

The Example of Christ's Suffering

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 9th of June 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled The Example of Christ's Suffering and is based on 1 Peter 2, verses 18-25. As a treat this week, I took my two young daughters, who are one and three, to McDonald's for lunch.

We have come down to this level. No longer going to cafes, we now go to McDonald's. They have great play equipment.

It means that we can have our coffee and a little bit of peace while we watch our children play in the play equipment. This week, as my young daughter, three-year-old Olivia, was playing, I noticed that she went to play in a little cubby house with two other little girls.

[1 : 06] Well, before I could blink, there seemed a bit of a ruckus forming. And then I saw my daughter's hand go up. And then I saw it come down and it just seemed to be blowing up.

So I quickly leapt off my seat and ran in and I sort of pulled her up and I said, Olivia, what are you doing? And at that moment she burst into tears. She hit me first!

Right from a very early age, we learn that we want revenge. That it's just not fair. That it's okay to retaliate. That it's right.

That we should have the things that we want to do. If someone hurts us, we should hurt them back. My three-year-old daughter has already picked that up. But how much more so when we suffer unjustly?

Do we want to retaliate? Do we want to seek revenge? Do we want to take revenge? This week I was watching the news and I saw that Colin Powell, the Secretary of State of America, I think he is, give an announcement that in the world there was somewhere between 700,000 and 4 million people sold or exchanged in slavery.

[2 : 25] 700,000 to 4 million throughout the world who are sold or exchanged in slavery. Can you imagine what it would be like to be a slave?

To have no rights whatsoever? To suffer injustice? Can you imagine the feeling of wanting retaliation there? Of wanting revenge?

Of the great frustrations they would feel. And feeling the frustration, they can do nothing about it because of their legal status. The government has decided that they wanted to do something about it in USA.

And they've isolated 19 countries which they'll sanction if they don't do something about the slavery that is happening. In today's passage, we look at a group of people, Christians who are suffering being slaves.

They are slaves who have masters. We're working through the book of 1 Peter. And in the book of 1 Peter, we've seen that Peter is writing to a congregation that are suffering great injustices.

[3 : 42] They are under great persecutions. We've seen though that Peter has pointed out that they have the great privilege of being Christians, that they have experienced so much grace from God.

And so Peter is now starting to talk about how they are to live in this world, in their world, a world of persecution. Last week we looked at the fact that they were to submit to the civil authorities.

They were to accept the authority of Nero, of the emperor. They were to accept it, accept his authority.

Today we look at the fact that slaves were to accept the authority of their masters. What a difficult passage for those who are in these circumstances.

As we look at this, why don't we pray and ask God to help us. Father, we do pray that you will be with us here this morning, that you will give us open ears and hearts to your word.

[4 : 45] Father, that you will help us to hear about the way that we should live our lives. Give us courage and strength to be able to put this into practice in the way that we live our lives, that we may bring you great honour and glory.

Amen. I don't know what your picture of slavery is and how it was shaped. I grew up reading different books about the black Americans who were taken, black Africans, who were taken from Africa and taken across to America to work on plantations, cotton plantations, and the great injustices they faced, the beatings, the cruel treatment they were facing.

Well, perhaps you might be shaped by some movies that you've seen. of Charlton Heston there in one of the great Roman galleys rowing the big ships.

And there's that big guy, bald guy, at the end with his whip beating the drum and beating the people, the slaves who were driving these ships. I'm not quite sure what picture you have of slavery, but let me tell you the picture of slavery back in the time when Peter was writing this letter. He's writing this letter, remember, to the provinces of Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, provinces of the Roman Empire. As slaves, they had little or no legal rights whatsoever.

[6 : 10] They were a possession, just a possession, like you might own a car or a cow. They were a possession. They lacked citizenship.

Their marriages held no legal force. Their children belonged to their masters. If they were to give evidence in a court, the only way that their evidence could stand is if actually they were tortured in giving the evidence.

Because that was the only way you could be sure that a slave was giving you the right information. A slave could buy his freedom, though. He could ask to be sold to another master.

Yet, those who had slaves sought their obedience. For the household to actually continue to move along, to operate smoothly, slaves needed to be obedient.

