**GOOD FRIDAY**

**THE TESTIMONY OF A SAVED SINNER**

**1 Peter 2:22-25**

**INTRODUCTION**

The letter of 1 Peter was written by the Apostle Peter himself, one of the original twelve apostles Jesus called to follow him when he first began his ministry. For those who have read the New Testament, you will know that Peter is one of the main characters in the four accounts of Jesus’ life recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He was part of Jesus’ “inner circle” among the twelve apostles – the other two being the brothers James and John – and therefore, he was often invited to join Jesus when the others were not.

For example, only Peter, James, and John were invited to join Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus revealed a glimpse of his true, heavenly glory. Only Peter, James, and John were invited to join Jesus when he raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. And only Peter, James, and John were invited to join Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus cried out to his Heavenly father shortly before Judas would betray him and hand him over to be crucified.

Peter also seems to have been the leader of the twelve apostles, because he is frequently recorded as speaking on their behalf. When Moses and Elijah appear on the Mount of Transfiguration, it’s Peter who’s proposing that they set up tents so that they can stay up there a little longer. When Jesus asks the apostles whether they will leave him after most of his disciples deserted him, it is Peter who says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” And when Jesus asks the apostles who they think he truly is, it is Peter who replies, “Lord, you are the Christ of God.”

Peter plays a prominent role in all four of the Gospels, and because of this, we are given front-row seats not only to his strengths, but to his failures. When Jesus tells the apostles that he is about to be killed by the Jewish elders and priests, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him, saying, “This shall never happen to you”. In response, Jesus rebukes him for caring more about his own plans for Jesus than God’s. On another occasion, Peter promised Jesus that he would never abandon Jesus, and never fall away, but after Jesus was arrested, Peter was denying that he even knew Jesus.

Peter’s prominence in the life and ministry of Jesus is one of the reasons why the book of 1 Peter is so unique, because here, we have the personal thoughts of a broken, sinful man who walked as closely with Jesus as anyone who has ever lived. And here in our text today, we gain Peter’s insights into the purpose of the life and death of his friend and Saviour Jesus Christ.

What I’d like to do today is to look at the story of Good Friday as it would have been understood by Peter. What did this man think about the cross after Jesus had died? What did he understand to be the purpose of the cross, and what difference does that make to us? As we look at Peter’s testimony, I believe that this unique but flawed man will give us a fresh perspective on both the sadness and the joy of Good Friday.

The title of this message is **The Testimony of a Saved Sinner.** My aim today is to show you that **True Life is Only Found in Christ’s Death.** The outline of the sermon is as follows:

1. Christ’s Perfection
2. Christ’s Suffering
3. Christ’s Redemption

(1) **CHRIST’S PERFECTION**

We know that Good Friday is all about the cross, just as we know that Easter Sunday is all about the empty tomb. Peter will take us to the cross in verse 24. But before he does, he takes us a little farther back in time to survey the entire life of Jesus, because Jesus’ death can only be truly understood through the lens of his life.

This is what Peter says about Jesus’ life in verse 22: “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.” How would you like that to be the summary of your life? “Josh never did a single thing wrong.” Or “Josh lived a perfect life”. Most of us would be thrilled if our legacy was simply that, by God’s grace, we did our best to love God and to love people, but Jesus lived up to a different standard. He lived up to the standard of perfection and met it.

Throughout the New Testament, the Scriptures consistently affirm that Jesus, in his humanity, was like us in every way, with only one exception: he never sinned. He was tempted like we are, he had the same weaknesses as we do, but not once did he give in to them and sin. As the writer of the book of Hebrews put it,

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (4:15)

For the Christian, the sinless perfection of Christ is a central doctrine of the Christian faith. If Jesus had sinned, even a single time, then he would have been unqualified to do the work of redemption that he was sent to do. He wouldn’t have been able to pay the penalty for the sins of others, because he would have had to pay the penalty for his own. Thanks be to God that he never gave in to temptation and succeeded in obeying God’s commands perfectly.

