

Suffering Like Jesus

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[0 : 00] Our Old Testament reading this morning comes from the book of Isaiah, chapter 53, verses 1 through 12. Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one for whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our sufferings, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[1 : 07] He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shears is silent, he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he has poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors. I recently read an article that discussed a growing phenomenon in our society, and you've probably heard of it yourself.

[2 : 30] It's called Cancel Culture. And the article that I read defined cancel culture as this. It says, Cancel culture is the moment when the masses swarm on an individual after taking offense to their actions or words.

It's kind of become a modern-day form of public shaming or ostracism. And it usually occurs to those who have some level of notoriety or fame.

They say something or do something that's deemed offensive. There's this public outcry. And immediately, this person is canceled. They are demonized in some way.

They're stripped of their platform, stripped of their dignity, much to the delight of the masses. Now, this occurs sometimes when someone has done something maybe criminally or morally egregious in some way.

But it's becoming more commonplace just when people express opinions or hold beliefs that other people don't like. Now, this article, it blamed this rise in cancel culture primarily on our addiction to social media, where people are able to respond quickly, instantly, and anonymously when something happens that they don't like.

[3 : 44] An article mentioned it could be due as well to this increase in polarization within our society or an increased idea of political correctness.

But I really think all those explanations kind of missed the mark here. I don't think it's a technology issue. I don't think it's a right or left issue. I view it as a rise of victimization, this victim mentality that we think that we may be entitled to nowadays.

And so with this victim mentality comes this idea that we should never be wrong, that we should never have to suffer. And if we do, we have the right to hand out our own form of judgment that we see fit.

If someone hurts you, you punish them. If someone offends you, you attack them. If someone disagrees with you, you cancel them. It promotes this false idea that our world would be a better place if we just eliminate all forms of suffering, if we can just silence all opposition.

And that's kind of what our passage talks about today, this idea of suffering. But we're going to talk about it from a very different standpoint. Rather than from how society views suffering as something we want to avoid or eliminate, we see here in 1 Peter that suffering can be good for us.

[5 : 03] It's something that we should embrace. And we need to recognize that we have a Savior who suffered for us. And that when we suffer like our Savior, Jesus, we can actually experience blessing and God can be glorified.

So let's look at our passage. It's 1 Peter 2, verses 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 what is 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 insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

[6 : 10] He himself bore our sins in his body and on the cross so that we might die to sin 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 the overseer of our souls. This is the word of God. Now, I think there's certain passages that we come to in the Bible where we may be attempted to avoid them.

Perhaps they make us uncomfortable. Perhaps we think that they just don't apply to us or they're outdated in some way. And I think on first glance, you may read this passage and think that that applies here.

That Peter seems to be condoning slavery. He sees it as acceptable and normal. And as we would certainly object to the institution of slavery today, you may think that Peter just isn't taking a hard enough stance against it.

That he's really missing the point of the passage here in speaking to slaves. On the other hand, you may hear these words about slaves and masters and just think, I'm neither one of those, so this passage really doesn't apply to me.

[7 : 22] But I really think there's a great deal we can learn from this passage. It reveals much about our own hearts. And more importantly, it reveals to us the heart of Jesus, who we are going to see described as our suffering servant.

In fact, this topic of suffering and slavery would have likely been very personal message to Peter, who wrote this letter. If you remember, Peter was one of Jesus' 12 disciples.

He would have heard Jesus speaking on the subject of suffering, and he would have experienced and seen firsthand Jesus be arrested and beaten and crucified like a slave.

And so as we dig into this passage, I really want us to focus on two main points that I think Peter emphasizes here. One is our calling, and two is our consciousness.

Our calling and our consciousness. So I first want to look at our calling. Now, I think it's important to understand the audience that Peter was talking to, what society was like in this New Testament church.

[8 : 26] At that time in the Roman world, slavery would have been something that was very normal and acceptable practice. Most well-to-do Roman families would have had slaves, at least one.

And it's estimated that a quarter of the Roman population would have been composed of slaves. Now, I think in our day and age, we may think of slaves as being from one single class and maybe confined to manual labor of some sort.

But in this time, slavery ran across ethnic boundaries. And in fact, you could have had slaves that were quite well-educated, that would have had respectable jobs by today's standards, jobs like being a doctor or a teacher or an artist in some way.

