

Session 6

LIVING FAITHFULLY IN SUFFERING

1 Peter 2:18-25

Memory Verse

For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly.

— 1 PETER 2:19, CSB



Living Faithfully in Suffering

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus serves as a model for us when we face unjust suffering.

CALL TO ACTION: We can face suffering because Jesus promises to be with us in it.

We are incredibly blessed, living in America, but even still, we walk through suffering in our lives:

- The death of someone you love
- The unimaginable medical diagnosis
- The heartbreak of a divorce
- The pain of infertility
- Broken relationships
- The struggle to make ends meet
- The workplace that makes you miserable
- The senseless violence and tragic losses

This list is short. It could go on and on, and no doubt you either relate to one or more of these or know someone who does. This is a sad reality of human life in our fallen world.

Today, we'll continue to read Peter's writings about suffering. In these verses, Peter focused on suffering in unjust situations.

 What types of unjust suffering are recorded in Scripture?

 How did Jesus respond to unjust suffering in His own life?


Session Summary

Peter told his readers to submit to Roman authority in our reading last week, and this week, he will write about another category of submission: household slaves to masters. God through Peter was not endorsing slavery but helping people understand how to live in a Christlike way in this unjust reality of a broken world.

Peter wrote that household slaves please God when they behave honorably, even in unjust circumstances. We are called to do good, even when it is hard.

This behavior follows Jesus's example. Though completely innocent before His accusers, Jesus didn't retaliate or threaten revenge, trusting that God would carry out justice on His behalf. We can trust that God will serve justice on our behalf too.

1. Household Slaves and Masters (1 Peter 2:18-19)

 What various aspects of injustice did Peter describe in these verses?

 How can enduring grief through unjust suffering bring glory to God?

Last week, we talked about submitting to authority, even when it is unfair. Starting with our passage this week, Peter broke down additional practical applications of this submission. In this section, he wrote that household slaves should submit to their masters' authority.

Slavery was common in Peter's day. The Greek noun Peter used here "described a person who works as a servant within a particular household."¹ Sometimes these would be retainers (think professionals: physicians, estate managers, tutors, teachers). ² This wasn't always a permanent arrangement, with some even on a path to freedom. Sometimes these slaves were treated well, and even paid wages, but they lacked legal rights and, as you can imagine, often endured harsh treatment.

We should note that New Testament writers like Peter and Paul addressed the social codes that were a reality in their society. This does not mean that God (or these writers) endorsed the practice of slavery. Historical weaponization of passages like this is not God's will (not to mention in direct contraction to many other mandates that echo God's true heart: showing others respect and love, treating them as you yourself would want to be treated). It was not God's good plan that people bearing His image should be mistreated (God's own laws mandated the fair and just treatment of those that might be exploited), but mistreatment is a sad reality of our fallen world, and thus these writers addressed how people should conduct themselves as Christians within this broken reality.

It is noteworthy that New Testament writers like Peter and Paul addressed slaves at all. Culturally, these individuals weren't fully seen as people and didn't have legal rights equal to those of a citizen. Things were different in God's family, though. They were seen as equals, and worthy of guidance and comfort in dealing with difficult situations:³

There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. —Galatians 3:28

It's not clear why Peter didn't address slave masters here (though Paul did). Perhaps his audience contained no, or few, slave masters and thus addressing them didn't make logical sense.

Peter referenced both gentle and cruel masters, and many of his audience in this household slave category had likely endured unjust abuse (like beatings). It would have been the norm in a Roman household to expect worship of your household idols from everyone living in your house.⁴ For Christians who sought faithfulness to Christ, this may have been an issue leading to such abuse.

Why is it worth enduring suffering for the sake of Christ?

Human suffering does not please God, but, if someone must suffer, it pleases Him that they suffer for having remained good and honorable. People in this category submit by not seeking their own revenge. Abusers will one day answer for their crimes (Romans 12:19). Peter made clear that the suffering of this group was unjust.

2. Christ's Example (1 Peter 2:20-21)

What distinction did Peter make in verse 20? Why is this important?

What are some reasons we might suffer that do not bring about good or glorify God?

Peter went on to note that a person does not get any credit if they are beaten for wrongdoing. Peter wasn't saying that it was always fair or right that they were beaten, but consequences are natural when we do wrong. Peter told his audience to conduct themselves honorably (v. 12). It is not honorable to do wrong.

