

# Christ an Example<sup>1</sup>

1 Peter 2:21



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**FOCAL Read Responsively** 1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: **because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:**

I sat in a Church building the other day and noticed how beautiful everything appeared. The pulpit from which the preacher spoke was a lovely hardwood, and a golden cloth was draped so that it flowed outward to the audience. Throughout the sanctuary there were a number of crosses. The largest, a bright golden Cross was mounted on a red velvet covered wall just above the preacher. Not too far away a free standing wooden Cross held two things: a beautiful piece of bright white linen and an elaborate dried flower arrangement.

Christians "sanitize" the Cross of Christ, rarely showing it as it really was. The Cross of Christ was not a beautiful and ornate piece of craftsmanship. The Cross of Christ was not a place of gold or of silver. The Cross of Christ was a place of terrible suffering, a bloody place, a dark and dreadful place.

Until Jesus Christ went to the Cross all those who so suffered were criminals guilty of capital offenses. This executioner's chair was a terrible and shameful place where only the lowest of criminals were punished. The criminal was made to carry the means of his death to an ancient landfill outside of the city gates. No one but the leprous and diseased lived where the Cross would be planted.

<sup>1</sup> ideas in this sermon were drawn from John MacArthur's sermon *Jesus' Death Shows Us How To Live*, as published in "Truth Endures"

Once the criminal reached Golgotha - the "place of the skull" - he was not given the slightest comfort. His body was beaten so that his pain would be enhanced. He was forced to lay against the rough wood, and his hands and feet were nailed to the tree. The criminal never died of blood loss. The executioners knew exactly where to drive the nails so as to avoid the major arteries of the human body. Hanging between the heaven and the earth the criminal was literally strangled to death. If he wanted to breathe he had to pull upward so as to relax his diaphragm, tearing at the wounds in his hands and feet. When death came it was a sweet relief. If the criminal was unfortunate enough to linger beyond the setting of the sun his knees were shattered with a large wooden hammer. The Cross was the most devilish and most terrifying means by which a person could die.

The French guillotine was terrible, then "Drawing and Quartering" of the Middle Ages was grisly, the American electric chair an awful means of death. But rising above all these methods of death and dying there stands the Godzilla of torture and execution, the Cross of the Roman Empire.

Jesus Christ went to that Cross for you and for me. Our Bible tells us that "**Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example**". We often see an example in His life, but rarely do we consider the example of His death. The Christian faith is built on suffering - and - contrary to many of these fly by night televangelists - **we who believe are called to a life of suffering**. Jesus told us that:

**John 15:18-20** If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. {19} **If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. {20}** **Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;....**

Isn't that suffering? **The world will hate the Christian.** Expect it. Believe it. The Bible says "**hereunto were you called**". We who believe are pilgrims in this life, telling others of the wondrous salvation that is available through Christ. We will suffer. We will be misunderstood. Wolves will often come among us, just as Judas Iscariot was among the original disciples. The tares will grow alongside the wheat. Do not worry. Look to Jesus Christ. **He left us an example of suffering on His Cross.** As Peter tells us:

**1 Peter 4:12-13** **Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: {13}** **But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.**

If you are partakers of Christ's Cross you are partakers of Christ's sufferings. Rejoice, and keep on serving Him. Look to the example of Christ.

## **1. The Christian Is Called To Forgive Others**

**FOCAL** 1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

We who are Christians have been given an example, that you should follow in His steps. The first footprint of Christ in suffering is the footprint of forgiveness. We read in:

Luke 23:32-34 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. {33} And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. {34} Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. ...

To be put to death on the Cross is terrible, but to be put to death *knowing that you are innocent* heightens the agony.

When we suffer for that which we did wrong we hang our heads in shame. But when we are *falsely accused* and suffer there is something within us that makes us want to lash out, to say "No, I didn't do it! You're wrong!". Jesus knew that He was suffering unjustly. In fact, the trial judge Pilate:

Matthew 27:24 .... washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

He declared Jesus a just person, innocent of any wrong doing. His betrayer Judas Iscariot took the

Matthew 27:3-4 .... thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, {4} Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. ....

Judas knew Jesus was innocent. The Scribes and the Pharisees knew that He was innocent, and nonetheless blasphemed God and profaned the Law of Moses in order to execute the Lord of Glory. How did Jesus respond? His first words from the Cross were a prayer for His tormentors. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".