But nonetheless, these slaves were on the bottom rung of society. And abuse would have been normal. It would have been acceptable within the ethical household code of the day.

And so this is a setting in which Peter's writing, which may make you think even more, Well, Peter addressed the real issue here. Don't call out the slaves. Call out the abuse of power, right?

Advocate for reform.

[9 : 35] Argue for a transformed society. But that's not Peter's purpose in writing this letter. And it's not his purpose in addressing these slaves. He's not trying to transform society.

It's his desire to transform the believer. And so let's look at verse 20. It says, But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you are called because Christ suffered for you. And so while Peter is speaking to the culture, he's actually saying something that would be very different from the prevailing thought of the day.

Philosophers in that day would have taught that everyone had their place in society. So for your benefit, your personal benefit, for the benefit of society, you need to just accept your position in life. There was no such thing as upward social mobility. So you needed to behave in a manner that was appropriate of your role. But that's really not what Peter's saying here.

[10 : 35] He's not buying into that message. He's not telling slaves to just resign themselves to the fact that they have to suffer. That because they're on the bottom rung of society, they just have to make the best with their position in life.

Instead, he's not saying that it's just a matter of suffering being inevitable. He's saying that we are actually called to suffer by God. So even though he's talking to slaves here, he's talking to the most vulnerable within society, this message is actually intended for all believers.

And so that's how we can see it applied to us today. When he uses that verb to call, in Greek it's kaleo, he uses it a couple other times in his letter here.

And I think it's worth noting how he uses it to see how it's applied to all believers. In chapter 2, verse 9, he said this, But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

Again, in chapter 3, verse 9, he uses that verb to call again. He says, Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit blessing.

[11 : 57] So Peter's saying that just as God has called us, all believers, to salvation, he's also called all of us to suffer. And notice here, this is in passive voice.

This is God acting upon us. This is God calling us to this lifestyle. It is his desire, and it's by his design that we are to suffer. And so it's important to look at exactly what kind of suffering he's talking about here.

He's not talking about suffering when we do something wrong or when we sin. He's talking specifically about suffering when we do what is right. It's unjust suffering for the sake of Christ, which is actually another departure from the common thinking in that day, because there really would have been no such thing as unjust suffering for a slave.

Because of the fact that they are slaves, that's their place in society, common thought would have been that they deserve whatever comes to them, that their master is justified in acting however he wants toward his slave.

So by Peter saying that calling slave suffering as unjust, he's actually giving worth to the slave.

[13 : 09] He's elevating them from this victim status and showing them that their true value is actually found in God. He's saying that our worth is not defined by man, but by God who sent his son to suffer for us.

And if we actually go back to verse 16, which James preached on last week, we see that James says that we are to live as free men.

So it's not a matter of being a slave to man. We are actually servants of God. And so as servants, we must submit to God's lordship, and we must remember that Christ has suffered for us.

And so that may raise the question, well, that doesn't really make sense. If Christ has suffered for us, why do we still have to suffer? And Jesus himself really answers this question.

If we were to look back in Matthew 10, he discusses this idea of suffering to his disciples, who he's about to send out with his authority. And he warns them, he says, All men will hate you because of me, because a slave is not above his master.

[14:22] You know, I mentioned earlier that this topic of slavery and suffering would have been a very personal message for Peter. In fact, probably more than any other disciple, he had to learn this message the hard way.

If you remember when Jesus talked to his disciples about how he was going to suffer and how he was going to die at the hands of Jewish leaders, what did Peter do? He rebuked Jesus, right?

He said, Never, Lord, this will never happen to you. And Jesus was very poignant in his response.

He said, Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me.

If we fast forward then to when Jesus is arrested and tried to be crucified, we see that Peter is there with those others.

And what does he do again? Three times he denies knowing Jesus in order that he can avoid personal suffering. And so we see now in this letter, thanks to the grace of God, it seems as though Peter now gets it, right?

[15:26] He understands that Jesus was called to suffer and we as servants of God are also called to suffer likewise. In our university Bible study, we've been going through the book of Colossians and we just finished up chapter one recently and we looked at this interesting phrase that Paul says there.