Therefore, they came under harsh treatment. Their life was demeaning and cruel. And many reacted accordingly. Many would try and kill their masters or even run away from their masters.

[7 : 24] Why would you want to put up with it? Many even went to the extent of killing their own children so that their children wouldn't be brought up in this set of circumstances.

Such was the harshness of their life. Yet, although they had no legal status, it was actually a great economic, there was great economic benefits for being a slave.

for there was, in slavery, you were bought at a price. You were bought, you were given money for being a slave. You were often being paid.

Many of them had managerial positions. Many of them were paid quite well. They were looked after, cared for. many of the free-born, those who were free, would sell themselves into slavery for the sake of money, for economic benefits.

They think that up to a third of the population in Peter's time were slaves. A third of the population. In many ways, it was a form of employment for many.

[8 : 39] But what a harsh form of employment it is. What a harsh form of employment. Peter is not writing here in this letter to condone slavery.

The New Testament makes it clear that slavery is not what a Christian should seek. Slavery is not the way that things should be. Peter is not here writing against the whole notion of slavery.

He is writing here to people who are slaves. And he is writing to them and telling them about how they should live their lives. Because many of these slaves, on hearing the word of God, have become Christians.

And as a Christian, one of the great message of the Bible is that they have been set free. They have a freedom. The Bible's message is that all have the same status.

We are all one in Christ. There is no longer a discrimination between gender or race or creed or social status.

[9 : 48] All Christians are the same in Christ. And so for the slave to hear this message, there would have been the great temptation, why put up with this slavery anymore? Let's react against it.

Let's get out of this situation and either kill their masters or to run away from them. Yet Peter says these words to them in chapter 2 verse 18.

You might like to have the Bibles open as we go through this. Page 984. Slaves, accept the authority of your masters. Accept the authority of your masters.

Don't run away from your duties. Take it. But notice there, it doesn't matter what your master is like. It's independent of their character.

Not only for those who are kind and gentle but those who are harsh. If you have a harsh master, don't run away from him. Don't run away from him.

[10 : 53] Continue on your duties. Do not withdraw from your duties but continue on. Well, Peter gives some qualifications of this submission. This acceptance of authority.

The first we see there is right at the very beginning. It says there, accept the authority of the masters with all difference. This notion here when we look at the Greek is the idea of we do it out of fear.

As we look back in verse 17, it's a fear of God. We don't put up with this harsh treatment for the sake of harsh treatment. We don't play the martyr for the sake of being martyred.

For martyrdom's sake, Peter makes it clear we are to be people who fear God. We do it because of God's sake.

They were to be slaves because of God's sake. This is picked up again in verse 19. Being aware of God. Being aware of God of the situation. Live as slaves fulfilling your duties.

[12 : 01] They were not to be stoic and accepting it just for suffering's sake but for God's sake. Second thing here is having God as serving God.

He was meant to be their primary allegiance. They were to suffer for him. But that may mean that you do not follow what your master says. You may suffer greatly because your master tells you to do something and you don't do it.

Your master may have told them to worship pagan gods or to be involved in sexual immorality or to be involved in things against God's will.

But the slave was not to submit to that. Their primary allegiance was to God. They were to submit to God and his will not to the master's.

We look there also in verse 19. We see that this is their credit. For it is the credit to you if being aware of God you endure pain while suffering unjustly.

[13 : 11] If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong what credit is that? But if you endure when you are doing right and suffer for it you have God's approval. If my daughter goes to school one day and she gets in trouble for doing something wrong and she gets punished for it well then I need to accept that punishment.

It's right that we should accept that. She should accept that punishment. If you've done something wrong then expect to suffer for that. Peter's not addressing those people who are suffering for doing wrong. He's addressing those people who are suffering for doing right.

He says it's your credit if you do this. This is what God this wins God's approval. This is what we are to do. This would have been very harsh words I think for those who are slaves.

To accept the authority of your masters despite harsh treatment. Hard words. Peter then goes on to give an example the example of Christ.

These next from verse 21 through to the end of the chapter are very powerful words as we pick up on the example of what Christ has done. We see Christ's response to suffering in these verses we see that he did not retaliate in word or deed.

