
The Cross as Our Example

DAVE BAST

How do you react when someone treats you wrong? Say something big happens; a friend betrays you or you are accused unfairly of something you did not do; or even if it is a little thing like getting cut off on the highway; what do you do? Do you get mad? Do you scream and curse? Do you try to get even? Jesus shows us a better way. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am David Bast; and with me today as my guest co-host for today's program, and the next several programs, is Kevin DeYoung. Kevin is the pastor of the University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan. He is also a blogger and a writer; he has published a number of books; and he happens to be the son of a colleague and a lifelong family friend. So Kevin, triply welcome to *Groundwork*.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Well, thank you. It is very good to be here. A little nepotism goes a long way.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. Kevin's dad, I should mention, is my colleague at Words of Hope, and is responsible for our international ministry; but today, Kevin, we want to start a series of programs on the cross of Christ, and I want to start by reading a quote from John Stott – the late, great Dr. John R. W. Stott, from his classic book, *The Cross of Christ*: I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the one ridiculed as God on the cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha; his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing around his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world; but each time after a while I have had to turn away and in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Hmmm, yes, that is beautiful. I mean, it is only with Christ and the cross that you have the exaltation and the humiliation – what Luther would say, the theology of the cross and the theology...

DAVE BAST

And the theology of glory, yes.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, exactly; and you have to go through one to get to the other.

DAVE BAST

And if you emphasize either one without the other, you end up going off the rails. So, you know, the God who is highly exalted, full of glory, but also who becomes one with us and shares our common fate in dying, and knows the pain and the agony, even to the bitterness of "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Right, right. And can it be that I should gain... “that thou, my Lord, shouldst die for me,” is really the cry of the Christian, and you are absolutely right; so it is holding those things together that we have all the vibrancy and vitality of the Christian faith, and it starts and ends, really, but looking at the cross.

DAVE BAST

But we want to look at the cross in several different lights. You know, we planned this series of programs, each one of which will focus on one aspect of the cross, and today I would like to take up the idea of example. Jesus’ death and suffering, and specifically, his response to it – the way he accepted or underwent that experience – how that serves as an example to us.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, and don’t you think, Dave, there is a danger here, and then there is a danger of a reaction here when we talk about Jesus as an example, because you know some liberal theologians would really emphasize: Well, Jesus is a good example; and their Christianity gets boiled down to: Hey, you have a lot of really great things you can do for God; when the essence of our faith begins with all that God has done for us. So there is a recoil some of us have to talk about Jesus as example, and yet, if we don’t go there at some point we are really not being faithful to the whole of the New Testament.

DAVE BAST

Well, I also think it is important to distinguish carefully in what sense he is an example, because sometimes you will also hear people say: The cross is an example of God’s love. It is a demonstration of how much he loves us; but if that is *all* it is, it really is not even that. I mean, if you think through this... I don’t want to go too far because this will get us off topic, but if it is merely a demonstration or an example – if it did not have to happen, well then, it is kind of stupid – it is kind of crazy. If it were possible for this cup to pass from him as he prayed in the garden, if it did not have to happen in the heart of the divine plan of salvation, well then, it really does not make sense.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Right. There would be all sorts of other ways that God could show his love for us, and he did all throughout history. We need to infuse this with a lot of good theological categories and underpinnings so that when we get to the Christ as example, we do not have to be ashamed or embarrassed like somehow we are going off the rails here with our theology because it is not a matter of just, well, here is a good example, follow it; but you get underneath that with the doctrine of new birth – that we have a new power at work within us to do this...

DAVE BAST

To be able to follow the example – to be able to live it out, right.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, absolutely; or our union with Christ, that is really because we belong to him and are joined to him that we can now begin to live like him.

