

Shepherd - Example? Savior? 1 Peter 2:21-25

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

So, what would you prefer to have Jesus be, your example or your Savior? Natural man has an inclination of what he'd like, and Savior isn't it. First, people do not like the idea of Jesus suffering, bleeding, and dying on a cross. To some it is just disgusting. Others do not like the idea that it truthfully means that I am helpless to do anything toward my eternal well-being.

After almost 23 years in the ministry, I am still informed upon occasion that I needed to change my business cards. Along with pertinent contact information - name, address, phone number, and such, I have printed on them, "we preach Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God."

It is interesting the number of times the basic reasoning has been given as to why I need to change my cards. "Pastor, I hate to tell you this, but you need to redo your business cards, these are simply wrong." I know now what is often coming, so now I look at the card, searching it, and innocently ask, "I must be missing something, what's wrong with them?"

"Oh, Pastor," they invariably say like, "How can you miss it? We don't preach Christ crucified, we preach Christ resurrected."

In Connecticut, a couple individuals who had noticed this "problem" with the cards, also then came to me and said that they were tired of hearing about the forgiveness of sins every single week. They informed me that they wanted to hear some *real* sermons. They wanted sermons that would teach them how to live a better Christian life, "give us Jesus our teacher and our example." The forgiveness of sins, purchased by Christ's crucifixion was a scandal, it was a turn-off. What they wanted, was to find out how they could do it their own way.

This is a common request made of those who preach as Jesus commanded. Just before His ascension He said, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." It is amazing how many want their pastor to preach more Jesus examples so that they can live a better Christian life. I am sure that there are others, maybe some here, who also want more Jesus as teacher and example. After all, it is in our human nature, in our fierce independence, that we all want know, "What can 'I' do." It is for this reason that many want to be instructed on how to live a more "Christ-like" life. And indeed we ought to be more Christ-like!

To all of you who want instructions from Jesus, here are your marching orders, I read to you again a portion of today's text. *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. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 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.*

There is Jesus your example, follow in His steps - commit no sin and let no deceit ever be in your mouth. When people revile you, that is, when they use profanity at you, make fun of you, bad-mouth you, you must not do the same in return. You will not grumble about them under your breath, and you certainly will not speak of them to others in any negative way. When suffering, trials and temptations come your way, you are to trust solely in God - trusting completely that all will be fine.

Do we even need to discuss the never sinning part? You know the 10 Commandments. Do you have them all sown up neat and tight? As far as deceit, there aren't any here who have ever lied, or stretched the truth, especially all us fishermen?

Let us take a moment and consider whether we trust everything into God's hands, as did our example, Jesus. So, how does that go. When trials and tribulations come your way, does human nature take over – your sinful human nature that is. Does your sinful nature take over? We love nothing better than to compare our woes and problems to others, and in doing so, one-upmanship is taken to a whole new level. “You want to talk about pain,” one guy quips, “You haven't felt anything till you've had to pass kidney stones.” Then the next guy chimes in, “Kidney stones, shmidney stones, I've got a pain in my lambago that makes kidney stone feel like a stubbed toe.”

Along with that, in all our trials, temptations, and tribulations, we wonder where is God? How come He hasn't come to my aid? Why has He failed to do for me, what I want Him to do?

Do you want Jesus, your example? Then look no further than the cross to see what Jesus endured in regards to trials and the suffering of pain. Jesus was reviled! He was spat upon, beaten, mocked, crowned with thorns, nailed to a cross. What did He say about those who treated Him that way? “Father, forgive them!”

Do you want Jesus, your example? Then reflect upon His words from the cross, “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” That is your example.

At the example of Jesus, I cannot speak for you, but I can speak for myself, I can only hang my own head in shame. I know the commandments yet fail to keep them, I grumble about others under my breath (and sometimes so loudly even others hear me), and then I must consider my own lack of faith in the face of trial and the temptation to doubt God. I pray you are better at all this than I am.

If Jesus were only our example, I'd be seriously concerned about my eternal well-being, for I am a failure, chief of sinners. Whenever I ponder Jesus as my example, it becomes all too easy to see my glaring deficiencies, my overwhelming sins.

Satan himself would like us to use Jesus as nothing more than an example. He loves to proclaim to us, “If you are trying to be Christ-like, you are a failure. Why don't you just give up, you cannot live up to the example He sets. If doing as Jesus does is what it means to be a Christian, you haven't got a prayer of getting into heaven. But go ahead, keep on trying! Do not look to Jesus as anything more than an example, do as He did so you can gain heaven. Please count your

own works. And as you continue to fail, as I know you will, it is all OK, I have a nice warm place all prepared for you.”

Dearly beloved of the God, what is it about your Good Shepherd that is most precious? Is it the example He sets, the example which you and I cannot ever live up to? And yes, He is our example, we are to amend our sinful lives. But is He only our example, is that what is most precious about our Shepherd?

No dear friends, what is most precious about our Christ is that our Shepherd is our Savior. He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. It is by His wounds that you (and I) have been healed.

That dear friends is what your Shepherd is all about. He is your Savior who endured the pain of the cross, suffering its shame, to bear your sin, and grant to you forgiveness and salvation. He has put to death your sinfulness, in His own body, and gives to you new life in the waters of baptism each and every day of your repentant life. When you eat and drink, celebrating His death, by His wounds you are fed the healing balm of forgiveness.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for you, His precious sheep, on the cross. Then He takes His life up again three days later.

And now dear friends, He delivers His life to you. His sheep listen to His voice, they hear Him speak words of forgiveness – they hear His voice make simple bread and wine the medicine of immortality. It is in hearing, eating, and drinking, that you are following in His steps, entrusting yourselves into the merciful heart of your Savior God.

Dearly beloved of God, you have a Good Shepherd who has sought you out and found you! He has brought you back! He has bound up the wounds brought on by the daily struggles in this mortal life! He strengthens your faith!

Thanks be to our God who, from His merciful heart, has made us one flock, and has blessed us with One Shepherd, our *Savior* - Jesus Christ. Amen.