

Jesus, our example

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[0 : 00] Lord, thank you that we can meet together. Lord, we are opening your word. Your word is powerful. It is for us.

It is about you. And we ask that you will minister to us by your word. Any kind of dross or unnecessary words that I say, may they fall to the ground.

May your word be lifted up. And minister to us today in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. We are a people that, whether we think so or not, we like conformity.

I just read an article about a lifestyle blog. I didn't read the lifestyle blog. But there's like this sub-genre of lifestyle blogs that's about parenting.

And there's a bunch of moms who are talking about how much parenting sucks and about how they regret the kids being such a ball and chain, so to speak.

[1 : 20] And it seems kind of crazy. But, you know, because of our propensity to conform, there's going to be a lot of people, a lot of parents that read that.

And it will give them license to indulge in their selfish nature. There's a lot of good lifestyle blogs as well that help people to cook healthier foods, to be more conscious of social issues around.

The point is, we are people that conform. We do. There's not too many fully autonomous people sitting in this theater this morning.

And I would suggest that there's not many walking the streets of Ottawa. In Canada, in the States, conformity is the air we breathe.

And I'm not suggesting that it's wrong. I'm just drawing your attention to it. So, we are on the third week of our sermon series on the crucified Messiah. Each week, we're taking a look at one aspect of what Jesus has done on the cross, how he accomplished something.

[2 : 31] So, the first week was Jesus. George preached on Jesus. He was a substitute for us. And that's what he did on the cross. Last week, we talked about how, on the cross, Jesus inaugurated a new covenant.

This week, we're looking at how Jesus is an example for us to follow. And the thing with Jesus being an example to follow, we're looking at 1 Peter 2.

Shane read a big section, 18 to 25, just for context, because we're actually just reading, taking a look at one verse, verse 21. And we could have looked at a few other verses throughout the New Testament because this idea of imitating Christ is actually throughout the Bible.

So, we could have looked at John 13. It says this in verse 34, a new commandment. This is Jesus speaking. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I have loved you.

You also are to love one another. In Philippians 2, it says, Do nothing from selfish or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves.

[3 : 33] And it continues on. It says, Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 5, verse 1 and 2. Therefore, be imitators of God, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

You get the picture. There's a ton of verses about imitating Christ. But we're reading 1 Peter 2, verses 21. And this is what it says. I'll read it again.

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.

This text is worth our consideration. I mean, all of those texts really are, but this text in particular this morning, because it flies in the face of our current cultural moment. Because at the heart of this text, it teaches us that true satisfaction in life, and real, genuine happiness is found in actually giving up our prerogatives, and giving up our freedoms for the sake of others.

But it actually goes a bit further than that. It says, it'll teach us, and I'll hope to bring your eyes, your attention to it. It also tells us that we are actually created to be subjects, not autonomous individuals.

[4 : 50] That we were created to be subjects, not autonomous individuals. And that true human flourishing is found not in the expressions of more freedom, but the limiting or the suspending of such freedoms for the sake of others.

We live in a society that values a curated life. If something doesn't tickle your fancy, or you want to incorporate something new, you do it, you get it, you spend the money.

You take a class, you watch YouTube tutorials till the cows come home. But the point is, you can curate your own life. It's about what you can do, your own freedoms.

And I'm suggesting that the scriptures, and this one in particular, suggests the opposite. But before we can really jump into this verse in 1 Peter chapter 2, I just want to take a few moments to talk a bit about the background of the book here.

Or, I guess, really chapter 2. So Peter here is talking to slaves. It's likely that a good amount of Peter's audience, the people that he's addressing, were slaves.

[6 : 04] And slavery was bad back then. It was terrible back then. However, just to be clear, it wasn't the same as the African slave trade. It wasn't based on race. It wasn't man-stealing.

People found ways into, found, you know, themselves in slavery for a number of different reasons. One could be that they were conquered people. Another, that they couldn't pay back debts.

So people, I mean, slaves were all sorts of different ethnicities. And they could participate to a degree in social life. But nevertheless, they were slaves.

They were still property owned by other people. And as property, their masters had full authority over them. To treat them really well or to treat them terribly.

To inflict beatings on them. There's no sort of mechanism that they could appeal to, to have their masters' hands stayed or punished for beating them.

[7 : 06] They were really at the whim of their master. And just a pause on this. Because as I was studying this, one thing came to mind. And I'm reading this. Peter's addressing slaves. It sounds really good.

Why doesn't Peter tell the slaves to run for the hills? To fight for their freedom? Why does he just tell them how to act in a nice way to their unjust slave owners?

To their masters? Is this somehow Peter condoning slavery? And if he's not condoning it, why isn't he fighting against it? And I struggled with this a bit. Struggled, in one sense, with my own, I don't know, frustration.

