

May 18, 2008 by Steve Brandon



Why Christ Suffered and Died

1 Peter 3:18

1. For An Example.
2. For All Time.
3. For Sins.
4. For Sinners.
5. For Reconciliation.
6. For Victory.

My exposition this morning will cover one verse: 1 Peter 3:18. There are two reasons why I merely want to tackle this one verse this morning. First of all, 1 Peter 3:18 is incredibly rich, and worthy of a single message. I want to take our time in unpacking the incredible truths contained therein. Second, verses 19-22 are incredibly complex and difficult. With all of the time that I want to spend on verse 18, I fear that we won't give them the justice that they deserve.

Now, 1 Peter 3:18 is all about the cross of Christ. Look at what Peter wrote, ...

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Corporations are often known by their symbols. Nike has its swoosh strip. NBC has its peacock. My children can spot the golden arches of McDonalds from miles away. Goodyear is known by its blimp. Arby's has its cowboy hat.

There is power in a uniting symbol. But, American free-enterprise isn't the only portion of society that has figured this out. Gangs have their symbols, which they spray paint on walls. Clubs have their symbols. Secular ideologies have embraced symbols as well. Marxism identifies with the hammer and sickle. The Nazis in Germany embraced the swastika.

Cities have their symbols. The Eiffel tower is the symbol of Paris. The space needle is the symbol of Seattle. The Sydney Opera house is the symbol of Sydney, Australia. You see these structures and you instantly think of the city. Even Rockford has its own symbol. [\[1\]](#)

Every world religion has its own symbols. Judaism has its Star of David (2 equilateral triangles). Islam is symbolized by the crescent moon. Buddhism has the Yin Yang symbol. Christianity is no exception. It has a symbol. Its symbol is the cross -- a vertical line intersected by a short horizontal line. It is seen on the top of steeples on churches. A cross is often displayed in the center of the sanctuary of many churches. It's on the front of many Bibles. Crosses are all over the place. And rightly so.

Other symbols could have been used to represent Christianity. A manger could have been used to depict the incarnation. An empty tomb could have been used to depict the resurrection. But, it is no accident that the cross is the one symbol that stands out as the symbol for Christianity. Of all of the symbols that could be used to define our faith, none is better than the cross. The cross is the center of our faith.

This morning, we gather because of the cross. We look back upon that event that took place 2,000 years ago and realize, that the cross stands as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. It will never be repeated. At this cross is where we experience the forgiveness of our sins and where we see the perfect life of Christ as the substitute for our sinful lives, redeeming us, turning away the wrath of God from us, justifying us in His sight, and reconciling us to God. The cross is where we are given access to God and where we are given eternal life. The cross is our hope. It's no wonder that Paul would say, "May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

As we look to the way that we live, the cross is central. First, it reminds us of mercy. We have been forgiven of much sin. So also should we be merciful to others. Also, the life of self-sacrifice that Jesus put on display for us is our model and example of how it is we ought to live. It's often called, "The Calvary Road." We are called to forsake all! Jesus tells us, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

Consider once again what Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. With these words, Peter is describing for us what took place on the cross of Christ at Calvary. It is remarkable to observe exactly how much Peter says about the cross in so few words.

Now, the main thought in this passage is the death of Christ. In fact, the simple sentence in this verse is simply this, "Christ died." Everything else modifies this main thought. It tells us why He died.

In about half of the popular translations, this reads differently. Some translations read, "For Christ also suffered" (ESV, KJV). The difference

in the translation comes because of the differences in the Greek manuscripts that we have. There are some that read, "For Christ also died" (which is followed by the NASB and NIV). And there are others that read, "For Christ also suffered" (which is followed by the ESV and NKJV). We simply don't know what Peter actually wrote. He may have written, "Christ died." He may have written, "Christ suffered." But, in the end, it doesn't really matter much, because the idea is the same. The suffering that is being addressed here is Christ's suffering unto death. And so, any difference in meaning between these two translations is marginal, to say the least.

