



1 Peter 2:18-25
Christ Sees Your Suffering

Summary: Christians are called to righteous submission in difficult circumstances as we follow the example of Christ who suffered and died for us.

Just over a year ago, our lives were turned upside down. We have endured a pandemic, racial tensions ignited over the public murder of George Floyd, and the most divisive political season in recent history with claims of a stolen election and a premeditated insurrection.

It has affected the world, our nation, and our region, our schools, and our homes, though thankfully, I think we all have enough toilet paper again. It has been a difficult year, and there is still more difficulty ahead.

Which is why it seemed like today, on Easter, instead of dedicating an entire sermon to the doctrine of atonement or offering an apologetic defense of the resurrection, perhaps the best thing we could do is continue our study of First Peter which shows us how to directly apply our hope in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to our daily lives, even as we face various trials.

You see, Peter tells us life is full of injustice, suffering, prejudice, and persecution, even for the righteous and the holy. But, he calls us to patiently endure it all by following the example of Christ who suffered and died for us, and promises to walk with us through each of the challenges we face.

So, let's dig into God's message - we'll talk first about the relationship between servants and masters or modern-day workers and employers, and then we'll see how Christ and the resurrection apply to it all because He is our example, our sacrifice, and our shepherd. We begin in

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 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.

Slavery was common in the ancient world, in fact, almost all work in Rome was performed by servants including people we regard as professionals today like doctors, teachers, administrators, as well as musicians and actors, all were considered servants in the Roman Empire where slaves were counted not by the hundreds or thousands but by the millions.

Servants and slaves made up the majority of the population, and therefore they made up much of the early Church. But slavery in Rome was rooted in citizenship, politics, and economics, it was not the race-based slavery that we are more familiar with as Americans. You could not look at a crowd and tell who was a slave by the color of their skin.

There were other important differences as well. Peter is writing here especially to household servants who “often had more economic and social mobility than free peasants” (Keener). They were often considered part of the family, could become the master’s heir, could own their own businesses, could even have their own servants, and could save up and buy their freedom – the situation was much more like that of what we would call an indentured servant.

Yet there was still an attitude that servants were more property than people. According to Aristotle, “a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.” In other words, even if you were well treated, you were still a thing and you had no rights.

I want to remind you - this is who Peter is writing to, just as we remembered last week that the tyrant Nero ruled the Roman Empire at this time. I want you to see, and know, and understand, that Peter is writing to people who felt like they had very little control over their lives and circumstances, very little, if any, impact on the decisions being made by their government or their boss – because maybe you can identify with that?

Maybe you’ve had the feeling that you don’t like what your government or leadership has decided, maybe you feel like it’s going to bring, or is bringing, real harm to your way of life or your independence and freedom. Maybe you disagree with the decision of your president, or congress, or governor, or your boss, your parent, or your school or coach and there is nothing you can do to change their mind. I want you to understand, this passage of Scripture was written to people just like that.

And I want you to notice what it says: when things are not going well for you with those in authority over you, focus first on your personal attitude and conduct – focus first on your personal righteousness. Peter is telling you: you can still work enthusiastically for God, even under bad conditions, and nothing ever goes unrecognized by Him.

He reminds us: Christianity is a durable faith; it endures and outlasts all opposition. You can actually work diligently and enthusiastically for your boss, your coach, your teacher or professor, your parents, and turn it into an act of divine worship that transforms your suffering into a holy sacrifice, and the more it costs you, the more you have to offer God. [When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.](#)

But, isn’t there real evil in the world? Isn’t there real injustice? Aren’t there actual policies and people who should be opposed? Yes. Of course. God knows that, and He will judge them. But He will also judge you, and that’s why He says, first and foremost, whether you have a good and gentle master or one that is harsh, you do good, even if you have to suffer for it, because, as we will see in just a moment, that is the path of Christ.

When you read the pages of the New Testament, you notice that Scripture speaks far more often about the internal issues of individuals and churches – what’s happening in your head and heart - than it does about the external issues of culture and community – what’s happening in politics and the media. That’s a focus we need to work to reclaim and maintain today. It is important, especially in a representative democracy, to work for good policies and good laws, even to elect good politicians, but if we pursue these things with God’s priorities, we will begin with our own hearts, minds, and souls, submitting our every ambition and action to Him and focusing first on the example of Christ.

