

The life of Christ's chosen pilgrims 寄居者 is not easy. God calls us to live holy lives of good works in the midst of a world that speaks evil of us and treats us unjustly.

- In 2:13-17, Peter speaks of suffering as Christians in the civil realm – that we live a life of good works, honouring our government in our earthly country.
- In 2:18-25, Peter speaks of suffering for Christ in the workplace – that we submit even the masters who treat us harshly so that we can imitate the sufferings of Christ.
- In 3:1-7, Peter speaks of suffering for Christ in the family – of wives whose husbands do not believe the Word. He calls them to submit to their husbands without being afraid.

In each case we are to hope and pray that our godly Christian example will lead unbelievers to Christ.

But this is a difficult road to travel, and fleshly lusts 私欲 of all kinds will try to pull us away from the pilgrim's pathway. How will we stay on this pathway, and remain true to our Saviour, and to the confession of Christ we have made? Like Israel in the days of Joshua, we can say with total devotion and commitment: **We will serve the LORD!** But Joshua answers: **You are not able to serve the LORD!** He's right: we don't have in ourselves the strength we need to fight against the lusts of the flesh and live holy lives all the way to the end.

There is only one way: Jesus Christ. He alone has the strength, love and faithfulness we need to serve Him in a God-glorifying pilgrim life all the way to the end. At the end of I Peter 2, the apostle Peter takes us back to this faithful Saviour: **Who Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes 鞭伤 you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**

Let us take note of 9 things about our Shepherd and Overseer which assure us of our complete safety through all the difficulties of the Christian life all the way to the end.

### **1. He is the Shepherd who suffered for His sheep.**

When Peter is describing Christ here as the one **who bore our sins in his body on the tree**, and healed us **by His stripes** He is telling suffering Christians about the kind of sufferings our Saviour bore, and we bear the Name of our suffering Saviour. Peter says in verse 21: **For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps.** And *how* did He suffer? **When He suffered He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.** The Shepherd and Overseer of our souls is One who suffered immeasurably for us and then, after His suffering he was exalted to glory.

This means that our Saviour who calls us to journey toward our heavenly inheritance down a road of suffering and unfair treatment is One who went before us down that same road. He knows what suffering us. He knows deep agony 苦闷 of soul and of body. And He does not turn a blind eye to our pain and fear. The Bible says: **We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted just as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** (Hebrews 4:15-16) It also says: **For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.** (Hebrews 2:18) He knows the temptations that war against the soul better than anyone else!

So let us remember when we suffer: a) to **rejoice to the extent that we partake of Christ's sufferings**, for as His sufferings led to glory, not defeat, so will our suffering for His Name lead to glory, not destruction! (I Peter 4:13); and b) that He knows and feels our pain and will give us all the help we need when we seek His grace.

### **2. He is the Shepherd who bore the sins of His Sheep**

**[He] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.** (I Peter 2:24) He is the Shepherd who lay down His life for the pilgrims. In His suffering Jesus not only gave an example of suffering for us to follow, but He gave an offering to God to pay for our sins! As He suffered His whole life long, but especially on the cross, He carried our sins upon Himself. Peter is referring here to Isaiah 53:6 which says: **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.** Jesus was held responsible for all our sins before the holy God who hates sin and must punish them in His infinite wrath. He paid for them in full to set us free from our guilt and God's condemnation. There is power in the death of Christ to cover all our sins in the sight of God and give us free and full forgiveness! In the cross every one who believes in Jesus is justified before God. He is declared "Not Guilty" and righteous in God's sight.

For every pilgrim this is great comfort as we struggle in the wilderness of this life. Our sins are many, and they keep coming, but there is in that one offering for our sins on tree, a complete forgiveness that we may draw from every day! **The Blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.** (I John 1:7)

The Shepherd of your soul who purchased your life at the cost of His own, will never let you be destroyed. You may go astray, but He will call you, and you will listen, and He will bring you back. **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.** (John 10:27-28)

### **3. He is the Shepherd who heals His sheep**

Peter describes our Shepherd and Overseer in another way: He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed. The cross not only has *justifying* 称义性 power to remove our guilt. The cross also has *sanctifying* 成圣性 power to remove our corruption. In Romans 6 the Bible teaches that when Jesus died on the cross He not

only were our sins crucified in Him, but also our sinful natures were crucified in Him! Thus, when the Spirit gives us faith and unites us to Christ, Jesus not only destroys the damning guilt of our sin, but also the controlling power of sin in our lives!

