

Imagine this scenario: you've got a best friend and neighbour that you've known for years, maybe since being **kids** together. You went to school together and stuck up for each other. You played together at weekends and you were always round each other's houses. You helped each other out, gave each other advice and you used to go out and have meals together.

But then one morning you're woken by banging on the door next door. It's the police. They bring your friend out in **hand-cuffs**, they've **arrested** him. Later that day it's announced that he's been charged with a serious crime. You find out that he's been living a secret life for **years** – something you've never been aware of.

How does this news affect you? It shocks you, it shatters you, you're speechless for days. How could it be **true**? You knew **nothing**. You wrack your brain to see if there was any sign, any sign at all, that he could be a criminal. You search **yourself** – was there anything you could have done to **help** him. You play over in your mind the times you **spoke** together, the **meals** you had together, over and over again.

Peter was one of the closest friends of Jesus in the 3 years that he was going round speaking of the kingdom of God and performing miracles. He knew Jesus comparatively **well** - when Jesus asked him who he was, **Peter** was the one who said, '*You are the Christ.*'. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter followed, wondering what to do, not believing what he was seeing – the one who claimed to be the Son of **God** arrested. No doubt he was searching through his memories of all that he'd seen Jesus do, all that he'd heard Jesus **say**.

The impact of that night, the events that followed, Jesus going to the cross, would have been **devastating** to him. It didn't make **sense**. He **thought** he knew Jesus so well, and yet here he was dying on a cross. These were things that would stay with him for the rest of his life. I've no doubt that the memory of the last **meal** they shared together would be fresh in his mind. "What did Jesus **mean** when he said, '*Take and eat, this is my body.*'?"

As events unfolded over the next 3 days, all became clear, as Jesus died and was raised from the dead on the third day.

The Cross, and the Last Supper took on a new significance, and as we come to take communion this morning, I just want us to see what Peter says about the cross, how it should affect our lives, and this morning I want these things to affect the way we take the Bread and the Wine.

Lets' read from Peter's first letter, chapter 2:21-25.

Peter was a follower of Jesus, a disciple, an eye-**witness** of all Jesus did and said. After Jesus rose again, he became an apostle, a servant, a leader and a pastor of those who'd become followers of Jesus in those early years. In his first letter he's writing as a pastor, encouraging believers – and as we read this now, this letter in the Word of God preserved for 2000 years, that includes **us** who believe. Believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, then and now were and are under **attack** for their faith, so Peter writes a letter of **encouragement**.

So he writes about suffering as a believer; he also writes about living the new life as children of God. But he writes about them through eyes focused on the cross of Jesus. **Throughout** this letter Peter keeps bringing us back to **the cross** of Christ, because he sees this as **the most significant event in history**. Jesus has had a greater effect on the lives of men, women and children down through history, than any other person who's walked this earth. And Peter says the cross is the most significant event in the history of the world. Jesus' sacrifice lies at the **heart** of everything Peter has to say. It should affect **every** part of our lives. Verse 24 says, *'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,'* Why? *'so that we might **die** to sins and **live** for righteousness:'*

The cross is at the centre of the Christian's calling - Jesus died **so that we might live for righteousness**. What does that mean? Well, basically, it means that because he died, he's given us a way of living lives which are righteous, good in the eyes of **God**, lives that are **pleasing** to God. Living for righteousness. Doing the things which please God, our **Maker**, our **Lord**. This is a great theme in this letter - that we are released from sins – we died to sins – to live a life which is **holy**, we're set **apart** from the world to be **God's** people.

Verse 9 of chapter 2 puts it like this; *'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to **God**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful **light**.'* **You**. If you believe that Jesus Christ died for **your** sins, this is **you**. Living a life for righteousness, for God, to please God. Because Jesus bore your sins, my sins, in his body on the tree.

