

Suffering: A Light to the World

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Date: 14 April 2024

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- [0 : 0 0] You're listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee. To learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.
- And now, today's sermon. In Mark Twain's classic book, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884, we follow the story, if you've not read it or heard of it, of Huck Finn, a young boy, who pretends to die to escape his abusive father.
- And he meets, on the way of his journey, he meets a man by the name of Jim, who is a runaway slave. And they travel down the Mississippi River together, on a raft, facing all kinds of challenges along the way.
- This book has been an interesting relationship to the American culture. Today, it's often banned because of its reference 212 times to the N-word, referring to Jim, the runaway slave.
- But this is not the original reason why it was an offense in the 1800s. It was rejected for very different reasons. Mark Twain is using this story as a satire to expose the hypocrisy of the society in which he grew up in.
- [1 : 2 7] The narrative depicts Christians who own slaves, endeavoring to impart biblical truth to Huck.
- And he can see the irony or the dispersion that is there. Huck forms a bond with a slave named Jim and wrestles with the moral implications of the aid of helping this slave escape.
- To which then he tells himself, based on what he has heard, I reckon I'll go to hell for helping him. Through the journey, Huck gains insight and wisdom from Jim, which contradicts his previous beliefs of what slaves could do.
- At the end of the book, you realize the goal and the point is the social issues that were taking place during the frame, which was during the 1880s.
- And it's to point out racism and the spiritual hypocrisy of the culture. Modern readers will miss this satire because they can't get past the use of particular words that are definitely, unfortunately, uncommon.
- [2 : 4 5] But the irony of how what we are offended by today and what they were offended by because it exposed their life.
- This is a good example of what we are engaging in with 1 Peter. I spent time this week reading through different commentaries and sermons, trying to gain insight from other sources about context of the culture.
- And what I came across repeatedly is that they were missing the point of what Peter was saying. Not only are they missing the point, but they also removed the gospel that was right here in the text.
- They just glanced over the very motivation for what Peter gives them. The emphasis became about work ethic. How to have a good work ethic.
- How to deal with complicated bosses and jobs. He has a much more significant goal in mind than how to have a good work ethic.

[3 : 54] I also want to point out that there are very few of us that will find ourselves in the situation that Peter is describing because this is a very different culture than we live in today.

And so the instructions may not apply to us, but the heart behind what Peter is presenting to us has a 100% application to our everyday life. I want to just help you understand the idea of slavery in Peter's cultural context.

The slavery that Peter is speaking of is not the same horrific scene that we see here in our history of our country. And really the history of the world has been brutally taking advantage of humans.

The type of slavery that we see here in Rome and that we even know that Israel had been involved in the past was, this is why he uses the word servant, which is very different from *doulos*, the word slave, one who has been captured.

And typically those who are a servant in a home were for two reasons. One, they either owed a debt to the master or they have a contract.

[5 : 03] They enslaved themselves. They went under contract for the sake of themselves to earn money or to get advanced in the culture. And a lot of these servants were doctors, lawyers, nurses, accountants.

So it's not the way in which you would think that they are being treated. It's very different. But they are under obligation. And once you're under obligation or under contract, that does not mean that your slave master or the head of the home was necessarily always a gracious master.

We do read of Christians in the early church who also owned slaves. If you've ever read the book of Philemon, it's a great example of someone who was a prominent leader in the church. And at the same time, you have a slave and a master both serving in leadership in a church.

And so it's not necessarily the same. Our culture likes to say that Christianity promotes slavery. It does not. It merely deals with the consequences or the circumstances of the culture.

But here's the key. I know I've said a lot of data, but here's the key I want you to understand about this passage. Peter's instructions is helping the readers navigate their life now that they live under a new king.

[6 : 18] They have a new leader, a new master. Peter. In the Roman culture, at this time, the patriarchal system is how the homes were run.

The head of the house, the man, all who lived in the house, they must worship and obey the gods of the patriarch.

