

What Does Jesus Mean to You?

Text: 1 Peter 2:21-25

Suggested Hymns:

391, 148, 146, 387

1) Christ is your saviour

2) Christ is your Shepherd

3) Christ is your example

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Peter 2:21-25, ²¹ *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:* ²² *“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;* ²³ *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;* ²⁴ *who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed.* ²⁵ *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Most people on earth are looking for something good. But opinions vary on the question what a good thing is. One person thinks money is the best thing on earth, another person thinks it is pleasure, a third person, honour and glory; and a fourth person, thinks power is best.

The search for something good is not at all a new endeavour. Ages ago, in search for the supreme good, Solomon carefully examined wisdom, pleasure, business, and wealth, but found them all to be vanity.

By its restless activity, strife, envy, and discontent the world of today shows very plainly that it does not have the happiness and prosperity it so eagerly seeks to get out of material things. The world is in misery because it does not believe in Christ or do His will.

The Lord Jesus offers us the greatest possible good for this life and for that which is to come. A man once took his small son to a huge cathedral, and as the

two were walking down the aisle, the boy pointed to the cross on the altar and asked, “*What is that big plus sign up there?*” If we have been thinking that Christ subtracts something from our lives, we have been wrong, for He adds the best there is to our lives.

What about you? Do you falsely imagine that Jesus is depriving you of something good, that he robs you of joy, that you would be happier if you had not chosen to follow Him as your Saviour?

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday and let us consider the question, “*What Does Christ Mean to You?*” May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Christ Is Your Saviour

Before Jesus can really mean something to us, we must understand the mess into which we have gotten ourselves. Peter describes it in these words, *For you were like sheep going astray*. That is the condition of all people by birth, including ours. By rebelling against the holy will of our Creator, we act like sheep that wander from their shepherd.

Isaiah tells us, “*your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you.*”¹ With this same Prophet we must admit, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.*”² It is daily that we fail to act, to speak, to think, to desire what God requires. Repeatedly we say, do, think, and crave those things which God forbids. By these violations of the Law of God we leave Him. We are like straying sheep, lost on the road to eternal ruin, for God in His perfect justice must punish the transgressions of His Law forever in hell.

But praise be to the Son of God, Jesus Christ! In His love Jesus has brought us back to God. He did not want us to remain such shepherd-less sheep. He therefore reunited us with our Creator and brought us back to His flock, as Peter declares, “*For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*” How could He do that great work for us sinners? What drove Him to do it for us, who of our own free will, had gone against Him? Only His love for us moved Him.

Many women who have suffered pain and abuse at the hands of a brutal husband or who have been the victims of repeated unfaithfulness cry out, “*My*

husband killed something in me. I can't love him any more." But all of our iniquities could not kill the Saviour's devotion to us.

So earnestly He wanted us back in God's fold. We hear Him say in Matthew 18:11, *"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."* No wonder Paul prayed that we *"might be able to comprehend what is the breadth and length and depth and height of Jesus' love and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge."*³ May Jesus mean to you that He is the Son of God, who made you God's sheep again.

How did Jesus bring you back into God's fold? Here is His own answer through His inspired Apostle Peter, *Christ also suffered for us ..., by whose stripes you were healed, who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.* Therefore Jesus could not have suffered for His sins. When He suffered on earth, He *"suffered for us."*

Jesus took our place under God's righteous punishment of our sins so that His Father might not pour out His wrath upon us, but might cancel all our transgressions and declare us His holy, spotless sheep. Yes, *"by Christ's stripes, or scourgings, we were healed"* of sin and its curse. Those blows of God's justice should have struck us, but Jesus placed Himself between us and those blows. Because they fell on Him, we escape, and in this way we were healed of sin.

Peter continues to describe how Christ brought us back to God when He assures us that Christ *Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.* Sinless Himself, Jesus carried our iniquities in His own body and soul when He went to the cross. He acted as our Substitute. We should have paid for our iniquities, but Christ took all the guilt and curse of our sins on Himself.

*"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*⁴ *"The LORD has laid on [Christ] the iniquity of us all."*⁵ *"For [God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us."*⁶ His Father dealt with Jesus as if He had committed our sins. He was cursed for our transgressions, as His death on the "tree," the wood of the cross, demonstrated.

