

# THROUGH THE BIBLE

## 1 PETER 1-2

Some names really fit... such as, the shop in Alameda, California that sells maternity clothes.

It's called, "*Fashion After Passion.*"

Or the fast food Indian restaurant in New York named, "*Curry In A Hurry.*" These names are apropos!

But the name "**Peter**" was one name that didn't seem to fit. "*Petros*" means "*rock,*" yet the disciple of Jesus we know as, "**Peter,**" was more like *shifting sand*.

Peter was impulsive, inconsistent, insensitive.

Peter was unstable, not very rock-like.

Yet Jesus named Peter, not after what he was at the time he received the name, but after what he would become once transformed by the Savior and the Spirit.

**Two events** turned a *Shifty Simon* into *Powerhouse Pete*. First, **on the day of Pentecost** a fearful Peter was endued or infused with power from on High.

Once he was filled with the Holy Spirit, from that day onward, he preached God's Word with boldness.

Peter received **power at Pentecost**, and **perspective at Calvary's Cross**. Before the cross Peter believed in a Messiah who'd reign and rule, not suffer and die.

Peter was never more confused than the night His King knelt to wash his feet. It wasn't until after the resurrection that he realized the path to God's glory runs through

the humility of the cross. We'll reign with Jesus, but first we die to pride and become a servant.

By the time Peter pens this epistle *that perspective* had taken firm hold of his life. This letter is a message of hope even in the midst of suffering and persecution.

We're not told when 1 Peter was written, but I believe it was penned while Peter was in prison in Rome, waiting to be executed by Caesar Nero.

In chapter 5:13 he sends greetings from those in Babylon. It could be Peter was in literal Babel - but it's far more likely he was speaking of the spiritual Babylon, or Rome, capitol of paganism and idolatry.

We know Peter and Paul were prison mates between the years 63-64 AD. This might explain why 1 Peter is so similar to Paul's letter to the Ephesians – the two apostles may even have swapped thoughts and notes.

We also know both Peter and Paul were executed about the same time - shortly after this imprisonment.

There's no doubt when Peter wrote this letter he knew death was on the horizon - and yet his eyes were fixed beyond the horizon - to the glories of heaven.

We glean from this letter... *If Paul was the apostle of faith, and John was the apostle of love; then Peter was the apostle of hope!* He grew rock-like when he looked beyond this life, and anchored his hopes in eternity.

Verse 1, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...” In Acts we learn the early Church was a wartime baby. The Church in Jerusalem was born in the midst of persecution.

Eventually many of its believers *dispersed* into other parts of the world. Peter is writing to these refugees.

In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, the audience who witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were from **Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia** - as well as, **Phrygia and Pamphylia**, *cities of Galatia*. After Pentecost many of these new believers may've stayed in Jerusalem to grow in their faith, before eventually returning home.

Peter never lost touch with these saints, and he writes them this letter to encourage their faith.

Of course, Peter is also writing to us. Even if you've lived your whole life in one place you're still a dispersed pilgrim. This world is not your home!

It reminds me of the mom onboard a ship in the middle of the Atlantic. An angry storm almost sunk the boat, but the woman exuded calm and strength.

When the ordeal was over the captain asked her the secret of her composure. She said, **"I've got two daughters. One lives in New York, and the other lives in heaven. I knew I'd see one of my girls in a few hours and it didn't really matter which one."** We're all just pilgrims on a journey. We're merely passing through.

Peter encourages these pilgrims. They may've given up their locality, and earthly comforts to follow Jesus, but spiritual blessings transfer from place to place.

And he lists them, **"elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace be multiplied."**

Notice the Trinity at work in our salvation: *elected by the Father, set aside by the Spirit, cleansed by Jesus!*

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again...” Literally we’ve been born again!

Recall the old saying, “Born once die twice. Born twice die once.” In Christ we’ve received a new birth.

We humans are a trichotomy - **body, soul, and spirit**. We’re a three stroke engine. We have three cylinders.

But here’s the problem, most humans run on only two of three cylinders. Our body is alive - our soul, the mind and emotions, is alive - but our spirit is dead.

Thus, we sputter and misfire, and limp along in life.

Yet when Jesus enters He quickens our dead spirit and infuses us with His life. We’re literally born again. Born this time not of human birth, but of spiritual birth.

And we are born again “to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

The Italian poet, Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, hangs a foreboding inscription over death’s door. It reads, “Abandon all hope, you who enter here!”

