

Sermon Brief

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April 10, 2022

Text: 1 Peter 2:18-25

Title: “In His Steps”

Subject: The church is called to declare God’s goodness to the world.

Complement: Submission to authorities even when they’re unjust is a way to show God’s goodness.

Textual Idea: The Church is called to declare God’s goodness to the world which means submitting to authorities – even unjust ones.

Sermon Idea: Ambassadors for Jesus represent Him in this chaotic world by submitting to governing authorities – even unjust ones.

Interrogative: Am I walking in Jesus’ footsteps?

Key Points:

Ambassadors for Jesus represent Him in this chaotic world by remembering:

1. Our calling by God includes unjust suffering.
2. Our God suffers with us.
3. Our God deals in futures – entrust your situation to His justice.

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that we are ambassadors of the kingdom of God called to make Christ known. To do that, we must maintain our personal integrity in the world by submitting joyfully to masters and bosses even if they treat us unjustly. We are to honor God by enduring injustice for the sake of Christian witness.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) assess their work reputation, (2) memorize Colossians 3:23-24, and (3) pray for the persecuted church.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need to live lives that honor God in the midst of a pagan society.

“In His Steps”

1 Peter 2:18-25

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Have you ever been ordered to do something by a boss or leader that you weren't sure was okay to do? Mishandle money, hide something, take a client to a questionable place? I can only think of one time when I was ordered to do something I wasn't sure was okay. Back in college, during the summers, I worked with about sixty other Christian students in a local pickle factory. We did tedious work but prided ourselves on doing a good job and working joyfully unto the Lord. However, this didn't sit well with the year-round lifers! They didn't have the luxury of leaving the smelly, dark factory after the summer was over!

In my third summer there, I was hired as the line supervisor overseeing the packing line...all my friends! Now, there was an important rule at the factory: if anyone threw a **(LCD) cucumber spear**, they'd be fired immediately. We informed all the employees of the rule on day one. Only two days later, I was walking by my friend Barb Kaelin, who would eventually become Barb Doyle, when another friend Tony took some cucumber seeds and put them down her the back of her shirt as a joke. Instinctively, she turned around, picked up a spear and threw it at him! We all laughed in the moment...until I noticed some lifers staring me down in the distance! I knew what they were thinking, “Is he going to report it?”

Suddenly I realized my dilemma. I told Barb that I was going to have to report the incident but, no worries, I'd vouch for her that there was no malice intended and that it was a mistake. I reported it to the shift manager who then went and talked to the plant manager. Now you need to know that the plant manager had previously told me that the only way to motivate workers was through fear. So it shouldn't have surprised me that he ended up telling me to fire Barb so that it could serve as an example to the others! What!?! This is unjust! Barb needed this job to pay for college! It was a stupid rule! She didn't mean it! I asked to speak to the plant manager. I'll never forget sitting in his office, desperately pleading for Barb, when he interrupted me and said, “I hired you to enforce my rules. You can either do that or I'll fire you too.” Angry but frightened, I went out, found Barb, and fired her. Needless to say it was an awkward summer after that, but time healed all wounds, and we got a good laugh out of it years later!

I never knew for sure if I did the right thing there. Should I have been willing to be fired for what I believed was right? Why bother if it wasn't going to make a difference? Good questions. These are the kinds of questions Peter has in mind in the next section of our study today. What do you do in the face of unjust orders from mean bosses and leaders? Please turn with me to 1 Peter 2.

We're in a sermon series on the book of 1 Peter which I've entitled, **(LCD) Alien Living in a Chaotic World**. The people Peter wrote to were struggling to live faithfully for Jesus in a pagan society. Last week, we looked at the umbrella verses that set the context for his answer, 1 Peter 2:11-12, “*Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to*

abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” The two main points were that ambassadors for Jesus represent Him in this chaotic world by **(LCD) living with integrity within ourselves and within the world**, thereby causing people to glorify God.

Peter then applies this to different social circles that believers in Peter’s day struggled with and that we do too: **(LCD) submitting to governing authorities, working for mean masters, loving spouses in difficult marriages, and getting along with others.** Last week, we looked at submitting to governing authorities and asked, **(LCD) “Even Nero?”** Peter said yes. With that in mind, Peter then moved on to the next group: mean masters. Verse 18, *“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. 19 For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”* Ouch! Some hard stuff here. Let’s look at it.

