

April 24, 2016

Sojourners To This You Were Called

1 Peter 3:8 – 12

I cannot get the words I ran across as I have been studying this passage out of my head: *'...one cannot step into the footsteps of Jesus and head off in any other direction than the direction He took, and His footsteps lead to the cross, through the grave and onward to glory.'*¹ In other words, you cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus unless you intend to walk in His steps, and those steps lead to the cross. In the middle of this section on submission and suffering, Peter reminds us of this: **21***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. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. 23 When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. 24 He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.*

The essence of this Christian life is that it is a cross-focused life. The very purpose Christ had in coming to earth was to go to the cross. This was His focus, His passion, His purpose and all of His energy was given to this. Satan tried to keep Him from the cross – tempting Him to make His own choices and do His own thing and offering Him all the kingdoms of the world as a bribe. He stirred up the crowd in His own home town to try and kill Him by throwing Him off a cliff. His own disciples couldn't see the sense in dying on the cross and Peter even rebuked Him at one point. But Jesus, the Scriptures tell us, *'... resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem.'* Jerusalem was where the cross was, and He steered a straight course for it. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 50:7 *'Therefore, I have set My face like flint, and I know I shall not be ashamed.'*

The cross is the heart of the gospel; it is why the gospel is good news. Christ stood in our place in the judgment dock of heaven's court; He took all our sins, which were and are and will be many, on Himself and went to the cross to die for us; in order to bring us to God. This is good news – this is astounding – He died when we should have. If you cannot be convinced of your guilt before God, you will never know the grace of God, because you will never appreciate the sacrifice Christ made for you. God loved you this much – that He sent His only Son to suffer the indignity, the brutality, the humility of the cross.

Yet the cross is not just the place where we were reconciled to God and given right standing before God. In the Christian's life, the cross must be a daily reality – because there is yet a life to be lived in the flesh that also requires, as Friar Hildebrand wrote, *'...the sweet ministrations of the cross'*.² We sing songs about the cross – *The Old Rugged Cross, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, Beneath the Cross of Jesus* – but mostly we apply that experience to conversion. **But the life reborn at the cross of Calvary, must live in its shadow.** Jesus told His disciples, *'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'* [Luke 9:23] You cannot follow Jesus unless you take up the cross. That is, you must let the cross of Christ continue to work in you – to live with the cross of Christ at the center of things in your life.

I believe Peter saw this better than all the other disciples because it was Peter who tried to persuade the Lord that the cross was not necessary, and it was Peter to whom the Lord spoke directly and said, 'No Peter, this is why I came, to die on the cross – and if you want to come after Me, you'll have to deny yourself and pick up your cross and follow Me.' It is a cross-focused life to which Christ calls us. And this was, I believe, very much in Peter's mind as he penned this letter. Because he knew, perhaps better than anyone, what this Christian life requires. You cannot live a submitted life unless you allow the cross of Christ to kill your willful independence. You cannot live as Christian citizens, slaves, husbands and wives, unless you allow the cross to deal with your selfishness and your pride. You'll never be able to bear the unjust treatment from others unless you realize that it is only by dying that you will truly be able to live.

1 Karen Jobes, Baker 1 Peter, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2005), 195.

2 Mary Anna Paull, Friar Hildebrand's Cross, or the Monk of Tavystoke abbaye, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1832), 254.

So Peter comes to the end of this section and he sums it up: *8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.* He gives us five characteristics of a cross-focused life that follows in Jesus' steps. Unity, sympathy, love, tenderness, and humility. First of all he says 'Have unity of mind'. Literally it means 'be like-minded'. It is a word that implies a harmony of thinking. It doesn't mean that we are all have the exact same thought at the exact same time. But it does mean that our thinking is not at cross purposes to one another. This word conjures up the idea of an orchestra. In an orchestra you have a lot of different instruments which play a lot of different parts. But each part is intended to work with every other part in harmony. You can imagine the chaos if all the instruments chose to do their own thing and play whatever they liked.

It means that we are to be united in heart and affections. To be united in heart and affections is not easy. It means that sometimes you must deny your way, your opinion, your preference, in favor of your brother's. It is choosing peace rather than war. It does not mean that everyone has exactly the same tastes, or gifts, or preferences, but it does mean that you are able to defer to your brother or sister in love. This is what Jesus prayed for in John 17: *that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.* This kind of like-mindedness is something for which Jesus prayed and the early church displayed. In Acts 4 we read: *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

This oneness of heart and soul flows from the truth of who we are as the church of God. Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 12: *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*³ Do we really understand that we belong to each other? Is that a new thought to you? You see, the analogy of our relationship to each other is a body. So for example, when you go to the store, how much of your body travels with you? When you move from one place to another, do your arms argue with your legs and say, 'We're not going with you'? If they do, you're in real trouble. I would say that for the most part, we don't really get this. Our Christian life tends to be lived in the realm of the individual and not in the realm of the body of Christ. But over and over again, the New Testament writers labor this point of like-mindedness.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth that had deep divisions among the members and says: *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.* Perfectly united in mind and judgments. How is this possible? How do independent, uniquely made individuals come to this kind of harmony, this kind of like-mindedness? How can this funny bunch of quirky individuals ever hope to be united this way? First of all, we must place ourselves under the headship of Christ, being submitted to the truth of His word. That is, the word of God is the command of God to us. These are not suggestions. This is not just helpful advice. This is not an option. Have unity of mind, Peter says.