And because believers in Jesus are living lives dead to sins and alive for righteousness, this of course has a tremendous impact on the way we live – we want to live in a way that pleases God, because Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We're born **again**, a new creation, the old me has **gone**, the new has come. And if God has made us new, then we should be **showing** that in our lives, the **way** we live, our very **character**, because if God has made us his adopted children, we'll bear the **marks** of his Fatherhood – we'll be **like** him. We do what Jesus **says** his followers will do, '*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*' and '*Love your neighbour as yourself.*' Mark 12:30.

And now we **can** do this, because Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree. We have to ask ourselves, how do we measure up? And we have to **keep** asking ourselves this question. We can't live for righteousness today, but we indulge ourselves in a little sinning **tomorrow**. No. If we died to sins, we no longer **want** to live that way. We live for righteousness. Jesus died, was buried, rose again for our sins. We're either **with** him, living to follow and please him, or we're still dead in our **sins**. How is it with you? Now? Today? We're coming round the Lord's **table** in a few moments. How is it with you?

Let's look closer at what we read earlier. The short section we read earlier from verse 21, starts off with '*To this you were called,*' referring back to what he's written about in verses 18-20, and it goes on, '*because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*' Jesus' suffering on the cross is to be **an example**, that we should follow in his steps.

In verses 18-20, Peter's been encouraging **slaves** to start with, but he broadens this out to include **all** believers when he uses '**us**' and '**our**'. He's encouraging believers to endure suffering patiently, and Jesus is the ultimate example of that, isn't he? He's not talking about punishment for doing **wrong** – everyone who's done wrong should suffer that – but here Peter's talking about suffering for doing **right**, for doing **good**, for doing things **God's** way. Verse 20, '*But if you suffer for doing good and you **endure** it, this is commendable before God.*' The ESV says it's a '*gracious thing in the sight of God.*' Patient endurance of suffering for doing right in God's eyes, that's living for righteousness, that's pleasing to God.

Of course, the great example of this is Jesus himself. Remember he said in the Garden of Gethsemane, '*My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.*'

He **knew** he had to die, but he was willing to suffer to please God his Father.

Let's read verse 22 again: ‘*“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats.*’ As Jesus is tried for a crime he didn't commit he **accepts**, as he's insulted he remains **silent**, as he's beaten, as he's crucified he doesn't complain, he doesn't retaliate, he submits and endures.

The verses here remind us of Isaiah 53:7, where Isaiah is talking about the coming Saviour who would be a suffering **servant**: ‘*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so **he** did not open his mouth.*’

This is the example we're to **follow**, if we're living for righteousness, the life that Jesus made possible for everyone who believes that he is the only way of salvation. If and when suffering **comes**, Peter's readers then and us now are to endure it patiently. Peter's writing to people who've been accused of doing wrong (2:12), they've received evil and been insulted (3:9), they've been slandered (3:16) and abused (4:4). Christians **today** suffer in these ways as well – and we may see **more** of these things in the future. But Peter says we must **endure** unjust suffering – why? – because we follow in Jesus' steps and follow his example – why? – because he bore our sins in his body on the tree – why? – so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. **That's** why.

But you say, ‘I can't. I'm not like Jesus – he's the Son of **God**. I'm not strong enough. I can't just endure suffering like **Jesus**.’

What does Peter say? He says we should **still** follow Jesus' example. Second half of verse 23; ‘*he entrusted himself to him who judges **justly**.*’ Jesus submitted to the will of God, he entrusted himself to God, God the One who judges justly. He knew he could **endure** this unjust suffering because he submitted himself to God's will and he could **trust** God to treat him with justice.

We **too** can know these things. Because Jesus died for our sins and gave us the right to become children of God, we can submit to his will and **trust** him because we know that he will treat us **justly** – our sins are paid for by Jesus, we won't face judgement like those who **haven't** had their sins paid for - God says, ‘*It is mine to avenge; I will repay.*’ Romans 12:19. 4

We **can** endure suffering, because this is part of the new life that Christ has **given** us – living for righteousness, to do the will of God, to live to please him. Paul reminds us, *‘I can do **everything** through him who gives me strength.’* Philippians 4:13

Do **you** know anything of this life? The cross is so important for **every** aspect of our lives, if we are **his**. We **live**, because he **died**. The way we can now live – even involving suffering injustices – is **only** through the death and rising again of Jesus. It’s so important. Have you seen the **importance** of the cross?

