

Consider Christ's Suffering

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to I Peter, Chapter 3. You have the portion. As an introduction to what we shall say (our Text is actually verse 18) as an introduction, may I give you the historical setting. I am sure that as Peter is writing, both in the 2nd Chapter, and I read briefly in vs 20 in the 2nd Chapter:

“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:...” (I Pet. 2:20-23).

So Peter's memory is particularly pathetic and precious, because he recalled how much he had added to the sufferings of our Lord, Jesus Christ. You recall that when our Lord said that He would be forsaken and betrayed that Peter declared, “Lord, if all forsake Thee, I will not. And our Lord looked at him and said, Peter, before the cock crows, you are going to deny Me three times” (Mat. 26:33-34). And so he recalls that he had added a great weight, a great load, a great burden to the heart of the Lord Jesus in His hour of agony. And Peter's life has not been without problem up until then. It is now the middle of this, so called by us, 1st Century. It is just before the time of Nero's persecution.

You recall that history tells us that Nero wanted to do some urban redevelopment, and instead of having a government clearing program, he decided that he would put it to the torch. And so he had it arranged for it to be burned and so, in order that his scheme for aggrandize metropolis, rather than what it then was, a few noble buildings surrounded by mud and wood houses might be realized. And so this as his means of clearing the slums in Rome. He fired it. But there was a great reaction, and so he had to find a scapegoat, and it was convenient for him to turn on the Christians. He did not have anything particularly against them, but you know, any port in a storm, and he had a storm around him, and he had to find someone to blame. And so he blamed the Christians. And just about this time, they were beginning to generate a little antipathy and antagonism, and to justify it, and rationalize it so that the people are going to support him in it. Rumors are being started, and words are getting around, and slogans are being formulated, and little maxims are being expressed. And Peter, discerning by the Spirit of God, both the face of the times, and the things to come, warns the people through this letter, and the second letter, that persecution is going to break out, that they are going to suffer unjustly. They are going to suffer for crimes they had never committed. They are going to be abused, and bruised, and hurt and killed. You know that when this thing started with Nero, he got carried away. He lighted the Appian way by soaking the clothes of bodies of Christians in tar and pitch, and then lacing them with ropes to poles and setting the poles in the ground on the roadside, and on a given evening, there was this torch way of burning Christians in order that they might be lighted to the scene of an orgy and a time of reveling. This was the means that he took to justify himself and continue his own moral insanity. The Colosseum, at one time in this persecution, was so filled with crosses that they were unable to raise another, nail them to the cross they could, lift them they could not. They could lay it down, but they could not lift them up. It was just so utterly crowded, so completely crowded that they were unable to get another cross erect. You know they were torn by elephants and by lions. They were put in sacks and torn by dogs. They were just treated cruelly — the reading of this time in Foxes Book of Martyrs, and other sources, causes your heart to melt within you, and Peter knew this. He saw it was coming. And so he wanted to prepare these believers for the things that were to take place. This is all part of the background of the 18th verse. And we find then that he has brought us to consider Christ's sufferings.

Now if we were to take this to Russia for the last 40 years, and find that 5 to 8 million of evangelical believers that have been killed because they were considered enemies of the state due to their loyalty to Christ and could bring them before us, I am sure they would have testimony to add. If we could find the 400 thousand in North Korea that have been assassinated because of their love for Christ they would certainly say that the 20th Century has problems as well. If we could find the other now numbering millions in China that have also been deprived of existence because they loved our Lord Jesus, then we would have

reason to realize that this world is no friend of grace, and no friend of those who are the objects of God's grace, and we recognize that it is not only wicked men that hate those that love Christ whose lives become a rebuke to them, but it is also that the god of this world has set all of his cunning to the end of throughout the ages seeking to exterminate the testimony of Christ, both by infiltration, by seduction, and by assassination. And thus there is no generation that escapes from the fact that the word given by Paul in the II letter to Timothy, the 3rd Chapter, the 12th verse, is a true word, "They that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