Secondly, we must own the fact that as Christians we do not belong to ourselves. We were bought with a price, and we belong to Christ and to each other. We don't think of ourselves first. We put into practice the words of Scripture: *'So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.'*⁴ Have this mind. This is what it means to have a unity of mind, to be like-minded.

Then Peter says, 'Have **sympathy**' or 'Be sympathetic'. It indicates that we are affected by like feelings. That is, you feel what others feel so that you can respond with sensitivity to the need. It is not only feeling sympathetic, but doing something about it for them. If we have the same mind, then we will respond with sensitivity to each other. Without submission to the same head, there can be no sympathetic response to the needs of each other.

3 Romans 12:4-5, NIV

4 Philippians 2:1-5, ESV

To be sympathetic is not a weepy, touchy-feely kind of thing. Rather it is to bear one another's burdens, to get down under their load and help them carry it. It means we rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. We laugh with those whose hearts are merry; and we cry with those who are weeping. It means we have compassion for one another. We are compassionate when we see our brothers and sisters going through a hard time. We've been there and we know what it's like. We're compassionate when we see someone fall into sin and we come alongside with grace to help them recover.

Then Peter says we need to have **brotherly love**. The word is *philadelphos* – the adjective of *philadelphia*. It is the kind of love shared by those who are brothers and sisters of common descent. This is the kind of love a family has. It is blood tie love. It is the kind of love you share in your own individual families. This doesn't mean that we don't have differences. This doesn't mean we don't have contrary ideas or that we never fail to see eye to eye. Families can have some pretty serious squabbles; but in the end, you are still family.

Then Peter says we need to have a **tender heart**. Peter uses two words here to describe what he is talking about. The one means 'compassionate' and the other means 'kindly disposed towards'. The NASV covers them both with the word, 'kindhearted'. The sense of this is that you believe the best about your brother because he is your brother – you hope for the best in each other – you are bent toward him in kindness first. The literal translation here would be that you 'feel generous in your belly' towards him.

Finally he says we need to be **humble in spirit**. Of all the Christian virtues, humility is the most abhorrent to our natural minds. In fact this word was never used in classical Greek – apparently the Greeks never found it necessary to mention this kind of humility. This word, outside of Biblical writings, was used to describe something something weak, poor, groveling or submissive. In other words, you wouldn't want this word describing you. But in the Bible it always describes a humility that comes from a heart of love for the Lord Jesus, and defines a mindset that Christians must have. *'...serving the Lord with all humility of mind...'* Acts 20:19. *'...walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you were called, with all humility...'* Ephesians 4:1-2. *'...and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...'* 1 Peter 5:5. Humility is an authentic and genuine attitude of **'You first'**.

Peter goes on in verse 9: *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.* To give as good as we got is natural and human – and fallen. It is the way of the old sin nature within us to not take it anymore, or even once. Retaliation is our normal response. Someone badmouths us – we give it right back – someone insults our character – we insult them right back. But Peter says something contrary to our fallen human nature – he says we have been called to return a blessing for evil done to us – to speak well of those who insult us. Peter is saying here, 'Bless those who insult you, because you were called to live this way; fulfill that calling so that you may inherit a blessing.'

We can live one of three ways: Returning evil for good – **living like the devil**. Returning good for good and evil for evil – **living like the world**. Returning good for evil – **living like Christ** – a cross-focused life. This rephrases 2:21 -23 which began, *for to this you were called*. To what were we called? To live like Christ did – while being reviled – not reviling in return – while suffering – not uttering threats – but entrusting Himself to God and even while on the cross, blessing those who persecuted Him to death – *'Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing.'* Remember the story of Ruby a couple of weeks ago? Here's an eight year old child, stopping in her tracks as she runs the gauntlet of jeering, swearing, abusive adults, and she stops and prays for them. She blesses them as they revile her.

10 For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days. Literally we are exhorted to 'will to love life' – to enjoy a full and satisfying life, or 'good days.' This quotation is taken from Psalm 34, and unless we read the entire Psalm, we might get the idea that good days here means nothing bad will ever happen. And that is not the case as you read this Psalm. The righteous are afflicted, the righteous have troubles; the righteous get broken hearts; evil, wicked men oppress and torment the righteous; BUT the Lord delivers them out of them all. The good life doesn't mean life without trouble – the good life means life with God.

