

1 Peter 2:19-25

Called by Our Good Shepherd to Endure Suffering

Famous London preacher Charles Spurgeon once told the story of an American slave name Cuffy. Cuffy was purchased at a slave auction by a demanding and cruel master. The master was told Cuffy only had one bad habit. He prayed. So the new master made it clear to his new property that if he ever caught Cuffy praying, he would whip him. Yet every night Cuffy knelt down next to his meager accommodations and came before his heavenly Father in prayer. Unsurprisingly one night his master caught him praying. And he beat him severely.

Can you even comprehend that story? It is unjust on so many levels. That a one person would have to even be in the position of slave. That one person would treat another human being so callously and so cruelly. That it was over a matter completely harmless to the master. That it was a direct attack on faith itself. Talk about injustice. It makes your blood boil, doesn't it?

You know, on the whole, we don't have a problem with people reaping what they sow. We don't have a problem with an incompetent worker being fired or a guilty criminal being locked up. We're fine with that...even when it happens to us.

But when there's injustice, our blood boils. Don't you cheer inside when the good guy bursts in and gives the bad guys what's coming to them. That's our default response. That's the way many want to deal with unjust suffering. Rage against it. Shake your fist at it. And if you can, rectify it by knocking some heads together.

But God's people are called to not be of this world even as we live in this world. God's people are called to another response entirely. **For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God...if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God.** Fight fire with fire? No. Finish what they started? No. Endure. Endure the sorrow. Endure the suffering.

I don't know what unjust suffering you have, are, or will experience. I just know you have and you will. That's the nature of living in a sinful world filled with sinners. Some of it we might chalk up to be unfortunate but not so bad...a boss or coworker who just has it out for you and makes your day job

miserable. Others of it will take a far greater toll. Slander. Being taken advantage of when you desperately need someone to help. Abuse. Persecution. There has been and there will be no shortage of suffering in our lives where we look and say *I don't deserve this!* And still, on this day when we remember Jesus our Good Shepherd, he says to you **if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God.**

But why?

Peter was actually addressed these words to Christian slaves. If you have your Bible with you, you could read the verse immediately preceding our reading which says, **Slaves, submit to your masters with total respect, not only to those who are good and kind but also to those who are harsh.**

It has been estimated that up to one third of the people living in the Roman Empire were slaves. Some of these slaves became Christians who were blessed to know how much love Jesus their Shepherd had for them. Which makes Peter's encouragement all the more poignant. Peter didn't encourage them to leave their masters. He didn't encourage them to band together in revolt against practice of slavery. He encouraged them to remain in their station of life.

Here's why. **you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps.**

It was into this same world of sin and suffering and injustice that Jesus entered 2,000 years ago. But for him, this world of suffering wasn't a minefield to be carefully navigated. Suffering was his purpose.

At the beginning of his ministry, right after his baptism, the devil offered Jesus a way out. *"If it's a kingdom you want, I have a world full of them. You can have them all. You can completely sidestep the cross. I mean, you're the Son of God. You can do whatever you want. You don't deserve to be treated like that. Worship me and you'll have it all- pain free.* But Jesus said, *away from me.*

At one point, Peter himself couldn't understand it. Years before he wrote these words...Peter told Jesus to his face that he would never allow Jesus to suffer and die...and then he pulled a sword on the night of his arrest to back it up. But Jesus said, *Put it away.*

A few weeks ago during Holy Week we pondered the depths of his suffering...his passion. Arrested. Slandered. Insulted. Mocked. Tortured. Beaten to within an inch of his life in front of friends and foes alike. And then one of the most brutal forms of execution mankind has every devised. Crucifixion. Suspended by nails through hands and feet. Left to dehydrate and wither until your strength gave out and your own body weigh suffocated you.

Can you comprehend that story? Even a thief on the cross saw it for what it was, **We are punished justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong.** And yet Peter reminds us **he did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats.** Why did he put up with it? Why didn't he just send fire from the sky upon his enemies or inflict them with crippling diseases? Why was did he not even speak a word in his own defense but instead silently endure as a sheep before its shearers?

You know why. Jesus walked willingly and quietly toward Calvary because he was thinking of you. He was thinking of me. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, could not shake the thought of us lost forever. **He saw the crowds and had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** In order to spare us from suffering for our sins in hell, the Shepherd had to lay down his life for the sheep. He had to suffer willingly and completely for each of us. If he had retaliated against those who treated him unfairly he could not have been nailed to that cross.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed.

Jesus trusted his Father to deal with those who had mistreated him and to make good come out of his suffering as he had promised. And now by his suffering...his wounds...he have healing.

There are plenty of opportunities for us to wander still...to fall into the temptation of self-righteous anger and a desire for vengeance against those who bring us suffering for no good reason. But if we do, we're just another face in the crowd of this world...living by the sword and dying by it...demanding an eye for an eye. This too we bring to the cross of Christ...sins having been carried in his own body

And now your Good Shepherd calls you and reminds you that you are **dead to sins and alive to righteousness... For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**

Friends, Jesus isn't interested in some cruel form of honor where we emulate him in suffering just for the sake of proving we will. He's not asking us to endure to test us to see if we're loyal enough. He's not asking us seek out suffering. He's not even asking us to remain in an abusive relationship if we don't have to. He's asking us to trust him in the same way he trusted in his heavenly Father...and he's asking us to think the way he did...for others.

Think about what that means. Our Good Shepherd is calling us in the face of unjust suffering to ask not how can I pay this back, but *how can I be your child, your disciple, in these circumstances? How can I let my light shine for you in this place, at this time?* When another causes you to suffer, your patient endurance can be a witness to the mercy and patience of God.

With this picture of our submissive suffering Savior before our eyes, how could we ever think of it as an indignity or a mark of inferiority to be asked to willingly endure as he did?

That's exactly what happened with Cuffy, the slave. The night his master beat him so severely for praying he couldn't sleep. Apparently he wasn't completely unconscionable. It was the way Cuffy had endured it...with love in his eyes even as he was suffering. It haunted the master. So he woke up his wife and said, "Can you pray for me?" His wife said, "I don't know how to pray?" Then he lit a lamp, went to the slave quarters and said to Cuffy, "My heart is troubled, will you pray for me?" Cuffy said, "Master, ever since I came here I have not stopped praying for you." Then taking his master's hand he began to pray and witnessed to the love of Jesus his Good Shepherd.

Whatever injustice you must suffer, your Good Shepherd calls you to endure with patience and trust in your heart...so that you might be a witness to the love you have known...the love of Christ...the love of our Good Shepherd who willingly and patiently suffered so that he might bring us, his wandering sheep, back to him. God grant it. Amen.