He says he's rejoicing in his suffering and he is filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction. It's kind of an interesting phrase. It almost makes you think like he's questioning whether Christ's suffering was sufficient for our salvation, if he has to fill up what is lacking.

But he's actually saying something very different. He's saying that as servants of God, we are invited to partner in God's mission. And so since Christ has suffered and he died in order to secure salvation, we also get to suffer in order to see the spread of salvation.

And so think of the impact that our unjust suffering can have on an unbelieving world around us.

Think about how countercultural that is, especially when we think of the cancel culture that has inundated our society.

Instead of playing the victim, we respond with joy when we're ridiculed or treated unfairly. When people see our unjust suffering, our goal should be that they see the suffering of our Savior Jesus.

[16:54] When they experience our love, that they are actually experiencing the love of Christ. And so this brings us to our second point. If we understand that we are called to suffer, then we also must be conscious of God in our suffering.

So let's look at verse 18 and 19. It says, And so we see bookend on these two verses that Peter is addressing our mindset.

He's saying how we should suffer. We submit with all respect, and we are conscious of God. And so the Greek word that's used for respect here in the NIV is the word phobos.

It's actually used in the verse before, and it's translated as fear, how we should fear God and honor the King. And so if we use that fear here, who's that fear supposed to be directed at?

Are we supposed to submit to man out of fear for man? Or do we submit to man out of fear for God? And I think how Peter continually uses this verb throughout his letter, it's clear he's saying to fear God.

[18:17] We are to fear God and not fear man. And so that's what he's saying here, that we are to submit to our masters out of fear for God.

And this fear is really a reverence for God that's going to motivate us toward righteous living. And likewise, when he says being conscious of God in verse 19, he's saying this, that our attention should be habitually directed on God.

We should be continually mindful of our calling and God's will in the midst of our suffering. Peter's telling us we're not supposed to focus on ourselves, which is so easy to do.

In our suffering, we focus on God. And so think about how this may affect our lives, some of the difficult situations that we face day in and day out. Maybe you work in a toxic work environment.

Maybe you have an overbearing boss. And it's very easy to think in those situations about yourself, right? You may be prone to self-pity. You complain about your current situation.

[19 : 23] You feel as though you deserve better because you're a professional. You deserve to be treated that way. Maybe when we are focused on self, we just want revenge.

If you have a classmate or roommate who ridicules you or makes fun of you, you may just want to get even with them. You want to teach them a lesson so that they don't hurt you again.

And what about this, kids, if you're listening? You've probably happened in your house often. If your house is anything like ours. When you maybe get in a fight or a disagreement with your brother and sister and your parents are trying to correct you.

Maybe what's the first thing to come out of your mouth? But he started it, but she hit me first, right? We want to place the blame on someone else for our actions.

We don't want to be responsible for our action because we think we are justified in feeling that way because someone else has hurt us. But all these ways that we may act are not the way that Peter calls us to act in this way.

[20 : 30] We need to stop focusing on ourselves and start focusing on God because that's what's going to change how we respond to suffering. We're not going to have self-pity. We're not going to seek revenge.

We're not going to blame our actions on others. Instead, we're going to follow this specific blueprint that Peter gives us here. And the blueprint actually is Jesus himself.

If we look at verse 21, it says this, Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. And this is really powerful imagery that Peter is using here.

When he says example, this word is actually referring to how a child would basically learn to write the alphabet, how they would trace over letters as they're learning to write.

And so he's saying that our following of Christ should be the closest of copies. In the same way, we need to be walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

[21 : 31] Just last weekend, our family was able to go to the Pentlands for the first time because we just got a car and could get out of the city a little bit. And a lot of those trails are very well defined from just years of use and many, many people that hike there.

And this is most notable on when you go to some of the steep portions of the hill, right? You've probably seen these footprints that are just embedded into the dirt from people stepping on them over and over again.

And so the easiest way to get up those steep sections is just to follow exactly in the footsteps of those who have climbed before you. And so that's what Peter is saying that we need to do here.

We need to walk in Jesus's footsteps because his suffering, the suffering of Jesus is actually the paradigm by which we must live.

And so if we are to be servants of God, we must not only be willing to suffer unjustly, but we need to do it in the same attitude and the same behavior as Jesus. So let's look at how Peter portrays Christ's suffering.

