



Sunday Sermons

Overcome Evil

Ryan Goodwin
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Overcome Evil with Good

Ryan Goodwin

Introduction

A striking difference between Christ and Muhammad was demonstrated recently, as John Piper notes in *World Magazine*, "We saw last week in the Islamic demonstrations over Danish cartoons of Muhammad another vivid depiction of the difference between Muhammad and Christ, and what it means to follow each. Not all Muslims approve of the violence, but a deep lesson remains: The work of Muhammad is based on being honored and the work of Christ is based on being insulted. This produces two very different reactions to mockery" (*World Magazine*, February 18, 2006). On the one hand, we see a religion that is intolerant of criticism, volatile, easy to arouse, and single-mindedly uninterested in the humbling act of abuse in the name of their religion. One cannot mock the figureheads of Islam, for Muhammad was a prophet of immaculate reputation and stainless quality. To abuse him is to call for violent repercussions, and Muhammad's followers do not take kindly to it. On the other hand, followers of Christ expect abuse. In an entirely peculiar way, we welcome it as a sign of our faithfulness, as a humbling factor in a proud world, and as our stamp of discipleship and participation in the sufferings of our Savior.

Interestingly, this sharp difference stems from a misunderstanding of who Jesus Christ is, and why He came to this world. The mentality of many Muslims is that Christ never even suffered at all as a result of abasement. "Muslims believe that Allah saved the Messiah from the ignominy of crucifixion... We honor [Jesus] more than you [Christians] do... We refuse to believe that God would permit Him to suffer death on the cross" (*World Magazine*, February 18, 2006). There is no reason for us to share in abasement, according to this belief, because God does not even allow it for the Messiah. To be like Christ truly, therefore, we must be honored and revered, as many of the great Muslim prophets are.

A deeper understanding of the way of Christ leads us to see that mockery and derision, suffering and abasement are tribulations that can bring strength and courage to our spirits and a deeper reliance on God. The question that we must ask ourselves is do we feel ashamed because of mockery, or do we glorify God?

Do Not Be Surprised

[1 Peter 4:12](#) – "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you..."

The troubles that we experience should never surprise us, although we tend to be in the face of trials. When things go awry as a result of our faith, we sometimes complain to God about not being sufficiently warned about the cost of discipleship. When things go awry as a result of our faith, we sometimes complain to God about not being sufficiently warned about the cost of discipleship. We become resentful because of the scorn surrounding us. We may very well become the object of jokes, as the Muslims are in newspapers across the globe. [Hebrews 11:35-38](#) states, however, that early Christians "were mocked and scourged, yes, also enduring chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword... men of whom the world was not worthy." If men and women of such great spiritual caliber experienced these things, should we not count ourselves blessed with good company when we do too? Should any degree of suffering surprise us? Should we allow mockery to leave us flabbergasted and questioning our faith?

SERMONS

SUNDAY SERMONS

LESSON SERIES

COMMENTARIES

GOSPEL MEETINGS

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Although great physical suffering does exist in many parts of the world, Christians encounter a different kind in more modern countries. This is not to say our suffering is more or less dangerous, for it still results in the damnation of souls and the discouragement of many believers. We face great mockery because of our faith. Most obviously, the scientific community and the scholars of "reason" hardly give Christians a second thought as they explore the great mysteries of the universe. In social circles, the Christian is derided because of his faith. In newspaper comics, conservative believers are called bigots and extremists. There is a powerful feeling of intolerance in this nation toward Bible-based faith. Do not be surprised, though, friends! Even Paul the apostle was thoroughly mocked by the great thinkers of his time ([Acts 17:32](#)). After preaching his sermon to the philosophers in Athens, the text states that "some sneered" and others were willing to continue the discussion at a later time. The idea of the resurrection was ridiculous to the most poignant thinkers of the Roman world, and is it not the same way today? As examples of modern day mockery, consider the portrayal of Jesus in the Martin Scorsese movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In this contemptible movie, Jesus is wracked with doubt and beset with lust. *The Da Vinci Code* portrays Jesus as merely mortal, married, and the father of children. In the same way that our Lord and Savior is abused in these travesties, we should take up our cross and defend the faith.

"Which comes upon you for your testing..." The imagery used by Peter is very appropriate. The fiery ordeal literally means, "Trying, severe, and difficult trials. Fire is painful, but fire is also necessary in the refining process" (*Bible Study Textbooks – First Peter*, Bruce Oberst, 211). Although the testing is not comfortable at the time, it eventually tempers our spirits and refines us. It makes us stronger. It forces us to confront our weaknesses. It brings us face to face with God, who is our only lasting relief from physical and spiritual hardship. Paul was beset with a thorn of trouble, as described in [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#). He states, "Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." When we do suffer as a Christian, it does not have to tear us down. Rather, by realizing our own limitations and weaknesses, we turn to the Lord and find greater strength than we ever thought possible. By relying on Him more and more each day, we are purified and tempered, just as the heat of the oven removes the impurities of gold.

Keep On Rejoicing

[1 Peter 4:13](#) – "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation."

In the face of mockery, smile. When close friends and even enemies ridicule you, praise God. Instead of hating our enemies, love them ([Romans 12:19-21](#)). Instead of fighting evil with greater evil, "overcome evil with good." This is, truly, a lesson the followers of Muhammad have not learned. What sets the Christian apart from all other people is his or her peculiar penchant for doing good in the face of bad conditions. We live this way for two reasons. First, because it is commanded ([Matthew 5:44](#)), and the more we live by this command, the more we prove ourselves sons of the Father ([Matthew 5:45](#)). And second, because it is the lifestyle of Christ, who is the object of our emulation. In the face of His accusers, Christ was silent ([Isaiah 53:7](#)). He accepted the beating, the mockery, the hatred with serenity and wisdom.

