

# Our Savior's Burden

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## Introduction

### The Text

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..." (1 Pet 2:24a).

### The Gospel in Capsule Form

- A. I don't know what you came in here thinking about this morning, but I do know what I hope you leave here thinking about: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..."
  - a. I hope the cross of Christ captivates your thoughts this afternoon, and this evening, and this week...for the rest of your life!
- B. This text presents to us the gospel in capsule form. It's just a few words on a page. It takes about a second or two to read them. But truly these words shake at the very foundation of eternity. Yours and my eternity hangs on the validity of these eleven little words: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..."
- C. The Father planned our redemption, the Son accomplished our redemption, and the Spirit is here in this room to make sure we don't miss it!
  - a. Without the Spirit's opening of our eyes, unstopping of our ears, kindling of our hearts, this text will seem as dull and drab as one of those old silent films—no sound, no color, no allure, and, hence, no faith.
  - b. But if the Spirit should be pleased to move in here this morning, it shall be as if Christ Himself is present before us, as if we are sitting at the foot of the cross, and our story shall be written for the first time, or yet once more, into His. I want sound this morning, I want color, I want affection and passion, I want faith!
    - i. O God may it be that, at the end of our time this morning, we all might join our voices with the Roman centurion's, who, upon his witness of Christ's crucifixion, declared with conviction: "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mat 27:54).

(1) "This is not just another execution. This is my salvation!"

### The Outline

- A. I got really creative for our outline for this morning: (1) "He Himself..."; (2) "...bore our sins..."; (3) "...in His body..."; (4) "...on the tree..."

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## (1) “He Himself...”

### The Sacrificial System

- A. In order to understand the massive significance of these two little words, we must recall quickly here the sacrificial system established by God in the Old Covenant.
  - 1. In light of God’s unapproachable holiness, man’s sin called for God’s wrath. But God is not only holy and wrathful, He is also gracious and merciful, “not wishing that any should perish” (2 Pet 3:9). So He establishes a sacrificial system in Israel.
- B. When a person sinned in those days, he was to bring a bull, goat, lamb, 2 turtledoves or pigeons, or a little bit of fine flour (depending on what he could afford) to the tabernacle or temple to be sacrificed.
  - 1. Assuming an animal was brought, the priest would have the sinner put his hands on the offering while the priest would slit its throat and “make atonement for Him, and he shall be forgiven” (i.e. Lev 4:31). The man would feel the life of this animal being drained from it.
    - i. In essence, the person would feel the effect of his own sin being transferred to and taken by another so that he could be made right with God.

### He Himself

- A. But, of course (as the book of Heb makes plain), all of these sacrifices, made day after day for hundreds of years, were but a picture, a foreshadowing, of that one and only acceptable sacrifice for sin—namely Jesus Christ: “He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26).
  - 1. He is, as John the Baptist declared, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Joh 1:29).
- B. Those priests would have the sins of Israel symbolically placed upon an animal. But this Priest, Jesus Christ, took the sins of His people upon Himself. He wore our sickness like dirty rags. There was no animal here. It was only “He Himself”!
  - 1. In that most holy moment on the cross, Christ became not only the Priest, but the sacrifice.

\* “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...”

## (2) “He Himself bore our sins...”

## Moses' Burden in the Wilderness

- A. The idea for this message was originally inspired back when I came across something in the book of Num (11:11-17).
1. Just as on their journey from Egypt to Sinai, so now as they journey from Sinai to the Promised Land, Israel is grumbling in the face of God and against Moses—dreaming of Egypt, tired of manna, longing for meat, weeping at the door of their tents. And Moses says what we all would say at this point: “<sup>11</sup> Moses said to the Lord, ‘Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me?’<sup>12</sup> Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,’ to the land that you swore to give their fathers?’<sup>13</sup> Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’<sup>14</sup> I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me.<sup>15</sup> If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.’ [This is Your problem!]  
<sup>16</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.<sup>17</sup> And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone’” (Num 11:11–17).
  - a. Moses is crying out, “I cannot handle the burden of these people! How am I to carry it all?! Why should I have to deal with this? Kill me!” And God responds by spreading out the burden to 70 elders helping to relieve Moses.

