

Date: July 26, 2020

Sermon Series: *Faith for Tough Times*

Sermon Title: *Getting in the Last Word*

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Scripture: 1st Peter 2:13-25

Take your Bibles and turn to 1st Peter, you should be good at finding it by now! Today's text is 1st Peter 2:13-25. Please stand in respect to God's Word as it is read.

13 - Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority,

14 - or to governors---who are sent by Him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

15 - For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

16 - Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

17 - Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

18 - Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

19 - For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

20 - But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

21 - To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.

22 - "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth."

23 - When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him Who judges justly.

24 - "He himself bore our sins" in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by His wounds you have been healed."

25 - For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Back in my youth ministry days we took Redland's teens on several *World Changer* projects. Kevin has done that with our current youth as well. To refresh your memory, *World Changers* is where teens are divided into work crews and each crew tackles a construction project of some sort. Many projects involve putting a roof on a house, and at first thought, having a bunch of teens climb up on the roof of a house with hammers and nails may not sound wise.

But each crew has adult supervision, including a crew chief, someone who has construction skills like Kevin or Hugh. The crew chief shows the youth how to do the job. They say,

- "Watch---this is how you take the old roof off."
- "Watch---this is how you lay down tar paper."
- "Watch---this is how you use a chalk line."
- "Watch---this is how you lay out the shingles and nail them."

World Changers works because at every step the youth are given an example to follow.

In our text for this morning, Peter, tells us we have been given an example to follow when it comes to our knowing how to respond to suffering caused by unfairness. Look at verse 21: ***“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.”***

How did Jesus respond to suffering and unjust treatment? What example did He set? Look at verses 22-23: ***“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.” When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him Who judges justly.”***

Peter says following Jesus’ footsteps can be summed up in two words. What are they? How are we to respond to people who treat us unfairly? Hint---they are the FIRST two words in our text.

Right! We are to ***“SUBMIT OURSELVES.”***

Now, if those two words don’t sit well with you, imagine what it was like for the Christians who first read Peter’s letter. Remember, they had been scattered, exiled, because of their faith. They were facing the threat of more persecution because of their faith in Jesus---persecution by the government, by their neighbors, and by their employers. Yet Peter leaves no wiggle room. He says, ***“Submit yourselves to EVERY human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority---or to governors, who are sent by Him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.”*** (vs 13-14)

And let’s remind ourselves exactly who Peter was referring to, who the emperor was, who the governmental authorities were when Peter wrote these words. The emperor was Nero, who led a great persecution against the Christians of that day. He blamed them for the fire that almost burned Rome to the ground. He had Christians covered with tar and hung from poles and then set on fire to light his garden. He was an insane, EVIL man. In fact, it was under Nero that Peter was eventually martyred. Other authorities at the time included Pontius Pilate who had Jesus crucified and Felix who rejected Paul’s testimony and left him in prison to please the Jews.

So, submitting themselves to the likes of these guys was RADICAL indeed. I can imagine the first church to hear their pastor read this letter would have said, ***“Are you sure you read that right? We SUBMIT to these guys?!”***

And let’s be honest here. SUBMITTING comes hard to us, even when we aren’t facing hardship. I mean, our natural response to rules is to rebel against them.

- When you see a speed camera you slow down, but what do you do when you get past it and are out of range? SPEED UP!
- If you are in Giant and you want to buy a box of cereal and it’s just a couple yards up the aisle but the shortest path to that cereal is to go against the posted one-way flow of that aisle. Well, do you go all the way around and come down the right way to get it? Of course not! You back your buggy up the wrong way so it looks like you’re going the right way and grab your Cheerio’s.
- When we lived in Louisville I often drove by this huge Catholic High School. There was a dress code that said boys had to wear a tie. Well, they wore one, but in a rebellious way. I mean, they wore a striped tie with a plaid flannel shirt, a polka-dot tie with a golf-shirt. They came up with all kinds of ways NOT to submit to the dress code. It was almost a competition to see who could obey while looking the most ridiculous.

My point is, no matter what our age, SUBMISSION doesn’t come natural to us. So, when we are told to submit ourselves to BAD people, we don’t respond well! Let me put it this way. The word ***“submit”*** means ***“to be put under”*** and we would prefer to be put OVER those who treat us unfairly.

But listen up.

THIS particular Greek word adds a new shade of meaning to submission because it is in the middle voice. So, it literally means, **“place YOURSELF in submission.”** In other words, it’s not something done TO you---it’s something YOU decide to do. It’s YOU obeying the speed limit even when the speed camera is not there. It’s YOU obeying the one-way aisles at Giant whistling through your face mask as you do. It’s YOU wearing a tie that matches your shirt.