Death is the great spoiler. It separates lovers, and creates orphans. It slams the door on opportunity, and causes vast potential to vanish instantly. It cuts short the promise of a blissful future. *Most of all death chokes out hope!* But we as believers in Jesus we can look death in the face and still maintain “*a living hope!*”

Our Lord has overcome death, hell, and the grave.

When Jesus rolled away the stone - and exited the grave, never to die again - He resurrected hope for all people. Through the triumph of Jesus, all His followers now have the hope of sharing in His supernatural life!

We've been born again, verse 4, "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you..." An earthly inheritance can lose its luster or value - its corruptible. It can be tainted or defiled - it can be lost or fade away.

There're no guarantees with earthly treasure.

Whereas, God's blessings are permanent and priceless. And there's such an inheritance in heaven right now with your name on it. Your inheritance is under lock and key - and it's reserved for you!

For you yourself, "are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." My kids would always ask me, "Daddy, will you hold this for me?" Sometimes it was their money, or baseball glove, or jacket, or their Bible - but it was an item they didn't want to lose. They trusted it to dad.

And you are an item God doesn't want to lose! So much so, He promises to keep you - hold on to you!

Believe in Jesus and God keeps you in His pocket!

Verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much

more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”

From the beginning Peter believed Jesus to be the Messiah, but his concept of what Messiah had come to do was transformed at Calvary's cross. Yes, one day Messiah will reign in glory, but there's a *grieving* that comes before the *glory*. The *cross* precedes the *crown*.

Faith has to be tried in order to be refined.

And you are like the precious gold. The refiner turns up the heat, melts the medal, picks out the impurities.

Which is also how God works in us. He turns up the heat of hardship - and melts our pride and self-sufficiency - and then God picks out the impurities.

**And how does the goldsmith know when the gold has been properly refined?**  
**When he can see his reflection on the surface of the medal!** Likewise, Jesus knows that we've been adequately refined when a Christ-likeness begins to surface in our lives.

Here's the *analogy* set to *poetry*. Listen closely as the author describes the refiner's work...

“He sat by a furnace of sevenfold heat, as He watched by the precious ore; and closer He bent, with a searching gaze, as He heated it more and more.

He knew He had ore that could stand the test; and He wanted the finest of gold - to mold as a crown for the King to wear; set with gems of a price untold.

So He laid out gold in the burning fire, though we wanted His hand to stay; and He watched the dross that we had not seen, as it melted and passed away.

And the gold grew brighter, and yet more bright; but our eyes were so dim with tears, we saw the fire - not the Master's hand - and questioned with anxious fears.

Yet our gold shone out with a richer glow, as it mirrored a form above - that bend over the fire - though unseen by us - with looks of ineffable love.

Can we think it pleases His loving heart to cause us a moment of pain? Ah! No, but we saw through the present loss the bliss of eternal gain.

So He waited there with a watchful eye, with a love that is so strong and sure; and His gold did not suffer a bit more heat, than was needed to make it pure."

I'm moved by the final line, "His gold did not suffer a bit more heat, than was needed to make it pure."

Perhaps tonight you're in the crucible of tribulation. The genuineness of your faith is being tested.

Sure, you'll serve God when He blesses, and when He makes you feel good. *Who wouldn't?* But what happens in the heat of adversity? How genuine is your faith in the fire? How sincere is your commitment?

Peter continues in verse 8, "whom having not seen you love." It was a young man's first day in his college science class. The professor walked in and said, "All who believe in Christ please stand." The boy stood up.

The professor continued, "Can you feel, see, smell, taste, or hear your God?" The kid replied, "No, sir."

He snarled again, "Then you may sit down for your God does not exist." But the boy was unmoved.

He responded, *"May I ask you something? Can you feel, smell, taste, hear, or see your brain?"* The teacher said "Of course not". The young man answered, *"Well then you may sit down for your brain does not exist!"*

The point is we all believe in realities we cannot relate to with our five senses. Love and loyalty are invisible realities, yet we all believe they exist.

Likewise with Jesus. We can't relate to Him tangibly or physically, but we can sense His presence and love in our hearts - and we can love Him in return!

Helen Keller said, *"The best and most beautiful things in life cannot be seen or even touched... they must be felt with the heart."* This is true spiritually.

*"Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory..."*

The heart of faith fills up with joy and glory!

Oh, the vistas that open up to the soul that looks through eyes of faith! A bubbling, splashing, abounding joy streams into our hearts. An indescribable joy - a joy that refuses to be reduced to words - surrounds the heart of faith... Joy and glory - laughter and wonder - belong to everyone who really and truly believes.