And that is the healing power of the cross! **By [His] stripes you were healed.** (I Peter 2:24; see also Isaiah 53:5) Jesus' stripes are the deep cuts made in His body by the whips that scourged 鞭 Him. It is another way of describing His sufferings in our place. The healing that we receive from Jesus' suffering and death is not first of all a physical healing of all our diseases and aging – although one day every Christian pilgrim will have a strong, and glorious body without any blemish 污点 – but a spiritual and moral healing from a life that loves sin.

Here is another comfort for weak pilgrims who are at war against fleshly lusts. Because you are united to Jesus, you have died to sins and now live for righteousness! Do you know what this means? Though sin remains strong in you, you are *healed* from the controlling 控制性 power of sin, and righteousness and holiness are stronger in you through the Spirit of Jesus who lives in you! Your Shepherd has planted in you a deep distaste and disgust for sin, and a deep love for unrighteousness, and even though the craving for sin can be very, very powerful at times, Jesus will not allow you to remain comfortable in your sinning and backsliding 倒退

#### **4. He is the Shepherd who receives returning sheep**

**For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.** (I Peter 2:25) Here is a picture of our genuine repentance 真正地悔改 or conversion. Once we were lost in the darkness of following our own pleasures and the foolish lies of this world. We were going our own way. But now we have returned to the One who truly cares about our souls, and He has received us and taken us in as members of God's flock.

A pilgrim is one who has been called out of the world into God's marvelous light when he/she came to the Living Stone, Jesus Christ. And we must think of salvation in this way: not so much that we have received forgiveness, or new life, or heaven, but we have come to a Person; we have received a new Shepherd, the True Shepherd who really loves us, cares for us, and is strong enough to take care of us in the darkest valleys and deepest struggles. Salvation is returning to and becoming attached to a new Master, Leader, Overseer, and Care giver. In His flock, under His care, you may be sure you will arrive safely home, together with all the saints who are His true flock and Church.

#### **5. He is the Shepherd who values 看重 the lives of everyone of His Sheep**

**...but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.** (I Peter 2:25) Every soul of everyone of His sheep is known to Him, and the life of each one is precious in His sight. Peter could have said **You have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of the flock of God**, and it is said that way in other places. But here, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he used the plural word *souls* indicating each and every member of His flock, individually.

This should remind us of the last time the word soul was used in this passage: **Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.** (I Peter 2:11) Pilgrim, you must value your own never-dying soul. Out of the soul or heart are all the issues of life. It is the seat of life, the source of every thought and action. It is the object and focus of Satan's special attacks and sin's temptations, for it is by overtaking a person's soul that you destroy His whole life.

Well, the goodness news for you, beloved pilgrims, God has given you a Shepherd who has made your soul the special focus and object of His care. He values your soul, out of which springs all the issues of your life. It does not mean that the Shepherd does not value your body; it means the opposite. If He has made Himself the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul, then He cares for your entire life! If your soul is safe with Him, your whole life is safe.

#### **6. He is the Shepherd who oversees His sheep.**

**For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.** (I Peter 2:25) Overseer is an important word. It means Bishop, Supervisor, and Guardian. It comes from the verb *to watch over* or *to visit*. Jesus the Good Shepherd has taken over responsibility for your supervision and care. He is watching over your soul and life. He is watching over the fleshly lusts which are attacking your soul day by day, and will guard your soul from all evil. It is all well-known to our Chief Bishop. We have the all-seeing eye of our loving Shepherd always upon us.

When our father Jacob was in the wilderness, fleeing from Esau, the LORD set up a ladder in a vision between heaven and earth right where Jacob lay sleeping. And the LORD stood at the ladder 梯 keeping a close watch on His beloved pilgrim, commanding His angels concerning him. And He added His promise: Jacob, **I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.** (Genesis 28:15) This is the kind of close supervisory care that every pilgrim may seek and expect from the Son of God who was sent to be the true covenantal Shepherd of the Sheep. **Cast all your care on Him for He cares for you.** (I Peter 5:7)

John Calvin writes: *There is then no cause to fear but that he will faithfully watch over the safety of those who are in his fold and under his care.*

#### **7. Jesus is the Shepherd who governs and leads His sheep.**

He died for us so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. (see verse 24) Now that He has found us and made us return to Him, and taken us back into His flock, He calls us to follow Him faithfully. He calls us to live for righteousness.

