Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Psalm 119:105









Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death---even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:8

Obedient unto DEATH.

here is only ONE who can be described this way. The ONE who died on the cross for wretched, selfish, idolatrous, proud sinners like us. And because of this, we need to remind ourselves especially this time, that what we actually deserve is death.

Let us contemplate on:

our

Depravity,

Election, the

Atonement of our sins, and

The undeserved favor which make us

Heaven-bound.

Let us imprint in our hearts and manifest in our actions:

- "While human beings are born fallen, there
- "Nothing prompts the heart more to burst forth with much gratitude and praise than in realizing such grace!"
- "There is no other way but Jesus Christ!"
- "Obey Him now out of gratitude and love."
- "Because of what Christ did on the cross, we have been purified, preserved and enabled to persevere."

"May the cross of Christ continue to prepare and strengthen us for whatever lies ahead."

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2021 Holy Week Message:

Christ's Suffering -Our Inspiration In Adversity

by Ptr. Robbie Casas

Someone once asked C.S. Lewis, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied. "They're the only ones who can take it."

hen I first read that anecdote and Lewis' answer, after my initial and momentary amusement, I began to realize how loaded and profound that statement was. Having some familiarity with C.S. Lewis' background, I assumed that he understood "the righteous" to be those made righteous in Christ. So I began to ponder, "Why is it that the righteous in Christ – believers – are the ones who can take suffering?"

Immediately, a lot of answers began to flood my thoughts. Because we have the Holy Spirit who indwells us and gives us strength (1Cor 6:19-20; Phil 4:13). Because God is sovereign over all our trials and afflictions, using these for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28). Because we have the promise of eternal life awaiting us (Mk 10:29-30; Jn 6:47). Because we have the prospect of heaven and being forever with our Lord (Revelation 21-22). Because of the future glory that awaits us (Rom 8:18). Because we are more than conquerors through God (Rom 8:37). Because nothing -

absolutely nothing – can separate us from God's love for us in *Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:39). (I actually could go on...)

But the commemoration of Christ's suffering and death during this Holy Week gives us yet another compelling reason. For this I turn your attention to 1Pet 2:21-25: "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, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

Peter wrote this letter to believers who were suffering persecution under Nero around 64 a.d. He wrote for the purpose of teaching them to live victoriously and encouraging them to endure in the midst of that hostility. In this passage, as he reminded them that God had called them to endure suffering in their striving to do what is right (see v. 20), he points the believers to Christ who suffered on their behalf whose example of suffering they were to follow to be able to endure (v. 21).

In vv. 22-23, Peter describes how Christ responded to suffering, beginning in v. 22 by reminding his readers of Christ's perfect innocence – highlighting His being undeserving of such suffering. Then in v. 23 he describes Christ's response to His mistreatment: "... while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats." Instead, He just "kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

Jesus' response to the suffering inflicted upon Him was not anger at His enemies nor a desire to retaliate against them; His response was to surrender Himself to the Father and to trust Him as the One who sovereignly knows what was being done to Him and therefore would judge

"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...."

I Peter 2:21

righteously those who are His enemies. But more than this, Jesus could entrust Himself to the Father because He knew that the Father was the one who delivered Him over by His "predetermined plan and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). In other words, He knew that the Father was in everything that He was experiencing, having ordained all this to fulfill His plan of salvation for the blessing of the elect and for the glory of His name.

Because of this, Jesus was not only able to suffer silently and in submission to the Father.

Over and above this, "24... He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Christ's perspective and response to His suffering also brought Him to fulfill His mission of salvation.

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." As if the torture and humiliation were not enough, Christ Himself "bore our sins in His body on the cross." This word "Himself" was added by Peter to emphasize that the sacrifice of our sins was not delegated to any another. This was personally undertaken by our Lord Himself. The word "bore" means to take upon Himself ("our sins") by imputation (put in His account) and to take away. How? "... in His body on the cross" - by His crucifixion. For what purpose? "... so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness...." This not only speaks of our being delivered from the penalty of our sins but also of our being set free from the **power** of sin in our lives to live the life of righteousness - the sanctified life, the Christ life. This – our being spiritually "healed" from sin – was made possible only through the suffering and death of Christ - "His wounds".