The believer's soul is like a chocolate-dipped cone at Dairy Queen. The ice cream of joy is stacked high, and covered with rich, creamy, chocolate glory!

Verse 9, *"receiving the end of your faith - the salvation of your souls."* The NT speaks of salvation in different phases. When you embrace Christ as Lord you are saved from the *penalty of sin*, as we grow in Christ we're saved from the *power of*



*sin*, and one day when we enter the glories of heaven we'll be saved from this wicked world and the *presence of sin*.

But at every stage of salvation we're saved by grace through faith! This is why its so essential to continue in our faith. Faith is not a one time proposition. Faith is a mindset we need to cultivate, and grow, and develop.

Verse 10, "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven..."

In other words, what the Hebrew prophets said about Messiah, and what the ministers of the Gospel preach about Jesus, are in perfect harmony with one another.

There's no contradiction in the message. The Gospel of grace is not a *man-made* invention - it's *Spirit-sent!*

And then Peter tells us, the Gospel reveals truths "**which angels desire to look into.**" The angels are intrigued with the implications of the Gospel.

The angels were stunned when their Eternal King humbled Himself and became a man - horrified when He allowed Himself to be nailed to a Roman cross.

In fact, for the last 2000 years the angels have tried to understand the depth of God's love for the little mud-dobbers called "*man.*" I imagine the angels to be a lot like

Dr. Spock - logical, non-emotive Vulcans. They're trying to fathom this divine emotion called "love."

These faithful messengers of God make it a favorite pastime to try and grasp why God would reach so low for wayward, rebellious, stubborn humans. They **desire to look into** the grace, and mercy, and kindness of God.

We would grow in grace, and our love for God would grow bolder, if we adopted the same pastime!

Verse 13, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind..." In other words, "get serious about walking with Jesus."

"Be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written..." And here Peter quotes Leviticus 11:44, "Be holy, for I am holy." Remember the word "holy" means "to set aside, or to reserve."

When we think of holy objects we imagine relics that have a supernatural quality - *the Ark of the Covenant, or the Shroud of Turin, or even the Holy Grail*. But any item can be made *holy* simply by dedicating it to God.

I can take the coffee mug I refill every morning, give it to God, and it would become *a holy mug*.

Likewise with people - we're holy not because we possess super human qualities or capabilities - but because our lives are reserved for God's purposes.

Look into my face and guess what you'll see? You'll see *a holy mug*. Yes, it's just a plain ole mug, but *its God's mug* - and that's what makes anything holy.

Verse 17, “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” In Christ we're redeemed!

To us the word “*redeemed*” is a religious word we rarely associate with every-day life, but in the Roman world it was a word that sparked instant hope!

The empire's 60 million slaves went to bed at night dreaming of “*redemption*” - that somehow they could purchase freedom, or someone would do it for them.

A few gold coins could free a Roman slave, but freedom from sin is much, much more costly.

It requires the *precious blood* of the *perfect lamb* of God. Our redemption has been paid for not by *precious medals*, but by the *spotless blood* of Jesus Christ.

Verse 20, “He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart...” On the cross, the lamb of God shed spotless blood - blood uncontaminated by sin.

Thus, those people who are purchased and cleansed with that blood need to live uncontaminated lives.

How can those who've been born again fail to love?

Verse 23, “**having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible...**” From the moment we're born we start to die. A flower blooms, then slowly fades...

There's a Yiddish proverb, “**A grandmother becomes feeble. Her grown daughter gives her a wooden bowl that trembling hands cannot break. The old woman dies, and the bowl is discarded. But the granddaughter retrieves it. The bowl, she knows, will be needed again.**” We're all going to fade and eventually die!

Despite their many theories, scientists still don't understand the mystery of aging. They've noticed that normal human cells grown in tissue cultures reproduce for many generations, but then one day, mysteriously, they start to degenerate and they eventually die.

It's as if human cells are preprogrammed to die!

It's as if '**death**' were written into the fertilized egg by the genetic language... It's as if the human seed or cell possesses a built-in 'time-clock' which causes it to shut down at a predetermined point in the person's life.

Well, the *observation of the scientist* only affirms the *declaration of Scripture*. Human seed is corruptible.

It deteriorates. Physically, you were born to die - but spiritually, you were born again to live forever.

The new birth results not from corruptible seed, but incorruptible... **“through the word of God which lives and abides forever...”** Spiritual life occurs in the human heart when the Word of God fertilizes a repentant faith.

And since the Word of God abides forever the life that’s produced in us is forever life - or eternal life!

Verse 24 sums up the chapter, **“Because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever.”** Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

One of the most powerful visuals I’ve ever seen occurred years ago at the funeral of a local pastor.