- **Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.** (Rom. 6:13)
- **For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.** (Romans 6:19)

So the pilgrim has his high calling from God – who is sufficient for these things?!

But your Saviour does not call you and then leave you to go it alone in your own strength. He is not an Overseer who stays at a distance, merely watching you with a critical eye 批判的眼光 Your Overseer is a Shepherd who **leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.** (Psalm 23:3) By Word He directs me in the way I should go each step of the way, and empowers me by His Spirit to walk in that way. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. His grace is sufficient for my every weakness.

By His hand which guides me and strength which enables me, I can say with the psalmist: I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. I have in Him more than all I need. Paul the apostle said of his difficult pathway: **I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.** (I Cor. 15:10) Your Shepherd and Overseer is your ever-present help. Go to Him continually. Boast not in your strength, but confess your infirmities to Him **so that the power of Christ may rest upon you..** (see II Corinthians 12:9-10)

#### **8. Jesus is the Shepherd who appoints Undershepherds for His sheep**

There is one other place in I Peter that describes Jesus as Shepherd: He is the **Chief Shepherd** 牧长 (I Peter 5:4) Here the name shepherd is used in connection with Jesus giving elders to His sheep. The elders appointed by the Chief Shepherd are called to **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers.** (I Peter 5:2) Elders are appointed by Jesus as Shepherds and Overseers of His flock of pilgrims! They are His *undershepherds*. They serve *under* the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

In this way Jesus has chosen to draw near to His beloved pilgrims. He appoints elders to serve among you in the middle of this wilderness of life where you walk as strangers and exiles. He calls the elders not to be afraid to serve and become witnesses of the sufferings of Christ so that one day they may also partake of the glory of Christ! (see I Peter 5:1) He sends undershepherds to nourish your spiritual life through the ministry of the Word and sacraments: with instruction, rebuke, correction, training, encouragement, and comfort. He sends undershepherds to admonish and discipline you when you begin to stray 偏离 from the pilgrim's pathway. Through faithful undershepherds, the Good Shepherd keeps your faith and love focused on Him, your Saviour.

Be sure, dear pilgrims of Christ, to submit to your elders' Christian ministry, for through them Jesus Himself is holding on to your life. He is seeking you, calling you, leading you, and strengthening you through their labours. And be comforted too. As you give heed to their instruction and admonition in the faith, you will persevere! You will make progress in the greatest trouble.

#### **9. He is the Shepherd who will surely bring you all the way to your eternal inheritance.**

**Even though we must fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life** (I Timothy 6:12) – and we will not finish the race if we don't fight; our sin will destroy us – nevertheless, our certainty of salvation as weak and unstable pilgrims, lies in the fact that Jesus is the true Shepherd who never loses one of His sheep, and the true Bishop who watches over our souls so carefully that not a single believer will escape His care. Our salvation lies in His eternal covenant with us and eternal commitment to us! He has said: Whoever believes in Me will never perish but have everlasting life!

Yes, it is true that some say they have faith in Christ, but they never truly believe in Him. Their interest in Him is superficial, temporary, and self-centered. They don't come to Him repenting of their sins and asking Him to become their new life. They don't come to escape from their sin and to find life in Him. Their assurance of salvation is not a true persuasion grounded in what Christ has done for them, but a careless assumption and carnal presumption.

But the true pilgrim believer who, even though he/she is filled with weaknesses and failures and imperfect devotion to Christ, rests (and keeps resting) on Christ alone for salvation, has committed himself to a faithful Saviour, Shepherd and Guardian who will surely take him all the way to the end, no matter how many attacks he has to endure along the way. The Celestial City 天上的城 is a sure thing for the true believer.

I Peter opens and closes on this note of certainty:

- **Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** (I Peter 1:3-5)
- **And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.** (1 Peter 5:10 ESV)

Didn't Peter himself, the Christian pilgrim, experience this in his own life? The Saviour had set His love on Peter and through faith Peter would be carried through all his weaknesses and sufferings to God's eternal glory **in Christ**. In Christ who laid down His life for Peter and interceded for him. Even though Peter had a major fall when he denied Christ and gave in to fleshly lusts sent by Satan, Jesus said to him: **"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat 筛麦子, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."** (Luke 22:31-32)