DAVE BAST

But I did want to start here because I think, you know, you and I are both Reformed and evangelical and passionate about the full biblical Gospel of the cross; and so, maybe it is a little easier for us to skate past the exemplary aspect of it, and that is why I chose to start this series here. It really is a matter of how Jesus responded to the unjust suffering that he experienced that I think we want to focus on.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Don’t you think one of the reasons why Christians are skittish to talk about this... we wonder if it is really even possible. Okay, Jesus as an example – oh, you just feel this sort of crushing weight – well, there is Jesus

and there is me... what a hopeless chasm; when that does not really do justice to... Yes, it is true, there is this hopeless chasm, but by his Spirit, and once we are adopted into God's family... You know, Romans 12 says: We can be holy and acceptable – not ever to earn our salvation, but God gives us the ability. I mean, why else would Jesus, in the great commission, say teach them to obey everything I command if what he really means is: And – hint, hint – you are really going to be just a complete, miserable failure for your whole life.

DAVE BAST

I read a story a while back about some average Joe who won a Lamborghini sports car in a contest. It was like a half-million-dollar car, and within a few months he had to get rid of it because it was too much car for him to handle; and in a sense, Jesus is too much example for us to handle; but the New Testament consistently portrays him as just that. He himself... you think about his last night in the upper room in John 13 as he washes his disciples' feet and he says to them: I, your Lord, have left you an example that you should follow. So if I have done this, you are my followers; in fact, that is what a Christian is, in a sense, a follower of Jesus.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, and as he goes on there in that upper room discourse in Chapters 14 and 16, he talks about the other comforter who is coming, and he says: It is good that I would go away because the Holy Spirit is going to come; so he does not just leave us an example, he leaves us an example, and then his very Spirit...

DAVE BAST

And the power to begin to live into it, yes. Well, there is a specific passage that we want to look at that sort of spells out the example Christ gave us on the cross for when we experience injustice or undeserved suffering; and we are going to go to that right after this break.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Hi. Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, and with me today is my co-host for a series of *Groundwork* programs, Kevin DeYoung. Welcome back, Kevin.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Thanks.

DAVE BAST

And we have been talking about Jesus as an example for Christians – for followers of Jesus – to live out our lives as he did, and who also gives us the capacity, the power, the means of doing that; specifically, we want to focus on his example at the cross.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Our text is from 1 Peter 2:21-25: ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²²He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten; but continued in trusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

DAVE BAST

That is a great passage, isn't it? There is a lot there; but notice right at the outset: For to this you have been called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, there are so many ways... I mean, every way that Christ leaves an example for us, but when we sometimes think: Well, Christ as an example, we think of maybe Christ's ministry to the poor or Christ's concern for the outcast, and those would be examples, too; but we see here, and this is very common in the Epistles, that the example is in particular in how he handled suffering – that he did not revile when he was reviled, he did not threaten when he was threatened; and of course, for Peter's context, this was hugely important because they were facing persecution; but all of us, whether it is government-sponsored persecution or just run-of-the-mill kind of suffering, this is a lesson that we have to learn as Christians; how to endure suffering, and Jesus is the ultimate example for it.

DAVE BAST

So rule one is no tit for tat – principle number one – the foundation thing is, you do not pay back what you are being paid. It is also interesting to me that he begins... you know, so often we skip the little words when we take a chunk of scripture – you kind of have to take it bit by bit. It is hard to read a whole chapter – but this passage that you read begins with the word, *for*: For to this you have been called. To what have you been called? Well, if you would back up and look at the context, the answer is submission. This is a whole chapter where Peter is dealing with how Christians relate to the circumstances of their lives, and the answer is sort of submissively. You sort of accept maybe where you have been placed – the kind of role that you have. It really goes contrary... talk about countercultural, huh? That is one thing people do not want to think about much.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes; well, especially in the West, tend to be fiercely anti-authoritarian: Don't trust anyone over the age of 30. It is hard for us, and of course, it is a complex issue, and we are not trying to touch on every reason that there might be for civil disobedience, or certainly to work against injustice. You know, Jesus holds up the example of the persistent widow praying about injustice. So, we are not saying, well just lay down and take it; but, boy, we really have to do justice to this passage that God gives us certain roles to fill, and in that we have to submit to the proper authorities that he places over us, even when it means difficulty in our lives.

