

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)

For To This You Have Been Called

November 11th, 2018

1 Peter 2:18-25

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 2:18; that's on page 1015 in your pew Bibles. While you are finding that let me remind you of where we are in the text. Back in verse 12 Peter said to these folks:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

And then in verse 13 he begins to explain to them what this will entail. He says:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.... (1 Peter 2:13 ESV)

We are not revolutionaries, brothers and sisters. Our goal is not to burn the house down. Our goal is to represent and resemble Christ wherever we find ourselves in this broken and sinful world. Jesus did NOT summon 12 legions of angels to rescue him from the injustice of the cross. Rather he ENDURED the cross, despising its shame and has now taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

That's our Jesus.

And so this is our PATH, brothers and sisters, as we worship and follow him.

That's what Peter is saying in this section and now here in the passage we're going to look at he applies that general teaching to a particularly difficult situation. It's all well and good to speak about honouring authority and submitting to institutions but what if the authority above you is evil? What if it is crooked? What if it is brutal?

What then?

Does this teaching apply even to people who are slaves to a wicked master?

That is the question that Peter is addressing in this passage. We'll read it and then we'll do the work we'll need to do in order to understand what this text is saying to us as modern day believers. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 18:

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:18–25 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

I mentioned that we would have a little bit of work to do if we are to understand the point that Peter is making in this passage. This is a passage with ONE POINT and Peter makes this point by means of a comparison between TWO THINGS that would have been very familiar to his original readers but that are less familiar to those of us reading his words here today. Peter is making a comparison between the experience of Roman slaves and the experience of Christ upon the cross.

The experience of Roman slaves:

Many of us have a hard time with what the Bible says and doesn't say about the institution of

slavery. We wish that the New Testament had come right out and condemned the institution as a whole. We wish that Paul or Peter had told slaves to rise up and to run away or to rebel openly against the cruelty and injustice of their masters. But the Bible never does that. To be clear, the Bible does not endorse slavery – the Bible limits it, undercuts it and then in the end subverts it – but as we’ve said many times now, the goal of the Christian is not to burn the house down – and that applies even to the house of slavery.

Now, slavery in Roman times was different than slavery in North America. I’m not saying it was better I’m just saying it was different. Slavery in ancient Rome had nothing to do with race. There were white slaves, brown slaves and black slaves. You became a slave in Roman times either because you went bankrupt or because your country was defeated in war. In rare cases, people might sell themselves into slavery during a severe famine just so that their family wouldn’t starve to death – but the majority of slaves were slaves because they lost a war or because they lost all their money and had to sell themselves to cover their debts.

Slavery in the Roman Empire – however you got there - was just as total and just as brutal as it was over here in North America in the deep south. A slave could be beaten, raped, sold, removed from his or her family – any child born to slaves was considered the property of the master and not the parents – just think about that for a second - so however you slice it being a slave was the worst thing you could possibly imagine. It was brutal, it was awful, it was inhumane and it was the experience of a great many of the early Christians.

Many slaves converted to Christianity because the Gospel gave them a sense of personal worth. The Gospel said to a slave: you are valuable to Almighty God! He loves you! He came for you. He died for you and he has plans for you. That’s a powerful message to a slave and so Christianity became known as a religion of slaves and women. It was EMPOWERING to people who had no power in the earthly realm. It was VALIDATING TO PEOPLE who were considered POSSESSIONS in the Roman world.

So here is Peter talking to these people and he is saying – God knows what you are going through. Our God – Jesus – is a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering; and then he goes on to speak about the experiences of Christ on the way to the cross.

The experience of Christ on the cross

Almost everything he says is drawn from Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 was a favourite passage in the early church and it would have been very well known to Peter's original readers. Keep in mind, when the Apostles preached in person, they didn't say: "Open up your Bibles please to 1 Peter 2:18" they were speaking 1 Peter 2:18 – so what they probably said was "Open up your Bibles please to Isaiah 53:1."

They preached Christ from the Old Testament.

Have you ever thought about that?

It seems very obvious once you think about it – and it is very obvious if you read this text with Isaiah 53 open beside you. You should do that – open your Bibles to Isaiah 53 – it's on page 613 in your pew Bibles.

Listen to what Peter says about the sufferings of Christ.

He says:

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (1 Peter 2:22 ESV)

That's from Isaiah 53:9:

he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. (Isaiah 53:9 ESV)

Peter is saying that Jesus KNOWS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SUFFER UNJUSTLY! Jesus didn't die on the cross because he was a sinner – Jesus died on the cross because YOU ARE A SINNER! He didn't do anything wrong – and yet he was betrayed, mocked, condemned, beaten, scourged and crucified.

Jesus knows what it is to suffer unjustly.

And yet, Peter says:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten (1 Peter 2:23 ESV)

Peter's folks would have remembered that from Isaiah 53:7:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7 ESV)

When Jesus was treated unfairly, he didn't threaten future punishment – which he could have done! He could have said to the soldiers: I am counting every stripe and I will require it from you 1000 fold in the fires of an eternal hell.

He could have said that. He would have said that – if anyone but Jesus was Jesus.