[14 : 38] Let's read them verse 21 for is this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps. As Christians the slaves were called to this to suffer this was God's calling and Christ gives the example.

The idea here I'll leave an example for you is the idea of tracing over the alphabet as a little child. When I was at college we had to learn the Greek alphabet and they had all these funny symbols alpha beta gamma delta omega we had to practice doing the symbols of the Greek alphabet and so at the top of the page you'd have the Greek alphabet up there and underneath we'd practice drawing the little symbols I felt like being back at kindergarten tracing the alphabet you'd have the A and you'd practice it.

It reminds me of my daughter at the moment my three year old she goes up to Michelle often and says can you write your name or someone else's name and then she tries to trace the letters to try and copy the letters.

This is the idea of what slaves were to do with Christ they were to follow his example they were to follow his pattern his template they were to follow in his footsteps so just as Christ suffered for them they were to suffer for him well let's look at how Christ reacted in verse 22 he committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth he was abused he did not return abuse when he suffered he did not threaten but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly here is a man that throughout his

life did not commit sin no deceit was found on his mouth he was pure in action and deed and as we read through the gospel throughout his life we see the persecution that he came under the harsh treatment those who wanted to kill him and then as we get towards the end of his life we see him that he's put before a jury a kangaroo court treated terribly there beaten slandered insulted a crown of thorns thrust upon his head then he was put on a cross and dies a horrible death for something that he never did he did not threaten it says there in other places he did call out judgment and woe to those people at other points on the cross he could have called out and said judgment will come upon you he could have called judgment down but instead he suffered there on the cross dying a horrible and cruel death you see there that he entrusted himself to God at the end of verse 23 he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly he knew that

God was a just God that God would bring about judgment one day he entrusted himself to this great God rather than for him taking out the justice that he wanted there and then he left it to a God who would judge fairly a God who would judge justly a God who would bring about his wrath and indignation against all sin he trusted God he left it in his hands this was the example for the slaves in the midst of great suffering and hardship having no rights no legal rights they would have trusted in God's hands knowing that the injustice that they were suffering God would bring about justice for one day and God would bring about it far greater than they ever could in a far better way than they ever could in a way that was just they were to give it over to

[19:10] God in verse 24 many commentators think that he's just kept on going with this illustration of Christ and sort of run off the rails a little bit like his pen just kept on going and couldn't help himself things that we learn from these verses that help us in trusting in God in leaving justice in his hands let me read verse 24 he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that free from sins we might live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed he himself bore our sins he substituted himself on the cross for us he took the punishment that was ours God showed his justice God showed his wrath once for all in Christ dealing with sin at the cross taking the punishment that the slaves and us as

Christians deserve he bore our sins we can have great confidence that just as God has brought about justice at that point on the cross once for all we can be assured that God will come again one day and bring about judgment he will bring about his justice it is coming be assured of it Peter tells the slaves be assured just as Christ bore the sins on the cross for us that there we see God's justice he will bring about it in the end for those who do not trust him but the second thing that we see here in verse 24 that gives us great encouragement to trust God is the fact there that we see that we have been given lives that we might live for righteousness we've been set free from the power of sin to live lives that can bring honour and glory to God his wounds have healed us he has given us the ability to be able to live lives that bring honour and glory to him to be able to live lives that cope with suffering and hardship we have a new life therefore we can live now in accordance with

God's will because of what God Christ has done for us on the cross in verse 25 Peter brings this section to a close talking about slaves and masters and also a close to the example of Christ he finishes by talking about the contrast about the way the slaves were and the way they are now it speaks about the fact that once you were going astray but now you've returned to the great shepherd for once you were going astray like sheep but now you are going to the shepherd the guardian of your souls here is the great shepherd the one who cares for us guides us looks after us like a good shepherd a shepherd who cares for his sheep in the midst of their great suffering these slaves they could know that there was a great shepherd there caring for them in the midst of this suffering enabling them to bear through it enabling them that they would not fall love from from verse 22 through to verse 25