Jesus understood what the Bible teaches us. The sinner apart from Christ is blinded by his sin. "They do not know what they are doing". The Bible tells us that

John 3:19 ... light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Sin is a disease that blinds the soul to light. The unbeliever, trapped in the mire of sin, Dear friends, "the whole world lieth in wickedness (1 John 5:19) and cannot see the Light of God. How can we bring darkened man to the Light of God. Only by prayer. Only by praying that their eyes might be opened. As John MacArthur said,

"Forgiveness is man's greatest need. It is the only way

that we can enter into fellowship with God and avoid hell, and that's why Jesus prayed for it".

These people did not need the judgment of God to rain down on them, but they needed God's forgiveness. The Christian must understand this great truth!

**"Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing"**. Christians who are undeservedly saved by the Grace of God and the shed Blood of Christ need to understand that **"hereunto were ye called"**. God called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. He opened your eyes to your need to be saved. When you are persecuted the first words you should utter are the first words Christ uttered: **Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do**. Father, open their eyes. Father, help them to see the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, and let them see eternal hell waiting for them. Christians should be as forgiving and as loving as **deacon Stephen was**. He preached the cross of Christ to those who would not hear. And as they stoned him to death Stephen cried out

Acts 7:60 .... **Lord, lay not this sin to their charge...**

Here is the love of Christ, a love that can open they eyes of the most hardened.

## **2. The Christian Is Called To Focus Outward**

Luke 23:34-37 .... And they parted his raiment, and

cast lots. {35} And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. {36} And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, {37} And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

As Jesus hung on the Cross the soldiers knelt at His feet - not praying - but gambling for His meager earthly possessions.

**The people didn't stand believing**, but they **stood beholding**. The soldiers were focused on a pair of dice and not Paradise. Would anyone be saved this day?

Jesus was no more than a curiosity to them, a little entertainment, a bloody show to watch before they went to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The self righteous Pharisees mocked Christ, saying **"let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God"**. The Roman soldiers likewise added their two cents worth: **"If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself"**. Even those who were crucified with Him made fun of Him. We read:

Mark 15:32 ... **they that were crucified with Him reviled Him.**

When Christ first began to minister among the people He had **John the Baptist**, a respected prophet, as His herald. John cried out **"behold, the Lamb of God Who taketh**

away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus now had no one. Judas Iscariot had betrayed Him, His disciples had fled from Him. Though the **Apostle John** stood at the foot of the Cross he didn't lift up his voice to encourage Jesus. Jesus was alone, suffering, naked, abused.

**Then God the Holy Spirit spoke to the heart of one of the thieves.**

God answered the prayer of Christ. Jesus cried out "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do**". In the midst of this terrible suffering God changed the heart of one of the thieves.

**2 Corinthians 4:6 ... God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

God shined in the heart of that thief. The thief had a choice, and he responded to the Christ. He said to his partner:

**Luke 23:40-41 .... Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? {41} And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.**

Turning to Jesus the thief said:

**Luke 23:42 .... Lord, remember me when thou comest**

**into thy kingdom.**

Jesus didn't reply, "weren't you the one who was *just tormenting Me*?" What did Jesus say?

**Luke 23:43 .... Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.**

Jesus, though terribly suffering, reached out to this man. **Jesus Christ came into this world to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10)**. He did not come to wreak judgment on the earth. There will be a day ...

**2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 ... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, {8} In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: {9} Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; {10} When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.**

When Jesus comes the second time He will bring with Him judgment for all who have not believed His Gospel. But now He does not judge, but reaches out a hand of love. He told that thief "**I will remember you. TODAY you shall be with Me in Paradise**".

In the midst of terrible suffering Jesus reached out in love to the thief. He reached out to **the Apostle John**

**and His mother Mary.**

In His *third statement from the Cross* Jesus took care of His mother.

**John 19:26-27** When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! {27} Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

In the midst of pain Jesus showed loving compassion for those around Him. This is a lesson for the believer in pain.

When we are in pain and focus on that pain, often the pain is enhanced and enlarged. But when we do as our Savior did and, *ignoring the pain reach out in love to others*, pain is often lessened and displaced. American Christians are entirely too *Me Focused*.

Yet the Scripture tells us that the example of Christ is to focus outward on both God as well as doing God's work. We are to never let our pain overwhelm us, but to *keep on doing that which Jesus has shown us*. The Apostle Paul tells us:

**Philippians 2:4-5** Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. {5} Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Look to your neighbor. Look to his good. Jesus looked to us above Himself and saved us. We must look to others above ourselves and lead them to Jesus.