Biblical submission is placing yourself under someone by choice. It’s not something done TO you, but rather something done BY you.

Now obviously, there are limits to how much you should place yourself in submission to others. God isn’t using Peter to tell us we must ALWAYS obey earthly rulers. There are tons of examples in God’s Word of people who did NOT submit to pharaohs and kings and councils because that submission would have meant disobeying God.

- When Pharaoh told the Hebrew midwives to kill all newborn boys, they refused and were commended for doing so.
- Daniel and his friends disregarded government orders when the king commanded them to stop praying to God or to worship idols.
- In the book of Acts we even read of a time that Peter himself didn’t submit to the government.

Remember?

Peter was told he could no longer speak about Jesus; he was to no longer share his faith or try to convert people. And Peter said to the Jewish council in Acts 4:20: **“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”** And in chapter 5 he explains by saying, **“We must obey God rather than man.”**

So, when government laws conflict with God’s laws, we submit to God. I mean, Peter didn’t say, *“Okay, the government has outlawed Christianity---so no longer share your faith and instead of going to church---head for a pagan temple.”* No, but Peter DOES tell us that as long as obeying earthly authorities doesn’t conflict with obeying God, we are to submit.

Why? Why submit to rulers we know are not Godly?

(1) Peter says one reason we do so is for the LORD’S sake.

Look at verse 13 again. It says, **“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men.”** Listen to the way *The Message* paraphrases this verse: **“Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; They are God’s emissaries for keeping order. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government.”**

The point here is that when we submit, we are not just submitting to the rulers, we are submitting to God. We **“submit ourselves”** for the Lord’s sake. We are HONORING God, obeying God when we obey man. Christians are not to submit to the governmental authorities because they agree with their views, or because the leaders are likeable or because they voted for them. High school students don’t submit to their teacher because they think he or she is cool.

No we, **“submit for the Lord’s sake.”** When we obey the law, when we BEHAVE, whether it involves paying our taxes or wearing a face mask, we please God.

When I was in sixth grade, I broke my right arm. I was playing hide-and-go-seek with my cousins and fell out of my hiding place which was about 20 feet up in a tree. My arm ended up in a plaster cast that covered my hand and went up past my elbow. It made writing very hard, especially in the days right after the injury.

Well, I had a very mean English teacher that year. And when I explained why I couldn’t write quickly or well, she said, in front of the rest of the class, that I was using my injury as an excuse. She made me so mad! But I still remember my dad’s guidance. He told me to respect her and do my best. And that was hard for me. I felt like conking her on the head with my plaster cast, but I did what my dad said. I submitted myself to my teacher. That pleased him and I have to say, it felt kind of good on my own end. You see SUBMITTING MYSELF to her, that put me in the driver’s seat. I was doing right, even when my teacher was doing what was wrong.

And I don’t mean to picture myself as some ideal, perfect 6th grader. Like I said, I wanted to HURT my teacher for HURTING me. I sinned in my head, if not with my heavily casted arm. But I did what my dad said. I submitted myself to my teacher for his sake. And it pleased him. He was proud of me.

When we obey our earthly leaders, when we submit, it makes God proud to see us showing that we have self-control, that we go against the sinful flow of this world and show respect even to disrespectful people.

I can’t help but think of the examples set by Daniel and Joseph. Their behavior pleased God.

Here’s a second reason Peter says we submit even when treated unfairly.

(2) We do so for the sake of our TESTIMONY.

Look at verse 15: **“For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.”**

The Message words it like this: **“It is God’s will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you’re a danger to society.”**

Now, the people that Peter was writing to, those first century Christians, were being slandered. There WERE INDEED people saying they WERE A DANGER TO SOCIETY.

- Some accused them of insurrection---because they talked about furthering the Kingdom of God. Non-believers heard this and spread the rumor that Christians were going to overthrow the government.
- Some accused these 1st century believers of atheism because they didn’t worship Caesar or the many other Roman gods.
- Some said they were cannibals because of a misunderstanding of communion.

They had heard Christians talk about Jesus’ statement: **“Except you eat My flesh and drink My blood you have not part of Me...”** and they took it literally.

- Non-believers heard Christians talking about a love feast and they spread the word that Christians engaged in sexual immorality and incest.

Of course, the natural response to all this is to be defensive, to sue for slander.

But through Peter, God says, *“Don’t do that. Silence this ignorance by living a Godly life. Don’t do wrong back to them---no---SHOW them they are wrong by living RIGHT.”*

Listen, our tools as Christians are different than those the world uses. We know there is no RIGHT way to do a WRONG thing. One of the greatest apologetics for the Gospel we are commissioned to share is our goodness -- our Godliness. In this way we prove the “Nero’s” of the world wrong. Obeying our leaders, paying taxes even if we don’t approve of the way the money is spent, obeying the law, even if we don’t like the law-maker, is a powerful testimony.