After preaching a forceful sermon the officiating pastor walked off the platform and went to escort the body up the aisle. But as he walked past the casket he reached over and plucked off one of the blossoms from the flowers that were adorning the top of the casket.

In dramatic fashion he wadded up the pedals in his clenched fist and threw them to the floor. Then he quoted this verse - **“the glory of man like the flower fades, but God’s Word lasts forever.”** I’d suggest we all build our life on God’s Word, not the glory of man.

Chapter 2, **“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”** Watch a baby root to feed...

It's eyes might be closed. It might not even know mom is near. But it's hunger, and all that matters is that nipple. Its little mouth starts searching, eagerly and aggressively, for mom's nourishment. This is how diligent we as disciples need to be for God's Word.

At feeding time a baby puts everything aside and roots. That's how we need to be when its time to feed spiritually. Lay aside all distractions, and start digging!

**“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious...”**

There's a legend associated with Solomon's Temple, that during its construction the cornerstone was quarried first, but when it arrived on site the builders didn't recognize its importance, and tossed it aside.

It wasn't until the structure was nearly complete and they needed the cornerstone that they realize their mistake, and raced to find the stone they'd rejected.

Indeed, this is how the builders of Judaism treated Jesus. They didn't realize that He was God's chief cornerstone, so they rejected Him... But one day, and I believe soon, the Jews will realize their mistake, repent of their sin, and receive Jesus as the chosen of God.

Verse 5, **“you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house...”** The OT Temple stood on top Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, but the NT Temple is a spiritual house made up of living stones - the Church.

You and I have been fitted together by the Master Stone mason as a house for the Holy Spirit to indwell.

The power of Christ sobers us. We go from *being stoned* to *becoming stones*. The Jewish Temple had *limestone walls* - Christ's Temple has *live stone walls*.

Each of us has a role to play in the Church.

*Don't be off the wall, find your place in the wall!*

Be apart of the house that Jesus is building!

We are also “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

OT sacrifices were physical offerings - bulls and goats, complete with blood and gore.

But the NT sacrifices are spiritual offerings of love, and praise, and devotion, and kindness, and giving.

And at the top of the list of spiritual sacrifices is our body. Romans 12:1 says, “present your bodies a living sacrifice...” Hebrews 13:15-16 lists three more spiritual sacrifices - praise to God, good deeds, and *sharing financially*. The author of Hebrews makes this list - then says, “for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

Verse 6, “Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture...” He quotes Isaiah 28:16... “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

Jesus is the precious cornerstone. He's chosen. He's solid. Rest on Him and you'll never be put to shame.

“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient...” Here he quotes Psalm 118:22, “The stone which the builders rejected has become

the chief cornerstone," and... He recalls Isaiah 8:14, "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense."

He concludes, "They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed." In three verses Peter uses three OT quotes to sum up the Jews rejection of Jesus in the words of their own prophets.

God intended Jesus to be the chief cornerstone - the rock on which the rest of the house would rest.

*But Jesus is a big rock!* He can't be ignored. If you don't make Him the foundation stone of your life, you'll always be stumbling over Him, and offended by Him.

Bow your knee, or you'll break your toes on Jesus.

Verse 9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, In the OT there was no such thing! Priests came from the tribe of Levi. Kings from Judah.

But as believers in Jesus we're a royal priesthood.

*One day, we'll reign and rule with Jesus. We'll be royalty. Today, we're building bridges between people and God. We're priests of reconciliation.*

We're also "a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."

There was a time in American history where we believed in *cultural assimilation*. We were the great melting pot. Everyone blended together culturally.



But today we're a **salad bowl**. *Cultural assimilation* has given way to *cultural accommodation*. People are taught to be proud of their national or ethnic identity.

We're no longer just Americans - everybody has a hyphen. We're *Irish-American*, or *African-American*...

But of all people this should be true of the Christian!

We should be *Christian-Americans*. We should stand out in the values, and character, and love we display.

Rather than *blend in*, our job is *stick out* – be different. Live out the priorities of heaven - on earth.

Verse 11, “**Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul...**” Imagine preparing your kids for a professional portrait at Olan Mills Studios. You clean them - a bath, shampoo, you even clean out their ears.

And you fight to dress them in new, stiff clothes.

*A mom deserves time-and-a-half for such a job!*

You're finally ready to go, and you send the kids to the car... And as the backdoor slams you see little Junior playing in a mud puddle! *How dare him!*

Couldn't he have kept himself away from the mud just long enough for us to make it to Olan Mills?