### **3. We Are ALL Called To Fear Sin**

**FOCAL** 1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

**Matthew 27:46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**

As the Jews sought to murder Christ, and as Pilate said "take ye Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him" (John 19:6), the Jews replied "we have a law, and by our law He ought to die." The Jews used the Law of Moses to cover their sin, and sought the death of an innocent Man.

The Pharisees felt no remorse at their sin and their hypocrisy, for they had no true idea how evil sin had made them.

Sin makes people into monsters.

Just as in the days of Christ we call good bad and bad good. We have departed from the Living God. There was a time when people feared what other people

thought about sexual sin. Today many in our nation seek to establish laws that will cover this sin. **"We have a law that a man and a man may be married"**. Because **"we have a law"** many think that God will overlook their actions. **"We have a law"** that covers the sin of murder, and mothers are allowed to execute their children as they come from the womb. **"We have a law"** that nothing Godly can be displayed in public, though godless actions are not only tolerated but encouraged. **"We have a law"** that evil is normal, and that normal is evil.

Dear friends, **God has a Law - God is the Law**. Like the Pharisees of old we can violate the law and love of God, but we need not think that God will overlook our sin.

**Proverbs 14:34 Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.**

Oh that we would fear sin in this country. Oh that God the Holy Spirit would convict all in this place today to realize the danger of what God calls "sin".

Christ feared sin. He knew that the judgment of God was going to be poured out on Him, but His fear of sin led Him to pray *three times* **"Oh My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt"** (Matthew 26:39-44).

There was no other way. We may **"have a law"** but our Law is made of styrofoam. **"God has a law"** and that

Law is absolute.

Hear me, Beloved! God loves and will love. He offers Grace to all who will hear the Gospel and respond to it. But God cannot abide sin. God is **"of purer eyes than to behold evil"** (Habakkuk 1:13). Does this mean that God can't *see* sin. No! God sees all things, and knows all things. But when God sees sin it causes Him to rage. **Sin causes God to separate Himself for the sinner**. Sin causes God to want to punish it. What did God tell His Old Testament people?

**Exodus 34:6-7 ... The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, {7} Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.**

God *must* punish sin. He is merciful, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. But God will not overlook sin. Had Christ not gone to Golgotha to bear your sins and mine we would all be destined to enter hell for all eternity. **God will forgive iniquity, and cover sin** (Psalm 85:2), but only after it has been punished.

**My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?**

**ILLUSTRATE** Here is the covering for sin. See Him hanging on the Cross, bruised and bleeding. Hear His cry **"I thirst"** (John 19:28). Do the angels of Heaven come

to cool His parched thirst? No. Is His mother - at least - allowed to give Him comfort? No. Does His Father come down from Glory to brush the tear from His eye? No. A Roman guard sneeringly does his duty, and thrusts "a **sponge filled with vinegar**" (John 19:29) into His bruised and bleeding mouth. This nasty fluid is enough to free His tongue. Christ cries out "**it is finished**" (John 19:30). He didn't say "I am finished", but "**IT is finished**". The work of covering our sins was done. We are told that

**2 Corinthians 5:21 {God the Father} made {God the Son} to be sin for us, who knew no sin ....**

The Redeeming work was done. "**Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**" (Hebrews 9:26). Jesus didn't deserve what happened to Him, but He took it upon Himself so that we who believe in Him could be saved.

The Last thing our Lord said was:

**Luke 23:46 .... Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.**

Have you commended your spirit to God? Have you trusted in Him? Have you believed that Jesus Christ paid your penalty on that hill called Golgotha? If you have not, then you have not been saved.

Do not believe for one moment that you shall escape judgment if you regard sin as no more than a gnat's breath. Sin is dragon fire. Sin is poison. Sin is a black

pit from which you cannot, in your own power, escape.

You must turn from sin and, desperately but trustingly, call upon the Name of Jesus. Have you done this? My prayer is that you will now, if you have not, for there is no other covering for sin but the precious Blood of Christ.

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**John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 4:12-13** \_\_\_\_\_

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**1. The Christian Is Called To Forgive Others**

**1 Peter 2:21; Luke 23:32-34; Matthew 27:24; Matthew 27:3-4; John 3:19; Acts 7:60** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. The Christian Is Called To Focus Outward**

**Luke 23:34-37; Mark 15:32; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Luke 23:40-41; Luke 23:42; Luke 23:43; Luke 19:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; John 19:26-27; Philippians 2:4-5** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. We Are ALL Called To Fear Sin**

**1 Peter 2:21; Matthew 27:46; Proverbs 14:34; Matthew 26:39-44; Habakkuk 1:13; Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 85:2; John 19:28; John 19:29; John 19:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:26; Luke 23:46**

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