Now for us, the sinless perfection of Christ is a statement of faith. We believe that Jesus was sinless because the Bible tells us so. For Peter, however, this wasn’t a statement of faith. It was a statement of *witness*. Peter was as close to Jesus as a person can be. He followed Jesus wherever he went, whether it was in a busy town or a remote mountaintop. Peter was with Jesus at every moment of every day, and after years of walking with Jesus, his summary of Jesus’ life is verse 22: “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.”

Therefore, as Peter wrote verse 22, we can imagine him thinking back to the times when he was with Jesus in a situation where Jesus could have responded sinfully but didn’t. Let me give you just three simple examples from the Gospel of Luke.

The first example comes from Luke 5. Jesus had just called Peter to leave his fishing boats behind and follow him. After travelling together to a city, a leper came up to Jesus there and begged him to heal him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” Leprosy was a highly contagious skin disease, which is why there were strict rules restricting lepers from living among people who didn’t have the disease. They were only allowed to live outside the cities with others who also had leprosy.

So when this leper approached Jesus, he could have responded in all sorts of ways. He could have said, “Get away from me, you’re not supposed to be here”, thus committing the sin of legalism. He could have recoiled in disgust at the man’s appearance, thus committing the sin of pride. Or, he could have become afraid that the leper would spread the disease to him, thus committing the sin of doubting God’s care. But Jesus didn’t respond in any of these ways. Instead, as the leper begged him and said, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean”, this is what Jesus did:

“And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him.” (Luke 5:13)

Here’s another example. While Jesus and his disciples were eating in a Pharisee’s home, a woman who had a city-wide reputation as a great sinner – likely because she was either an adulteress or a prostitute – came into the house and made a beeline for him. When she reached him, she fell at his feet and started weeping. Her tears wet his feet, her hair dried them up, and her life savings in the form of an expensive jar of perfume was poured out on them. This could have been an extremely embarrassing moment for Jesus. Men, can you imagine a woman who is not your wife doing this to you in public? If we were in Jesus’ place, we could have easily sent the woman away in order to save face in front of the Pharisees.

Jesus could also have been tempted by the woman sexually. There’s no question that what this woman did was an extremely intimate act. Jesus would have been reclining at the Pharisee’s table, which is how people used to eat their meals, and here is this woman known across the city for her sexual sin rubbing his feet and wiping them with her hair. Jesus could have fantasized about the woman, he could have pursued the woman, he could have asked her to meet him privately later on, but he did none of these things. Instead, he says this to the woman, in front of all the Pharisees who expected him to condemn her:

“Your sins are forgiven…Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:48, 50)

Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin.

One more example. Shortly after the twelve apostles return to Jesus after casting out demons and curing diseases with the power and authority Jesus gave to them, Jesus retreats with his apostles to a remote place. They’re tired, and they want to rest and catch up. It was finally time for a vacation. But when the people found out where Jesus has gone, they followed him. A massive crowd of five thousand men and their families went out to Jesus when he was supposed to be on vacation.

How do we tend to respond to requests and needs when we’re tired and just looking for some R&R? How do we respond when we’re asked to return to work when we’ve just left for a vacation? We don’t respond very well do we? We respond with bitterness. We respond with frustration. We even respond with anger. But Jesus felt none of this. Luke 9:11 tells us the following:

“When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.”

And to follow all that up, after spending the entire day of his day off healing them, when the apostles just wanted to send everyone away, Jesus miraculously feeds the entire crowd with only five loaves and two fish.

We could think of countless other examples. Jesus was tempted by racism when non-Jewish Gentiles asked him to heal their relatives. Jesus was tempted by greed when the rich young ruler asked him how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus was tempted by power when Satan offered to give him the entire world if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are, and yet not once, not even for a moment, did he sin. Peter testifies to this in verse 22. After years of following Jesus wherever he went, he could honestly say that “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.”