And so we find here that the text is, Consider Christ's Sufferings. Notice the first phrase in the verse: "For Christ also hath once suffered" (I Pet. 3:18). This is the fact, the historical fact that Christ... Now who is Christ? What does this word mean? Of course, you understand it is Messiah, Messhiach, the Anointed One. Well who is the One that is anointed? it is none other than the eternal God, by whom all things were made, by whom all things were held together, God, who became flesh, who clothed Himself with a human personality, and a human body, a nature like yours and mine, that He might invade time, and He might live under His own law and identify Himself with His people, the people whom He would redeem. And so we find that Jesus is none other than Jehovah Savior, God who became flesh. But He is also anointed of the Father. This anointing is before the foundation of the world. This anointing was also there at the riven Jordan, where He said, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. He hath anointed Me. The anointing to which He was called was an anointing of death to Himself.

Now let me explain what we mean. Our Lord Jesus had an intrinsic right to His own position, and place, as the eternal God. All things were made by Him. All were made by Him, and controlled and governed by Him, and He had perfect right to act in His own essential Deity as Creator and Sustainer. But for the purpose of redemption, He humbled Himself. And being found in fashion as a man, He accepted the limitations of His humanity. This was the first aspect of His condescension. Then, being found in fashion of a man, He accepted the responsibilities of His humanity. As a lad, He learned from His mother, though He was the teacher of the ages. As a boy, he sat in the synagogue, kicking his feet against the bench as did the others, though He was the One who had given the Scripture as the rabbis expounded. And as a young man, he went to the carpenter shop, and there patiently waited while Joseph told Him how to use a saw, and a plane, and an axe, and a chisel, and a hammer, and He is the One that made the Tree. We will never, never understand such condescension and such love. But this is not the suffering for which He came.

He was to be tempted at all points. And here was one aspect of it, to have these 40 days and nights in the desert, when He was under this continued pressure of Satan, tempted of the devil. Most of us are not. We are tempted of our appetites, and there are very few I suppose here that have ever had personal encounter with Satan and would be able to say, Tempted of the devil. But the prince of darkness came and assailed the Son of God who stood those 40 days and nights. This was suffering. But that suffering which crowned it all came to Him when in the Garden of Gethsemane, the infinitely holy Son of God had to reach out in love for me and love for you and draw us to Himself and in the eyes of the Father be made sin. Here suffering begins with the quality, and the degree, and the kind and a quantity that our fallible, finite minds cannot comprehend. Can you understand what it must mean? Here you look out on the street and see pathetic creatures of iniquity and darkness parading the evidence of their depravity, and your heart revolts against it, and you feel inward repulsion by it, and yet to realize that in the eyes of God the Lord Jesus Christ had to become that. He had to be made sin for us, He who knew no sin. And this is His suffering. And it was once, once that He suffered; from before the foundation of the world He had anticipated it. From that time on, He had lived in retrospect, reviewing it. But once has suffered. Someone has asked the question rhetorically, What would it be if there were other worlds inhabited by men likewise in the image of God such as we are? I still would have to say, that were that the case, (and I see no reason whatever to believe it is,) but were it the case then still the atonement that has been made would be the atonement here, for He has once suffered. And so should it be discovered that there are, we still have the text, Christ hath once suffered. But be it understood by us today, that the suffered, the Son of God, the infinitely holy God voluntarily suffered, that it was not just this inward suffering, but it was also at the hands of men; because He had identified Himself with us, then He had to suffer, having His body torn by the cat-o'-nine-tails, bruised by their fists, cursed by their lips, and then crucified by their cruel ingenious invention. Christ suffered. He suffered. Now let us never forget this. Let us never get away from it. Should I find that I am speaking to someone here that came in with a load of guilt, and you have come in with an awareness of your uncleanness, and your unworthiness, and you have slipped into the door, and you have said, I am unworthy to come because

of my past sins, then I have good news for you. Christ has suffered. If I find I speak to a Christian that is undergoing agony of heart and of spirit, then I have good news for you. Christ has suffered. He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, and He knows our weakness, and there nothing that will ever happen to us that has not been in some measure at least experienced by our wonderful Lord. And so our whole faith rests upon this fact, Christ has suffered.