DAVE BAST

But, who of us actually responds this way? I mean, what is our common mantra? I am not going to take it anymore. I am not going to take this. This is not fair; this is not right. Just look at how Christ was treated. What led up to the cross? False witnesses at his trial; a cowardly judge who is afraid of losing his place and caves in to public pressure; a friend who has betrayed him; everything about it is wrong; and he just takes it?

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And it is really remarkable, because when you go through... I was just preaching through Mark's Gospel, and you get to Mark 14 toward the end, and it is just systematically, comprehensively everyone departing from Jesus, from Judas to Peter to the disciples, to even a man who would rather run away naked in the woods...

DAVE BAST

Than stick around.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, than stick around and be with Jesus; and it is to show us not only Jesus taking our sin but taking our shame; and we see some of the fruit of that here in leaving an example for us.

DAVE BAST

I have often reflected on the fact that Jesus was crucified naked. You know, artists modestly drape him with a bit of cloth, but that is not how the Romans did it. So, I mean, talk about the ultimate shame and degradation in every sense, and he accepts it all without once retaliating or fighting back.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And then you compare that with how we handle suffering of such a smaller magnitude. I mean, I think of it as one of the indications of being made in God's image that every human being feels injustice at the most profound level; whether it is the referee makes a call that you don't like or, in the last week I was trying to get through – I won't say which phone company – but trying to get through this Byzantine bureaucracy of: press this button and prima uno, and press this and this and this, and then you get to somebody and then they hang up on you or they don't help you; and I just think: This is a travesty of biblical proportions!

DAVE BAST

There are those funny commercials that even make fun of it, right? Some guy saying his name is Peggy, and then putting you on hold... I really wonder, is it even right that we should do this? Isn't the criticism that this turns you into doormats and look, Christians justified slavery with this kind of argument: You should submit; here you are. That is a real critique... that is a real criticism. How do you respond to that?

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, I think we need to be careful that we don't turn it into a lay down, be a doormat sort of theology; although I would want to push back a little bit and say: In our cultural context, that is not the danger that many of us are in; and were that the context, it is true that sometimes we do have to face suffering, and quite unjustly; and I think we can be thankful by God's common grace, that if you live in a democracy there is at least some means for the people to affect change, and we want to take advantage, and encourage people to take advantage of all of those means; and like the persistent widow, cry out to the judge – pray, fight to change things when they are genuinely unfair – but I think if we are honest, for most of the things in most of our lives, we are not dealing with all of these sorts of highest level of injustice. It is learning how to suffer even with the mysterious things: Why did I get cancer? Why did my husband die? Why did that car accident... How do I take this and not revile God? That is really the question.

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, I think our tendency as individuals in our personal lives – because that is what is really being addressed here, I think, by Peter – our tendency is to be quick to anger and slow to forgive; and that is just the opposite of what Jesus was on the cross. He turned the other cheek, literally. He gave his face to those who “pluck out the hair,” as the Old Testament prophecy said. He hid not his face from shame and spitting; he turned the other cheek; he said, “Father, forgive them.” That is the example we are called to follow. Now, I also want to ask the question, why? Because I think Peter gives us some good reasons here for doing that. So, let's take a quick break and come back to that.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Hi. Welcome back to *Groundwork*. Along with Kevin DeYoung, I am Dave Bast, and we are talking today about the example of the cross; the model that Jesus has given us for what we should do and how we should react if we find ourselves experiencing unjust suffering; it is important, I think, to make that point, Kevin. Peter is not saying – in fact, he says here: Hey, if you are suffering for doing wrong, you are getting what you deserve, so forget that.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Right.

DAVE BAST

But there is a way to react when you are being mistreated – when you are getting a raw deal – and Jesus shows us what that is. We have explored that a little bit, but I want to look at the question, why? What is our motivation for even trying to do this?