(2) **CHRIST’S SUFFERING**

As much as the words in verse 22 were Peter’s personal testimony about Jesus’ life, he wasn’t the one who came up with them. God was. They are God’s words. In verse 22, Peter is quoting Isaiah 53, a prophecy about Christ that was written hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth. This is what Isaiah 53:9 said:

“And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

This is what’s called a “Messianic prophecy”, a prophecy in the Old Testament about who the Messiah would be and what he would come to do. Over and over again, these prophecies predicted the final triumph of the Christ, telling us that the Christ would come and restore God’s Kingdom and God’s people. The same is true of this prophecy, but this one had a little twist. Isaiah 53 foretold that, in order to establish God’s Kingdom and restore his people, the Christ had to suffer and die. That is where Peter turns next as we reach our second point: Christ’s Suffering.

Shortly after Jesus celebrated the Passover with the apostles, he told them that he was about to be betrayed and killed. He assured them, however, that this was all part of God’s plan, and therefore, these things *must* happen. Jesus then has a private moment with Peter where he tells Peter that his faith is about to be sorely tested. In response, Peter boldly proclaims:

“Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” (Luke 22:33)

But Jesus knows that this isn’t true. He knows what’s about to happen, and he knows that Peter won’t be able to keep his word. Instead, in a few short hours, before the rooster crows to signal the beginning of the new day, Peter will deny that he knows Jesus three times.

That’s what happens in Luke 22. After Jesus is arrested and brought to the High Priest, Luke tells us that Peter followed at a distance. Peter ends up joining a group of people huddled around a fire in the high priest’s courtyard as an anonymous observer, and this is what follows:

“Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ And a little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. *And the Lord turned and looked at Peter*. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:56-62)

Peter may have run away when Jesus was arrested, but he was there when Jesus was being mocked. Peter was there when Jesus was being beaten. Peter was there when Jesus was crucified. And he did nothing about it. Instead, he sat there as an anonymous observer, denying that he even knew the man he said he would never abandon.

But here’s the amazing thing. As Peter saw Jesus suffering innocently at the hands of sinful men, he saw his Lord and Master *also* doing nothing about it. This man – who calmed the wind and the waves with a word, who made legions of demons tremble with fear, who had the power to raise the dead to life – this man, who had absolute power, did absolutely nothing to protect himself. Instead, he stood there silently as his accusers beat him, mocked him, and crucified him.

We can only imagine the tears Peter must have shed as he wrote verse 23. With pain in his heart as he recalled the insults hurled at Jesus and saw in his mind’s eye the fists and whips and nails tearing up his Master’s body, Peter remembered that “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten…”

This man, Jesus Christ, who never committed a single sin throughout the entirety of his life, faced the false accusations of the Jews in silence. He did not defend himself. He did not protect himself. He did not repay evil with evil with threats or force. Instead, he stood there as helpless and gentle as a lamb.

As Isaiah wrote in the same Messianic prophecy Peter quoted in verse 22:

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:7)

(3) **CHRIST’S REDEMPTION**

Why did this happen to Jesus, and why didn’t Jesus do anything about it? If Jesus was sent by God, why did God allow this injustice to occur? And if Jesus was truly innocent, why didn’t he speak up? This leads to our third and final point: Christ’s Redemption.

Before the cross, Peter never believed that Jesus would die. In fact, he thought that Jesus had come to put an end to death. After all, he was the Messiah, wasn’t he? He was the one who had come to make the world right again and usher in the golden age of God’s Kingdom. So when Jesus started telling his disciples that he must suffer and die, Matthew records that Peter did the following:

“And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, lord! This shall never happen to you.’” (Matthew 16:22).

What a thing for Peter to say! As Jesus’ disciple, Peter was fully devoted to following Jesus. He memorized the things Jesus said, and he imitated the things Jesus did. If Jesus told him to stand, he stood. If Jesus told him to sit, he sat. If Jesus told him that the sky was green, then it was so without question. So for Peter to tell Jesus what to do was not only completely inappropriate, but would reveals to us that Peter *really* didn’t believe that Jesus was going to die. If Jesus died, then all of Peter’s hopes for the coming of God’s Kingdom would die with him.