So if you're looking for the good life, listen to what Peter says: *let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.* This requires the application of the cross. The cross deals with our tendency to indulge in evil speech – or wicked, harmful talking. It deals with our proclivity towards guile, and deceit with one another. A lie, no matter how small or well-intentioned, is still a lie that offends the holiness of God. The cross will cause us to be dead to sin and alive to righteousness – to turn away from evil and do good. To turn away from evil here mean to 'go out of our way to avoid it.' We need to cross the street when we see it coming. Living in the shadow of the cross will cause our hearts to desire and search out peace – to make it our aim and goal in our relationships.

The main thing most of us have trouble with is our tongues - *let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.* And James says *'So also the tongue is a small part of the body and yet it boasts of great things. Behold how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire. And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our lives and is set on fire by hell. For every species of bird and beasts, of reptiles and creature of the sea is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse men who have been made in the likeness of God.'* James 3:5-9

One of the first things a Christian needs to nail to the cross is his tongue. The Bible tells us that every careless word will one day be brought to account before God. Perhaps you have been having hard times, things do not seem to be going well with you, and you have not had good days – perhaps it is time to consider your tongue. Perhaps it is time you take the words of Ephesians 4:29 to heart: *'Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.'* We ought to be speaking grace to one another. Consider Jesus, who in the extremity of suffering was nevertheless, gracious in everything He said.

We also need to actively turn away from evil and do good. Galatians 5:24 says *'Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'* For Christians, the cross of Christ has broken the bondage to the passions and desires of the flesh so that they no longer live under their control. And so those who belong to Christ are able to deny those ungodly urges and desires and do good. Perhaps you are experiencing hard times and bad days because you are not turning away from evil – you are not taking your ungodly passions and desires to the cross.

The other thing that needs the sweet ministrations of the cross is our tendency to seek our own satisfaction and not seek peace, much less pursue it. To pursue peace means that you hunt it down with the intensity of a hunter tracking his quarry. Paul tells us in Romans 14:19 to *'...pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.'* This really is a mindset and is an admonition to live in the shadow of the cross in our thought life. Consider Philippians 4:8-9: *'Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, what ever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute; if there is any excellence, and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.'*

Finally Peter says, *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."* When the Bible says, 'The eyes of the Lord are upon you' it means that His face is turned toward you and not away from you – that's a good thing. When His eyes are on us it means that He is showing us favor. And not only are His eyes on those who practice these things – His ears will hear our prayers. But *'If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.'* Psalm 66:18 tells us. If we are not living in the shadow of the cross with respect to thought and word and deed, the Lord will not only not hear our prayers, but His face is against us. That means, in Biblical custom, that He actually turns away from us and leaves us to suffer the consequences of our actions. Have you ever felt God was against you? Perhaps He is.

Christ died to save us from hell, but not to save us from the cross. He died that we might live crucified lives. *'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'* [Luke 9:23] **For those who have been redeemed, the cross is not merely in the past – it is a present reality of daily execution.**

'Our old man was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin...so consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to righteousness.' [Romans 6:6,11] We should not consider ourselves too much – but the considering we do ought to be considering ourselves dead to sin. *'I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...'* [Galatians 2:20] What this says is that we must never let the cross lose its crucifying power in our lives. Don't relegate the cross just to the substitutionary death of Christ, but let it work in your life day by day – killing sin. You see, the cross is where criminals go to die. And make no mistake, the old man with its lusts and passions is nothing less than a criminal. He is proud, stubborn and rebellious; he hates God and there is nothing good in him. The cross is the only place for him. It is not as though this is in the small print – this is all over the Bible.

The cross is a place of execution: the execution of pride, the execution of envy, the execution of unreasoning anger and bitterness and malice, the execution of evil speaking, the execution of self-reliance and the love of money, the execution of a me-first attitude. The cross was meant to deal with it all. And just as Jesus set His face like flint toward the cross – those who follow in His steps must do the same. Because it is only when we daily deny ourselves the fleeting, wasted pleasure of returning evil for evil, of stirring up dissension instead of peace – because we want our way or we're exercising our rights, denying ourselves the satisfaction of promoting ourselves before others, of keeping our mouths shut when we so desperately want to say something – it is only then that we truly live. After telling us to take up our cross, Jesus went on to say, *'For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.'* [Matthew 16:25] When Jesus set His face to go to Calvary, He was not only taking our place – He was setting the pattern. What we must come to grips with is that His journey to the cross is our journey – if He set His face to go there, we must set our face to die with Him – because it is only in dying that we can truly live. Because to this you were called.

Our gracious heavenly Father,

In the precious name of Jesus, we ask that You would seal this word in our hearts. Grant that we would be whole-hearted in our passion to follow in the steps of Jesus. I pray that we would live sincere, cross-focused lives with joy and thanksgiving resounding to the praise of the glory of Your name. Help us deny ourselves and die to the sin that so easily besets us. May we live harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, humble and God-honoring lives in the shadow of the cross of Christ, we pray, Amen.