Instead he prayed:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34 ESV)

Jesus knows what it is to endure injustice and to return only mercy, compassion and prayer. Jesus didn't need to get even – Jesus didn't need closure. He didn't need for people to KNOW how much they had hurt him.

He didn't need any of that. Rather, Peter says, he:

continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23 ESV)

Jesus never had a bad word to say to those who were abusing him on the way to the cross because he knew that every single one of those people would one day stand before God and they would be required to give an account for every single second of their lives. They would answer for every stripe. They would answer for every mocking word. They would answer for every miscarriage of justice.

And so Jesus wanted these folks to get saved.

Jesus wasn't pursuing JUSTICE he was pursuing MERCY.

That's what Jesus did when he suffered at the hands of brutal men.

He kept his eye on the big picture. Peter says in verse 24:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24 ESV)

It was all part of the plan. Jesus suffered for a reason.

He suffered FOR OUR SALVATION. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree – by his wounds we have been healed – all of that too is from Isaiah 53. It comes from verses 4-6:

4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4–6 ESV)

By adding the words “on the tree” – as opposed to “on the cross” Peter brings in a reference to Deuteronomy 21:23 which says:

every one that is hanged on a tree is cursed of God (Deuteronomy 21:23 LXX-B)

Peter is making it clear here that Jesus bore the curse of God on our behalf. He suffered the punishment our sins deserved. He was an INNOCENT SUFFERER on behalf of other people.

He went through something he didn't have to in order to SAVE the souls of the very people who were abusing him.

Dear brother or sister SLAVE – can you see in this something relevant to your situation?

You see that's the point Peter is making.

This isn't actually a passage on the atonement – even though it is one of the best passages in the Bible on the atonement. But that's not the main point in this passage. Peter isn't PRIMARILY

concerned to explain the nature of the atonement – rather Peter’s main concern is to establish the PATTERN of the atonement.

Look at what he says in verse 21 – verse 21 IS the heart and centre of this passage. Listen to what he says:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

The word Peter uses here for EXAMPLE actually means “a pattern to be traced”. It refers to a tool that was used to teach little children how to write their letters.

Can you picture that in your mind’s eye? Can you see the cross of Christ drawn in dark, bold strokes upon a canvas and can you see a child with a piece of wax paper leaning over and tracing that pattern and whispering quietly this is what my life will be like as I learn to follow Jesus. That is what Peter is saying here. The cross isn’t JUST a gift to be received - it is that – but it is also a PATTERN to be imitated: “that we might follow in his steps.”

Dear brother or sister slave: You are saved by the cross of Jesus Christ. His perfect life can be the life that you owe God. His sacrificial death can be the death that you owe God. If you take hold of him – if you confess your sin and claim him as your Lord – your Shepherd and the Overseer of your soul – then you will be forgiven. You will be healed of all your bruises. Every bone that has ever been broken by the cruelty of your earthly master, will be set and restored and healed entirely by your HEAVENLY MASTER. He will treat you as a son or daughter. He will sit you on a throne. Reward you with crowns and jewels. And set you forever among the company of your saved friends and loved ones.

This is all yours now because of Christ.

So if he endured all of that to give you all of this – then surely you can endure in your circumstances for just a little while longer:

For to this you have been called (1 Peter 2:21 ESV)

Peter's Point: Your Suffering Is Not An Accident

That's Peter's main point in this passage.

Peter is saying that your suffering is not an ACCIDENT – it is not a DETOUR. Your suffering is your CALLING. You are right where God wants you to be. Your suffering is the stage that God has ordained for the display of your faith and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is not something to be resented.

It is not something to be escaped.

It is something to be used for the glory of God and the salvation of FALLEN and WAYWARD souls.

That is Peter's point in this passage.

And before you dismiss that point as being irrelevant to you – after all you are not a slave and this is not Rome and we live now a long way from the situation being addressed here – before you think that let me remind you that this is merely a specific application of a universal principle.

Thomas Schreiner makes that point, he says helpfully:

“The exhortation is addressed to slaves, but slaves function as examples for all Petrine Christians, and so the principle enunciated applies to all believers.”¹

All believers are to view their particular suffering as a STAGE upon which to display their faith and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's what this passage is saying.

¹ Thomas Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 134.

And so I think it's fairly obvious where we need to go as we attempt to apply this teaching to our lives. We need to talk about how to turn our suffering into a stage.

How To Turn Your Suffering Into A Stage

Based on what we see in this text I think the first thing we need to do towards that end is:

1. Remove all just causes

Peter makes that very point. He says in verse 20:

For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. (1 Peter 2:20 ESV)

Nothing of benefit happens if you suffer for doing bad things. You aren't going to make an impression on your boss by patiently enduring his lectures about your persistent lateness. Stop being late all the time! That isn't suffering for Jesus – that is suffering for being lazy and stupid.

Stop!

If you want your suffering to have kingdom benefit then it has to be righteous suffering. Now – none of our suffering is righteous in the same sense that Jesus' suffering is righteous. Peter isn't saying that. But he is saying that LIKE the suffering of Jesus our suffering only has Kingdom value to the extent that it is unrelated to our particular sin.