In v. 25, Peter reminded his readers of where they used to be and where they were now because of what Jesus did: "25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

What a beautiful picture of the testimony of the sinner saved! Before Christ, we were all spiritually lost, "straying like sheep." "But now," because of what Christ did in v. 24, we are in the care of our

divine "Shepherd" and in the protection of the heavenly "Guardian of [our] souls," having been returned to Him. In the KJV, this is rendered "but are now returned" reflecting that in the Greek, this is in the passive voice: it is not us who have returned on our own, but rather we have been brought back by Christ through what He did in v. 24. All glory indeed to our loving Savior and Lord!

As we celebrate Holy Week, may the reminder of Christ's suffering, first of all, cause us to respond to our earthly afflictions in the way that He did to His, being our divine example. Secondly, may we be reminded that we can and must entrust ourselves to God who, in His sovereignty, ordained all that we go through in this life for some good and holy purpose. Lastly, may we never lose sight of the fact that because of Christ we have victory over sin's power so as to continue to live righteously even in the midst of these dark times.

Jesus Christ is our inspiration and motivation to live boldly and faithfully according to who we are and what we have in Him, "the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

May the cross of Christ continue to prepare and strengthen us for whatever lies ahead.

Depravily

of Human Beings

by Ptr. Jun Malazo

The generation that rarely owns up to its mistakes but expects praise for its littlest effort will hardly be interested in hearing about an assessment of the moral demise of the human race. However, if only they will sincerely listen, they will begin to see a translucent image of humanity's odious fallen nature.

The Bible declares that **every fallen human being is rotten to the core:** "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen.6:5). This assessment was given before the Flood (Gen.7-8). But while that generation perished in the Flood, the wickedness that was in their inner beings continued with the four married couples that were saved from the flood. Thus, thousands of years later, our Lord himself said that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Mt.15:19). James wrote, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that warin your members?" (Jam.4:1).

Wickedness continues to happen because the fallen human heart continues to exist. It produces sinful desires and passions. Peter said, "Beloved, I beg you, ... abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1Pe.2:11).

Can human beings change who they are? No. Why? Because (1) it is in their very nature to despise any change towards God (Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil? – Jer. 13:23), (2) they're deceived about their true condition (The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? -Jer. 17:9). Fallen human beings won't and can't change towards God.

Will the possession of divine laws and precepts transform these fallen human beings? No. Why? Because their very nature is to rebel against God and His laws. In fact, the very opposite is produced when divine laws are imposed upon rebels. Paul testified, "the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death" (Rom.7:5). Instead of producing righteous desires "sin, taking the opportunity by the

commandment, produced in [him] all manner of evil desires" (v.8). Thus, more laws and more restrictions produce more rebellious desires and disobedient thoughts.

Now, that does not mean that fallen human beings do not have "noble" aspirations. Paul continued, "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (v.15). "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (v.19). Noble desires were conceived in his mind, but he couldn't carry them out. Why was that?

Because at the very core of his being another principle was effectively working: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (v.23). While incarcerated in his fallen nature, his condition will not change. Thus, Paul exclaimed in desperation: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (v.24). Paul's self-description is true of every fallen human being. **Wretched is a fair assessment of fallen humanity** (cf.Heb.4:12).

Since we cannot reform ourselves even if we are armed with God's laws and precepts, who is going to change us? God. Through the preaching of the gospel and the miracle called regeneration, we can "partake of the divine nature" (holiness and righteousness) and "escape the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2Pet.1:4).

Upon regeneration, our hearts will have new abilities. The Bible says, "I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD [and] they shall return to Me with their whole heart" (Jer.24:7). "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezk.11:19). Thus, while human beings are born fallen, there is hope.