But now, on this side of the cross, Peter shows us that he finally understood why Jesus had to die. Jesus’ death didn’t put an end to God’s plans. It fulfilled them! How? By dealing with the thing that made everything wrong with our world in the first place: our sin.

Sin is what corrupted human nature. Sin is what introduced death into the world. Sin is what separates us from God. Humanity’s failure to uphold the moral standards of God’s law brought us darkness and death, where there should have only been joy and peace. But worst of all – worse than all the pain and suffering that our sin brings into our lives and into the lives of others – our sin brought us God’s justice.

God is Holy, and he will not let sin go unpunished. His justice demands retribution. All of us owe a sin debt to God, but none of us can pay it. Instead, with every passing moment, we find ourselves deeper and deeper into debt with God.

But God found a way for us to escape. He found a way to pay the penalty for our sin without inflicting that penalty on us. How? By placing it on his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

“He *himself* bore *our* sins in his body on the tree”, Peter wrote in verse 24. Not an angel. Not a family member. Not ourselves. He *himself*, the eternal Son of God, bore *our* sins in *his* body as he hung on that cursed cross.

This is why Jesus didn’t open his mouth. This is why he didn’t fight back. Jesus hung there on the cross and died out of a love for us that is so deep and so wide that he was willing to die in our place.

Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, which is why Peter could say that Jesus “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” There is nothing more *unjust* than the execution of an innocent man. If Jesus had gone to his death as an innocent man, then there is no way he could have said that God was just. God would have been manifestly *unjust* to let the only perfect man who ever lived die such a cruel death. But the reality is that Jesus wasn’t innocent as he hung there on the cross. He was guilty, because he bore the guilt of sinners like you and me.

Finally, Peter understood why Jesus had to die. He had to be wounded so that we could be healed. He had to die so that we could be brought to life. He had to be abandoned by his Heavenly Father so that we could be reconciled to God. The Lamb of God had to be slain so that we could turn to him as the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

**CONCLUSION**

This is what Good Friday is all about. It is an occasion marked by a profound combination of sorrow and joy. Sorrow because Jesus the spotless Lamb of God suffered and died at the hands of sinners. Joy because he did it for us, taking the penalty that we deserved so that we could live the life that he deserved.

This is good news, but it’s only half of it. We’ll celebrate the other half on Easter Sunday when we move from the cross to the empty tomb. But for now, let us linger at the cross a little longer and think briefly about three ways in which it changes our lives.

The first is that the cross calls everyone to put their trust in Christ and his work on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. There is no other way to become right with God. If you’re here today and you’re not a Christian, or perhaps you think you’re a Christian but don’t really know what that means, then speak to a friend, or to me, or to Pastor Mark, and we’d be happy to talk with you after the service.

Second, the cross calls us to live holy lives. We see that right in verse 24, where Peter writes that Christ went to the cross “that we might die to sin and *live to righteousness*.” Jesus didn’t just die so that we would be saved from the penalty of sin. He died so that we would be saved from the power of sin. No one who has truly put their faith in Christ can continue living comfortably with sin, because it was your sin that nailed the Saviour to the cross. To say you believe in Christ on the one hand and to continue living comfortably with sin on the other is to spit on Jesus’ sacrifice and prove that you don’t really trust him or value his sacrifice. Don’t let that be you. Let the cross give you a fresh reminder, both today and every day, to take sin seriously, and to believe that God has given you the ability to stop sinning through the cross.

Lastly, the cross prepares us to face suffering in our own lives. If Jesus our Master suffered for doing nothing wrong, how much more should we expect the same? This is indeed the entire context of our text. In the two verses earlier, this is what Peter wrote:

“…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.”

We live in a culture that is becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity and to the message of the cross. Persecution has come and will come in growing intensity in the coming years. But when it does come, we must not be surprised. We must not despair. Even when we suffer for doing good, we shouldn’t respond as if something unexpected were happening. If Jesus our Lord suffered for doing good, then we can expect the same. But the wonderful thing about the cross is that, if we believe it, if we cling to it, if we remind ourselves daily that He *himself* bore our sins in his body on the tree, then nothing can take away our joy.