The first thing that jumps out at us is “slaves.” Many of your translations say “servants.” That’s because the word here is a technical one referring to a **(LCD) household slave**. Here’s an ancient painting of household slaves serving a Roman family. Our immediate response is probably twofold: on the one hand, this is irrelevant to our modern world, and two, slavery?! Does the Bible condone slavery?! We know that Southern preachers used texts like these to validate the institution of slavery in the pre-Civil War South. What’s going on here? First, God’s Word is always relevant as we’ll see, and two, we need to understand that the slavery we think of when we hear the word “slaves” is much different than what was practiced in the ancient world.

Here’s a **(LCD) short list of some of these differences:**

- Race played no role – socio-economic factors were more important
- Education was encouraged – some were better educated than their masters
- Slaves could own property (including slaves)
- They shared the same cultural traditions as their masters
- There were no laws against slaves publicly assembling
- Majority were emancipated by age 30

So it’s very different than what we think of. Here are some **(LCD) features:**

- There were different types of slaves: Aristotle distinguished between brute laborers and slaves who were in positions of trust – like household slaves.
- Between 25-40% of ancient population was slaves – so it was foundational to ancient life and economy
- It was often a temporary condition on the path to freedom
- Many slaves were voluntary because they would be impoverished on their own.
- Former slaves often did not seek abolition for others – didn’t seem necessary
- Often, household slaves were better off than freedmen
- Many had high positions in home and government

- Yet, they were viewed as property with no rights and abuse was allowed
- Inciting a revolt was suicidal – it had been done many times and resulted in horrible destruction of people and property

So you might say that this is almost more like modern factory workers I described earlier than pre-Civil War slavery. Yet, we need to be sensitive. Just the word “slave” or “slavery” can be triggering for our friends of color whose ancestors were brutalized by it. As Scott McKnight suggests, (LCD) **“African-Americans read their experiences of oppression as reenactments of the biblical descriptions of slavery. No matter how hard whites try to distance themselves from this experience, and no matter how thoroughly (and accurately) they argue that ancient slavery was not like modern slavery, African-Americans will still hear this text in modern tones.”** With that, let me disavow any old teaching that the Bible supported the kind of chattel, involuntary slavery that occurred in our regrettable history. Father, bind up our national wounds!

Okay...so with that all said, let’s see what we can learn from this passage. *“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.”* Once again, as with last week, the key verb is “submit,” “hupotasso,” placing someone or something under another’s authority. And Peter says to do so to both good and bad masters. Again, keep in mind that revolting was just not an option for these slaves, so Peter wants to find a way for them to bear up. One way is to submit in “reverent fear of God.” The Greek doesn’t include “of God,” so some translations think it should be “in fear of masters.” I don’t think so. Verse 17, which we looked at last week, says “fear God.” The same word is here; so I think the NIV is right in assuming that our submission is ultimately to God. In other words, remember that you’re working for God, not man.

This is what Paul says too, (LCD) **“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”** I memorized these verses years ago and when I worked at Travelers, I’d quote them to myself throughout the day. “You’re my boss Lord Jesus. Help me remember that and work in a way that pleases and honors You.” You might want to memorize it too as a way to remind yourself who your true boss is!

Notice that Paul says that the chief motivation is that we will be rewarded in the end. Peter essentially says the same thing in the next verse, *“For it is commendable (something worthy of eternal reward) if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”* Peter too says that God is keeping track and He will commend, reward those who are faithful to Him. Which is why it is so important that the suffering be for doing good, not wrong! We’re not rewarded if we’re justly punished,

we're rewarded if we're unjustly punished. But there's something weird here. Why would a master beat a slave for doing good? What's Peter talking about?

Remember, Peter's been saying a lot about "doing good," like our umbrella verse 12, *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."* Peter is specifically thinking about times when a believer is accused of doing wrong but is really doing good, doing right. What I think Peter is referencing is the problem I faced at the pickle factory. Times when to obey my earthly boss would mean doing wrong. The word in verse 20 for "wrong" is actually "sin." When your boss orders you to do something wrong against God, the "good thing" to do is to disobey. Are you following me? Why would a master beat a slave for doing good? It has to be when he or she is doing it out of obedience to God but disobedience to the master.