Chosen In Christ: The Definitive Purpose Of God In Lec ion by Ptr. Ence Ragos

m a g i n e hearing your name drawn from a large pile of raffle entries winning the grand prize. How would you respond? I'm sure you would be in much great joy and excitement as youreceive your prize!

The Bible speaks of Christians having been "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world..." (Ephesians 1:4a). Learning this truth should cause us to declare much praise to God. This is not merely referring to a certain amount of money or material blessing, but of having the greatest blessing we could ever have – our eternal salvation!

For centuries, theologians and biblical scholars alike have debated and written regarding this important theme of God's election which relates to salvation. We will not be able to delve deeply into this topic. I hope that this short article will lead us to study this subject more. Allow God to enable us to approach this with humility and dependence on His wisdom.

It is our firm belief that our God is sovereign over all things. This is also true with regard to the reality of our salvation. God is not a capricious being who makes choices arbitrarily. He does not bestow certain privileges nor makes promises without a real and established purpose. Paul said that in Christ, "we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). God from eternity past had a definite plan and fulfilled it.

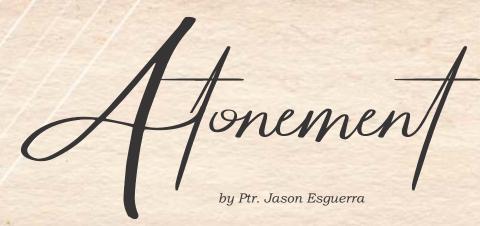
Why has God chosen us? What could be His basis for doing so? The only answer is that in His grace, God chose undeserving sinners who do not at all have the ability to save

themselves. Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you..." (John 15:16). Paul declared, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). The word foreknew in the verse means "to choose" or "to set special affection on" or "foreloved." God from the beginning, predestined those whom He has chosen by sending His Son to accomplish their salvation. John wrote, "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God manifested His love long before anyone of us could do anything to merit His love.

The truth of election points us back to the undeniable reality of our depravity. We know how deserving we are of God's wrath and judgment for our sin. Sinners who had been enslaved to sin cannot get away from its grasp. Man being spiritually dead because of sin will not come to God nor in any measure desire to submit to Christ. There is nothing in us that should prompt God to demonstrate such love. There is no way we can attribute any ability on our part to seek and choose God on our own. Only God's gracious, marvellous, extravagant sovereign love can make a rebellious person become His child, freed from guilt and condemnation and have eternal life.

How then should we respond to this truth? God's choosing incites true reverence and affection from His own chosen people. Those who understand the depth of His love for them would desire to live in holiness. As Paul puts it, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him (in love)" (Ephesians 1:4). If we have been truly elected by God, we will demonstrate in our lives a strong desire to know Him and grow in grace and the likeness of our Lord! When we consider and reflect upon the truth of our election, we would want to dedicate the rest of our lives bringing glory to God! Nothing prompts the heart more to burst forth with much gratitude and praise than in realizing such grace!





Testament is used once in the New Testament to speak of Christ reconciling men to God. Romans 5:11 tells us that Christians should "rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." It is a word commonly understood in the Old Testament as an act where God repairs a broken relationship due to man's sin through an atoning sacrifice. The offering should be according to what the Lord has ordained and how the Lord prescribed it to be done and consecrated. The meaning of the word is "at-one-ment" which speaks of being at peace with God.

The Bible teaches that in Christ, believers received reconciliation with God (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Let us explore how Jesus' life, death and resurrection made the atonement for Christians.