Not only the slaves, but the wife as well. Well, Peter knows this. And so he dresses both of them. He says first to the servants and then to the wives.

Because he understands the culture of the time. And think of it this way. If you have servants and wives who are now acting different, and when you ask them why, they give their allegiance to one God.

They give their allegiance to one king. Well, this is a threat. Because that would mean all other gods are unworthy and are to be rejected.

[7 : 15] And those are the gods to whom they trust. And so this is why I don't believe Peter is writing about work ethic in your jobs. But he's dealing with one who now has a new identity, is in a hostile situation to where those around you are not going to be rejoicing in the fact that you follow a king.

Especially the leader of the home. So I do want to do a quick review to help us understand. Because sometimes we can read passages and we disconnect them from what came before.

If you just scroll up a little bit in your page or in your phone, up to verse 12, this really is kind of the flow of the whole section after he gets done describing our identity.

1 Peter 2:12 says, 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.

So that's the beginning, right? So he takes general meaning anyone in Rome, anyone that's not a believer, another way of saying a Gentile is anyone who is not under the kingship of God, your conduct among them actually has significance.

[8 : 31] Because it's a reflection and pointing to something that's greater than yourself, which is your king. So Peter has already set up what is happening here in this chapter.

The way in which we act becomes the observable introduction to our God and king. This is why Peter uses the imagery of both the temple, remember he says your living stones, and royal priests.

With a temple, again, this is not, we don't live with temples in our culture, but they would have. A temple is where the God would have been housed. His presence would be felt.

His blessings would come and flow out of. He says, you, dear person, not the pastor, not the elder, he says, you, congregation, brother, sister, you are the temple.

You house the very presence of God and his blessings. And then secondly, you are the royal priest. So not only do you house God's spirit within you, but your job is to represent men to God.

[9 : 41] You are to bring them to God. It doesn't matter what your education, what your background, your gender, your race, it doesn't matter at all. This is why he says, in Christ, there is no caste system.

There's only child. There's only priest. Right? That's it. There's only adopted. Those who are in Christ. Now, if you have to remember, if you're a woman at this time, underneath the patriarchal system, this is good news.

It's like, huh, my jerk of a husband is not in charge of me anymore. The slave who is feeling the brow beating of the master is like, huh, this is a jerk.

I'm not underneath him anymore. I got a gracious king I'm under. You could see why Peter says, don't use your freedom for evil. This is hard words.

Often when I struggle with passages, my wife can see me walk in and sit on the bed. She goes, okay, let me have it. What is it? I said, listen to what I have to say tomorrow. This is hard words.

[10 : 54] But what he is trying to give us a picture of is that there is a difference between those who are in the kingdom. Our life is now set apart and separate to be used up, consumed for the glory of God and to lead people to see his power versus those who only live for self-gratification and self-preservation which is why you have people who are selfish.

Look at verse 18. First Peter 2, 18. Servants, be subject to, now that we have this information, he is talking about these, we are temples, we are these royal priests.

Our job is to be this representative. We got the patriarchs who are going to be very clearly seeing. We're not in full allegiance to the way they want to live. We're not living. Because you have to understand, a lot of these gods were evil.

They were not good. As a matter of fact, none of them are good. This is why we're called to worship only one god. And what they required was often sinister and sensual. And there are times when the believer would say, I cannot, just like Daniel, Meshach, and Abednego, David, a lot of them would have to say, I cannot participate in this because it's counter to my king.

But yet, they stayed in submission. They stayed in submission to their leader. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.

[12 : 24] For this is a gracious thing. What a weird thing to say. When mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

For what credit is it if one, if when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure, but, I know that's just weird, right? That's the culture.

But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is gracious thing in the sight of God.

Twice, Paul states that when we serve those who unjustly hurt us and continue to do what is right despite the sinful action, we are being gracious to them.

Grace meaning you give a gift to which cannot be earned. We are responding to their sin in the same way that God responded to our sin.