But notice the character in which He suffered. Christ suffered once for sins. He suffered the Just One for the unjust. We will never understand the fact of His suffering from merely weighing the pressure exerted upon His flesh by the cat-o'-nine-tails. This gives you no measure. And if you could find out the pressure of the blow that fell upon His face, this does not give us any key to the suffering of Christ. It was the fact that He was just, infinitely just, and now He had taken our sin upon Him. The blameless One had taken the blame for the guilty. The upright One had taken the place of the devious and cruel. The kind One had taken the place of the unkind. And in the eyes of God had to be dealt with as though He were guilty, and crooked, and cruel, and brutal. He had to identify Himself in such a way, that in the eyes of the Father the Just One stood there as though He were unjust Himself. This is the meaning of the text. He was made to be sin for us. "He who knew no sin. That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21). He became what you were so that you could become that which He is. He had to therefore as the infinitely holy One identify Himself with you and with me, with our sin, and stand before the Father just as though He were you.

In that verse I read in I Peter 2:20-22. "What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." But He not only suffered as the innocent One in the place of the guilty, the Just for the unjust, but notice, when He was reviled, He reviled not again. He accepted the fact that in the place of these for whom He stood, He deserved all of the cruel reviling that could be heaped upon Him, and since I had no answer to bring, and He was there for me, He could bring no answer. Since you had no claim to present, and He was there for you, He stood silent in the face of the accusation. And He is thus given to us as the innocent, suffering for the guilty.

But I would recall to your attention that this text emphasizes something else, the persons for whom He suffered. He suffered, the Just for the unjust. Now, my friend, you have no claim to the suffering merit of His death, or no part in His suffering unless you have been willing to identify yourself as unjust. Now this is God's great problem. It is not to provide cleansing for the guilty. He has done that. But it is to get the guilty to see now greatly and gravely they need cleansing. It is not hard for God to bring "the Publican who beats his breast and cries, God, be merciful to me a sinner," back to his house justified (Luk. 18:13). The difficult thing is to get the Pharisee, living in his own eyes acceptably, to realize that he is a sinner. And so the only ones that have any part in the suffering of Christ are the unjust. Christ died for the ungodly. The only people that have any place or part in the death of Christ are the ungodly. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. The only ones that have any claim on the death of Christ are the weak, the ones without strength. While we were enemies, says the Scripture, He died for us. And the only one the before that has any part in His death are those that have been enemies. Now see it. The only ones that He can help are the unjust, the ungodly, those without strength, the enemies, and the sinners. And this is the reason why the world goes on without benefit from the death of Christ, because who among them is going to say, I am unjust. I am unclean. I am ungodly. I am without strength. Oh, don't you see that the only ones the Lord Jesus can help are the utterly bankrupt. And, consequently there will be no time in the Christian's career when he will have any other ground of standing before the Lord.

Some say, Well if the Lord will forgive my past sins, then I am sufficiently strong in and of myself to live an acceptable life. But how can such a person have any real part in the death of Christ; because if they were without strength before they were saved, then how are they going to suddenly acquire strength having been pardoned of the past. If they were ungodly in nature before they were forgiven of their ungodliness, how does forgiveness turn around and make them godly. If they were unclean before, how does being forgiven of uncleanness turn them around and give them the power to make them clean. And if all you were to secure from Christ were pardon for the past, it would leave you utterly helpless in the present, and hopeless in the future. But there is this glorious provision of His grace, that He not only gives us forgiveness and pardon. But He gives us Himself. He gives us Himself and then He becomes our strength, and He becomes our righteousness, and Christ becomes our life, and anyone

after forgiveness that thinks that he has more in him than the man in the world has failed to understand the grounds of forgiveness. Do you see? A Christian there is a person at that point of forgiveness disavowed all strength, all cleanness, all righteousness, all goodness, all wisdom, and all ability, and stood hopeless before God, and not only needed pardon. But he needed everything else. He needed everything else. And the idea that your past was forgiven, and then because the weight of the past was off, then all of a sudden we stood up, noble creatures that had unfortunately been bowed down by the past, is a complete disavowal of the teaching of the Word. This Word tells us that He died, the Just for the unjust, for the ungodly, for those without strength, for sinners, for enemies. And there never comes a time that there is in us, intrinsically in that which we brought to Him any improvement. This is what we are, and this is what we remain, and I assure you, dear heart, that if you think you have improved since the day you came to him that before evening comes you will be on your face in failure.