But, when you suffer unjustly for merely doing the right thing, Peter said this “brings favor with God” (v. 20). God is pleased with this type of patient endurance that models Christ!

Take a moment to think about the suffering Jesus endured in His earthly ministry:

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers also twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and clothed him in a purple robe. And they kept coming up to him and saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” and were slapping his face. —John 19:1-3

... he humbled himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.
—Philippians 2:8

Jesus was always humble and never vengeful. When He was beaten unjustly, He endured it. He didn't fight back. He didn't complain. He was obedient. He knew the cross was in His future and was God's plan to redeem humanity, so He suffered and endured.

When a household slave did the same, they followed Jesus's example and honored God.

? What does it mean to be called to suffering (v. 21)? How does this apply to all Christians to some degree?

The referenced calling in verse 21 is God's call for us to do good. Even if it means we must suffer, we should still do good.

3. He Turned the Other Cheek (1 Peter 2:22-25)

? What stands out about the description of Jesus's suffering in these verses?

? How are we reminded that no follower of Jesus is called to a level of suffering He has not already surpassed?

Having said that the suffering household slave should follow in Jesus's footsteps, Peter went on to describe Jesus's suffering.

Christ was completely devoid of sin and deception. Though He was tempted, He never sinned. Peter quoted Isaiah 53:9:

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully.

Though Jesus was perfect and innocent, He suffered unjustly. When He was insulted, He did not retaliate:

While he was being accused by the chief priests and elders, he didn't answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear how much they are testifying against you?" But he didn't answer him on even one charge, so that the governor was quite amazed. —Matthew 27:12-14

When Jesus suffered unjustly, He did not seek revenge (though it was uniquely in His power to carry this out). Instead of seeking His own vengeance, Jesus trusted God. Peter's point? His audience should do the same. Jesus suffered unjustly, yet entrusted justice into the hands of the Father and mistreated household slaves should do the same.



What does it mean that we have died to sin and might live to righteousness?

Peter's next words not only describe Jesus's example, but also His great sacrifice for us.

Jesus, the Son of God who never sinned, "personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right" (v. 24, NLT). We are spiritually healed and saved because of the wounds He took on for us.

God repeatedly uses the shepherd/sheep metaphor throughout Scripture to describe His relationship with His people (Psalm 23:1; Ezekiel 34:15-16; John 10:11).

Peter continued this analogy by reminding his readers that they were like sheep that had gone astray, stuck in a life of sin they couldn't get themselves out of, but then Jesus, the Good Shepherd, brought them into God's family, and now He is watching over and protecting them. Those suffering today may not see justice served in their lifetime, but it will certainly be carried out at the Lord's hand in eternity.

Conclusion

In our reading last week, Peter wrote about submitting to the Roman government. In our reading today, Peter wrote about another category of submission: household slaves and masters. In the first-century world, some household slaves were more like educated retainers (physicians, teachers, etc.), and their situation wasn't always permanent (sometimes they were on the road to earning their freedom). But there were others who unjustly suffered abuse.

The New Testament isn't condoning slavery or abuse (these are in direct violation of very clear commands from God on how to treat people) but addressing a reality of their society. The Christian's submission to their master honors God, who will one day bring justice to the situation.

There is no honor in suffering as a result of wrongdoing, but when we are honorable and suffer for it, God is pleased (not that we suffer, but that we respond righteously). Jesus unjustly suffered but did not fight back. Rather, He fully submitted to God the Father's will. We are called to do good, even when it's hard.

After urging suffering household slaves to follow in Jesus's footsteps, Peter described the character of Christ they were meant to imitate. Though He was completely innocent, Jesus didn't retaliate or threaten revenge. He patiently endured, trusting that God the Father would carry out justice on His behalf. Though all of us were once like sheep wandering helplessly without a shepherd, now that we have the Good Shepherd in our lives, we are under the Lord's protection and can trust, like Jesus did, that God will bring justice in due time.

❓ What can we learn about God and His character from our reading today?

❓ How does it honor God when we submit in difficult situations? How does reflecting on the suffering Jesus endured in His earthly ministry impact the way we view suffering in our own lives?

❓ How can endurance of righteous suffering give us opportunity to point others to Jesus?

Memorize

For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly.

- 1 Peter 2:19, CSB

References

¹Eric Lewellen, “Servant,” in Lexham Theological Wordbook, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

²Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 112.

³soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/1peter/1peter.htm

⁴bibleproject.com/videos/1-peter/