



When you see a title of a message like this, what really goes through your mind? What is your reaction in your heart? Actually, let me step back a little farther. We are about at the halfway point of 1st Peter. We have been going through this letter since the first of the year. Has this letter been an encouragement to you? Are you understanding better your new identity in Christ? Are you being comforted with the truth of God's Word in the middle of the trial you face right now, in the middle of unjust suffering you may be enduring, in the middle of trying to live as aliens in a fallen world?

Encouragement for those who are suffering on the journey is certainly one of Peter's intentions by writing this letter. He tells us not to fear anything that is of this world. He says fear only God. Peter reminds us that we have been born again into a living hope. Encouragement pours out of this letter to us when he describes our new identity. He says we were dead in our sin, like dead men walking, but now, because we have been born again into a living hope, we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession. We have been given new life, new access to God, new power to live differently, and a new hope for today and for all eternity in heaven.

This is a letter of comfort but it is also a set of marching orders. Peter tells us that because God changed us from the inside out when we accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have now been given the capacity and power to march a different direction from where the world is marching. So we should ask ourselves: How are we handling the new marching orders that Peter is giving us?

What is this different direction we are to march? We have been given the capacity and the power to obey the command to proclaim the excellencies of God with our words, our actions, and our attitudes for those around us to see. We have been given the capacity and power to obey the command to march toward holy living. We have been given the capacity and power to obey the command to march in submission to authorities in our lives wherever that may lead. We have been given the capacity and power to obey the command to march toward loving each other in a new way with a sincere love. It's Peter's intention to comfort and it's Peter's intention to deliver us our marching orders in this life.

Today we look at a passage that is just flat out radical. Before we study passages like this we may need a little shoring up so we don't go wobbly. King David wrote in Psalm 119, "*Your Word O' God is a lamp to my feet; A light to my pathway.*" The great

preacher Charles Spurgeon said this about David's words. "God's word is not just a lamp to illuminate our minds, it is also to illuminate a path and give practical steps for our feet. God's Word is intended to get our minds and our feet moving in concert." Peter will light up a path this morning. May our minds and feet work in concert.

Last week we were taught that we best represent God by not fighting authority but by submitting to authority. He continues this idea of representing God by submitting in verse 18. He takes it further and makes it more personal to each of us by saying you also need to submit to those who have direct authority over you, those earthy masters that take whatever shape or form in our lives.

Then Peter answers the question, "As a Christian how am I supposed to respond to those over me who cause me unjust suffering?" This passage teaches us how to endure unjust suffering. This isn't a warm and fuzzy passage. It's a passage for anyone who takes seriously God's marching orders and who is willing to let the Word of God light up their path instead of taking marching orders from the world and letting the word of the world light up their path. So what's the big idea this morning? **We endure unjust suffering by following the example of Jesus who entrusted his care to his heavenly father.**

I don't think I'm alone when I say, "I don't like suffering." I have a hard time even accepting minor difficulties. Julie would tell you that I think I am suffering when my headlight bulb burns out on a car that I own and I have to leave a condo that I own and get in another car that I own and drive to a store to buy a new bulb that I certainly can afford and I bring it home and I have the physical and intellectual means to replace it!

But, I don't want anything else controlling my life. I want to be the sovereign one. I have enough trouble grasping this issue of suffering in my present circumstances, let alone relate to the kind of suffering that was occurring the first century, in Peter's original audience. Here is our first radical idea this morning.

### **It is a Calling from God to Endure Unjust Suffering**

**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 (1 Peter 2:18).**

There are two words in particular to focus on here: slaves and submit. It's important to understand that evil people throughout

history have perverted this verse to defend their idea that one human could enslave another. It's important to understand that the Bible is not supporting slavery. Peter is referring to those who read his letter who are at the bottom of the ancient Roman culture. At the bottom of Roman culture were slaves. Up to one-in-three people in Italy were slaves. Slaves did the labor in a culture that valued luxury. Some slaves remained slaves forever. Others worked as indentured servants for a period of time to earn their eventual freedom. The point was there were many in Peter's first century audience who were at the bottom of Roman culture and were involuntarily owned as slaves.

Peter is addressing those who feel they have no rights, who receive no justice, and who feel devalued by harsh authority figures. Applying this to our modern world context, it is not a stretch for us to apply these verses in a general way for those of us who suffer unjustly under any kind of evil. And it is not a stretch for us to apply principles from these verses as marching orders for those of us who suffer unjustly in our modern work places.

The word submit in verse 18 is the same word used for submit to human authorities in verse 13. Peter says, *"Don't just submit to government authorities, but also submit to economic authorities in your life."* Peter challenges with contrast: "don't just submit to those masters who are good and gentle, but also submit to those who are harsh or literally, unreasonable." At first glance, it seems that Peter is commanding us to do something that is opposite of dignifying. How could that be? Our fallen world sees this kind of submission as docile or weak. But Peter is saying voluntarily come under authority, not because of the character of the master or boss, but because of the character of our Heavenly Father.

As hard as this might be to accept, we may be called to suffer. Peter isn't telling these slaves that they are lower than low. His words intend to actually elevating them. He is saying the world may treat you like trash, but God's grace has elevated you. God's grace has leveled the playing field. You who are treated like slaves deserve dignity. You don't deserve the gross injustice you are receiving as a slave. But while in this world, in those moments, in those places where there is injustice, submit to these earthly masters as if you are submitting to God. If you do this, you are doing what is good and commendable.

Here are questions for all of us to ask ourselves this morning: *Do I believe that I am entitled not to struggle? Do I really believe that there can be some positive outcome from God that can come through unjust suffering? Can I really experience the most closeness to Christ if I escape unjust suffering in this life?*

The calling of God on our lives may include unjust suffering. This is not because God's plan has failed. This is not because God has been unfaithful, weak or forgetful of my situation. This is not because the world is out of control.

I don't like what I am about to say, but unjust suffering brings things to the surface in my life like the head of a pimple. Unjust suffering brings to the surface my pride, my self-righteousness, my judgment of others, my sense of entitlement, my anger, my envy—all things that need to come to a head and then be lanced and drained from me.

A natural question for us to ask is, "If God is about removing ugly things in my life why would he allow unjust suffering?" Unless I am taken to places beyond what I can control... unless I am taken beyond things I can comfortably manage, how else can I grow in faith? How else can those ugly character things be drained away and refilled by the beauty of Christ in my life? Why wouldn't Christ have us endure unjust suffering to become more like him? That's why he says:

### **It is Commendable Before God to Endure Unjust Suffering**

**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. To this you were called, (verses 19-21a)**

A better translation is "bears up under the sorrow or grief..." Another reason unjust suffering is commendable is because it is a witness. The world watches all this play out. The world watches how your life plays out to a neighbor who is making your life miserable through some unfairness. The world watches how your life plays out to a co-worker who watches you handle the temptation to bend or break the rules to get ahead because everyone else seems to be doing it. Or maybe it's to a family member, or to your child, when a relative who thinks you are a fool because you follow Christ. Maybe it's played out as you seek to become part of a group but they are not letting you in because they don't like what you stand for. Peter is saying we can bear up and be a witness under the pain.

The idea is to have a trusting awareness of God's presence, literally a mind full of God. The key to righteous suffering is a mind full of God. A mind full of a God whose love is unfailing. It's a mind full of God that brings confidence that God will ultimately right all wrongs so a follower of Christ can bear up without resentment, self pity or despair. Peter is saying don't confuse our suffering because of our stupid choices with our suffering because we do good. God doesn't commend those who suffer for their own foolishness.

Let's not gloss over this. Unjust suffering is transformed into an act of worship because we are aware of God's presence and trusting in him. God is pleased and honored by this. Unjust suffering takes us beyond our own boundaries of our own strength and our own wisdom. Unjust suffering causes us to depend on

him. Unjust suffering pries us open to let go of things in this world and depend on him.

Suffering works God's grace into our hearts. For you who are suffering unjustly this morning, I challenge you to smile. The grace of God marks your life. God is smiling on you. Finding your satisfaction in God alone is grace. The idea that God might use unjust suffering in your life to bring someone closer to Jesus is grace.

When was the last time you, in your moments of suffering said, "This is grace"? Peter is saying God calls you commendable and you make God smile—that God would love me so much to push me to abandon my self righteousness, my own wisdom, my own strength and find my hope and peace in him. That God would love me so much to use unjust suffering to pry my fingers off of idols that won't satisfy. That God would love me so much that he would convict me of my sin of envy. We get it so wrong. This calling to unjust suffering is a calling of grace.

So along with laying out our call, Peter lays out our example to follow. He says, to this you were called.

### **Jesus is Our Example to Endure Unjust Suffering**

**... because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "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" (verses 21–23a).**

Using Isaiah 53, Peter lays out the example of Jesus for us to trace. This word for example refers to a writing or a drawing that a student produces. Can you remember back when you learned to write? We were handed a page that had letters written on the page with dotted lines. We were to learn how to write by tracing the letters. That is the idea of following Jesus. To follow Jesus mean to trace his way of living until it becomes your way of living. It's following God's marching orders. My unjust suffering doesn't change the rules. Just because I am going through unjust suffering doesn't mean I have permission to do wrong. If we follow in the steps of Jesus we are not letting our morality, our ethics, our attitude, our behaviors change because we are going through an exceptionally hard time. Unlike Jesus, we cause our own trouble. We make our suffering worse because we choose ways that are sinful to try to cope with our suffering and those ways actually make our own suffering worse.

Jesus didn't lie himself out of difficulties. He remained committed to His Father. No tit for tat. No vengeance even though he was the Lord God Almighty who could call down legions of angels with a Word. Why didn't he just do that? Because Jesus believed in his Heavenly Father.

### **Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (v. 23b).**

He believed in the presence, the power, the wisdom, the sovereignty and the justice of the one who judges justly. He saw in his Father the definition of everything good, right and true. He endured suffering because he didn't believe in fate, he didn't believe in the survival of the fittest. He believed there was meaning to his journey. He trusted his Father totally and that allowed him to endure unjust suffering. So Peter is telling us, "Whatever God ordains is right. So do what is right." In those moments of suffering you will be tempted to question God's goodness, God's wisdom, God's faithfulness, and God's power. Watch for sins of envy, anger, doubt and fear to surface. Believe! And then repent of those sins.

Are you a believer? Are you **really** a believer? These moments of unjust suffering reveal truth about what we really believe. When I am going through difficult times I notice in my life a kind of disconnect between my confession of faith thinking and my everyday street kind of thinking? As Paul Tripp, one of our Men's Fraternity video teachers said, "We demonstrate the true beliefs in our heart in the moments when we are receiving the treatment we don't deserve. We don't demonstrate the true beliefs in our heart by attending church on Sundays. The purpose of theology is to produce holiness in the people of God."

At this point, I am looking at this passage and saying, "I can't live this way. I hate suffering. I want to be comfortable. I don't want my possessions, my status, my loved ones to be compromised. This is too much. The bar is too high." And I think Peter understands this internal conflict. That is why he moves from a discussion about enduring suffering to one of the clearest most succinct gospel presentations in the Bible. Our deepest struggle is not unjust suffering; our deepest struggle is our sin. Sin makes life a mess. It's the sin in our lives that complicate our moments of suffering. The greatest problem we will ever have in this life is not what's out there that the world lobs at me; it's what is in here. And for that I have the precious shed blood of Christ.

When Jesus entrusted himself to his Father, something amazing happened. The unjust suffering he received revealed a grand purpose. Jesus' unjust suffering became redemptive.

**"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" (v. 24).**

Throughout the Bible we see the benefit of being healed. We long for healing. And Peter builds upon the words of the prophet Isaiah when he says the healing that we desperately need is found in Jesus. So when we believe in Jesus and trust that he bore our sins by his death, the enslaving power of sin has died to us, and we now have the capacity and the power to live for righteousness.

It might be easy to miss, but it's crucial that we don't: The gospel is not just for past forgiveness and it isn't just for future hope. The gospel is also for present help. The gospel allows us to live for righteousness in the here and now. We can live for righteousness in the here and now in the middle of unjust suffering. Not because I am righteous in myself, but because I have been given God's righteousness as a gift of grace that I receive on faith when I first believed and was born again into a living hope.

When I face unjust suffering, I know now that I can't work up the right response. I know now I don't have the wisdom. I know now I don't have the strength to go through it. But if there is a Jesus, and if there is a cross, there is hope for me in this moment. And there is a Jesus and there is a cross. So I can say no to envy, no to jealousy, no to vengeance, no to anger and fear in the here and now. I hope verse 25 is as encouraging to you as it is to me.

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

I hold tight to this: Peter assures me that I will never endure unjust suffering alone. I have the promise that I will never be outside the care of our Good Shepherd. I can be confident that I will never land in a situation, location, circumstance or relationship that is outside of his shepherding care.

I would like us to read together the familiar Psalm 23. As this Psalm has done for thousands of years, may it remind you of the shepherding care of God, in particular for those who are enduring unjust suffering.

**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,**

**he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.**

### **We Endure Unjust Suffering by Entrusting Ourselves to God**

If this is true we can endure suffering and bring glory to God. If this is true, we can endure suffering and grow spiritually. If this is true we can endure suffering and let our unjust suffering be a witness to the world. May God encourage and equip us to endure unjust suffering. And may he show us how to encourage a friend who we know is suffering unjustly.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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