## Christ's Burden in the Garden

- A. Now fast-forward some 1500 years to the Garden of Gethsemane, where the final week of Jesus' life is coming to a close: “<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray.’<sup>37</sup> And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.<sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.’<sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’ [3x]” (Matt 26:36–39).
1. We note quite easily the similarity between the Moses' burden in the wilderness and Christ's burden in Gethsemane.
  2. But what of the disparity?! For Blood is dripping from His brow; His heart is wrenched with agony; and He's crying out to His Father for help.
    - a. But where Moses heard the promise of God that He would ease the burden, Christ heard only 2 things:

(1) The footsteps of Judas coming to betray Him (v. 47); and

(2) The footsteps of his closest friends fleeing from Him (v. 56).

- B. God cannot disperse of this burden. No one else can carry it. The best He can do is send an angel to strengthen Jesus for what He alone can do (Luk 22:43).
  - 1. And in the end, even the Father must leave the Son utterly alone. The cross-hairs of God's wrath were fastening over Him. The burden of all the world was to be carried by ONE man!

\* "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..."

### (3) "He Himself bore our sins in His body..."

- A. What does it mean that He bore our sins in His body?!
  - 1. Many people make a great deal of the physical sufferings of Christ, and rightfully so. Crucifixion, after all, is one of the most barbaric, brutal, degrading forms of execution ever conceived by men.
  - 2. But what of the spiritual sufferings, which I think Peter has in mind here most of all?

#### Physical Suffering

- A. Certainly "in His body" can be understood physically. Look with me to that Man upon the cross.
  - 1. See the thorns wrenched into His temples;
  - 2. see the blood, mingled with sweat, that has now blinded His eyes;
  - 3. look with horror upon the crimson stripes that channel His back and chest;
  - 4. watch the gasping of His mouth as He continues the slow and painful process of suffocation;
  - 5. and what of the nails that hold Him in place.
  - 6. What a sorry specimen on display for all to look upon and laugh at.
- C. If we allowed ourselves to truly imagine the sight of this Man upon the cross, I am sure many of us would grow nauseous and excuse ourselves from the room. If we could really see him, I am sure there would be some among us who would weep uncontrollably just because of the pain of it all.

#### Spiritual Suffering

- A. But the worst reality of all, is that which no eye could see. And that is this: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..."
  - 1. There is something far worse than wounds on His body. O I tell you, with tears in my eyes, my sins were there; your sins were there; the sins of all the world were there; "our" sins were there. The blood is terrible. The physical suffering He endured is overwhelming. But what of this?!

- B. And God, His Father, whose eyes are too pure to look on iniquity, turns on Him!
1. There's a touching passage in John's gospel when Jesus is preparing His disciples for His death and He says: "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (John 16:32).
    - a. And yet, here on the cross is the terrible moment, when the Son is utterly alone. And this spiritual suffering erupts into the physical world with what R.C. Sproul has called "the scream of the damned": "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46b).
      - i. "This cry represents the most agonizing protest ever uttered on this planet. It burst forth in a moment of unparalleled pain. It is the scream of the damned—for us."
- C. Our text gives us the answer to Jesus' burning question: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..."

## When God Weeps

- A. Let Steven Estes and Joni Eareckson Tada put words to this verse and make sense for you of what it means that Christ bore our sins "in His body" (perhaps close your eyes and listen): "The face that Moses had begged to see—was forbidden to see—was slapped bloody... The thorns that God had sent to curse the earth's rebellion now twisted around his own brow... 'On your back with you!' One raises a mallet to sink in the spike. But the soldier's heart must continue pumping as he readies the prisoner's wrist. Someone must sustain the soldier's life minute by minute, for no man has this power on his own. Who supplies breath to his lungs? Who gives energy to his cells? Who holds his molecules together? Only by the Son do 'all things hold together' (Colossians 1:17). The victim wills that the soldier live on—he grants the warriors continued existence. The man swings.
- As the man swings, the Son recalls how he and the Father first designed the medial nerve of the human forearm—the sensations it would be capable of. The design proves flawless—the nerves perform exquisitely. 'Up you go!' They lift the cross. God is on display in his underwear and can scarcely breathe.
- But these pains are a mere warm-up to his other growing dread. He begins to feel a foreign sensation. Somewhere during this day an unearthly foul began to waft, not around his nose, but his heart. He feels dirty. Human wickedness starts to crawl upon his spotless being—the living excrement from our souls. The apple of his Father's eye turns brown with rot.
- His Father! He must face his Father like this! From heaven the Father now rouses himself like a lion disturbed, shakes his mane, and roars against the shriveling remnant of a man hanging on a cross. Never has the Son seen the Father look at him so, never felt even the least of his hot breath. But the roar shakes the unseen world and darkens the visible sky. The Son does not recognize these eyes.
- 'Son of Man! Why have you behaved so? You have cheated, lusted, stolen, gossiped—murdered, envied, hated, lied. You have cursed, robbed, overspent, overeaten—fornicated, disobeyed, embezzled, and blasphemed. Oh, the duties you have shirked, the children you