And thus we discover that the only grounds of our continuance is the Life of Christ. We were put by the Father into Christ that the Father could put Christ into us. And He then becomes our strength, just as He becomes our holiness and our righteousness. He becomes our wisdom, our sanctification. Christ is all, all in all. And this is why He suffered that He might bring us to God. He did not suffer that He could take the barrier away. This would be great. If He had just suffered to remove the barrier. But the removal of the barrier was not enough. Just the removal of past sins was not enough. Just forgiveness was not enough. Oh no, that was imperative, that was necessary, but it was not enough. And He suffered, therefore, that He might bring us to God. And the only way He could bring us to God was to come into us and live His life in us, and be to us everything we are not. And so if I find I am speaking to someone who says, Well I have refrained from becoming a Christian because I cannot hold out, well then I want you to know that you are the wisest of men among us. Because this Book clearly tells us that none of us can hold out, or hold up, or hold on, or hold under, or anything else. The only thing we can bring is need. And the only thing we will ever bring is need. And He has to furnish everything else. But if you are willing to come, bringing need, and bringing hopelessness, and bringing helplessness, and bringing bankruptcy, then Jesus Christ suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; not send us to God, or point us to God, but that He might pick us up and carry us to God. And He does this by becoming everything we are not. He is everything I am not. He is everything you are not. And this wonderful Lord gave complete and perfect testimony that He is absolutely able to bring us to God by rising from the dead.

And so, we have today One at the right hand of the Father in His resurrection body that testifies that He is able to accomplish what He set out to do. If He had just suffered for us, the Just for the unjust, and died, then we would have had the example of a noble martyr that tried to set a path. But you see God raised Him from the dead and has exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, so that what He set out to do He is perfectly able to accomplish, and that is, to bring us to God. He suffered to do that, and His suffering was not in vain.

But are you going to allow Him to bring you to God, or are you going to say, Well back here 20 years ago I was forgiven and from now on I'm going to make it by myself? Well, if you do I have news for you. You were not forgiven back there 20 years ago in my estimation, because it did not carry with it the revelation of the nature of your own helplessness. The only kind of people that He can forgive for the past are the ones that are aware of their inability for the future. And this is part of the work of conviction. It is not just to convict us of what we have done, but it is the revelation of what we are. It is the conviction that in us, "in our flesh there dwells no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). It is the conviction that in a lifetime of meritorious service won't add one iota to our acceptability. And that if we were forgiven of the past we are helpless for the future, because of intrinsically what we are. But Oh, isn't it wonderful? Isn't this good news? That Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal God by whom all things are made and sustained, "Christ has once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Pet. 3:18). The abundant proof that He is absolutely able to do what He set out to do.

There is only one thing in the world that can stand in the way. Oh, the persecutions of Nero may be a little uncomfortable but they cannot hinder His bringing you to God. That is why the Christians would line up in front of the government buildings and give themselves up, because they said, It is a glorious thing to die for Him because He will take me to God, take me right into the Presence of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And all that death meant was just a one-way ticket on the express train to Glory. They did not have to stop at all the local stops the others had to make. And they were quite ready to go that way. Happy to go that way. Because Heaven had become more real than earth and time offered nothing to them but the

continuation of what they had already experienced, and they did not have any particular desire just to repeat themselves over and over again. They wanted to get where they were going. And they were going to Heaven. And so they were quite willing to suffer. And so as Peter told them about this, that He suffered, the Just for the unjust that He might bring us to God. He took the fear of Nero's swords away, and the fear of His crosses away, and they could go down and pet the elephant that would walk on them, and could caress the lion that would eat them, because they knew that Christ had suffered once, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring them to God, and that the only thing that could happen would be that they got there a little sooner than they had planned on or they had been expecting. But nothing could interfere with that.

