

# Our Living Savior Gives Us a Living Hope that Endures the Pain!

A sermon based on 1 Peter 2:19-25

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

When I was a kid, I'd panic whenever I'd see my mom with a wooden spoon. You see, it happened maybe only once or twice, but when we misbehaved, we didn't get hit with a switch or a belt, but were bent over the knee and were paddled with the wooden spoon. Because I knew that I usually deserved a spanking or two, I'd panic sometimes when I saw mom with the wooden spoon, even if she was just making a batch of cookies, because I thought for sure she was there to bring on the **pain**.

Often we do deserve punishment for our sins and the problems and pain that we face are often simply the consequences that we've earned for our actions. But in our text for this morning, God tells us there will be times that we suffer, not for doing something wrong, but for doing exactly what he wants us to do. We will face persecution and **pain** for the sake of the gospel.

That sounds a bit depressing, doesn't it? But God doesn't tell us this to **discourage** us, but to **encourage** us. He wants to encourage us to remain faithful to our calling. No matter what suffering we face, we should never take our eyes off of Jesus. For we are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps. And because we can't do that well enough, we're called to focus on Jesus sacrifice.

It's been said that the greatest miracles of Jesus, were those he never did. Just think: If you had divine power and could do whatever you wanted, what would you do to that guy who keeps picking on you at work for being a Christian? What about that guy who taunts and you ridicules you mercilessly? Wouldn't you show those people a thing or two?

But consider Jesus. Look at how he suffered. When he was put on a mock trial, he didn't lash out. When his accusers told lies about him, he didn't stoop to their level. When Jesus was taunted and mocked, beaten and abused, scourged and crucified, and endured the worst kind of **pain**, he never once struck back. He never used his power to retaliate or even to alleviate his suffering and **pain**!

And God, through the apostle Peter, says, "**To this you were called...**" To suffer, not for doing something wrong or because you deserve it, but to feel the **pain** for doing what's right; to suffer for your faith. **That's** your calling, your vocation. So how well have you done?

For the early Christians to whom Peter wrote, following in Jesus' footsteps sometimes meant prison. Sometimes it meant being beaten or flogged. Like it did for Stephen, it often meant being tortured and killed in some pretty gruesome ways. And while you and I may not be burned alive, sawed in half, stoned to death, or crucified for our faith, we too will face persecution—and not for doing something wrong, but for doing something right; for following Jesus. Jesus didn't sugar coat it, but he himself warned that if we follow him, we'll suffer. Following Jesus brings pain.

We may get singled out and picked on. Ever been there? The only Christian in the room? How did it go? Did you stand up for the truth against all opposition and gladly endure the **pain** of insult? Or did you keep quiet, hoping they wouldn't find you out? How much of a witness have you been at work? Have you been willing to endure the **pain** of unemployment for sharing your faith? Or have you kept quiet, citing the fact that it's against company policy to try to soothe your conscience?

Or, when you do stand up for the truth and take the *pain* that comes, do you accept it as Jesus did—without sin? Have you ever threatened to take revenge on your persecutor? Or at least day-dreamed about it? Or have you ever had a quick comeback to answer insult with insult to put that person in their place? Have you always suffered gladly, entrusting yourself to God and his care? Have you always had loving thoughts about your persecutor? Jesus did. And it's *his* example that we're called to follow.

The snow fell the previous night, and it was so thick it gave everyone a welcome break. School was cancelled, people called in sick. And dad took off from work to play with his son in the snow. They went outside and as the man walked he saw his four year old trailing close behind trying to step in the big footprints he left behind. But after jumping, to match dad's stride, he finally said, "Daddy, your footprints are too big!" and he gave up the game.

Jesus is our example as he leads the way. ***"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."*** But the problem is that his footprints are too big. His stride is too long. And we can't keep up. We don't endure suffering and *pain* as he did—as he demands we do. And our failure is sin. For denying and betraying our Savior, we deserve to be denied by him and betrayed by him. For running away from him when the going got tough and we might have to face *pain*, we deserve to have him to run away from us. And for abandoning him when we got scared, we deserve to have him abandon us to the *eternal pain* of hell.

But thank God we don't get what we deserve. And thank God that we don't have to follow in Jesus footprints to get to heaven. For Jesus isn't just an *example*, but far more importantly, Jesus is our *Savior*. And we're called, not just to follow in his footsteps and endure the pain it brings, but even more to focus on his sacrifice and enjoy the peace it brings...

When we rightly feel ashamed for the times we haven't followed Jesus' example, God calls us to focus, not on our failures, but on Jesus' perfect sacrifice for us. For his footsteps are pretty big! His stride is huge! He took those giant steps down from heaven to become a human, just like us. And he took those giant steps to the cross to endure *its pain*. And he did it all to rescue us, though we love to wander...

One of parents' frustrations of shopping with small children is the challenge of keeping track of all of them. Maybe you've had it happen where when you were looking for an item on your shopping list, they would spot some cartoon character on a cereal box or some superhero on some fruit snacks and they would dart after what they saw, usually in opposite directions.

And that's exactly how we act with our Savior. Some sin catches our eye, some path looks more appealing than what Jesus has to offer (especially the *pain* he promises) and we wander away from him. With every sinful rebellion, we dart away. We're like sheep, going astray—sheep who love to wander. And he has every right to leave us be, to let us wander away, and to let us become separated from him and lost, not just in Sam's Club or Walmart, but to an eternity of *pain*.

But he doesn't let that happen. Instead he chased after us, like a father frantically searching for his son in the store, like a shepherd searching for his lost sheep. And he stopped at nothing to bring us back to him. He endured the worst kind of *pain*. ***"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."***

Though Jesus didn't deserve it in the least, he took that unjust suffering gladly—to save us. He took the beating that won our healing. He bore our sin in his body. And like a divine lightning rod, Jesus absorbed the horrible charge of God's wrath on the cross. And by taking our sins on himself and enduring hell on the cross, you and I have been made spiritually healthy and well. We who were once sick with the eternally terminal illness of sin we have been restored to perfect spiritual health.

And he doesn't stop there. He brought us to faith that we might believe in his gracious promises. Literally the Greek doesn't say, ***“you have returned”*** but ***“you have [been] returned.”*** By his grace, ***not*** by our choosing, we are brought back to Jesus who continues to watch over us and protect us no matter what ***pain*** we may face. And even in the midst of the ***pain*** of this life, he keep us focused on him on his perfect sacrifice. Now we don't need to follow his footsteps into heaven. We don't need to walk there at all, because the Good Shepherd carries us in his arms.

And now, knowing that we don't need to follow in his footsteps to get to heaven, we long to follow in his footsteps to thank him, even if it means we suffer ***pain***. ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness...”*** Now we're eager to follow his example and gladly suffer, even the worst of ***pain***, even ***death***, like Stephen did, for his sake, just as he suffered for our sake. And we ***can*** do this, with confidence, knowing that the Good Shepherd won't just abandon us to the wolves. He'll continue to care for us and oversee our souls. And the more we heed the call to focus on Jesus' perfect sacrifice, empowered by that Gospel, the more we'll be able to heed our call to follow in his footsteps and echo the apostle Paul when he says, ***“I consider it a joy to share in the suffering of Christ...”***

Dear friends, may you always follow Jesus—confidently through suffering and ***pain***, peacefully through death, and victoriously into heaven. Amen.