Well, now you know how God feels about us.

In Christ we're cleansed from sin and clothed in righteousness - and we're headed to heaven. Can't we stay out of the mud just long enough to get in the car?

Peter tells us, “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

You’ll be accused unfairly in this world, but if you conduct yourself honorably, in the end, God will be glorified in you. In other words, “If you take care of your character - God will take care of your reputation.”

Verse 13, “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.” Here’s the divine right of government. God established human government for two purposes: **to punish evil** and **to encourage good**.

I read about a novel police tactic being practiced in South Windsor, Connecticut. Traffic cops were pulling over cars and passing out tickets. But the tickets read, “Your driving was great! - and we appreciate it.”

The police have started passing out \$2 rewards for obeying the speed limit, and wearing seat-belts, and using turn signals, and the proper use of child seats.

A resident of South Windsor, says, “You’re always nervous when you see the police lights come on. It takes a second or two to adjust to the officer saying, ‘Thanks a lot for obeying the law.’ It’s about the last thing you’d expect.” We expect our government to *punish evil*, but we don’t often expect it to *reward good*. Yet, the police in South Windsor are being biblical!

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men - as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” In other words, *Uncle Sam* can use some *Christian brothers*...

We need to live a practical holiness that shuts up the mouth of the cynic - that adds to the common good of society - that brings glory and honor to our Lord Jesus.

And understand Peter’s words to “*honor the king*” not only apply to honorable kings, but the dishonorable also. *Remember, who was king in Peter’s day?*

The Emperor Nero. And hey, if a Christian can honor a *Nero*, he can also honor an *Obama*. Even when you don’t respect *the person*, you can respect *the position*.

Verse 18, “*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.*” A servant, or we could say “*an employee,*” who comes to Christ needs to be as good a servant as he can, regardless of what kind of boss rules over him.

God changes our circumstances, by changing us!

Perhaps your world needs some sweetness. He puts it in you, then He uses you to spread it around.

“*For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*”

In a fallen world, children of God often get a raw deal. Stay true to a biblically-informed conscience and it could put you at odds with the values of this world!

Suffering for what’s right and good can happen.

“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.” In the Beatitudes Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” - NOT “*Blessed are those who suffer because they acted like a jerk.*”

I know self-righteous, unloving Christians who get laughed at for their hypocrisy - yet they stick out their chest and claim they're being persecuted for Jesus.

They act like a living martyr - but they're a mockery!

*Rejoice* if you're being persecuted for good conduct and faith. *Repent* if your hassled for being a *snob*!

Verse 21, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 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...” Jesus is the ultimate example on how to handle suffering. *He let the rage end with Him!*

The world is great at swapping insult for insult.

You get slapped at work, so you come home and slap the kids, then they go out and slap the neighbor's kids – and the whole world is just plain slap-happy.

Hatred passes from person to person, until it comes to the Christian. We've been called to imitate Jesus.

When He was reviled He didn't revile in return.

When He was slapped, He didn't slap back.

He returned love for hate, and as His disciples so should we! The weak have to retaliate, but it takes real strength to absorb a blow and transform its impact into the opposite response. *Let's learn to retaliate in love!*

And Jesus, verse 24, **“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.”** We hear a lot of talk these days about self-help programs - 12 step approaches - but God has a *one-step plan* for dealing with sin - called **the cross!**

On Calvary's Cross, God put an end to sin. Jesus bore our sin in His own body. He paid sin's penalty and conquered sin's power. In Christ, sin was snuffed out!

Thus, now that I'm in Christ, I too am dead to sin. Sin has been snuffed out in the innermost part of me – the spiritual part of me that's connected to Christ.

I can now see myself as pure and spotless. My spirit is alive to Christ, and dead to sin. And as I believe this truth, a desire for righteousness will swell up within me.

**“For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”**

Sheep are so dumb they'll follow each other over a cliff if you don't stop them. And we're like dumb sheep!

We were *constantly losing our way*, and *going astray* until Jesus, the Good Shepherd, rescued us from the brink of destruction, and brought us back into the fold.

In conclusion, let me ask you, **“Can you name the only man-made thing in heaven?”** The only man-made items in heaven are the scars Jesus bears in His body.

That sums up the value of our good works!

We nailed Jesus to a tree, *history's ultimate tragedy* - yet ironically, God used it to engineer *His ultimate blessing* - pardon, healing, redemption, new life...

Hey, from one dumb sheep to another, Christianity is not a *baaaaaaad* deal. Jesus does all the work - in life and death - and all we do is trust in what He's done!