And so, getting back to my main point here this morning, we observe that Peter's main point is that Christ died. In the text, Peter gives six purposes for His death. These six points for the basis of my outline of my message this morning entitled, "Why Christ Suffered and Died." First, we see that Jesus died, ...

1. For An Example.

I get this point from the little word here in this text, "also." If you look there in the text, you can see that it says, "For Christ also died" (or, "Christ also suffered"). The idea here is that Christ did something that He is calling us to do also, namely (from last week), "suffer for the sake of righteousness."

Back at verse 17, we read, "For it is better, if God should will it so that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." After you read this verse, you might easily ask yourself, "Why is this better?" Verse 18 answers the question, "... because Christ also suffered for doing what is right, rather than for doing what is wrong."

There is no earthly reason why Jesus should have died as a criminal upon the cross. The reason why people were crucified, is because they committed crimes. But, Jesus committed no crime. Perhaps you remember when Jesus was crucified, there were two others crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left (Luke 23:33). In the course of that afternoon, "one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at [Jesus] saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!'" (Luke 23:39). And yet, the other criminal rebuked him saying, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are **suffering justly**, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:40-41). The obvious conclusion is that the suffering of Jesus was completely undeserved. He was suffering unjustly, just as we are called to do in verse 17.

I love the way that the hymn writer tells the story of the life of Christ, ...

My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me
Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be
Oh, who am I that for my sake,
Oh, who am I that for my sake,
My Lord should take frail flesh and die?

Sometimes they crowd His way and His sweet praises sing
Resounding all the day, hosannas to their King
Then, "Crucify!" is all their breath,
Then, "Crucify!" is all their breath,
And for His death they thirst and cry.

Why, what has my Lord done to cause this rage and spite
He made the lame to run, and gave the blind their sight
What injuries, yet these are why,
What injuries, yet these are why,
The Lord Most High so cruelly dies. [\[2\]](#)

The crimes of Christ were making the lame to run and giving the blind their sight! That's the life of Jesus. He lived a righteous life, and yet, He suffered incredibly. And this is Peter's point. Jesus has become the example for us of one who suffered for the sake of righteousness.

This is Peter's message throughout the entire book. It's not that God calls us to suffer for the sake of righteousness, while He, Himself, knows nothing of this suffering. No, Jesus "suffered for doing what was good" (1 Peter 3:17).

The clearest place that you see this is in chapter 2, verse 21, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." What is the purpose of our life? To do what is right and suffer for it (cf. 2:18-20).

In verses 22 through 24, Peter describes how Jesus suffered. He writes, "who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (verse 22). In other words, "Jesus did what was good." Peter continues "and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats" (verse 23). In other words, Jesus "suffered for the sake of righteousness."

Instead of "returning evil for evil" (3:9), instead of "returning in insult for insult" (3:9), Jesus "entrusted Himself to Him who judges righteously" (2:23). And this is what we are called to do. We are called to walk righteously (3:8-9). We are called to walk in purity (3:10-12).

In so doing, it may be that God has willed that we suffer for it. In such times, we are to look to Jesus as our example. And do what He did. In chapter 4, verse 19, Peter writes, "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." And so, when you are suffering for the sake of righteousness, look to Jesus, who suffered and died for an example.

Christ suffered and died, ...

2. For All Time.

You can see this point in the next phrase of verse 18, "Christ also died for sins once for all." The idea here is that the sacrifice of Christ is never to be repeated.

By way of contrast, the sacrifices of the Old Testament were intended to be repeated often. Every morning, there was to be a sacrifice of a lamb (Ex. 29:39). Every evening, there was to be a sacrifice of a lamb (Ex. 29:39). Every year, on the Day of Atonement, there was to be a sacrifice of a lamb for the sins of the people (Lev. 16). Whenever there was child born in a home, the mother was unclean, until she brought a sacrifice to the priest to be cleansed (Lev. 12:6). If the child was a first-born, a sacrifice was required as well (Ex. 13:2, 12). Every year, the men of Israel were to come to the Lord three times during the national feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths). During each of these feasts, sacrifices were to be offered. During the Passover, each family needed to bring their own lamb to sacrifice. Historians tell us that during these days, the number of sacrifices performed in the temple were so great that blood used to trickle through the streets of Jerusalem. In addition to all of these sacrifices, there were sacrifices to be offered each time a member of the Israelite community sinned (Lev. 1-5).