[13 : 26] This is what he's saying. You do not revile them, you do not fight back, because you are a living example. Remember the story of Hosea. Hosea was a living example to the children of Israel of their sin.

We become a living example, according to Peter, to these people who are rejecting and serving other gods and themselves. We become a living example of grace when we are hurt and reviled and we do not respond with judgment, but we respond with kindness and good.

I know what you're thinking right now. I mean, even this word, when it says unjust, it literally means, it comes from the word scoliosis.

It means those who are twisted. Those who are mangled or mangling you. I know what we're all thinking right now.

This is nuts. Why would we continue to show respect and honor to someone who does not show it in return? Why would I take such treatment unjustly?

[14 : 40] Well, let's keep reading. 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.

Peter isn't saying, this is a good idea. It's a helpful tip for evangelism. It's something to try if you want. He tells the church, this is your calling.

I mean, this is a, this is hard to hear. This is a weight. And what is the reason? What is the reason, Peter?

He says, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example. What is the example? He took on our disobedience, our unjust disobedience, our unjust payment for him, and graciously gave us forgiveness in return.

Turn with me to chapter 3 in verse 1 because you can see where Peter is pointing the ultimate aim and the focus of the end of this. Because it's not that just we're suffering for suffering's sake.

[15 : 56] That would be very hard to hear. Nowhere in the letter has Peter given this indication yet. But he is telling us to suffer. Look at verse 1. He gives an example of the wives.

Verse Peter 3, 1. Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

When we are wronged, we don't respond in sin and anger, but we respond with kindness and forgiveness. He's saying that the world will actually see those actions and they can potentially be won over to the king.

It's crazy. The giving of grace and not the responding of anger and violence or even defending oneself, but giving respect is to turn its gracious act on its head.

Now some of you are feeling some of the tension here about being in an unsafe job or relationship or marriage, I will get there.

[17 : 18] So if you're feeling that, I will have a release valve. So stay with me. I know some of you are feeling that weight. I have felt this weight. But this is what Peter is saying.

He's like, you have a new narrative. You have a new story. The way that you see your life is different now. He goes from this is who you were. He's cleansed you. He's clothed you. He's given you the power of the spirit that lives within you.

He's given you a whole new identity as a representative of God to the people. And the story of your life now is to engage in the world. And as you engage it, you do good, you're kind, you're gracious, and when you're reviled and you're hurt, those are actual gospel moments where you respond with grace.

And they see the way in which you respond and it leads them to the one who rescued you. Now some of you might be saying, well John, that sounds like lifestyle evangelism.

I don't care what you call it, it's biblical. The purpose of your life is to, in every situation, look to God's grace and his gospel in you.

[18 : 26] Look to what he has done for you and how he's changed you and transformed you. And every time you are hurt, that is the opportunity that you get to respond and say, I'm going to give you what Christ gave me.

I mean, even in the Lord's prayer, he says, Lord, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. This means in all our relationships, Peter's giving us a few examples, but he started with the government.

He says, those who rule over you, listen, we've all seen unjust rulers. It is not our job to create justice in the world because he says it very clear, the one who is the judge sees and he will make all things right.

We want to do that now, but we won't see the justice. All of the disciples were murdered, they didn't see the justice now, but when the king comes, justice will be served. But while we wait, our job is to receive the injustice and in return, give grace that they might too be freed in the same way in which we were.

And so he's talking about it in the government, now he's talking about it in the employment with these slaves, he's talking about it with the wives. This is a kingdom perspective he's talking about, this is a new way of thinking, which is the opposite of our former life.

[19 : 46] What was our former life like? Our work isn't from the heart, no, our work is driven by money and power and fame and advancement and security and affirmations of others.

And Peter says, you have a whole new story. You have a whole new significance. Now, I think we can understand what he's saying, okay, so I find myself in my marriage, my children, my job, doesn't matter where I'm at, the circumstances doesn't matter.

