



ELECT EXILES
HE HIMSELF BORE OUR SINS

1 Peter 2:24-25

April 2, 2010

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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. ²⁵For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Introduction: Five Precious Words That Make Good Friday Truly Good

On this very night, Christians around the world are remembering—indeed, even celebrating—the crucifixion and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Not only so, but they, like us, are calling it Good Friday.

Yet there’s nothing particularly good about death, is there? Nor is there anything particularly good about suffering or sin or injustice or execution or banishment—the very realities that give this night, this Good Friday, its meaning.

With so much that’s not good about this night, why do we call it Good Friday? Because of five simple words; the five words in our passage: “He himself bore our sins” (2:24); of course, not the words themselves, but the reality to which they point. These five words, taken together, point us to what makes this Good Friday truly good; they point us to the realities that transform the greatest of human tragedies into the most glorious of divine mysteries.

He Himself Bore Our Sins

The first word to consider is “He.” *He* himself bore our sins.

Who is he who bore our sins? He is the Lord Jesus Christ. The letter of 1 Peter begins by identifying Jesus in just this way: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3). And so too does the entirety of the New Testament. From Matthew through Revelation, this is the steady refrain: “Jesus Christ is Lord.”

He who bore our sins, then, is Jesus Christ, the Lord. Yet in calling Jesus Christ ‘Lord,’ the earliest Christians were not trying to classify Jesus as one of the great earthly powers of the day, like the Caesar in Rome who himself was called ‘Lord.’ Instead, they were identifying Jesus as the *God* of biblical history, the God of the Old Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush by his own personal name: *Yahweh*, the Lord.

This is who Jesus Christ is, the Lord of heaven and earth. And this is he who bore our sins, God incarnate. The God who created all things visible and invisible is one with him who bore

our sins. The God who called light out of darkness is one with him who bore our sins. The God who redeemed Israel out of Egypt is one with him who bore our sins—Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Yet this Jesus, this God-man, is also the one who knew no sin. “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (2:22). To be sure, he had every opportunity, and indeed every earthly reason, to sin: he was reviled unfairly; he was mocked unmercifully; he was treated unjustly; he suffered unlawfully. But what serenity did he display in the face of sinful opposition: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten” (2:23).

It was this sinless Lord, Jesus Christ, who bore our sins. It was truly the righteous for the unrighteous (3:18); the lamb without blemish or spot who was led to the slaughter (1:19); the one who was chosen by God, and precious, yet rejected by men and therefore crucified (2:4) — this Jesus, he bore our sins. He who is very God of very God, begotten, not made, one with the Father—this Jesus, he bore our sins.

He himself bore our sins.

He *Himself* Bore Our Sins

The second of our five Good Friday words is this: “himself.” He *himself* bore our sins.

We often hire people to do the jobs we don’t want to do; sometimes we call these ‘dirty jobs.’ A number of years ago, Katie and I discovered a mouse hidden away inside the cooling unit underneath our refrigerator; a dead and decomposing and stinking mouse carcass, that is. I could have gotten it out, but I didn’t want to. So I hired someone to deal with it rather than do the dirty work myself.

How much more tempting it would have been to do the same, were I asked to bear the sins of others, to call on someone else to do the job I did not want to do! Yet the Lord Jesus Christ took a different approach; he did the dirty work of bearing our sins himself.

When Jesus heard his closest follower Peter say he would even die for him, Jesus still didn’t take him up on his offer and let Peter go to the cross in his stead. He did it himself. When Jesus was met on the road to Golgotha by Simon of Cyrene, who helped to carry his cross, he did not let Simon ultimately be lifted up on the cross in his place. He did it himself. Or when Jesus was attended by a myriad of angels in the wilderness, ministering spirits sent to serve the Son of God, he did not order one of them to do the dirty work for him. No, he did it himself.

Bearing our sins on the cross was deeply personal for the Savior. He did not bear our sins from a distance; he did not do it from afar. Instead, he got as up-close and personal as humanly possible. In fact, he bore our sins *in his body on the tree* (2:24). And so the lacerations on his back scraped against the harshly hewn wood of the executioner’s stake; his thirty-three year old skin was pierced straight through with blunt and probably rusty nails; his forehead was pricked a thousand times with the crown of thorns upon his brow; his side was pierced, his body bruised, his lungs suffocated, his mouth dry, his very life extinguished there on that tree at Calvary. He did it *himself*.

He himself bore our sins.

He Himself *Bore* Our Sins

Our third Good Friday word is this: “bore.” He himself *bore* our sins.

What did Jesus Christ do with our sins? He did not simply excuse them. He did not merely explain them away. He did not just wink at them, and cause them to disappear. No, what he did was he *bore* our sins.

To bear sin is to receive the penalty for sin. The Jewish people had a vivid reminder of this in the annual Day of Atonement. Once a year, the high priest was to offer two male goats as a single sin offering for the people (Lev. 16:5). The one was to be killed, and its blood sprinkled over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat inside the temple. The other was to be kept alive, and was to be brought to the high priest who would,

lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall *bear all their iniquities on itself* to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness (Lev. 16:21-22).

Through banishment and death, these two goats were to bear the sins of the people; through shedding blood and being sent away, they received the penalty that was due for Israel’s sins.

This is what Jesus Christ has done for our sins. He bore our sins by receiving the penalty they deserved: both death and banishment. He received—no, he *embraced*—both death and banishment for our sake and for our sins: our banishment, when he cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Mark 15:34), and our death, when he breathed his last, bowed his head, and “gave up his spirit” (John 19:30).