Peter is using a lot of the language from Isaiah 53 Isaiah 700 years beforehand predicted that there would be a person suffering servant God's suffering servant who would come and deal with the sins of the world Isaiah predicted what we see here what we see in Christ 700 years earlier we can have great confidence that God is bringing about his promises that God is dealing with things God is not silent well for slaves these are great words words of great encouragement for them words to help them enable to live lives that do bring honour and glory to God but how hard would it have been to actually do that as we look through this passage we see there that it's addressed to the slaves many of the New

Testament codes household codes where we pick up the idea of giving instructions to different groups when they speak about slaves they often speak about give some instructions to masters as well because there would have been Christian masters back then but we don't see it here if you look at the language all the way through it we see that it's a very inclusive language Peter is not just addressing slaves and masters back then he has a much broader audience in mind he has an audience of those who are suffering under any authority those who are suffering injustice against authority how were they to live they were to submit to it not to retaliate to live lives that bring honour and glory to God well during this week I found it greatly difficult to try and apply this to ourselves if you look at just the context of slaves and masters we are people who are free we are people that are not under this slave master relationship where we don't have any legal rights therefore it's not quite like an employer or employee relationship yet there are some similarities there as well so what can we say in terms of this passage about the employee employer relationship for those of us who do have jobs who do have bosses how are we to relate to them how are we to live our lives well all of us know I guess in the midst of these the context of having a boss in the context of being at work of what it is to be treated poorly to be treated unjustly to know what it is to work in harsh environments for your boss to dig a great big pit and then go to

[26 : 05] France leaving you to fill it in it is so easy to want to retaliate to want to give them a hard time to mock them behind their backs but some of us even suffer more than this more than just verbal abuse and injustice many of us have suffered physical and sexual abuse as well these are difficult words the passage provides a clear teaching an example of Christ of how to deal with such situations how to deal with unjust suffering for the sake of Christ therefore we are not to be people who retaliate like Christ didn't retaliate we are to leave it in

God's hands we are not to be people who gossip about our bosses behind their backs we are not to be people who steal who slander our bosses who take equipment we are not to be involved in corrupt dealings against our bosses but likewise we are to stand up against our bosses as well if they try to seek to draw us into illegal activity we are to serve God first we are to live lives according to his will not the will of our bosses but again how do we deal with such terrible abuse both physical and sexual how do we deal with this situation I guess one of the great differences between slaves and masters of Peter's day and our own situation is the fact that we have a legal system we have a legal system that enables us to leave our jobs we have a legal system where we can sue people we have a legal system where we can bring legal action against people we have as Christians these rights to use these things and can I just say in the midst of these terrible abuses it may be appropriate that we do bring about this legal system and use this legal system and it may be appropriate that we leave the context of great abuse but I want to say we still need to follow Christ's example in the midst of this what is your motivation for bringing legal action is it for retaliation to get yours back at the boss to see him trampled in the mud so that way you feel vindicated and you feel so much better about it is that why we use the legal system or in the midst of using a legal system do we give the boss a hard time and laugh at him and ridicule him and laugh at him our motivation is something we need to think about very clearly in these very difficult situations

I cannot imagine what it is like to be under such physical and sexual abuse the pain and the anguish hardship of it all I cannot imagine but we must look at our motivation for the way that we live our lives it may be right and proper that we do bring legal action for the sake of that person for the sake of trying to bring change in that person for the sake of others who are suffering at his hands as well it may be right and proper many consider being a Christian as just something where we follow some moral teachings where we treat people fairly kindly where we're just all around nice people but I think the reality of this passage today is is that it is a far more radical and gutsy thing to be a Christian it is a far far costly decision in being a Christian a commitment to endure suffering as Christ suffered to take the pain of difficulty if that is the way of bringing about good but we must remember from this passage that we are doing it for God's sake this is what we have called to do we must entrust ourselves to a

God who judges justly we are to follow Christ's example we have to remember that he has brought about a life-changing power in our lives through his wounds we have been healed he is the great shepherd the one who cares for us in the midst of our pain and suffering he cares and loves for us as a good shepherd may God give us the ability to live lives that bring honour and glory to him in the midst of such suffering every and anymore for Him to us to approximate it's definite to ■■■■
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