Read with me again and notice why all this really does fit together on Easter because Jesus is our example, our sacrifice, and our shepherd through every season of suffering:

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

*22 “Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;*

23 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; 24 who 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. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Christian, you and I are called to accept the fact that holiness, righteousness, and purity are not always valued by the people around us or even the people who make decisions over us and that suffering exists. There is no avoiding it - you might suffer for your faults or for your conscience, but it is likely that you will suffer as you follow the example of Christ.

And what is that example? According to our text, we are called to avoid sin, to avoid deceitfulness, not to return an insult when we are insulted, not threaten when we are threatened, but to trust that God sees and knows and will judge with righteousness. We are called to face suffering with patience and calm confidence that God is in control of the present and the future.

When you are mistreated by someone in authority over you, when they make a decision you don’t like or do something that negatively impacts you, remember Christ. Remember He did no wrong, committed no sins, but was reviled and suffered - that’s what life is like on this planet. And if it was true for the perfect Son of God who never did anything wrong and never mistreated anyone personally, how much more likely is it for you?

The life of Jesus proves it is possible for you to be loved by God, to be right smack in the center of the will of God, and yet suffer tremendously and unjustly. Shallow Christianity and Internet Influencers want you to think you can have a life that is always easy and always awesome. That’s not always true.

God calls us to lives characterized by humility and submission, but don't misunderstand, those are not signs of weakness, they are signs of power, demonstrations of tremendous self-control, enabled by the Spirit of God in you.

Again, Christ is an example for us, but what kind of example? He doesn't show us how to live a life without suffering, injury, or injustice. He shows us how to live a life of derivative submission – submitting to kings, bosses, spouses, parents, and all other sources of leadership on earth because we submit ultimately to our eternal King and Father in Heaven. We look straight in the face of the wrongs we experience and choose to follow Christ with defiant faith.

Of course there is a problem with that: Jesus is an example for us, but none of us can perfectly walk in His steps. None of us are completely innocent. We can only aspire to what He actually attained. But thankfully, in addition to being an example for us to follow, Jesus is also a sacrifice to save us. Look at

[24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes \[we are\] healed.](#)

He bore our sins, carried them as a sacrifice and made a substitutionary atonement for us.

But what is sin? It is breaking God's laws whether by action, doing things we should not - or by inaction, not doing things that we should. Perhaps we could say, it is not meeting God's performance standards. And what happens, with any employer on earth when you do not meet the performance standards? You face discipline. That could be a cut in pay, a demotion, or being fired.

Well, with God, none of us are in the running for Employee of the Year. No matter how hard we try, we don't meet the standards, meanwhile, we're also stealing from the company, using God's resources for our own purposes, or doing our own thing while we're supposed to be on the clock, His clock.

Let's do a quick review of just a few of the Ten Commandments. Number Three, do not use the Lord's name in vain. Ever done that? Number Five, honor your father and mother. Ever disobeyed mom or dad? Ever thought they were stupid or said something that dishonored them to your friends? Number seven, do not commit adultery – are you open, honest, and proud of the way you honor your spouse by avoiding anything that might draw you closer to someone of the opposite sex emotionally, mentally, physically, or virtually? Number nine, don't lie. Ever done that? Are you doing that right now about your other responses?

Friends, we might not be slave owners who beat their servants, but in the eyes of God we're still sinners of another kind. We have broken, do break, are breaking, and will continue to break His rules. We all drift away from Him or intentionally avoid Him in our own personal ways, for our own personal reasons.

And yet, He calls out to us, He summons us to receive the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us. And He meets us there and gives us our pathetic performance report – He shows us justice by calling out our life, our motives, ambitions, thoughts, our conniving and scheming and our lusts for what they are. But then He shows us mercy, and says since you could never bear the discipline you deserve and you could never improve your performance enough on your own, I will experience and absorb the discipline you should receive.

The cross is God saying man has a problem he can't solve on his own. But justice and mercy collide at the intersection of the cross where Jesus **bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes [we are] healed.**

By whose stripes you are healed. Think of what that must have meant to someone in Peter's original audience, an actual servant, who had perhaps been wounded or whipped the night before by her master. What does it mean to someone with welts or scabs on their back to know that Christ was whipped and wounded too? That her Savior understood her pain, and His suffering actually brought her healing.