Initial frustration. But also, how am I going to explain this to the folks here? Or, I don't know, I have new neighbors now. They say something like, well, like, have you read this part of the Bible?

How do I explain that to them? I would just like to say one thing. The overarching story, like, the story in the Bible that is used time and time again to communicate God's interaction with humanity is the Exodus story.

[8 : 18] God has rescued, we looked at a bit of this last week, but God rescues this people from terrible slavery. Slavery, that was generations after generations after generations after generations, saves them into promise, into freedom, into non-slavery, but really into human flourishing.

And this story is brought up time and time again throughout the Scriptures. And I would also like to say, wherever the true Christian faith, the true Spirit-filled, real conviction of the Spirit message is believed, believed, slavery diminishes and eventually is no more.

Slavery is incompatible with the message of the Scriptures. So what do we have here with Peter? I think Peter is addressing specific people in a specific situation with a specific goal in mind.

And this is actually one reason why the Bible can be trusted, because it doesn't talk in just outrageous platitudes, ideals that are so lofty, they don't make sense.

The Bible speaks into the muddy mess of life. Peter is addressing slaves. Who addresses slaves?

[9 : 40] It was a problem then, it is a problem in parts of the world now, and has been a problem throughout human history, but he addresses it. And that gives me great hope in the Scriptures, because I know that they apply, they touch different parts of real human experience.

So that's a little apologetic for why I think, actually, Peter isn't somehow condoning slavery in the Scriptures. If you still struggle with that, I'd love to chat with you about it. I might not have the answers, but we can still have a bit of a dialogue about that.

But anyways, so Peter here is addressing slaves. And although they are slaves, how does Peter address them?

Verse 9, take a look with me in chapter 2, verse 9. This is what Peter says. Speaking to slaves. You'll speak to other people as well, but right here he's speaking to slaves. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

If you're a slave, imagine hearing this. What else does he say? Verse 16. He says, live as people who are free.

[10 : 52] Here's a big, big, important thing for you to understand. That if you are in Christ, whether a slave or free, a woman or a man, poor, rich, young or old, your eternal standing is declared, even if your current temporal standing hasn't changed.

These are slaves. They're still slaves. But they're free men. They're a part of a holy nation, a royal priesthood. That's who they are, and that's who they'll be for eternity.

And that's how Peter addresses them. At the same time, he's addressing them as slaves. So it's important that we keep this in our mind as we take a look at our verse. So let me read our verse again.

1 Peter 2, verse 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.

If we're talking about these slaves, Peter is addressing these free men that are currently slaves but will eternally be free, there is no more free person in the entire universe than God himself.

[12 : 11] The scriptures teach us that God is the uncreated one and that everything that is created, he created. We see this in John chapter 1. This means he's subject to no one.

He relies on no one. He looks to no one for affirmation. He is not seeking somebody's approval. He's not a debtor of anybody.

He is in no need of anyone or anything. And what does he do? The second person of the Trinity, God, the Son of God, what does he do?

He descends to earth, is born of a virgin, fully man, fully God, and he suspends his divine rights, his divine freedom, so to speak.

And he's born in a specific time in very not the greatest circumstances to common folk and grows up in a backwater, dinky little town some hours north of a walk of Jerusalem.

[13 : 19] You remember when he first comes on the scene, what do they say about Jesus? Can anything good come from Nazareth? Like, what's Nazareth? The completely free and independent God lays it down to enter into the reality of humanity.

And Peter is addressing this. And, I mean, this is all throughout Scripture. The Apostle Paul actually says in Ephesians 2, verse 7, talking about Christ, but Christ emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, literally taking the form of a slave, a bondservant, being born in the likeness of men.

So Jesus came to save, and what happens to him? What happens? He is crucified not because of crimes he committed, but because a Roman governor kowtowed to an unruly and jealous Jewish mob 2,000 years ago.

He is crucified as a criminal unjustly. He suffered unjustly. He had accusations thrown on him unjustly.

He suffered, he suffered, he suffered unjustly. But this was God's design all along. Jesus, what he did when he came, it wasn't a plan B.

[14 : 47] It was always in God's plan and providence that this would happen. That Jesus would suffer for the sake of others. This was always, always God's plan.

And although this text is specifically addressing the slave, it's actually addressing everyone. It's addressing all Christians. And Peter uses two ways to elaborate on our call to suffer as Christ.

The first is this. Let me just read this again. Verse 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.

So how do we imitate Christ? We take him as an example and we follow in his steps. The idea of an example is literally like a stencil. If you take a stencil, you're not innovating.

You're trying to stencil the exact image of whatever stencil you're kind of filling in or using. It's like painting by numbers.