Peter is saying we win our right to be heard when we are good citizens. Remember, our CITIZENSHIP is in Heaven, so we are to act, well, “Heavenly” even when we are mistreated. We do this to get the opportunity to lead more people to become citizens of Heaven.

Now look at verses 18-20 where Peter includes not just governmental leaders in his instruction that we SUBMIT OURSELVES---but slave-masters. That’s hard to hear isn’t it!? I don’t like that word---SLAVE-MASTER. But that’s what Peter says, ***“Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”***

Let me say a couple things.

First, the Bible does not CONDONE slavery and Peter is not CONDONING slavery. He is simply acknowledging its existence. And boy did it exist! As much as a third of the population of the Roman empire were slaves. There were slaves and slave masters in the congregations of the churches that first read this letter.

Second, slavery in the Roman empire was not like the slavery in America during the Civil War. I’ve talked about this before so I won’t belabor the point. But, in Roman times slavery was more of a social class and it was not race-based. In fact, in his commentary on this passage David Helm says that the word translated as ***“slaves”*** here comes from a Greek word for household servants. He goes on to point out that in the Roman world there were three classes.

- There was the Roman citizen who had full rights and protection under law.
- There was the freedman who had restricted protections but still enjoyed a great deal of autonomy.
- And there was the servant class. These were the man and women who served as mangers and helpers of the home. They were doctors and accountants who were in this servant class as well.

Helm says a closer modern-day parallel would be someone who received their medical school education, through the Military Medical School on the campus of Walter Reed. They are “owned” by the government for a certain period and must serve in military hospitals. That’s not a PERFECT parallel, but it’s a better picture of what the slavery Peter is talking about was like.

Again, the Bible is not condoning that---it’s just acknowledging its existence.

So, this is the class of people to whom Peter addresses his comments. He is saying, when you live a Godly life in front of your owner or employer, even when they treat you harshly, it validates your testimony. It gives POWER to your witness.

Last week at our deacon meeting our deacon chairman shared a testimony that relates to this principle. He's given me permission to share it. He said, *"Some of you know that I work for the local transit authority as an electronic technician. I've been working there for 19 years. About three years ago, a new supervisor came to my shop and as soon as he got there, he began to harass me and other coworkers who were black. We had several confrontations to the point where I scheduled a meeting with him and his superiors. I addressed my supervisor directly and asked, 'What have I done to you or your family for you to treat me this way?' He did not say anything. I told him it was illegal for him to harass and bully people because of the color of their skin. I said, 'In fact the 1963 civil right act prohibits discrimination against someone base of color, race, religion, and national origin.'* I told him he must treat all men equally. After the meeting things got better---but just for a week. After that my supervisor continued to treat me and the other black coworkers the same as he had before. So, I put together evidence of his abuse. Five of my coworkers signed it as witnesses. I scheduled an appointment at the civil rights department of the main Metro building for a Monday. But on that Sunday, at Redland we studied the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus says we must, **'forgive those who trespass against us.'** I found myself wrestling with God as I sat in my seat. I told myself, 'You should have slept in today---because you can't forgive this guy.' At the end of the service we were challenged to think of someone in our lives that we needed to forgive---and I continued to wrestle with God.

After church I continued to pray. Finally, I came to the conclusion that God must be first in my life. He wants me to forgive my supervisor and so I must do that. When I got home, I cancelled the Monday meeting---and told the people in charge everything was now okay. On Tuesday, my coworkers gathered around all excited wanting to hear how the meeting at Metro had gone. I told them that I went to church on Sunday and God told me to forgive our supervisor. They were all speechless. Even the ones who are Christians could not believe what had happened. Now---I had not told my supervisor about that meeting down at the Metro headquarters. But from the moment I decided to forgive him on---he began to treat me differently. In fact, we have become great friends. And people in the shop noticed it. About a month later one of my friends asked me, 'What kind of voodoo did you do to this guy? He treats you better than everyone else.' I told him that as a Christian I serve God not man---and God is all-powerful. Even my Muslim coworker noticed the difference. It gave me an opportunity to share my testimony with him and he still talks about it today."

Okay, what does Peter say we should do when we are treated unfairly. We follow Jesus' example and---Right!
"Submit ourselves!"

Why do we do that?

FOR THE LORD'S SAKE and FOR THE SAKE OF OUR TESTIMONY.

Let's pray.