But, the sacrifice of Christ was different than those sacrifices of the Old Testament. His sacrifice took place only once in history. It never again needs to be repeated. The sacrifice of Christ took place once for all time!

The writer to the Hebrews pounds this home on several occasions. Consider the following words carefully, ...

Hebrews 9:24-26

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; Nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Other wise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested **to put away sin** by the sacrifice of Himself.

A bit later in the book, we read, ...

Hebrews 10:11-14

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; But He, having offered **one sacrifice** for sins **for all time**, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected **for all time** those who are sanctified.

All of this theology is behind Peter's mentioning of the "once for all" sacrifice of Christ. The fact that the Old Testament sacrifices were offered again and again and again and again demonstrates that they were never good enough. On the contrary, the sacrifice of Jesus was perfect. And therefore, it never needed to be repeated. There is nothing more to be done.

When you reach perfection, there is no need to do it again. Here's an analogy that will fail in many ways, but, perhaps it might help to illustrate the point. When you are building a house, you tack your studs together to make a wall. When you are finished with the wall, you stand it on end and line it up. If for some reason, there is an imperfection in the wall, such as a miss-measurment that caused the wall to be too long or too short or such as a failure to account for the plumbing fixture by notching a hole in the wall, what do you do? You tear the wall down and fix the imperfections. But, once the wall is perfect built and situated and in place, there is no reason that you pull it down up to put another wall.

Now, if for some reason, the wall becomes imperfect, you may repair it. Perhaps one of the studs twists and comes out of joint. Perhaps after the drywall is applied, there is an accident that puts a hole in the wall. Perhaps you want to put a window into the wall. With any of these things, you will change the wall. Either you will replace the problem stud or re-mud over the problem area or cut a hole in the wall for the window. But when a wall is perfect, you don't tear it down.

Like a perfect wall, the sacrifice of Jesus was perfect. But, the sacrifice of Jesus was better. It never loses its saving power. It never becomes defective over time. It is as powerful to save today as it was 2,000 years ago. For that reason, it never needs to be repeated. It was once for all time.

Christ Suffered and Died ...

3. For Sins.

Now, at this point, it might be obvious to you that this is the case. I've already mentioned it on a few occasions. But, as Peter explicitly says this, it is helpful for us to emphasize this point again. Peter said, "For Christ died for sins once for all."

People live and die all the time. In the days of Jesus, it was no different. Now, on rare occasion, someone's death meant something. When a king died, it meant the end of an era. When someone was struck down from heaven, it signified God's displeasure for sin. When Uzziah was struck down for touching the ark or when the sons of Korah were swallowed up for their rebellion or when Nadab and Abihu were burned by a fire from heaven, each of those deaths signified the holiness of God. But, usually, a death didn't have any sort of meaning.

On the contrary, in the death of Jesus, His death meant something. He died for sins. In other words, His death was an atoning death.

In this sense, He is like all of the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Throughout the history of Israel, animals were slaughtered all of the time. Most often, their death didn't mean anything. Animals were simply slaughtered for food. But, there were some times when the death of an animal had significance. It had significance if the animal was brought to the temple and given to the priest with a confession of sin. It had

significance if the priest accepted the animal, laid his hands upon the animal, naming the sin that was just confessed. It had significance if the priest then slit its throat and placed the carcass upon the altar to be burned as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. When that took place, the death of that animal had significance. The death was an atoning death. The death was a plea for God to grant forgiveness for the sins that were confessed.

In the same manner, the sacrifice of Jesus had significance. It was an atoning death. Jesus died to secure forgiveness of sins. Throughout the Bible, this significance is attached to the death of Christ. First of all, it was prophesied in Isaiah 53.

"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried" (Is. 53:4).

"He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities" (Is. 53:5).

"All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Is. 53:6).