[15 : 53] You don't elaborate. You try to mimic the exact image that you're seeing. And this is the same type of idea that we are not innovating something new in the Christian faith.

We are looking to Christ. We are trying to imitate him. We're using him as an example. We're looking at his life and then examining our life. And if there's some kind of incongruity, then we adjust.

We'll talk about that adjustment in a bit. But also the second thing that we follow in his footsteps. It's not something that we see today, but the idea here is that there's disciples following a rabbi.

The rabbi goes this way. The disciples go this way. The rabbi goes that way. They're hanging on his every word. They're forsaking all other opportunities to follow the rabbi.

To be a disciple of the rabbi is a very, very good thing. Maybe they'll have disciples later on, but that's the idea that we're seeing here. To follow in his footsteps is to literally follow on his coattails.

[16:54] Again, the call is not to innovate new ways to be a Christian. The call is to imitate Christ.

So when we suffer unjustly, interestingly, and we suffer righteously, we bear witness to Christ. It's a wordless witness.

And that's, by the way, not an excuse not to share our faith. But it means we bear witness to Christ in his suffering, but without words. Indeed.

Like, with deeds. Not indeed. Like, indeed, that's what you'll do. No, but like, indeed. We also trust that God will vindicate us, so we ought not to seek vengeance.

And I'll just pause really quickly. It is not an ungodly thing to push back against misunderstandings or slander. I think there's a, we live in a society where we have mechanisms to fight injustice, and we ought to.

[17:57] But I think what this is getting at is this. I'll just say this. Like the slave is addressed as a royal, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, that they are freemen.

That's their eternal standing. There is nothing that will further that eternal standing. Their reputation before God Almighty is secure.

Christ calls them brothers and sisters. There is nothing more that they can do to be accepted or righteous in God's eyes. The problem is if you're pushing back against unjust suffering in a way to guard your reputation, to advance your reputation.

in a selfish way, maybe if somebody is unjust to you, you're going to be unjust back. You're going to get them back. If they slander you, you're going to slander them back. You're going to dig up a bunch of dirt and broadcast it.

Because to hell with them if they're going to mess me up, if you have that idea. Because how can one elevate one's own reputation if your reputation is secure for eternity in Christ?

[19:19] So, this is not calling us to be a perennial doormat. We fight injustice when we can, but not as a self-serving way, in a way that's still loving the person that is persecuting us.

But, you know, to really understand how to faithfully endure unjust suffering in the same way Christ did, you have to have an eternal mindset.

You have to. And I'll tell you the reason why. The slave won't be a slave forever. The slave will either be released or will die and then they are a slave no longer.

And by the way, their eternal, as a reminder, their eternal position is free man or free woman.

So, to have an eternal mindset means we can endure suffering now. Why? Because there are benefits and pleasures and glories and union with Christ forever and ever.

[20:26] Romans 8 says this in verse 31, What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Matthew chapter 5, Jesus says this, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Verse 12, Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

Your eternal rewards are just that, they're eternal. So, it's important to have an eternal mindset to remember that this world as we see it today with all of the ups and downs and it feels like 2020 has a bit more downs and ups, that this will not be the end of the story.

Interesting too that Christ lays down his life for us. He endures the cross despising the shame and remember that Christ doesn't stay on the cross, he doesn't stay in the tomb.

He is resurrected forever and if we endure the sufferings like him as he is our example, then we too will participate in the resurrection.

[21:53] That if we are found in Christ, we will have that eternal security with him. That's a wonderful, wonderful truth.

So, I mentioned at the beginning that this flies in the face of our current cultural moment. This text asks us to give up our freedom and be defined not by how we curate our lives but in following a life of self-sacrifice.

And calls on us to have a life of duty and not self-expression. So, by the way, if this is wrong, your quarrels with Christine, okay?

Christine, if she watches this, I'm sorry. Anyways, I was talking with her about this. I'm just joking around. But Christine talked about this idea of duty versus self-expression and she says it's interesting because the queen, she has embraced duty at the expense of her own dreams. I mean, listen, the queen's not suffering, okay? She's still the queen. She still enjoys a lifetime of benefits that we don't have. But how about if she wanted to do something else?

[23 : 04] How about if she wanted to be an engineer? I don't know if you guys maybe know a biography or you've watched The Crown 1,500 times, you know. But maybe she wanted to do something else. What does she do?

What has she done? She suspended her own privileges, her own self-interest for the sake of others. And Christine goes, compare that with Meghan Markle and Harry.

What do they do? They say, forget about duty. We're going to live our best life now. We're going to curate our life. We're going to live the life that we want even if it means despising laying down our lives for other people.

You get what I'm trying to say here. It's an interesting compare and contrast with the Queen and Meghan and Harry. By the way, if I'm wrong on that at all, again, the quarrel's with Christine, so I feel no problem.