The cross was not only a method of execution, but it was also a sign that God's curse was upon the victim, as the Bible warns, *"He that is hanged is*

accursed of God.”⁷ Jesus was accursed for our sins so that we might be blessed. *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).”*⁸

During the First World War a French officer fell wounded in front of the French trenches. The enemy’s shrapnel was bursting all around him where he lay, entirely unprotected. Seeing his danger, a private crawled out of the trench, dressed the officer’s wounds as best he could, and, lying down beside him, he whispered in his ear, *“Do not fear! I am between you and the shells. They must touch me first.”*

What a beautiful picture of Christ, who on Calvary placed Himself between us and the thunderbolts of God’s justice and then assured us, *“Do not fear! I am between you and the strokes of God’s wrath and punishment. They must touch Me first.”* Therefore we need not fear. We are right with God. He has forgiven us for Jesus’ sake. He has taken us back into His flock. Yes, *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”* *You were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

There is but one thing we need do to be a sheep of God, and that is sincerely to believe in His Son as the One who *“suffered for us, who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and who healed us of sin by His stripes.”* Such faith in Christ is *“returning to Him as the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.”* This trust, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts by His Word and Sacraments.

Does Jesus mean such redemption to you? Do you joyfully sing, *“Christ brought me, a wandering and lost sheep, back to Himself, my Good Shepherd, by taking all my sins on Himself and suffering and dying for them?”* I pray that He does mean that to you. If so, you are a sheep of the Triune God.

If not, you do not believe; and your unbelief is the greatest of all sins. A survey put the following question to a cross-section of the adult population, *“What do you consider the biggest mistake of your life so far?”* Of those interviewed, 22% stated that their greatest mistake was their failure to get enough education. 10% thought that their marriage was their worst blunder. And 8% said they made their greatest error in choosing their career.

We agree that these are serious mistakes. But there is a mistake a thousand times worse, and that is stubbornly to refuse to turn to Jesus in true repentance over your sins, and then in complete trust believe in Him as the One who has purchased your salvation by suffering and dying for your sins.

Beware of unbelief! Believe in your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and confess that Christ means everything to you because with His agony and sacrifice He removed your transgressions, thus reconciling you to God.

2. Christ Is Your Shepherd

If such is your faith, you can rightly assert, “The Lord is the Shepherd and Overseer, of my soul. He will always look after me. I shall always live under His loving care. He knows all my needs and will supply them richly in His grace. He keeps His gentle hand over me constantly. He will never leave me nor forsake me. Therefore I need never worry. I need never fear. Someday He will take me to heaven. Yes, that is what Christ means to me.”

An eye specialist said, *“If your eyes tire of close reading, stop your reading for a few minutes now and then, and look at the hills.”* Our eyes will become strained and overtired, our hearts will be burdened with anxiety and fear, if we focus them too long on the needs and problems of life. We need to lift our eyes of faith to the all-gracious, all-providing, never-failing God. There is the key to our puzzled, worry-filled lives. *“Cast all your care upon God, for He careth for you.”*¹⁰ Learn to say: *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”*

Your Shepherd promises, *“Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love.”*¹¹ Many things change in our lives, but God’s love is always the same.

A farmer painted on the weather vane over his barn, *“God is Love.”* His neighbour asked him, “Do you mean that God’s love is as changeable as the wind?” *“No,”* he replied, *“I mean that God is Love no matter which way the winds blow.”*

May God’s Spirit endow us with such a faith in God, our Shepherd. Then we can lead the kind of happy life our God wants us to lead, for we shall then go on living each moment with the certainty that He forgives our every sin, that He will take us to heaven someday, that while He leaves us on earth, He will provide

our physical needs, help us in every trouble, console us in every sorrow, protect us in every peril, and guide our life in such a way that all things will work out for our eternal good.

3. Make Christ Your Example Out Of Love To Him

A man who returned after a War was heard to say, “*After what I have seen, I’ll never be the same again.*” The terrible scene of the ruins had made such a deep impression upon him that his memory would never again be able to shut out the vivid pictures which he carried in his mind.

Similarly, and yet in a different sense, the Christian can repeat the words of this traveller, “*After what I have seen, I’ll never be the same again.*” With the eyes of faith, he has seen the Son of God become man in order to be his Saviour and Shepherd.