Yet there’s more. In God’s economy, the penalty must fit the crime. But since God is infinitely worthy of honor, any sin against him is infinitely heinous. Thus, even the slightest of sins against an infinitely holy God requires an infinite punishment; indeed, enough to justify a finite creature enduring an eternity of suffering. And this for even one sin, much less tens of thousands of just my sins, not to mention yours or anyone else’s.

Yet Jesus Christ bore them all. Every one of our infinite offenses against an infinitely holy God. In his body on the tree, on that Good Friday, Jesus endured an incalculable number of eternities in hell—bearing the penalty for our sins.

He himself *bore* our sins.

He Himself *Bore Our* Sins

“Our” is the fourth Good Friday word. He himself bore *our* sins.

Whose sins did he bear? *Our* sins, this passage says. But who is this? Who does this include? Does it include me? Does it include you? Does it include everyone? Who gets a share in this most marvelous exchange?

The Bible says Jesus died for the sins of the world. This is a precious truth, and one we should want to proclaim from the rooftops. We ought to be like John the Baptist, who when he saw Jesus, cried out: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Yet the Bible, indeed our own passage, makes clear that Jesus *did not bear* the sins of the world. He did not receive the penalty for every single person's sins. For we know that some will have to bear their own penalty for their sins; and God forbid that any should suffer for sins for which Jesus Christ himself has already suffered!

It's of course not as though the cross of Christ is in any way insufficient for sins. There is nothing lacking in his sacrifice. No, it is an infinite storehouse of mercy; it is a never-ending ocean of grace. Should we have all eternity to plumb its depths, we would never reach its bottom. As we love to sing: 'O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!'

Yet while it's true that Jesus' death is sufficient for all, it is only *effective* for those who actually receive it. This is the wonderful truth contained in that well-known verse from John's gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that *whoever believes* in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The Son was given for the sake of the world; but it is only those who believe in him who find he has already suffered the penalty in their place. It is only true of those whom Peter calls "elect exiles" (1:1); those who have been "born again" (1:3); those who love Jesus Christ even though they've not seen him (1:8); those whose "faith and hope are in God" (1:21); those who have "indeed tasted that the Lord is good" (2:3).

Can you include yourself among that number? Can you say with confidence: "He himself bore *my* sins"? There is nothing more important, nothing more precious and nothing more pressing than this.

You can say this, even this very night, if you will in repentance turn from your sin and by faith look to the cross of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus Christ is always ready and willing to forgive sins; he never turns any honest seeker away. Should you do so, then, and only then, will you be able to say: "He himself bore *our* sins, even my sins, in his body on the tree."

He Himself Bore Our Sins

Our fifth and final word is the most unpleasant. We know this word well, indeed, all too well. It is the word, "sins." What was it that the Lord Jesus Christ bore in our stead on the cross? He himself bore our *sins*.

Notice carefully: "sins," plural. This verse does not simply say that he bore our "sin," singular, as though the sin he bore was something unspecific or abstract, like some vague idea you learned in Math class in high school. No, he bore our sins: those very specific and concrete acts of violence against God and others; those little and not so little cases of indiscretion you and I commit on a daily basis.

Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to talk about sin in general than it is to talk specifically and concretely about your own particular sins? Presumably, most of us would have little or no trouble confessing that we are sinners. Yet how would you feel about coming up to the podium and confessing the ugliest sin you committed this past week? How much easier it is

to say, “I struggle with purity,” than to answer the question, “When was the last time you looked at pornography?”

It is our tendency to want to hide from the reality of our sin by viewing our sins in the abstract. In fact, the more abstract, the less accountable we feel, while the more concrete, the less comfortable we become. “People usually justify themselves by making a general acknowledgement of sin. But I experience the complete forlornness and corruption of human nature, insofar as I ever experience it at all, when I see my own specific sins.”¹

Yet, friends, this is what is so wondrously good about Good Friday: Jesus Christ has graciously entered into our own forlornness and the corruption of our human nature. Jesus Christ himself bore our *sins*—not merely sin in the abstract, but all those petty little cases of wrongdoing we’d be ashamed to mention to anyone; all those ridiculous betrayals of love for God or neighbor for which we have no good explanation; all those inexcusable and even unexplainable transgressions of the law of God. Jesus bore them all; he himself bore our *sins*.

Conclusion

He himself bore our sins.

These five words, taken together, point us to what make this Good Friday truly good. Not one of them can be missing; each is critically important. For there’s ultimately nothing good in saying that someone else bore our sins, but not Jesus, the sinless Son of God. There’s ultimately nothing good in saying that Jesus had someone else bear our sins, rather than doing it himself. There’s ultimately nothing good in saying that Jesus excused our sins, but did not actually bear them. There’s ultimately nothing good in saying that Jesus bore sins—someone else’s—but not ours. And there’s ultimately nothing good in saying that Jesus himself bore our sin, but not all the inexcusable and even unexplainable little sins that crop up in our lives where we least expect them.

He himself bore our sins.

This is the message of the gospel. This is humanity’s hope. This is the glory of the cross. This is the wonder of grace. And this is what makes this Good Friday truly so good.

It is also, dear friend, if you have received this gospel truth by faith, the end of your own life in sin and the start of a life lived to righteousness; it is the wound, which if you embrace it by faith, will be the very thing that heals you; it is, if you will have Jesus to be your all in all, the end of your straying and the beginning of your return the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul.

Amen.

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¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 113.