So if your boss treats you poorly because you are a bad employee – there is no kingdom benefit in that. But if your boss treats you poorly just because he is a wicked and crooked man or woman – and you endure that righteously – then there is kingdom benefit in that.

So the first thing you need to do to activate this program is remove all just causes of your suffering – to the extent that you can do so. Take away any JUST AND FAIR cause for complaint and maltreatment. Think about that at the individual level and think about that at the

corporate level. Our suffering as a church – if ever we are called upon in this culture to offer it – will be valuable only if we have removed all JUST AND FAIR causes of resentment. Right now, the world has a few legitimate beefs against the church I would say. We want our tax exemptions, but many of us don't do anything of value in the community. We can be mean and censorious towards those who disagree with us. We aren't always welcoming to newcomers. Let's get all that sorted out so that if we suffer for being Christians it will be clear that we are suffering because of the crookedness of the world – not the crookedness of the church.

So that's job one – address and remove all just causes of suffering and maltreatment and then the second flows out naturally from that; once we've removed all just causes, we need to:

2. Endure all unjust treatment

We need to be like Jesus. When he was reviled he did not revile in return. When he suffered he did not threaten. This is standard Christian ethics and it goes all the way back to Jesus. Jesus said:

if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (Matthew 5:39–41 ESV)

Endure UNJUST TREATMENT, Jesus says. But don't be resentful. Don't go the extra mile all the while cursing your oppressor under your breath – no! Jesus said that while you are going the extra mile you need to be praying for the salvation of those who are mistreating you. He said:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:44–45 ESV)

This is the family business, brothers and sisters. This is how we do it – this is how Jesus did it. While they were nailing him to the cross he prayed:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34 ESV)

That's our example! We aren't just saved by that – we are instructed by that.

We are instructed to endure all unjust treatment.

And we are instructed here to:

3. Entrust all things to God

Again that's what Peter said that Jesus did. In verse 23 he said:

when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23 ESV)

That's what Jesus did so that's what we need to do. The Apostle Paul said that too, he said:

Repay no one evil for evil (Romans 12:17 ESV)

Never take your own revenge (Romans 12:19 NASB)

To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." (Romans 12:19–20 ESV)

Are you seeing that? Christians are never to be interested in getting even. Even if we have the chance to PAY BACK those who have wronged us – we NEVER TAKE THAT CHANCE. We never pay back evil for evil because we have bigger fish to fry.

Some of you may have heard the story of Korean Pastor Yangwon Son. In 1948 during the Korean War a band of communist guerrilla soldiers briefly took control of the border town where he was living and serving at the time. These young soldiers – filled with zeal and fired up with patriotic ideals – executed several villagers including Pastor Yangwon Son's two older boys, named Matthew and John.

They murdered his sons right before his eyes.

When the communists were driven out a young man from a neighbouring village named Chai-sun was identified as one of the killers – one of the ones who had pulled the trigger. He was arrested and scheduled for execution but Pastor Yangwon Son argued for his release. In fact he demanded that he be allowed to adopt this young teenage boy as his own son – and his daughter Rachel demanded that she be allowed to have him as a brother. The courts released him and Chai-sun

became the son of the pastor, the brother of Rachel AND a follower of Jesus Christ.²

That's what it looks like to follow the example and pattern of the cross.

And that leads us to the fourth and final thing we would say here about turning our suffering into a stage. Obviously for this to work we must be prepared to:

4. Answer whenever we are asked

I don't imagine that it took very long for Chai-sun to ask Pastor Yangwon Son why he had argued so strenuously on his behalf. Why didn't you kill me like I killed your two sons? Why did you want me? Why did you adopt me? Why do you love me? I imagine that those questions were asked and answered fairly early on.

As Christians we hope to be asked similar questions by those that we love, serve and forgive in this fallen and crooked world. Peter assumes that living this way will result in Gospel opportunities. In chapter 3 verse 15 he tells these people to:

be prepared to give an answer **to everyone who asks** you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15 NIV11-GK)

Are you seeing that? Is the plan coming into view? Is the pattern beginning to take shape? Peter is telling us here to live in a way that cannot be explained according to the beliefs and values of the world. Live that way – in whatever circumstance God ordains for you – LIVE THAT WAY and then be prepared to answer questions as to WHY.

Why do you care so little about paying back those who have wronged you?

Why do you care so little for your own situation in this world?

Why do you care so much about the well being of people who don't give a rip about you?

²Yong Choon Ahn, *The Triumph Of Pastor Son* as cited by Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, ed. John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 114.

What is up with you?

What do you know that we don't know?

What do you have that we don't have?

What are you seeing that we're not seeing?

Is there anything you'd like to tell us?

Those are the questions that our lives are supposed to inspire and that we are supposed to be prepared to answer. That's why God has put you in the place where he has put you. That's why he has given you what he's given you. Your situation is not an accident. Your station in life is not random. You are where he wants you to be. There is nothing about your life right now that isn't part of the plan.

This is what you were called to – brothers and sisters. This is the way of cross – and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.