Christine's a big, she's a big royal fan. Being self-defined is the highest form of humanity in our culture. Having freedom to embrace whatever we want, to embrace whatever we want for a time and then throw it to the wayside.

[24 : 18] I mean, a very, very selfish, we live in a very, very selfish, self-centered cultural moment. And I said to you that true human happiness isn't the embracing of more freedoms but the restriction of it.

Consider this. if you are all about creating the best life now, then that's going to change from time to time.

You're worried about how other people see you, so you spend a ton of money on a new wardrobe. By the way, none of these things in and of themselves is wrong, but hear me out.

Maybe your spouse or significant other, your partner, just doesn't do the trick anymore. How can you live your best life when they've gained 30 pounds?

You know, they've lost their job or this other person looks a lot better. How can you live your best life? No, no, no. Forget about it. What happens if your children are weighing you down?

[25 : 20] They're not children who are here. You're not weighing your parents down. Hear me out. How about if your children are getting in the way of, you know, you want to vacation three, four times a year and not in a tent?

You know? You want to be in an airplane. Well, I don't know if you want to be in an airplane now, but you get what I'm trying to say. The point, the point is, your kids, like they're a nuisance. How are you supposed to live your best life now?

And so on, and so on, and so on. What does that sound like to you? Does that sound like a free person or like a slave? If you worship something, you will be enslaved to it.

And I'm going to put forward to you that that's the case for God Almighty as well. That we are made to be slaves, to be subjects.

But, if this is rubbing you the wrong way, when we are slaves to God, we are slaves to other people. When we are subjects to God and subjects to other people, we experience true freedom.

[26 : 29] Some of you have been Christians for a long time and you know that there's some seasons that are just sweeter with the Lord. It's like, you read the Bible and every verse, it's like it is, it is, it is water in a dry land, but then there's other seasons where, I mean, you labor over the scriptures or you labor at church and you're just, you don't feel it.

But just, hold on a second. Those times when you are, it's a sweet season with the Lord, does that feel like slavery? Or does it feel like freedom? Does it feel like you are less of your true self or that you are more like your true self?

The world tells us that we need to obsess over me, consume to overflow, to live whatever life makes us happy, but it really is calling us to slavery to our flesh.

And if you're honest with yourself, I'm honest with myself right now, we fall into it. We fall into it. We prayed it at morning prayer at the 8 a.m. service, but we didn't today.

There's a call called the call for peace. I don't know if we'll, it'll be in the, yeah, it won't be. But the call for peace goes like this, a very ancient prayer. I love it.

[27 : 53] This is what it says. O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom.

And then it goes on. Laying your life down for others, suspending your own freedoms, following the example of Christ will lead to blessing and blessing and blessing.

Enduring unjust suffering might feel really, really, really unfair. But remember that Christ went through it. So He can relate to you.

So when you pray to Him, it's not that He says, you know, sucks to be you. I know what you've gone through. I've experienced it.

I can relate. And what fruit does it bring? It brings blessing to others. No more slavery to our flesh, to our desires, to our addictions, to our passions.

[29 : 02] And it means we get to operate the way we truly were designed to operate. To both the Christian and the non-Christian, consider the reality that no matter what, you will be a servant or slave to something.

You will. And if that bothers you, we can talk about it. If you want to beat me over the head after the service, verbally, you can. I'm happy.

I'm happy to talk. And if you're honest with that, if you're honest with that, if you really consider it, consider becoming a slave of Christ. Maybe for the first time.

Maybe you're struggling with your faith. Maybe you haven't truly ever been saved. You know it, you know, deep down, you may be feeling conviction today. today is a perfect time to become a slave to Christ, a slave to God.

To follow the example of Christ, to lay down whatever freedoms you may have for the sake of others because ultimately you are doing it for God. Bearing witness to the very nature of the cross of Calvary.

[30 : 08] And he will help you do this. He will help you do this. Israel was taken from Egypt out of slavery. Still slaves up here. Still slaves up here.

But God was patient with them and he'll be patient with you as well. Slavery to Christ is true freedom. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your words in Holy Scripture. Thank you so much that our example is Christ of how to suffer unjustly. How to walk in a way that is pleasing to you. How to be a slave to you which is perfect freedom.

Lord, I pray that this morning that you will to the Christian and the non-Christian, to the skeptic, to the believer, to anybody in between, that by your Holy Spirit you will show us areas in our lives where we are addicted to pleasure.

That we are slaves to pleasure. We are slaves to the need to be recognized and rather, Lord, you will begin the process, again, by your Holy Spirit, fellowship of believers by your word to start removing that.

[31 : 23] Help us to serve you. Help us have that eternal mindset and to look to Christ as our example. Pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.