Peter talks **here** about the call to live for righteousness, he speaks about one aspect of that life – following Jesus’ example of patient endurance in the face of suffering. **Both** are totally dependant upon Jesus’ work of salvation on the cross. The cross is **central** to the life of **any** who would be saved to a relationship with God. Isaiah **foresaw** it, Peter **witnessed** it, we’re **saved** by it. Like a wheel, the tyre is joined to the central hub by the spokes: **everything** to do with the Christian life radiates from the central hub, the cross.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, ‘The hour that produced the cross is the central, pivotal point, of history and God always knew about it, the Lord **came** for that hour.’ Have you seen the **importance**, the **significance** of the cross? Your whole life in **eternity** depends upon it. If you truly understand the meaning of the cross, you’ll thank God for it for **eternity**.

Let’s move on to remind ourselves of what Jesus was doing there on the cross. Peter **has** to keep speaking about the death of Jesus; he says to the authorities in Jerusalem in Acts 4, ‘... *we cannot **help** speaking about what we have seen and heard.*’ This was the most important thing for people to know about – Jesus died, was buried, but rose again – he can’t **stop** speaking about it. He speaks about what Jesus has done **here** – **why he died**. What do we learn? What should **motivate** us to live a life for righteousness?

Let’s look again at verses 24 and 25, because **these** are the things that Peter just can’t stop talking about, wherever he goes. [Re-read]

Firstly, **he died to bear our sins**. The Bible tells us that whoever sins – and that’s **all** of us – must pay a **price** for those sins: Ezekiel says, *‘The soul that sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son.’* Ezekiel 18:20. This is an **individual** thing, between you and God. We **each** must pay the price of our sin. 5

Only **Jesus**, the suffering servant, could bear the burden of our sins and remove the punishment which they deserve; why? because **he** was totally **sinless**, flawless – chapter 1 verse 19 calls him *‘the lamb without blemish or defect’*. Jesus had no sins of his own, so **he** could bear the sins of everyone who turns to him in repentance. The use of the word **tree** in verse 24 instead of cross, you’ll remember, reminds us of Deuteronomy 21:23, where we read *‘anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s **curse**.’* Jesus bore God’s **curse**, so we don’t **have** to. Jesus bore God’s **wrath**, so we don’t **have** to. Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree, so we – if we turn to him, repent of our sins and believe in his saving work – so **we** don’t have to. I think that’s an excellent deal, and well worth keeping talking about, don’t you?

Secondly, **he died to make our lives new** – as we’ve said earlier, because he died for our sins, we can be **changed** to turn **away** from sin and to a life of righteousness. David speaks about living a life which is right before God in Psalm 92:12-15: he writes, *‘The righteous will **flourish** like a palm tree, ... Planted in the house of the Lord, they will **flourish** in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, “The Lord is upright; he is my **Rock**, and there is no wickedness in him.’* New life in God is well worth keeping talking about, isn’t it?

Jesus died to heal our wounds. Here in the death of Jesus, the healing that is being talked about is the forgiveness of our sins, our being made **right** before God. All the evil and wickedness that’s evident caused by our sins can be **healed**, and one day there’ll be no more pain, no more suffering, no more illness, because the effects of sin will be no more. **That’s** worth keeping talking about as well, don’t you agree?