In these verses, we see transgressions and iniquities falling upon Him. His death was for sins. The New Testament clearly picks up on this saying that Christ died for sins. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). "[Christ] gave Himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:4). "Christ [has] offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (Heb. 12:10). And one last passage, "And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24).

This is significant. This is the heart of Christianity. The death of Christ was for sins. But, it gets better than that, which is my fourth point this morning. Christ suffered and died, ...

4. For Sinners.

What makes this point different than the previous point is simply that this point is more personal. See, it's not merely for sins in general that Christ died. He died for specific sins committed by sinful people. In so doing, you can say that "Jesus died for people." Or, you can say, "Jesus died for sinners." I trust that you can see this here in the text. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust."

Your translation may well use a different word, "The righteous for the unrighteous" (which I prefer for the sake of clarity). You could easily say, "the holy for the unholy." Or, "the Godly for the ungodly."

You can't see it in the English text, but Peter is clear here. It is the righteous One (singular) dying for the unrighteous ones (plural). He died for people. He died for sinners.

This is addressing the idea of substitution. Christ died in our place. Rather than receiving the brunt of the wrath of God for our sins, Christ Jesus took it upon Himself. He was our substitute. It was "the righteous for the unrighteous."

This concept of substitution in the place of people carries throughout the entire Bible. Do you remember with my previous point when I gave to you some verses that talk about Jesus dying "for our sins"? For every one verse that says that, I can give five more that says the Jesus died "for sinners." For instance, consider John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." The emphasis here isn't so much that Jesus laid down His life for what the people had done. Rather, He laid down His life for the people themselves. He laid down His life for the sheep. The sin is implied.

Here are a few more, ...

"Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2).

"Christ died for us" (1 Thess. 5:10).

"Christ gave Himself for us" (Titus 2:14).

"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16).

This is the greatest expression of the love of God. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And that's what Jesus did. He laid down His life in place of us. And thereby, He demonstrated His great love for us.

But, you need to realize, that we weren't always His friends. Before we came to faith in Christ, we were His enemies. And this shows how great the love of God is for us. See, it is easy to love those who love you. Jesus said, ...

Luke 6:32-34

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount.

Three times, Jesus says the same thing. Even sinners love those who love them. But, it's an entirely different ball game when you love others who are your enemies. And this is what Jesus did when He died, "the righteous for the unrighteous." This is what Romans 5:6-10 teaches.

Romans 5:6-10

For while we were still **helpless**, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that

while we were yet **sinners**, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were **enemies** we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

I trust that you see the progression in these verses, which show the extent of God's love toward us. When we were helpless, Christ died for us. When we were sinners, Christ died for us. When we were His enemies, Christ died for us.

Jesus suffered and died for sinners. Spend a few moments and let that sink in. Jesus died for sinners. If you believe that fact and trust that fact, I know that your heart will be encouraged this morning.

David begins Psalm 32 with these words, "How blessed is He whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." He had come to experience God's forgiveness and came to experience the blessing which often comes with it.

Christ suffered and died, ...

5. For Reconciliation.

With this point, I'm focusing my attention upon the last half of verse 18, which describes the ultimate purpose of Christ's sufferings. "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God."

One of the most basic teachings of the entire Bible is that our sin has caused an alienation between us and God. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they were cursed and cast away from the presence of the Lord. When the people of Noah's day sinned, God's anger burned against them and He destroyed them all. As Israel sinned, they continued to drift away from the Lord and towards the gods of the nations.

In Romans 1, Paul speaks about how God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. As they deny God and refuse to give thanks unto His name, God merely lets them go to do their own thing, which is far away from God. Eventually, they await "the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:9).

Now, against the backdrop of this teaching comes another truth. There is a way to restore the relationship that has been damaged by sin. It is through the death of Jesus Christ. Because, it is the death of Jesus that removes the sin, which is the cause of our alienation from God in the first place.

It couldn't be clearer than our text before us this morning. "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, **so that** He might bring us to God." The death of Christ was for the purpose of bringing us to God, to usher us into the presence of the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

If you want to go and see the president of the United States, you can't merely walk up to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D. C. and ring the door bell on the White House and ask to see George. It doesn't work that way. You need to know somebody who has access into the inner circle of the presidency. Then, he needs to pull the proper strings so that you can come and see the president.