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, there are a lot of things we could say: Show grace because God has shown grace to us would be part of it. It is also important to recognize Jesus was never... It was not a position of weakness... Now, it was, but he was utterly strong, I mean, through this whole injustice; so, in asking people to endure injustice...

DAVE BAST

It was not cowardice that led him to react this way.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

No; and in some ways it was not even victimization. He willingly gave himself up. Now, here is the key, I think, and this is really revolutionary to some Christians, but it is right out of the Bible and right out of this text, in fact, that it says in verse 23:

He continued in trusting himself to him who judges justly; and I really think this is the power to show mercy to people who do not deserve it, to forgive, that we, as Christians, know the end of the story. Hebrews 12 says it was for the joy set before him that he endured the shame of the cross. So, Jesus knew: (1) I am going to have joy on the other side of this; and: (2) God will judge justly, so I know the end of the story is, I get joy, and all those who have sinned will get shame. God will judge. He will make this wrong right; so, it is in no way saying God does not think injustice is a big deal – he does not think suffering is a big deal; no, he does, but it is saying: You know what, God? You will deal with that in your time so I don't have to deal with it here.

DAVE BAST

This is absolutely the opposite pole from indifference.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

It is a conviction that the last judgment is essential for righting wrong and sorting things out, and without judgment... I mean, you know, there is such a tendency to downplay judgment, or even to dismiss it in the Church today, and you cannot handle anything if you do that, really. Life becomes intolerable. The only way we can manage is because we are convinced that God will publicly put all wrongs to right. There will be no more hidden sins.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And you see it in Romans 12, where Paul says: Leave room for God's wrath. Don't seek revenge; don't repay; and this is absolutely right. It is paradoxical, but it is brilliant that the reason we can forgive – forgiveness is foregoing the justice we deserve – and the reason we can do that is not the absence of justice, but as you said, the absolute assurance of justice at the end of the age; so, I would say to our people in the church that you can forgive sins against you because every sin committed against you will either be paid for on the cross or paid for in hell. It will be dealt with.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is kind of harsh, but there it is.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

You disagree?

DAVE BAST

No, I don't disagree. I think maybe I would add that God is the one who perfectly understands...

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And he is the only one who can take motive into account. We just do not know enough, even, to sort through things and make judgments; so, our judgments are always provisional.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Right. We could be totally wrong on what we think.

DAVE BAST

I think I would also want to add that we entrust to the instruments of God to make provisional judgments here and now; so, particularly the State; but there is one other thing here that I think we should point to as a motivation for imitating Jesus and following his example, and that is at the heart of the text, where Peter says: Why did he die? Why did he go to the cross? He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. I mean, part of the purpose of the cross is not just to pay for sin, but it is to bring about a new birth in us, and a new way of living. We become new creatures who live... we live in a totally new way.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And part of that new way is this way of patient suffering.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And because we have a new identity, that is what you were getting at earlier, that we are now in Christ; we are not in Adam, in our sin; that is what Peter is getting at. When Jesus died, those of us who belong to him, we died; when he rose, we rose; when he is seated in the heavenly places, we are seated in the heavenly places; so, I think one of the main, if not *the* main ethical motivation in the New Testament is simply: Be who you are in Christ, and therefore, you have a new power and you have a new identity. This is just who you are as a Christian is bound up in all that Jesus is and was and suffered and bled and died and rose again. Out of that history comes our new life as Christians.

DAVE BAST

Oh, for the power to live that life more fully; to experience it more completely. You know, maybe that is where the doctrine of the Holy Spirit needs to become more real and powerful in each of us; or the idea of union with Christ; I just love that idea that the secret of faith is not that it is some intellectual acceptance of some doctrine; it is that faith unites us with Christ and enables us to live his life.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Right; and the whole Christian life – the pursuit of holiness – is the pursuit of Christ, therefore; not just the pursuit of trying to get some of these attributes down, but really, to be who we are in Jesus and follow his example.

DAVE BAST

Thanks, Kevin. And thanks to you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. Don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Just visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-cross-as-our-example>

Printed on December 27, 2024

©  ReFrame Ministries