And then we look at verse 25, and see that **Jesus died to restore our relationship with our God**. This verse too, using the image of the straying sheep, is reminiscent of Isaiah 53:6, where we read, *‘We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on **him** the iniquity of us all.’* Sheep, apparently, are good at straying, wandering off, not recognising the dangers, thinking that they don’t **need** the protection of the shepherd. But the shepherd goes **looking** for the lost sheep, to bring them back to the flock, to restore **security** and **direction** to their lives. Likewise with **us**. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and by bearing our sins on the cross, we’re **restored** to the right way for our lives, under the loving watch of the Great Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Such great news! Can **you** stop talking about it? **Peter** couldn’t.

All these things we've mentioned are **vital** as we come to remember what Jesus did on the cross in a few moments time. **How do you view the cross?** How do we view the cross? I hope we've seen this morning that it's **vital** to understand the cross and what was **happening** there. We have to get the **meaning** of the cross. It's vital to have a right **response** to the cross. It's **vital** so that we can remember it in the right way as we take the bread and the wine. In what way does the cross **influence** us as we come to this table?

We've got to remember that we're eating in the presence of Jesus, in the presence of God. There's nothing **special** about this bread and wine of themselves, they're just **symbols** of Jesus' body and blood. But we're remembering Jesus' sacrifice in **his presence**. That's what we're **doing**. But Paul says there's a right way, and a **wrong** way, and this springs from our understanding and **application** of what the Lord was doing on the cross. He was bearing our sins on the cross.

We shouldn't come to communion in the same way as any other meeting. We have to **prepare** ourselves. Let's look quickly at 1 Corinthians 11:28-29. Remember we're thinking about living for righteousness. Paul's talking about the Lord's supper, communion and says, *'A man ought to **examine** himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the blood. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord, eats and drinks **judgement** on himself.'* We need to **examine** ourselves before we take the bread and the wine. This is **really** important.

Peter has said in his letter that Jesus bore our sins on the cross, so we might die to sins and live for righteousness. 'Dying to sins' means we lose the desire to keep on sinning. We don't **want** to carry on sinning any more – although we may fall to temptation at times – our heartfelt desire is to **die** to sin, to **stop** sinning. So if we live for righteousness, to please God, we **hate** sin, as **God** hates sin. We recognise that because Jesus **died**, this should be a **consequence**. We don't keep sinning.

What Paul is talking about is that if we **persist** in sin, if we go away and continue to sin without seeing that it's **abhorrent** to God, and think it's **OK**, we haven't recognised the body of Christ; we haven't **recognised** that Jesus died for our sins, because we continue to **practice** that sin. It's as if that sin isn't **covered** by Jesus' sacrifice. We've not seen the **significance** of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Jesus **dealt** with our sin on the cross, but if we're still holding on to particular sin, his forgiveness is not **applied**. If we're still in unforgiven sin, this meal has no meaning. We're not eating with Jesus, we're eating **without** him.

And this is what Paul **means** when he says, '*anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgement on himself.*' Because either **Jesus** deals with our sins on the cross, or they will have to be paid for by **us** before God the Judge of all things.

I'm not saying these things in judgement, it's not for me to judge. I say these things in **love**, I want everyone to understand the **true** and full significance of the cross, and the full **significance** of what we're doing as we take the bread and the wine this morning. As we take communion, we must be doing just **that**, knowing **oneness – communion** – with God. How can we? Because Jesus '*himself bore our sins on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.*'

So I want us to have a time of quiet before we come to take the bread and the wine. Let's do what Paul said we **should – examine** ourselves, and see whether we **are** recognising the body of Christ. Jesus died for us – that's **great** – but to understand fully what he's done, we should die to sin and live to please God. Is that what's happened to **you**? Do **you** understand what the cross stands for and its consequences in **your** life? Or is there some sin that you won't give **up**, you don't **want** to give up, at this moment in time you've no **intention** of giving up? Do you need to ask God's forgiveness now?

Before you take the bread and the wine, I urge you to examine yourself, judge **yourself** before **God** has to. The cross is at the centre of the Christian's life, it's at the centre of communion – do you have a right **understanding** of it? Have you died to sin? Are you living for righteousness? Let's come before our gracious God now, and be **honest** with him, he wants you to **know** him.