That's where the 100% application comes in. You have all been mistreated. You have all been treated unfairly. You've been passed up for a promotion, your spouse is treated you in a way that is completely inappropriate and so have your children.

We don't gloss over the sin or ignore it. Their sin must be paid for but your, excuse me, your response to the sin is what Peter is most concerned about.

You don't stand as righteous judge. You stand as one who's forgiven saying, what you just did is wrong and listen, you can have the same forgiveness that I have. I too have wronged the king.

[21 : 05] I too have wronged others and I don't want to wrong you because of what my king has done for me. This is the motivation that he gives. Look at verse 21. Verse Peter 2, 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.

Listen, it is not fear or judgment or the, or else. He's pointing to the past. Christ loves you. Christ died for you.

Christ fully has cleansed and forgiven you by his wounds. Think about that for a moment. It wasn't a slap on the wrist. We all know the scene from the cross. It's horrendous.

It is, that's what was required to heal you. That amount of pain, that amount of suffering was required to heal you. And Paul says, we have never suffered like Christ has.

We will never suffer like he has from the hand of another even though it might be intense. Verse 22. He committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled he did not revile in return.

[22 : 11] When he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who was judged justly. He continued entrusting himself to him who judged justly.

This is what we do as well. In the midst of our suffering and being treated unjustly we commit ourselves to God saying we know you see and we know you will handle this.

He himself bore our sins in his body verse 24 on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed quoting Isaiah.

For you were straying like sheep but now return to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Peter is always using the gospel to motivate our new life.

You did not get involved at any moment from your birth to your transformation to your adoption to your new title and your new home all of that has been granted to you by God's grace.

[23 : 14] Even if we don't suffer endure well does not dictate what our future will be. That's secure.

There's never an or else involved in God's plan of salvation but you can either watch God's power work through you by being kind and gracious to those who hurt you and see how God transforms and brings people into his country.

Listen, by being nice I have to tell you some of the meanest people I know are Christians. We're a mean bunch. It's mostly because we're mean to each other and then when the world gets around us we're like we'll boot them out.

This is why he's like protect the church. Protect the body. Don't allow nastiness and he says only that which builds up should come out of your mouth.

Only that which is of grace and kindness and mercy. We should be quick to forgive and ask for forgiveness. Why? Because it's really hard out there. It's really hard.

[24 : 22] And so we look to the gospel to encourage us and strengthen us. You know, the word that came to my mind when I was thinking about this and it's a word that I really didn't like for a long time but I like it now because I think it fits.

How would you like to be described as a radical Christian? Like, dude, she's radical. She's nuts.

How would you like to be described as a man of God who's radical for God? So when we think of that we think of the Congo. No clothes and smelly out in the wilderness sharing the gospel with those who want to eat us.

That's radical. That's radical. And Peter's like, no, just be nice. No one in the world does it.

No one lives like this. Not only when you are kind and gracious and demonstrating to people the same grace you've received, people will be saved.

[25 : 33] You see, it takes a radical act of our God who saves a sinner like us and then simply says, you're going to learn how to live a selfless life and the world around you will know what to do with it.

You might even die. What's interesting, you guys remember the story of Stephen? He's preaching to these people. Paul's holding the coats and they're stoning him.

And what does he say? Lord, bring judgment upon them as he's being stoned to death. Right? No, he looks up to them and says, Father, they don't know what they're doing. Who was watching at that moment?

Who saw him give grace? Paul. Paul saw it. We don't know what God is doing from our perspective looking up.

But God knows exactly what he's doing because he never makes a mistake. If you will, turn with me to Philippians chapter 2.

[26 : 36] This will be the last passage we look at this morning. No, we have two more, sorry. Philippians chapter 2. Kids, you're doing great. I'm super proud of you. Keep it up.

Going back to last week, he says, our freedom was not given to us so that we could set ourselves free to do whatever it is we want. We are free from the slavery of sin like the world is free. We were obligated constantly to give in to our flesh.