In a similar way, if you want to come to God, you need to know somebody who will be able to bring you into His presence. And that someone is Jesus Christ. He is the path of reconciliation with God. In fact, it's a bit more precise than that. Jesus Christ is the only way to God.

This is what Jesus taught. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). This is what Peter taught. He said, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This is what Paul taught. He said, "There is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). You can't get to God through any other means. You must come through Jesus. And, it is through the death of Jesus Christ that you have access to God.

Our access to God is incredible! Through faith in the work of Christ upon the cross, we not only have access to God, but, we are considered to be the children of God, who can call God our "Daddy" (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15).

To go back to the illustration of the White House. Not only do we have access to the president for matters of politics But, we have a room in the White House where we can stay and sleep. And, in the middle of the night, should we feel so inclined, we can get out of our beds, walk down the hallway and knock on the president's door, because there is something that you want to talk about with the president.

The same is true of God. Through Jesus Christ, we can come to God, the Father, anytime that we want. And that was the purpose of the cross of Christ. Christ suffered and died (1) for an example, (2) for all time, (3) for sins, (4) for sinners, (5) for reconciliation, and now, finally, ...

6. For Victory.

This comes in the last phrase of verse 18, "Christ died for sins, ... having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." The suffering and death of Christ may well have looked like a failure, but it wasn't.

Some may mock, "Look at this 'great leader'!!!? The one who was the king of the Jews! He suffered and died as a weak criminal. Look at His body. It's hanging limp upon the cross, suspended by a few rusty nails. That doesn't much look like victory to me!" Oh, but it is victory. See

the one who was put to death in the flesh was made alive in the spirit! His body may have been dead, but the spirit of Jesus lived on!

The religious leaders thought that they could stop Jesus by putting Him to death. But no, such is not the case. Though His body was dead, His spirit lived on. Jesus was ultimately victorious. I believe that verses 19-22 demonstrate the victory of Jesus, which we will look at next week. But, it bears mentioning now, as Peter introduces the thought in verse 18.

Though Jesus suffered and though Jesus died, His death was ultimately the means of His victory. You can see it there in verse 21, "Baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

Next week we will examine more closely this phrase, "Baptism now saves you," to see exactly what that means. As a preview, I don't believe that this means that the ceremony of dunking in water saves you, rather, it's the "appeal to God for a good conscience" that saves. However, the point is that salvation comes! And what is the power to effect this salvation? It comes "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (verse 22).

The suffering and death of Jesus wasn't defeat. Rather, it was the victory! Indeed, it is a strange victory, and not one that is obvious at first glance. Next week, we will look at this victory more closely.

As I bring my message to a conclusion, I want to consider how it is that Peter initially received these words for the first time. The account is given in by Matthew with these words, ...

Matthew 16:21-23

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

When first confronted with the cross, Peter did not like the news at all. He didn't want the cross. He thought that it was a bad plan. Jesus responded with His strong words of rebuke. The cross is God's plan. The cross is a good plan.

Perhaps as you are reading this message, you may be thinking, "That's a bad plan. I don't need the suffering and death of Jesus. You can take it for yourself." My dear friend, my only hope for you is that you might go through the same process that Peter went through. Initially, he hated the cross. But, eventually, he came to cherish the cross. As the hymn writer says,

I'll cherish the old rugged cross, where my trophies at last I lay down.

I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown! [3]

There is victory in the cross. Someday, the cross will give us a crown!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 18, 2008 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] For those of you who are reading this and are not from Rockford, it may help you to know that "symbol" is the name given to a public sculpture, created by Alexander Liberman (1912-1999), which stands proudly upon the riverfront. You can see a picture of it here: <http://www.answers.com/topic/rockford-illinois?cat=travel>.

[2] *My Song is Love Unknown*, written by Samuel Crossman (lyrics slightly changed).

[3] *The Old Rugged Cross*, written by George Burnard