First of all, the Scriptures affirmed that the sacrifice must be blameless, spotless and holy before God. God won't accept an offering that fails the criteria set in Leviticus (4-5). In His baptism. God had revealed Jesus as the Sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). In this way, God had appointed Christ to be the atoning sacrifice. He had set the Son of God as the perfect, spotless, sinless and holy sacrifice for sin. Jesus fulfilled the law as the sin offering when He lived His life in perfect obedience to God. 2 Peter 3:14 says that Christ is "without spot or blemish." In the words of Paul, Jesus is "without sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Leviticus gave us details on how the sacrifice should be killed and offered before God. There must be a shedding of blood in order for sin to be atoned for (Hebrews 9:22). Again, Jesus Christ shed His blood and died to fulfil such demand of the law. He did not just faint on the cross. He shed His blood. He was pierced for our iniquities. He was crucified taking the shame of ultimate penalty. Isaiah described to us the Messiah and

how He will suffer in the hands of sinners (Isaiah 53). In his epistle, John testified that they had heard Christ; they had seen Him with their own eyes; they had touched with their hands "the word of Life" Himself (1 John 1:2). Then he further claimed that this Word of Life "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). God's wrath against ungodliness and unrighteousness has been appeased by the death of Christ. The blood of Christ which means His death covered the sins of those who truly believe in Him. His death was offered as a "ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

On the Day of Atonement, the Jews celebrate the most holy day of their religious life as a nation. It is this day that the High Priest enters the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the sins of the whole people. The High Priest will prepare all the ceremonial details as the whole nation anticipates God's mercy. Whatever ceremonial readiness the Jews make, they are still dependent on God to accept their offering. It is this reason why Christ's atonement is so vital that believers are fully assured and secured of their sin's pardon. Christ guaranteed the payment for our sins when He sealed victory over sin, Satan and even death through His resurrection.1 Corinthians 15:17 tells us that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." Christ defeated sin through His death and resurrection.

Knowing therefore the truth about Christ's atonement for us, we should respond in joy. John wrote about this so that "joy will be made complete" (1 John 1:4). COVID-19 should not rob us of our joy in the Lord. Whatever happens to us in the coming days, may we anchor our life and faith in Him "who loved us and gave Himself for us" (Galatians 2:20). The truth about atonement should also motivate us to live in holiness. Jewish people are fully aware that the Day of Atonement is also the day of purification. As Christians, we have been purified by Christ (Hebrews 1:3). Finally, the message of atonement should be proclaimed to all men. This is their only hope of forgiveness. Christ is the only way men could ever come to God. No other way but Jesus Christ!

UNDESERVED FAVOR

by Bro. Joey Fernandez

any people are obsessed with the pursuit of happiness. They spend hard-earned money to listen to motivational speakers share the secret to happiness only to realize that the motivation ends a few days after the talk. They realize too late that the promised lasting joy could only give a temporal high. The saying "the best things in life are free" is so true in this case. You don't need to pay for advice on how to achieve lasting joy. In the book of Philippians, the most trustworthy advice is given freely by Paul. Despite his wretched situation as a prisoner in Rome, Paul's letter to the Philippians overflows with joy because his focus is on Christ alone. The secret to having joy is in Christ (*Phil. 4:11-13*), and our joy can be complete in Christ who lavished His grace upon us.

God's grace gives guilty sinners the "free gift" of salvation. The Bible intentionally uses this redundant combination of words "free" and "gift" for emphasis. It is an unmerited gift, God's undeserved favor. "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Romans 11:5-6).

A story is told about Robert Robinson, who as a young man, brought his gang of troublemakers to heckle and mock the great preacher George Whitfield as he preached.* But Whitefield's preaching on Matthew 3:7 haunted him that day, and he left the hall greatly disturbed. At the age of 20, he wrote the preacher telling him that he

"found full and free forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ."
Shortly after, he wrote that well-loved hymn: "Come Thy Fount of Every Blessing", a song that bursts forth with the truth of the grace of God that had saved him. A young

thug who had wicked plans of disrupting a worship service deserved severe punishment from a Holy God. Instead, he experienced the undeserved love of God and the promise of salvation -- an amazing testimony of how God can turn situations around for His Name.