It literally says that we've been set free from our death. The death of our flesh. And now we have the supernatural power and order because the spirit lives within us.

We're this temple. We have the robes of righteousness. We can suffer because his strength is sufficient. And this is why I want to go, we, Theo Gass put out an episode this week on why we're not an antinomian.

I think this sermon is pretty clear. I think you should obey. There you go. The sermon alone. But the only way you will ever obey is if you have something that motivates you and that is grace.

[27 : 43] There can never be too much grace. Not in a world like this world that we live in. I'm excited that I've made it this far without breaking down and crying. Our small little congregation has been under the weight of all kinds of pressure.

Satanic, sinful, and suffering. And me standing up here and telling you to try harder assuming you haven't already tried as best you can won't work.

Does anyone want me to stand up here and just yell at you and step on your throat and say how dare you not try harder? Because you know what the results will be. Another week of failure.

This is why Paul's like God will you please give me a break in my flesh here? This is really hard. And he says no because the weaker you are in your flesh the greater your faith will be in my strength.

And this is my encouragement to all of us church that all of us who are feeling the different circumstances we find ourselves in you don't need to be motivated in your flesh. You need to be able to be motivated in your faith that God's grace is sufficient to transform your heart and your mind to do the very thing he's called you to do.

[29 : 11] So no we have to continue as Peter just keeps using this intertangling of who you are in Christ this is how you should act this is what Christ has done for you this is how you respond.

The response is always planted rooted cemented built upon the grace of God. Philippians chapter 2 verse 12 he says this therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only in my presence much more in my absence work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

We always miss the point. Did you receive the salvation by something you did? Yes or no? No it's a gift. It's like it's a part of who you are.

You'll never be the same it's been gifted to you. What he means by work it out is he says let others see the gift you have received with reverence and awe meaning with the understanding of what it is that you have received this grace that you have received.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as light in the world.

[30 : 29] It's not obey because you have to. It's obey because look what you are. You're a light. I have felt the darkness of our world this week and the only thing that got me out of bed this morning was the reality that I could open my frail failing mouth and be a light to somebody.

Peter is saying that actually when you're kind to everyone but especially to those who are not kind to you you become that light.

You become that light. all of these places that we find ourselves living in need grace need forgiveness need this light that means we can take comfort in not seeing our justice now God's not bringing justice now and we don't want God to bring justice now because if he did we would have not made it.

He holds back his justice because we are the ones who are shining the light in the world bringing those underneath his healing and underneath his grace. Now before we finish this morning I do want to take a moment and point out that there are points in scripture that are very clear that there are appropriate occasions to remove oneself from a job or a marriage.

there are multiple occasions where Paul found himself leaving his city or using his Roman citizenship to protect himself from persecution but he didn't do it with anger or violence he was doing it gracefully.

[32 : 28] It is not wrong to remove ourselves from abusive situations. Many of them who could left the cities and were living on the outskirts of Rome because of this very reason but there were some who were still stuck in Rome.

This is why the letter was circulating throughout Rome. So yes there are times when he says if you can Paul also says the same thing if you're in a marriage and you're in a marriage with an unbeliever and they are willing to stay married to you you can try to stay in that marriage in order to bring honor and glory to the Lord and bring them over but that doesn't mean you're required to because that may not be the case.

We also in our church practice church discipline. This means that at times there are actual Christians who are abusive to each other so much so that they are warned they are then removed from the table and then eventually put out of the church because they will not repent of their abuse.

I do not believe this is what Peter has in mind. so if you find yourself in a situation where you can find another job and remove yourself from an abusive boss you do so with grace and kindness and forgiveness.

You do not leave and throw a grenade and hoping they get hit with the shrapnel. I want to encourage all of us here I know that I had this vision of turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4 and we'll be done.