The result of this attitude is rejoicing. To be honored enough to suffer as Christ suffered is a privilege the early disciples did not take for granted. In [Acts 5:41](#), the apostles "went on their way... rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." This resolutely positive attitude is our only alternative to a bitter life. Either we can face our suffering with joy, or we can face it with misery unto misery. It is our choice, friends. How we handle ourselves can go a long way toward personal evangelism, also. We do not always know who is watching us, and the praise that we give to God can have a great effect on those around us. For example, consider the story of the Philippian jailor in [Acts 16:23-34](#). While in prison, chained to the wall and bleeding from wounds previously inflicted by the ravenous crowd, Paul and Silas sang songs of praise and prayed in their cell. It is difficult to imagine how this must have seemed, not only to the other prisoners but to the jailor as well. In a place of pain, suffering, bitterness, and misery, they heard singing! Who knows who might be listening to our songs of joy in the face of pain!

"So that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation." Who will rejoice when the Lord returns and reveals Himself descending in judgment? Truly, it will be the very people about whom Peter is writing – those who suffer for the name of Christ. The evil will not rejoice, nor will the rebellious and indifferent. All those who did not live righteously will be begging for mercy on that great and terrible day. The reason why ought to be such long-suffering people is explained in [Matthew 5:10-12](#). Those who endure the mockery and insults, who suffer through the pains of this life, who patiently and eagerly wait for the coming of God – they will be the people who will be welcomed into the "kingdom of heaven." Notice also the proclamation of the deceased martyrs in [Revelation 6:9-11](#).

Why Are You Suffering?

[1 Peter 4:14-15](#) – "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God."

Why do we suffer? What is the cause of it? Is all suffering beneficial, and should we feel sorry for those who suffer as a result of their own sins? Peter states that those who are reviled for the name of Christ are blessed. Notice first the importance that the writer places on the "name of Christ." We are often asked, "What's in a name? What is so important about having the right name?" Indeed, mockery for only the name of Christ is our blessing, and to stand up for that name is to stand up for Christ Himself. What is so important Christ's name? "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" ([Acts 4:12](#)).

But we are not given permission to suffer as evildoers. "By no means..." Peter is making it clear that his previous exhortations were not given for the purpose of excusing criminals who suffer, for suffering itself is no sign of virtue. Truly, we can suffer shame for many things – child molesters, even in prison amongst the dregs of society, are abused and dishonored, as are pornographers, abusive parents, drug addicts, cheaters in school, drunkards who drive recklessly and kill others, worthless children who disobey their parents for years. It is not the shame of the prodigal son that is admired in [Luke 15](#), but the forgiveness of his father. There is no honor in suffering because of crimes committed. We should not feel sorry for a murderer who spends a lifetime in prison, for not even God has sympathy for their situations. In the same way, Peter tells us not to suffer as thieves. "Thief" simply means one who steals from others, either for petty or substantial gain. As a result of their decisions, thieves do suffer – either in conscience after the fact, or because of their inability to avoid being caught. Next, Peter puts it quite simply – suffer not as an "evildoer" or one who crafts evil activities. Finally, and most importantly for us today, we are not to suffer shame as "troublesome meddlers." The word here is indicative of the kind of gossip-seeking people that we can sometimes become. There is no honor in this activity, and gossip is an abhorrent pursuit in the eyes of God ([1 Timothy 5:13](#)). The word Peter uses is closely associated with the word "elder" (*episkopos*) or "bishop," and literally means "an elder of other men's affairs." It holds a negative connotation, indicting the troublesome meddler of trying to rule other people's lives in an entirely unwholesome manner.

This exhortation is interesting because most of us today do not need to be warned against suffering as a murderer or as an evildoer. But this shows, perhaps, what kind of people had been converted in the first century. We must remember that Christ came to seek and save the lost, and to call to repentance even the most revolting sinners. The encouragement, therefore, is to watch ourselves and never allow ourselves to fall back into the sins from which we came. "This is a strange counsel to Christians. That it is thus given to them: 1. Reminds us of

the classes from which the first converts were drawn. No doubt many were not only from the poorest, but from criminal classes... 2. Suggests to us to be on our guard against sins to which before we became Christians we were addicted. That old taint is a peril" (**Pulpit Commentary**, Vol. XXII, 199).

"But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God." There is nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to suffering for Christ's name. It is our honor and our duty as Christians to do so. Instead of feeling sorry for ourselves when we must choose between popularity and our faith, or the lies of mankind and the truth of God, or the goals of avarice and the humility of poverty in Christ, we should count ourselves entirely blessed for the opportunity to represent our Savior in this world. We should stand tall and take great confidence in Jesus, for there is nothing else better in this world to boast about but Him. "But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord" ([2 Corinthians 10:17](#)).

As we close the lesson, let us return to the story where we started. In response to the Danish cartoons that mocked Muhammad, the Islamic world essentially bombed itself and its enemies in a frenzy of ill-directed zeal. "When Muhammad was portrayed in 12 cartoons... the uproar among Muslims was intense and sometimes violent: they burned flags, torched embassies, and stoned at least one Christian church... [This shows] that a religion with no insulted Savior will not endure insults to win the scoffers. It means that Islam is destined to bear the impossible load of upholding the honor of one who did not die and rise again to make that possible. It means that Jesus Christ is still the only hope of peace with God and peace with man..." (Piper).

How should the followers of Christ respond to mockery? While we might at first be angered by it, we ought to embrace the suffering – we should rejoice in it, knowing that it is the promised result of true fellowship with Christ. Suffering only makes us stronger; a virtue that too few in this violent world have come to understand. "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay... but if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him drink'... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" ([Romans 12:17-21](#)).

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