

## Suffering Unjustly

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We're working through 1 Peter to grasp what it looks like to be a hope filled community no matter how hard the times. This text couldn't be any more in line because it says we're *called* to suffer unjustly. Everyone experiences unjust treatment but do you have a sense of calling, of purpose in it? Let's start by considering the perhaps hardest case, slavery; then our case, and finally Jesus' case of unjust suffering.

### Slave's Case

Slavery is a touchy subject and our passage opens with it, "[Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust](#)" (2:18). This raises an important question. Does the Bible endorse slavery? Is Peter approving of institutional slavery? To understand that, we have to shed our modern presuppositions and get into context. As we do this, it important to recognize that 1st century slavery was *not* based on racial discrimination, as it was in our country. The slavery in the Roman empire included all kinds ethnicities. It was *not* racially discriminating it oppressed all kinds. So, why doesn't Peter repudiate social and institutional slavery? Scholar Murray Harris has noted three broad reasons. *Historically*, there was a process for emancipation under which half a million slaves were freed 81-49 B.C. The alternative, slave revolt, often ended in execution and more persecution of slaves. *Socially*, the early Christian church did not have status and influence to effect such change, and even if they did, their religion would have been interpreted as a front for social revolution. *Theologically*, Christianity was not primarily a social movement but a religious movement that focused not on top-down change but inside-out change, *starting with the fundamental, the most important need, for every soul to be reconciled to God*. So, while the NT doesn't take institutional slavery head on, it certainly doesn't approve of or endorse it. In fact, Christianity actually *challenges* it. How can that be if Peter is saying submit to the unjust master? By addressing slaves Peter defies social convention since slaves were believed to be sub-human (Aristotle). NT also treats them as fellow moral agents with their masters. And in fact the NT calls masters to just treatment (unheard of): [Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven](#)" (Col 4:1). So Christianity is radical; it gives dignity and accountability to slaves and masters. But takes it a step further when Peter elevates their status to being worthy of a deity's death, "*Christ also suffered for you*" (21). Unheard of! Ok, but I'm having a hard time if they had such a high view of slaves, why does Peter tell them to submit to unjust treatment? Well, remember if he told them to revolt then it would probably end their demise *and* Christianity would have been mistaken as a socio-political movement and eradicated. **And this gets to the deeper reason slavery was not wholly repudiated—because Christianity has a greater agenda.** The agenda is rescue from sin, death, and hell to treat the cause of slavery. And, if Jesus hadn't embraced unjust, treatment enduring a slave's death no one would be sitting here! His greater agenda was the rescue of souls: "[For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls](#)" (25). So, if we make Christianity out to be a kind of social/political activism, as many are doing, we abandon it and we abandon the rescue of souls. We recently got a shaggy, golden haired doodle. And when we go to pet him, or he hears a noise he immediately crouches in fear. He bumps into things. We figured he had been abused, so we decided to help him recover by

showing him our hands and petting him lovingly. Then we took him to the vet. The doc came in and was talking about what to do for his eye infection and how to socialize him but I saw her hands were shaking. Turns out he has treatable heart worms. That disease is making him slow, apprehensive. How cruel would it be to socialize him, pet him, walk him, put the ointment on his eyes, but ignore his heart? *We all have heartworms and Christianity insists not on just grooming and treating humanity, but getting to the deepest, innermost need—the healing of our souls.* Jesus will not leave us untreated. He will do whatever it takes, name-calling, whipping, abandonment, rejection, and crucifixion to heal your inner wounds. But you have to take the medicine, day after day. Christianity is an inside-out religion not a top-down. Healing from the inside and it does make its way out. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Bartolome de Las Casas went to the New World to exact tribute for Spain believing some men are by nature slaves and others free. He heard a sermon and realized that all men are made in the image of God and issued a charter of freedom for the Indians in 1542 and became known as the Protector of the Indians. