



Six years ago a staff member of ours came into my office with a text they received from a person who attends CPC. This text said that a friend of a friend told her that I did something awful to her friend's friend a long time ago. I was stunned. I immediately went into Mark's office and told him about the false accusation. We told the elders. And of course, I talked with my wife. We all tried to get to the bottom of it and find out who was making this accusation and why, but everyone wanted to remain anonymous. So, an anonymous person told an anonymous person, who told a CPCer, who then told a staff member, who then told me about this false accusation. I quickly went from shock to anger. I felt that my reputation and even my ministry was at stake. I couldn't believe that someone out there was falsely accusing me of something and then wasn't willing to approach me or anyone else about it. I felt I was suffering unjustly and there was nothing I could do.

During those dark days, my wife, our elders, and my close friends encouraged me to forget about it and move on. They all told me this was a lie from the pit of hell and it was a ploy from the Enemy to hurt and discourage me. As a self-recovering people-pleaser, the damage was already done. My joy was totally robbed as I mulled over my past wondering who this person could be and why they would accuse me of something I would never do. I prayed. I read my Bible. I searched my heart. But, it was a struggle for me to move ahead.

Then one day, as I was reading my Bible, I came to a series of Psalms written by King David. They were like cold water to my thirsty soul: *"In you, Lord my God I put my trust. I trust in you, do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will even be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause"* (Psalm 25:1-3). *"Vindicate me, Lord for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered"* (Psalm 26:1). *"The Lord is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life--of whom shall I be afraid?... Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations"* (Psalm 27:1,12).

As I continued to read one Psalm after another, I realized a powerful truth, one that Peter will teach us today: there will be times in your life when you can only trust God to take care of you. I realized that ultimately only God can protect and deliver me. Only God is my Shepherd, rock, refuge, Redeemer and friend.

And just like that, the Lord lifted the weight and burden of the false accusation off my shoulders. I was set free.

Our text this morning in 1 Peter is going to speak to any of you who are suffering. And not just any suffering, but suffering unjustly. This text speaks to anyone who has felt the sting of gossip, slander, libel and false accusations. We all suffer and experience mistreatment at some point in our lives. Maybe you gave time, energy, and relationship to a person who, in turn, treated you harshly or attacked you. Maybe you are at a job where folks are speaking about you behind your back. Maybe you are an athlete and because of your outspoken faith, the coach sits you on the bench and starts someone else. If we are going to walk with Jesus, that means we are going to live as exiles, strangers, and foreigners in this world and because of that, we will face unjust suffering. How will you handle it when you are attacked personally, verbally, and for no reason whatsoever? We must all learn how to endure suffering. That's what we will look at today. Turn with me to 1 Peter 2:18-25.

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. To this you were called, 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. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "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." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

First, let me talk about slavery in the first century. The second I say that word "slaves" everyone starts to feel uneasy. But, we're talking about apples and oranges here. Slavery that was sadly institutionalized in the United States was radically different from

first-century slavery. One-third of the people in the Roman world were slaves. That was about 60,000,000 people. Slavery though was not usually a permanent condition of life. Many people voluntarily chose to be slaves of a Roman citizen so that as a result of good behavior, they could become full Roman citizens. Some scholars suggest that the reason Peter and Paul urged Christian slaves to be submissive and obedient because in doing so, they would be set free (if the slaves wanted their freedom).

Slavery was also an integral part of the world economy; it was impossible to conceive of the idea of life without it. Not all slaves were suffering either. Slaves often had the status and power that was connected with their masters. So, it was actually desirable at times to be a slave.

Most slaves were born into that way of life, but many chose slavery over trying to find odd jobs for the rest of their lives. And slaves were not all ignorant or manual laborers. "Doctors, teachers, writers, accountants, agents, bailiffs, overseers, secretaries, and sea-captains" all comprised the slave population. With all that, let me also say, just because Peter and Paul talk about slavery does not mean they condone it.

At our church we have a thriving recovery ministry called Higher Power that meets on Friday nights. We're not condoning substance abuse and we sure don't want to encourage people to develop an addiction so that they can join Higher Power! Addiction is not what God wants for your life, but we also want to help those who have been through it and are dealing with it.

Slavery in all its forms is morally wrong! In fact, it was the biblical writers who introduced a radical new idea into the mix: the idea of human dignity. Christianity teaches that every person has value and that each life is worth something. The New Testament writers challenged slave owners to treat their slaves with dignity and respect. They also challenged slaves to treat their masters with respect and do their work wholeheartedly.

Here, Peter is addressing Christians who were slaves. He's acknowledging the reality of the institution and telling his people how to deal with it. Now that we've covered that, let's look at Peter's first point.

Enduring Suffering Pleases God

From 2:11–4:11 Peter is teaching these new Christians how to live godly lives in a pagan society. *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits"* (2:12). Peter is now going to teach slaves, wives, husbands, and all Christians how to live that command out. What he is doing here is addressing the most important unit in the Roman world at that time—the family, the household. And he starts first with slaves.

Peter is pointing to slavery to teach you and me a spiritual principle: enduring suffering pleases God. He writes, *"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"* (verses 19–20). The word "commendable" is the word "grace." And two times in these two verses Peter says enduring suffering is grace, it's commendable, it pleases God. Enduring suffering pleases God. Suffering is actually a sign that God's hand is on you! It's grace to you! Let that sink in for a moment.

Why is that? Suffering is an inevitable part of life. No one gets around it. Every person, Christian or not, deals with it. But, how you deal with it and your perspective on suffering is what can please God or dishonor him. Let me tell you how I've seen this play out in my life and in countless others. Peter is not talking about suffering that you deserve or that is your own fault. That's why in verse 19 he says, "Hey, if you did wrong and got a beating, that's on you!" But, often times suffering is not your fault. And here's what the Enemy, the Devil, loves to do. He is the master of spin. When you suffer, he will do everything in his power to convince you that it's all your fault, that you don't deserve it. How could a good and loving God allow you, his precious child, to suffer? He'll convince you that God doesn't love you, that God is punishing you. That's what the Devil does.

On the flip side, the Devil will spin it the other way. Sometimes the suffering is because of your sin, poor judgement, or mistakes, but he'll spin it so that you feel like a martyr. "My boss doesn't like me because I am a Believer, not because I'm lazy and don't perform well!" You think you're being persecuted for your faith when you're not. Or I've heard people say, "People don't like me because I'm on fire for Jesus!" When in reality, they need to be told, "No, people don't like you because you have a holier-than-thou attitude."

Sometimes we suffer because we are right or because we are wrong. Sometimes suffering happens for no reason at all. Just read about Job. What did he do to deserve it? It's all about having the right perspective on suffering. It's about seeing it as an opportunity to trust and please God. Suffering is an opportunity to trust God. It's about saying, "God, I don't know how much of this is my fault, but I want to do right, and I'm going to endure what I have to endure because I want to please you."

Here's the second reason to endure suffering.

Enduring Suffering Fulfills Your Calling

In verse 21 Peter writes, *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."* Later in this letter Peter says: *"But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed"* (3:14); *"Therefore since*

Christ suffered in his body, arm yourself also with the same attitude" (4:1); "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering*" (4:12). Suffering is not only a fact of life, it is your calling as a follower of Jesus Christ.

The word calling suggests an invitation and an experience. You have been summoned, called, invited to experience life with Jesus Christ and that means following him on the road marked out with suffering.

Calling is a major theme of Peter's letter. Already in 1 Peter we've heard about our calling to be holy, "*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do*" (1:15). That's a call to be set-apart. Then we heard these powerful words later, "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*" (2:9). You have been invited out of darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ. Later in 1 Peter 3:9 we'll read, "*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*" And finally in 1 Peter 5:10, "*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*" Peter reminds us at the end of the letter that all this suffering is only for a short while.

Called to suffering usually is not the approach we take when we invite people to trust and follow Jesus. We tell them that God loves you, has a plan for your life, and wants to be your friend. All that is true, but it's also true that part of our calling to follow Christ will include suffering. F.B. Meyer said, "The child of God is often called to suffer because there is nothing that will convince onlookers of the reality and power of true religion as suffering will do, when it is borne with Christian fortitude."

Here's the thing: we're not called just to suffer. Everybody in the world suffers. But, as followers of Jesus, we're called to endure suffering in a way that brings glory to God and honors him.

But, how do we do it? That brings us to the next point.

Enduring Suffering is a Way of Being Like Jesus

Here's the example: "*To this you were called, 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. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*" (verses 21-23). The call to suffering is rooted in Jesus. He is our supreme example. These verses are all taken from Isaiah 53, a chapter about the Suffering Servant.

The word for "example" comes from a word used for the wax tablet on which children wrote in order to learn their letters.

Patterns were impressed in the wax so children could learn to shape their letters properly. Jesus is not just an example but **the** example to copy our lives after. Karen Jobes put it this way, "Jesus Christ left us this pattern over which we are to trace out our lives, in order that we might follow in his footsteps... For one cannot step into the footsteps of Jesus and head off in any other direction than the direction he took, and his footsteps lead to the cross, through the grace, and onward to glory."

How do we respond to suffering? Peter tells us to follow the example of Jesus Christ. He points to three things Jesus did. What's interesting is that they all have to do with the spoken word.

Speak no deceit. Whenever people start talking about me, I want to defend myself. I'm often tempted to twist the details in my favor. We all do that with half-truths. It's not the whole truth, but close enough. As a follower of Jesus, don't let there be deceit in your mouth. Jesus was the way, the **truth**, and the life, and yet did not come to his own defense.

Following Jesus' example means we speak no insults. Isn't human nature that when someone insults you, you want to insult them back? I want to lash out. As followers of Jesus, we don't live according to the flesh but in the Spirit. We live according to our new nature in Jesus Christ. We've been transformed and made new! So when we are insulted, we don't retaliate. Following Jesus' example means we speak no threats. Threats are often the last resort. Threats come when we are done arguing. We want to intimidate others so that they'll leave us alone. Threats come when we feel that we've lost control of the situation.

What blows me away and what is so incredibly convicting is how Jesus responded to unjust suffering. He responded with silence. We always want to get the last word. Yet, the Son of God said nothing. And when he did finally speak he said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing." That's why Peter ends this section with this line in verse 25, "*But now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*" He's saying that because Jesus is the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul, you can endure unjust suffering. Because Jesus is the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul, you can say nothing at all and trust God to take care of you.

Enduring suffering pleases God.

Enduring suffering fulfills your calling.

Enduring suffering is a way of being like Jesus.

When you suffer, when you're criticized, ridiculed, mocked, laughed at, what do you do? Peter tells us to keep your mouth shut and trust God to take care of you. How's that for a sermon's big idea? Shut up and trust God!

Jesus saved you through his submission so that you can honor him through your submission. When Jesus came into this world,

even though he was the one who created the world and every form of authority that existed on earth, he willingly submitted himself to human authority. As a child, he submitted to the authority of his parents. And as an adult, he submitted to the authority of the government, even though he had the power to overthrow them. Even when he suffered unjustly and was crucified on a cross, a death reserved for slaves under Roman law, he did not rebel, but instead entrusted himself to his father. And as a result of his submission, we have the ability to be reconciled to God and a live a life that pleases him.

And here is Peter, many years after the death of Jesus Christ, writing to the church, reminding them that the call to suffering is rooted in following Jesus to the cross. Peter, the same guy who once took Jesus aside and rebuked him because he didn't like how Jesus said he had to suffer, be crucified and rise again.

(Mark 8:31-33). Peter, the same guy who during the Passion week, hid from Jesus. (Mark 14:66-72). The guy who didn't get it now gets it.

If you're not a follower of Jesus yet, Peter encourages you to "get it" now, to embrace Jesus as the suffering savior. For the rest of us, as we take the Lord's Supper today, we are reminded this is a table for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, for those who are suffering and those who are not.

Jesus did not suffer to be an example. He suffered to rescue you and be your savior. This meal is for you.

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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