[34 : 04] I had this vision of full time ministry for many years. I went to Bible college to go to ministry but I actually worked up into my 30s in the secular jobs. Ben May has a tally of all my jobs I don't even know what the number is at now but somewhere in the 20s.

I worked a lot of different jobs for most of my well more than half of my life I was not a pastor of full time ministry as you could call it. For six years of my life I worked as a manager of an apple store and the frustration I had in this store was those who had the reputation of being a Christian were the worst employees and it just grieved my heart.

It grieved my heart. Now Les I was no perfect employer. I was no perfect man but it broke my heart to think that the Christians who should have the attitude of reflecting and light were the ones who had the opposite.

You see I agreed with the unbelievers criticisms they were late they were lazy they lied they would not do their job. They were not being criticized as Peter says they were not being punished for their righteousness but they were being punished for their sins.

It's a shame. And it really made me want to long for full time ministry. Now that I've been in full time ministry at times I long to go back to the secular world.

[35 : 33] But it changed my perspective and here's why. I'm going to read to you something here in Ephesians chapter 4. He says this Ephesians 4.11 and he gave the apostles the prophets the evangelists the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

Pop quiz. Who's doing the work of ministry? The saints. See when we think of full time ministry you think of me.

I get paid a salary to study the Bible 40 hours a week. By the way that would be awesome if that's not what I do. But when that job becomes available I'll take it.

The work of ministry is actually done by you all the time. You're in full time ministry. There's never a moment of your day where you are not going to be obeying what Peter has called us to do which means you're never not ministering God's grace to either believers or unbelievers.

You see sometimes we think of our life based upon the status of the culture I know Judith told me a little bit about what she was speaking about this morning so I'm going to steal from her lesson. But we can find ourselves finding the significance based upon the pay or the kind of work or who we are as a mom or if we're married or the significance of how we feel our emotions what the social status of us says are we actually making an impact in culture does the world applaud us for who we are and Peter has no concerns about that at all.

[37 : 10] He says no matter where you are you are a light and you are doing the work of ministry and our church is designed to train you how to do that. Church if you didn't hear anything else that I said I want you to hear this this last encouragement from Paul is this your life is significant every time you can give kindness and grace and mercy as a representative of God.

It's significant because he uses it he said he uses it in order to draw people out of their slavery out of their condemnation out of the wrath that is waiting for them out of the grasp of the evil one it draws them out simply by first you showing them what they cannot get in their own.

They do not deserve your grace but you are being gracious to them because your father has been gracious to you. Let me read this to you. This is 1 Corinthians 15 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on the immortality.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on the immortality then shall come to pass the saying that is written Oh the songs that we sang this morning Death is swallowed up in victory Oh death where is your victory?

Oh death where is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ therefore my beloved be steadfast immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord the ministry that we've been called to that which Peter has called us to listen to this knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain may I just change it all every time that you show forgiveness and kindness every time that you suffer unjustly every time that you go through life in pain God says it's not in vain which means there's never been an insignificant human that has ever existed because they are the representative of God if they are in Christ they are a light and they can give grace so how do we practice this?

[39 : 43] Church it starts in the seats that you're at right now to each other to your spouses to your children how you respond to your children is a reflection of how God has responded to you asking your children to forgive you because you didn't respond in grace asking your spouse your employer your neighbor your sister your brother to forgive you because you didn't respond in grace you are bringing God's light into the world and hopefully as Peter says in chapter his second book hopefully they'll ask you why and you'll be ready to give an answer of the hope that lies within you let's pray our father I feel so inadequate to even stand up here because I too need to be forgiven for the ways in which I've not been gracious may your grace be what motivates all of us may your forgiveness be what causes us to be immovable steadfast in your gospel help us to understand our new story and our new narrative is to be kind and gracious to all as a light so that we might be able to share the power of the gospel that saved us in Jesus name amen thanks for listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill Tennessee where everyone is in equal need of grace to plan a visit or to learn more about us visit our website at gracereformed.org church in him it is as you a it you you you you you you you you you