Does this happen in our world? Ever heard of whistleblowers? How about right here in our own state of Connecticut. Back in the 1990's, a believer named **(LCD) George Galatis** worked at the Millstone nuclear plant. He noticed that the safety protocols for cooling down the nuclear rods were not being followed so that Northeast Utilities could save millions of dollars. Recognizing it was wrong and dangerous, he reported it to his bosses. They told him to shut up. Two years went by. Galatis kept his job, but the work environment was terrible. When he sat down in the cafeteria, coworkers left. When he entered a meeting, the room fell silent. Coworkers spread rumors that he was an alcoholic, and his performance evaluation suffered. According to an article in Christianity Today, *"Galatis began an intense search for God's guidance. He awoke at 4 a.m. to pray and read Scripture. During lunch breaks, he drove to a secluded place to pray and search the Bible. It was during one of these prayer times that Galatis believed God whispered to him, "Will you die for me?" Though he feared for his safety, Galatis realized there were many ways of dying: his livelihood, his reputation, and his family were at stake...After months of prayer and study, he concluded that no matter how much he was badgered, God would not allow him to be devastated. He decided to contact the NRC."* Eventually, the NRC did investigate and shut down the reactor.

George Galatis stayed the course because, as Peter says in verse 19, he was "conscious of God." Are you conscious of God in your workplace? Is the reality that God is with you and that He is your ultimate boss who will grant you eternal rewards enough to work hard and do right...regardless of the cost? This week something remarkable is happening. **(LCD) Tiger Woods** is playing the hardest golf tournament in the world: The Masters. This after a car accident 500 days ago that shattered his right leg. A doctor compared his leg to a crushed eggshell. It was almost amputated, and he was told he'd probably never walk normally again let alone play golf. Here he is, walking a course that is 4.3 miles long, has 14 steep hills, and requires over 11,000 steps! He was asked on a scale of 0-10 what his pain level is. He answered, "Higher." Why? Why submit to so much pain? Because golf is his life. And that leaves us all a question, "What will I endure for?" What is great enough in my life that I'm willing to suffer excruciating pain for?

This week is Holy Week. It commemorates another who was willing to suffer literal excruciating pain because He was conscious of God the Father. His name is Jesus. He is familiar with suffering, and He is our example which is where Peter goes next. Verse 21, *“To this (unjust suffering) you were called, (it’s part of our calling as ambassadors for Christ) because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”* The word for **(LCD) suffer** is **“pascho”** meaning “to suffer or submit.” It is the root of the word “passion” which in Dictionary.com means either “strong and barely controllable emotion or the suffering and death of Jesus.” Actually, the word was coined about 1000 years ago with the original definition being the suffering and death of Jesus. Why? Because theologians could not come up with a word strong enough to describe what is the ultimate act of suffering and submission the world has ever known, **(LCD) the unjust suffering of the Perfect One**. So they took the word for “suffer, submit” and created a new one: passion. The Passion of the Christ is what we’ll be remembering all week long starting today.

Peter then describes it by essentially paraphrasing the great prophecy of the Suffering Messiah from Isaiah 53, *“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”* (his suffering was unjust and undeserved) *23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 “He himself bore our sins” in his body (he truly suffered physically, just like the slaves Peter is writing to) on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”* Behold the lamb of God who suffered unjustly for you and for me. To set us free from sin, remove the fear of death, and give us His righteousness so that we are now empowered to do good even if it means suffering and persecution. Amen and amen.

Note how Jesus did it, *“He entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”* Do you remember a few weeks ago when I shared that **(LCD) “The Lord deals in futures?”** He does. Jesus banked on it, and we can too. And God vindicated Him by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand to be our Shepherd and Bishop. Verse 25, *“For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”* In the ancient world, kings were often called the shepherd of their people. Listen. We serve a resurrected king who promises to shepherd us. **(LCD) “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”**

Is He your Shepherd? The One who oversees your life, knows all your suffering for Him and promises to reward it eternally? Do you know Him? I hope you do! Let me summarize what we need to take away from all this: **(LCD) Ambassadors for Jesus represent Him in this chaotic world by remembering:**

1. **Our calling by God includes unjust suffering.**
2. **Our God suffers with us.**
3. **Our God deals in futures – entrust your situation to His justice.**

This week, we'll be celebrating the passion of Jesus. In Jerusalem, pilgrims will be walking the **(LCD) Via Dolorosa**, the way of suffering – re-tracing Jesus' steps to the unjust cross. Are we willing to walk in his steps? Verse 21 says that is our calling. What are we willing to endure for Him? Let's close by praying his benediction from Hebrews over us, **(LCD) “Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”**