Surely, after what we have seen, we can never be the same again. We, then, want to please our Redeemer, who loved us so dearly. Yes, we want to make Him our Example. We want to follow His steps, as our text calls upon us to do, ***Christ [left] us an example, that you should follow His steps.*** May Jesus, then, mean this to you, that you constantly make Him your model in all that you say, think, do, and desire.

It is well for us to know that in the original Greek text, the word translated “example” is model writing placed under another sheet and traced by a pupil. We are to trace Christ in our conduct, as a person traces a writing or drawing. Or, as Peter reminds us, “***we are to follow His steps,***” or His footprints, as the original has it. We are to follow Jesus and walk in His footprints.

We are to strive to be like Jesus, who is holy. Christ is our best Pattern because ***[He] committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.*** Of course, we can never completely follow His example and perfectly walk in His steps. Yet, like Paul, we are to say, “***I follow after***”¹² *that perfect example which Jesus left me.*”

A little child can follow the steps of his father, walking in the same path after him; but the child cannot make such long strides as the father, nor can his little feet fill out the father’s footprints. And while the father strides on lustily, the child will often slip or stumble or even fall to the ground. Yet, scrambling up again, he pushes on after the father.

So we follow the footprints of Jesus. We never can fully walk in His footprints, but with the assistance of His Holy Spirit we seek to do it ever more fully with each passing day. This eagerness to become ever more like our holy Redeemer is to be characteristic of us Christians, who declare:¹³

*I long to be like Jesus,
Meek, loving, lowly, mild;
I long to be like Jesus
The Father's holy Child.*

Let us also remember that Christ died so that we might serve Him in righteousness as *Luther's Small Catechism* tells us. Living such a life is another purpose of Christ's great sacrifice. ***"[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.*** Christ did not die so that we might continue to live in wickedness. No, He bore our sins not only to remove them but also to fill us with willingness and power to be dead to them and to live a righteous life, a life that God approves. Let us follow Christ's holy example in our life.

Like Christ we are to be ready to suffer innocently. Christ did not deserve His suffering and death on the cross. He suffered innocently. He also suffered while doing good. Peter reminds us that because of the enmity of the ungodly children of the world, followers of Christ also have to suffer innocently and while doing good. ***"For this is commendable,"*** we read, ***"if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. ²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²² "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth."¹⁴***

When the Saviour says, ***"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master,"¹⁵*** He reminds us that if He had to suffer enmity and persecution on earth, we, His disciples and servants, must also expect to suffer. Let us, then, be ready to suffer ridicule, animosity, ostracism, for the sake of our Saviour. Let us be willing to be persecuted when we stand up for Jesus as man's only Hope of forgiveness and eternal salvation. Let us consider it an honour to

be afflicted for standing up for godly principles, for justice, purity, and right. It is then that we are following Christ's steps.

Like Christ we are not to seek revenge. When Jesus suffered for well-doing, He did not get angry at His persecutors, nor did He ever try to repay evil with evil. Our text says, *when He was reviled, did not revile in return*. Though insult and abuse were heaped upon Him by His enemies, the Lord Christ never once abused and insulted them. *When He suffered, He did not threaten*. Under the severest torture Jesus never uttered one word of threatening. Instead, Jesus *"committed Himself to [God] who judges righteously."* He left it up to His Father to deal justly with those who were wronging Him.

May we follow His example also in this respect. Let us not hate those who hate us and abuse us. Let us not seek to return evil for evil. Let us not repay insult and abuse with insult and abuse. Hatred and revenge are to find no place in our heart, as they were not found in the heart of our Lord.

Like Jesus, let us leave it up to God to deal justly with those who persecute, revile, and wrong us. *"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,"* says the Lord.¹⁶ That is His promise. Looking to Christ's example, may we follow Him in all that we do, to the glory of God the Father.

What does Jesus mean to you? I pray that your answer is, Jesus is my Saviour, Jesus is my Shepherd, Jesus is my perfect example, Him and only Him will I follow. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isaiah 59:2

² Isaiah 53:6

³ Ephesians 3:18

⁴ John 1:29

⁵ Isaiah 53:6

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁷ Deuteronomy 21:23

⁸ Galatians 3:13

⁹ 1 Peter 3:18

¹⁰ 1 Peter 5:7

-
- 11 Jeremiah 31:3
 - 12 Philippians 3:12
 - 13 ALHB 344 v 4
 - 14 1 Peter 2:19-22
 - 15 Matthew 10:24
 - 16 Romans 12:19