[22 : 36] If we read verse 22 and 23, it says, he committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate.

When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Peter here is actually referencing Isaiah 53. This is a passage that we read earlier on in the service. And this passage is known as the suffering servant passage. It's the prophecy that foretells Jesus's suffering and death. And so it's interesting, the element that Peter specifically focuses on here from Isaiah 53, it's that verbal aspect of Jesus's behavior, right?

He says that there was no deceit found in his mouth. When insults were hurled at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. And I think he may highlight this because what are we most tempted to do when we're treated unfairly?

What's our easiest way to respond? It's with our words, right? We threaten, we criticize, we complain, we talk behind other people's back. That's the easiest thing for us to do.

[23 : 47] That comes naturally. But as Jesus demonstrated here, if we are to suffer well, we must keep our mouth shut. And instead, we entrust ourselves to God, the one who judges justly.

So what does that mean to entrust ourselves? Our youngest daughter, Francie, who's just turned four, she's wanted to ride her bike like her big brother and sister without her training wheels.

And so she's asked me to take them off. I think you refer to them as stabilizers. That sounds much more official or proper. She has her stabilizers that she wants off of her bike, right? And as we've been practicing going up and down the street without her stabilizers on, I've been running behind her, holding her bike.

And the thing that she always repeats over and over again, daddy, don't let go. Don't let go, daddy. And my response is the same. Trust me. Trust me. I got you. It's okay if you wobble.

Nothing's going to happen to you. And so I think sometimes in our suffering, we have that same fear that Francie may have that I let go of her. We think that God has let go of us, that God has abandoned us or that he's not in control.

[24 : 58] But yet when we look to Jesus, someone who suffered far more than we ever will, we see that he fully trusted his father.

Because Jesus recognized that his suffering was God's way of accomplishing the redemption of man. And so likewise, when we suffer, we can be confident that God is in control, that he is using our suffering to accomplish his purposes in us and through us.

And I think this is important here. When we think about emulating Jesus, it's not only seeing him as our example, but we need to recognize Jesus as our true Savior.

In verse 24, it says this, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we may die to sins and live for righteousness.

On the cross, Christ accomplished what we could not. No matter how much we may be willing to suffer, no matter how many good things we think we do, we can't save ourselves. It's only through the suffering of Jesus that our salvation is secure.

[26 : 12] It's only through Jesus who bore the punishment of man by hanging on that tree and bore the punishment of God by bearing our sins. It's only through him that we can be saved.

It says by his wounds, we are healed. And so how are we to respond here? Peter makes it clear. He says, since Christ died for our sins, we must die to our sins and live for righteousness.

We need to recognize that we're no longer slaves to our sin, that we no longer have to have this victim mentality. We no longer have to judge others who hurt us.

As servants of God, we are set free from accusation. We are presented as holy and pure before the Father. And now we are empowered by the Father through the Spirit to pursue righteousness.

And so when we face suffering for doing what is right, let's take heart in knowing that it is our calling from God. And as we suffer, let us be conscious of God, following in the footsteps of Jesus, our suffering servant.

[27 : 20] This passage concludes in verse 25 with saying, for you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

And so believers, rather than focusing on how we can change our circumstances to avoid suffering, let's focus instead on how God has changed us.

How he is our good shepherd, how he has called his sheep together, how he protects his flock, how he provides for them, how he laid down his life for us.

If you're an unbeliever, maybe this passage really scares you. Maybe you think that you've already experienced enough suffering in your life and you don't need anything else piled on.

If that's your thought, know that there is more suffering to come for those who are not in Christ. God says that he will come again to judge the living and the dead and that the penalty for our sin is death.

[28 : 29] It's said back in Isaiah 53 that all we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned to our own ways, but the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

We can have hope in knowing that we can avoid punishment because of the sacrifice of our Savior Jesus. And so know that Christ has died for you.

He has empowered us to live this life of suffering, to be able to pursue righteousness, and be able to glorify God in the process.

So I pray that that will be your thought today and encouragement to you that when we go through suffering, we can know that Christ has suffered for us.

He has accepted the ultimate penalty for our sins, and now we are empowered through his Spirit to live righteously. Amen. Amen.