This is the story of every man saved by grace. No matter how good or bad he thought he lived his life, his broken heart realizes his great sin. He then cries out to God for forgiveness and surrenders his life to Him in repentance and faith. He realizes that he cannot save himself by his own works. Only the perfect, sinless Christ can save him from his sins and grant him everlasting life. Only Christ had a love so perfect that He would deny Himself to save sinners like us.

The biblical word "grace" holds so much meaning to a Christian. The word becomes even more meaningful when God extended it towards prominent, yet underserving characters of the Bible:

God extended His grace upon Abraham and wife Sarah despite their unbelief (*Gen 15-18*).

Noah, a drunk (Gen 9:21), "found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8).

Moses, a murderer (Ex 2:12), full of doubt despite the Lord directly revealing Himself to him and yet was chosen by grace.

Christ was the stark opposite: In the form of God but gave it all up to become man; deserving the highest praise and yet chose to receive humiliation and scorn; eternally rich and glorious but chose a life of poverty and suffering which ended with a painful, humiliating death on the cross. The Highest chose to become the humblest. "He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf" (2 Cor 5:21).

"Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

The example of our Lord Jesus Christ is set before us. And so, Paul exhorts us to have the attitude of Christ. Develop a spirit of humility and obedience, to "work out (and not work for) our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in us... for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).

We cannot earn God's grace, and we most certainly cannot pay for it either. It will always be free and undeserved. Because He lavished it upon us, our hearts long to live for Him and love Him in return. Therefore, **obey Him now out of gratitude and love**.

 ${\rm *Robert\,Robinson\,biography\,sources:}$

https://www.stempublishing.com/hymns/biographies/robinson.html https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/did-robert-robinson-wander-as-he-feared-11630313.html



by Ptr. Tabs De Jesus

eaven-Bound – the very thought of that eternal destination for us believers brings a profound comfort to our lives. It reminds us that this life is not the end and a more glorious destination awaits us.

The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." I believe that the most exciting thing about heaven for the believer is that it is not just a destination; it is where we belong. As believers we are not heaven bound, we are actually homeward bound.

And as we are travelling towards our eternal home, the journey of life is God's instrument in preparing us. Every trial, suffering, persecution and blessing is God's instrument to purify, preserve and push us to persevere in order to reach our eternal home.

It is amazing how Peter deals with the subject of sanctification, preservation and perseverance in his letter to persecuted believers in I Peter 1:3-9. Peter takes away their focus on the persecution and focuses on how hardship and persecution purify and prepare us for the kingdom of God.

Sanctification, Preservation and Perseverance: (I Peter 1:3-7)

- 3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
- 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,
- 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials,
- 7 So that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold which is perishable even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Peter reminds us that because of God's great mercy those who have surrendered their life to Christ have been born again, regenerated, given new life. Positionally because of Christ, we have been given a positional sanctification.
Christ's righteousness became our righteousness so that because of Christ's work on the cross we have been declared righteous. But notice that our new life in Christ has given us a living hope that will grant us an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and reserved for us.

It is an inheritance that prepares and helps us through the various trials that distress us. In other words, we are not only positionally sanctified, but we are progressively sanctified as believers through the trials that we go through.

The great hope of those who are heaven-bound is the inheritance that God has reserved for the believer which will be revealed as he enters God's kingdom. And because God has reserved this inheritance for him, He will also make sure that He will protect him until that day. Peter says in verse 5, "who are protected by the power of God through faith...." God preserves His people.

In other words, God will make sure that those whom He has saved will be preserved up to the end and will receive what He has promised to them as an inheritance. The only thing that He asks of us is to persevere. But what will help us persevere?

Verse 6 tells us, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials." Peter points us to the fuel of our perseverance. The rejoicing of our souls in our position as heirs of an inheritance and our security as sons who have been made the children of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we meditate this holy week, may our hearts rejoice greatly in the truth that because of what Christ did on the cross, we have been purified, preserved and enabled to persevere.