Oh, let me ask you have you asked the Lord Jesus Christ to come into your life Himself. Oh, so many think He sends salvation. Oh, let us get that out of our minds as of this morning, shall we? This good morning, this June morning, let us say, once and for all, forever, we are through with that. He did not die to give us salvation. He died to become our salvation, to become our salvation, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. And he that hath the Son hath life, for life is in the Son. Is He in you? Then, if He is in you, He is in you in all that He is. He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. That means to bring, that is, to go and get, pick up and carry where you are going. And I am so glad I preach a Savior that is able to do just exactly what He set out to do, bring us to God. Aren't you? Do you know Him? Do you love Him? Do you have the witness of the Spirit that He is in you? Do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is your Lord, your life, your Savior?

Hear the Text. Wonderful, wonderful text. For Christ also has suffered for sins once, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. You have seen the facts of His sufferings. You have seen the character in which He suffered, the persons for whom He has suffered. You have considered the intent of His suffering, and you have seen the seal and the certification that He is able to achieve and accomplish what He set out to achieve. And I trust we have spoken some good word concerning our wonderful Lord, that your eyes have been turned on Him, that you will see that He is everything that you are not, and right now while He stands outside the door of your heart, ask Him to come in in all that He is and be to you all that you are not.

Shall we bow together in prayer. Our Father, Thou knowest the hearts of these people, Thou knowest all that are here. There are some that do not know Thy Son, wonderful, wonderful Lord. Know about Him, lived where He has been preached, but they have never known Him. O God of grace, that they might open their heart and invite Him in, not just to save them from what they have done in the past, but to be to them everything that they need in the future. There are some Christians here, our Father, that have been trying to make it alone, trying to ask Thee to help them to be the things that they know they are not, instead of letting the Lord Jesus be to them what He is. Might it be that today that they will realize that He has suffered, He has died and risen from the dead that He might just do that, that He might bring us to Thee. O Father, might we just open our hearts to Him, invite Him to be in us all that He is, and all that He wants to be. He promised to bring us to Thee. He became the new and the living way. He said, I am the way. I am not pointing to it. I am it. If you receive Me, then I become your Way, Truth and Life. He is such a wonderful, wonderful Lord. We want this people to know it, to see Him, get their eyes off themselves and other and onto Him, fall in love with the Lord Jesus, and let Him be all that He wants to be. Grant to us then, Father, that there shall be in this precious moment some heart that just says, Come in, Lord Jesus, into my heart. Into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

With our heads bowed, this invitation. If there are any of you that would like to have us talk with you and to have us pray with you, do not hurry to leave. Make know your need. We will be glad to speak with you further about the things of our wonderful Lord.

We are so happy to have Dr. Albert Helser, General Director of the Sudan Interior Mission with us, and I am going to ask that as we stand that Dr. Helser lead us in prayer. Would you come to the platform please, Dr. Helser, and let us stand, please. Dr. Helser has served many, many years in Africa, and has been greatly used and blessed of God as a missionary in the North Country of Nigeria, and as the General Director of the Sudan Interior Mission. Dr. Helser.

Our Father, how near we are to Heaven when we stand here close to Jesus. We are thrilled with the thought that some took the express to Glory, did not need to stop at all the local stops. Lord, we want to be ready. We want to be just what we ought to be right now, that when it our time to go, we will have nothing else to do but to go. We are thrilled this morning as the Body of Thy people to be here in Thy presence, and to hear Thy Word opened to us in such a marvelous way by Thy servant. O God. There must be some here who need Thee. And we cry to Thee this morning that Thou wilt touch any soul who have not had the wondrous grace, which is so freely poured out, given to them and had their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. O God, save the soul before this audience leaves this building. And then, our Father, Thou knowest each one of us have our needs. And we have seen something this morning of His suffering. We are so afraid to suffer a little for the Lord Jesus. Forgive us. Make us willing to enter in that the Lost around the world may hear the Gospel, and may know that Jesus stands ready. To any that may come, He says, Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden. And oh, this world is in such need of Him. Raise up young men. Raise up young women. Thrust them forth, we pray, O God, that there may be such a witness go out across the earth as we have never seen, empowered by Thy Blessed Holy Spirit. Bless this pulpit. Bless this people. Rejoice our hearts together. And now, may Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest and abide with us and with all those whom we love now and forever. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, June 24, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

©PRBTMI 1962