have abandoned! Who has ever so ignored the poor, so played the coward, so belittled my name? Have you ever held your razor tongue? What a self-righteous, pitiful drunk—you, who molest young boys, peddle killer drugs, travel in cliques, and mock your parents. Who gave you the boldness to rig elections, foment revolutions, torture animals, and worship demons? Does this list never end! Splitting families, raping virgins, acting smugly, playing the pimp—buying politicians, practicing exhortation, filming pornography, accepting bribes. You have burned down buildings, perfected terrorist tactics, founded false religions, traded in slaves—relishing each morsel and bragging about it all. I hate, I loathe these things in you! Disgust for everything about you consumes me! Can you not feel my wrath?’

Of course the Son is innocent. He is blamelessness itself. The Father knows this. But the divine pair have an agreement, and the unthinkable must now take place. Jesus will be treated as if personally responsible for every sin ever committed.

The Father watches as his heart’s treasure, the mirror image of himself, sinks drowning into raw, liquid sin. Jehovah’s stored rage against humankind from every century explodes in a single direction. ‘Father! Father! Why have you forsaken me?!’ (When God Weeps).

1. Did you identify your sin in that list? Did you trace your punishment in His wounds? This is how God is able to atone for and forgive and justify a wicked man like me.

\* 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...

## (4) “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree...”

### The Great Exchange

A. All of this, of course, takes place upon the cross, referred to here as “the tree” by Peter.

1. To be hung on a tree was to be cursed by God: “<sup>22</sup> And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, <sup>23</sup> his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance” (Deut 21:22–23).

- a. Did you hear that? God says: “All well and good, hang the wicked man on a tree, but don’t you dare leave him there. His body is so filthy, and My curse is so heavy upon him that just his continued presence will start to bring corruption and curse to the land around. Get him down and get him out of my sight.”

- i. And this is what Christ becomes for us on the cross?! This is why Christ was quickly taken down and put into a tomb?!

B. But, in the unfathomable wisdom and mercy of God, the place of His curse is made the place of His blessing: “<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13–14).

2. It is on the cross that God makes what Martin Luther called “the Great Exchange.”
  - a. He bore my sin...so that, in Him, we might have His righteousness!
  - b. He was condemned...so that, in Him, we might be justified!
  - c. He was punished...so that, in Him, we might be rewarded!
  - d. He was wounded...so that, in Him, we might be healed!
  - e. He was aborted...so that, in Him, we might be adopted!
  - f. He was killed...so that, in Him, we might live forevermore!
  - g. He endured God’s wrath...so that, in Him, we might enjoy God’s love!
  - h. He was forsaken...so that, in Him, we might hear God say, “I will never leave you or forsake you!”
  - i. He screamed the scream of the damned...so that, in Him, we might sing the songs of the redeemed!
  - j. And on we could go...

C. Is it any wonder, then, that the cross is the centerpiece of all that is Christianity?!

\* 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...

## The Great Reunion

- A. And now, I want to draw things to a close this morning by reading our text one final time. But, this time, we’ll continue reading a bit after to get the full constellation of Peter’s thought: “<sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet 2:24–25).
  1. It is in what follows our text that Peter gives us the ultimate aim of the cross. There’s a lot here, but I might sum it up like this: the great exchange of the cross has as its goal the great reunion of God and man.
    - a. We were straying from our Creator like madmen, and the cross of Christ made a way for us to get back home.
      - i. As Peter will put it most succinctly later in this letter: “Christ...suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...” (1 Pet 3:18a).
- B. I wonder where you are with God this morning? Are you running? Are you hiding? Are you hardening? Are you stumbling? Are you doubting?
  1. We are all still dealing with sin in one way or another. Yet often we come into the church acting like we’re not.
    - a. The cross says: “You’re not fooling anybody—you’re a sinner. That’s why Christ died!” But the cross also says: “You don’t have to fool anybody—God is gracious. That’s why Christ died!”

- i. The cross provides a safe place for us to come out of hiding and engage God and His people with what's really going on.
- C. Can I encourage you: do business with God right now in the light of the cross. Come back to Him afresh, or even for the first time. You will not be turned away!
- \* 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...