Friends, you may, for a moment, endure the wrath of a master on earth, but you have been saved from the eternal wrath of God by the offering of His Son who now gives you everlasting life and promises that one day, in Heaven, He will personally wipe away every tear from your eye. And yet even here and even now, we have access to Him, in fact, He promises to watch over us like a shepherd, even in our most difficult trials. Notice:

1 Peter 2:25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Warren Wiersbe points out that in the Old Testament, the sheep died for the shepherd, but now the shepherd dies for us. Scripture speaks repeatedly of God as our shepherd. Perhaps you know the famous opening line of the 23rd Psalm:

Ps 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd

Or you've heard the prophet Isaiah's description of the coming Messiah:

Is 40:11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.

Jesus told His followers:

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

But what does it matter if God is my Shepherd and Overseer? How does affect my life? It makes all the difference in the world, because God is telling you He sees you, He knows you, He affirms your value. You are more than the possession of a cruel owner - God sent His Son to rescue you. He is the Good Shepherd who searches for you and brings you into His flock. You are seen, you are known, you are loved EVEN in the difficulties of life. The Greeks and Romans saw slaves as things, but Jesus sees them as souls.

And so today, He sees you as more than just your professional self. He sees what you were before your current job and what you will be after. He sees you differently, more honestly, more accurately than your current supervisor. He can see straight through you, He makes a more accurate assessment of you, and yet He still wants to be with you, to lead you, if you'll follow.

So, what do you need to do this morning as a result of hearing this? Well, let this be a new beginning for you, a milestone marker. Let this be the day you look back on as the day when the changes began. Let me suggest a few things to you:

1. The message of Jesus is simple and clear, He said we must repent and believe in the gospel for the Kingdom of God is at hand. Have you done that? Have you come to Him, admitted the things you are guilty of, and asked for forgiveness? Have you received His healing? Have you asked Him to be the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul? If not, do it now.

There are no special words, no special place you have to go, just talk to God openly and honestly about it. And if you have questions or want to pray with someone, just ask the person you came with or come to the welcome table and we'll connect you with someone who will help.

2. Once you have repented and believed, remember that the chief purpose of our lives is to Know God and enjoy Him forever, even in this.

Peter is writing to people living through difficult times, people who have been through various trials and hardships and he encourages them to remember their living hope in Christ who is with them. My friends, you may not have a master who actually owns you as a piece of property, but most of you have a boss, an employer, or some other person in authority over you, and you are being encouraged to live for righteousness, here and now, in whatever setting you find yourself.

You get to make a difference for God in real estate or contracting, in programming, in accounting, or nursing, on your sports team, in your club, wherever you are - you get to creatively explore: how do I magnify righteousness here and now among these people whether they are [good and gentle](#) or [harsh](#)?

Our passage this morning reminds us that you can do your work for the Lord under any conditions. Even if you're in a difficult situation, you can redeem your suffering with righteous endurance - you can invest meaning into the frustration and you can be trained

by it, growing spiritually and becoming more like Christ. The world around is watching you, but the Good Shepherd is watching over you, He is in control, and He is preparing a place in heaven for you, even while you endure this season of difficulty.

3. Understand that the cross unites us with God, but it also unites us with one another - we belong together and all our problems with each other are dealt with at the cross. Don't bring unnecessary suffering upon yourself, but when it comes, don't threaten revenge or curse. Follow the example of Christ who also endured suffering at the hands of cruel men and responded with patient, enduring, reconciling love. [Beloved, let us love one another.](#)

4. For some of you this may be your first time back at church in a while, maybe you've been away because of COVID, maybe you've been away for other reasons, but you're here today. Come back again as long as you're physically healthy. Don't go wandering away from the fold, press into fellowship with the Lord and with His people.

There will be other difficulties ahead, and you're going to need the Lord, you're going to need the Word, you're going to need other people, and they're going to need you - we belong together, this is how God works.

Last week we saw how Christians should respond to a disagreeable government, this week we've seen how to handle a disagreeable boss, beginning next Sunday we'll look at how to handle differences with your spouse - maybe you've been working at home, together, for a while, and could use a little encouragement and direction from God on issues related to marriage, or maybe you need to know what to look out for as you look for a spouse, either way, come back and we'll get into God's Word together at 9 and 11.

If you have any questions, or need prayer for anything in your life, come up to the welcome table, we have men and women who would love to meet with you.

Let's pray.