted to bring us out of the cursedness of sin and death and He wanted to bring us into that healing and that forgiveness that can only happen through His wounds.

[19:29] He says in 1 Peter 3.18, He suffered for sins that He might bring us to God, that He might reconcile us with our Creator God against whom we had rebelled, that He might bring us back into fellowship with God as our Abba Father.

So when we look upon the cross and we look upon that most dramatic experience of unjust suffering in human history, what should cause us to tremble is not so much His physical suffering when He was reviled and tortured and executed at the hands of His enemies.

And what should cause us to tremble is not so much His mental suffering when He was betrayed and denied and abandoned at the hands of His friends. But what should really cause us to tremble is Jesus' spiritual suffering when He, the sinless one, bore our sin and He bore our curse and He bore our condemnation and our eternal death penalty not at the hands of His enemies, not at the hands of His friends, but at the hands of God Himself.

That's the real meaning of the cross, the real meaning of what Christ did on that cross is that the suffering and the agony that Jesus bore was the endless suffering and endless agony of being cut off from God and being separated from God.

And Jesus, of course, didn't deserve that. Jesus deserved nothing but adoration and reward for the life that He lived. But the one person who did not have to die volunteered to take our place and to

become our sin-bearing substitute.

[21 : 18] And on that great central day of history, for one time only, God treated the only righteous person as if He were unrighteous. And Jesus cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And the reason He said that is so that none of us would ever have to utter that awful sentence for ourselves. That we would never be forsaken by God. Jesus cried out from that cross, It is finished so that you and I could know that all of our sin and our unrighteousness was transferred onto Him. And all of His sin and His righteousness was transferred onto us. and that all of our self-centered homo incurvatus in se, curved inness upon ourselves, past and present and future, all of our self-centered attitudes and actions, past, present, and future, were born by Jesus for us. In a lot of churches, people would say, mm-hmm, or like, amen, or that's right. There's nothing more that you can do to make you more acceptable to God.

And there's nothing more that we could add to Christ's work on that cursed tree. And so if you're here and you're exploring Christianity, I want you to know, again, that becoming a Christian is about allowing this meaning of the cross that I've just explained to you, allowing the meaning of the cross to become the meaning of your life, to become the very foundation of the heart of your identity.

[23 : 01] And that's how Jesus' followers talked, right? The Apostle Paul closes his great letter to the Galatians like this. He says, may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

You following with me? The centrality of the cross and the meaning of the cross but I also want you to see the result of the cross because Peter doesn't just leave it there. He keeps going and kind of begs this question of like what was God's desired outcome of Jesus' sin bearing death?

It wasn't just that we might be forgiven. It was that but it's more than that. Peter says in verse 24 that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. Jesus bore our sins that we might be given a new birth into a new life with a new power and new habits so that we increasingly more and more come to look like Jesus and sound like Jesus and feel like Jesus and act like Jesus and talk like Jesus.

So the cross not only brings us forgiveness but it commits us to the holiness of Jesus. Our new life in Jesus Christ is so radically new that it can only be described by Peter as a death and a resurrection.

[24 : 32] He's saying to us you died with Jesus to sin and you were raised with Jesus to a new life of righteousness in line with God's will.

And so what does that mean for us in practical terms? Well it means simply this that I can no longer do things my way. That if you embrace the meaning of the cross for you you can no longer do things your way.

And here's where I get that in verse 25 Peter says for you were like sheep going astray but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

See Peter was there when Jesus said to the disciples in John chapter 10 I'm the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. And so Peter knows that Jesus is our seeking shepherd. He passionately pursues his straying sheep. And when he says that he's quoting again Isaiah 53 6 which says we all like sheep have gone astray and each of us has turned to our own way.

[25 : 37] And that's what sin is. Sin is my way. Sin is saying to God not your way my way. And if you know the story of Peter you know he had some my way moments didn't he?

Peter had some some big kind of like my way failures like big time. And so what a relief Peter must have felt. What a joy Peter must have felt and must have filled his heart when he met the resurrected Jesus and he received the forgiveness of sins from his good shepherd.

And I'm imagining from that point on Peter was thinking to himself gosh if my good shepherd laid down his life for me and my failures and if the overseer of my soul bore my sins and my way for me then it's inconceivable that I should insist on my way anymore.

The result of the cross is that I should no longer go in my way but that I should go in my good shepherd's way. And if he's leading me in paths of righteousness who am I to resist him?

He's the shepherd and overseer of my soul. And so Peter says I'm done with that old life of my way and now I want to live this new life of Jesus' way.

[27 : 06] And the way he describes that is he says it's living for righteousness. Living for righteousness. What in the world does that mean? Well look again at verse 21 of chapter 2.

He says because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He left us an example that we should follow in his steps.

And that word example it refers to the pattern of letters in the alphabet. and children in the ancient world they would learn to write their ABCs by taking an example of the letters and then they would trace over that example.

And so Peter's telling us that living for righteousness means tracing the pattern of Jesus' life onto our life. It's like laying that paper over the pattern right?

And looking through it and seeing the example the pattern of Jesus cross-shaped sacrificial self-giving love and then tracing that out on our life replicating that out in our life.

[28 : 23] Peter says we're to follow in Jesus' steps. And that simply means that we cannot step into the footsteps of Jesus and then go head off in our own direction that's different than the direction that Jesus is taking.

Jesus' footsteps led him to follow a particular pathway. And the path that Jesus took was the path of meek submission to the Father's will.

The path that Jesus took was radical obedience to the Father's word. The path that Jesus took was suffering love and relationship with others. The path of Jesus was surrendering his needs and his desires his rights and his privileges and his comforts for the sake of loving others.

Can you imagine tracing those ABC's of Jesus onto your life? And I'll go one further in verse 23.

It says when they hurled their insults at Jesus he did not retaliate and when he suffered he made no threats instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

[29 : 34] And what Peter's telling us is that living for righteousness means following in Jesus' footsteps of non-retaliation. And you may find this useful in your workplace tomorrow or in your family gatherings this July 4th weekend.

Right? That just as people hurled ugly words at Jesus and he did not retaliate. So when people say something to you that's not worth saying. Right?

When people are insensitive to you or mean to you. When people criticize you to your face or they slander you behind your back. And whether they do that in person or over text or online.

As someone who's living for righteousness someone who's following in Jesus' steps you will not reply in kind. You will as Jesus he did not retaliate.

And that's to state it negatively but let me just end by putting it positively using Jesus' own words from the Gospel of Luke chapter 6. And I think if the church did this it would probably change the world because here's what Jesus says.

[30 : 43] Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you.

If someone slaps you on one cheek turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat do not withhold your shirt from them. Love your enemies.

Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting anything in return. Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High because he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

So be merciful as your Father is merciful. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus' righteousness means that when we're hated we do good.

And when we're cursed we bless. And when we're mistreated we pray. And when we encounter someone who's ungrateful we're kind.

[31 : 55] And when we encounter someone and deal with someone who's wicked we're merciful. Friends this is the way of Jesus. And this is the intended result of his cross.

So may we follow in Jesus' steps and may when people look at us may they see the example, the pattern, the ABC, of Jesus' righteous life writ large in our lives.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.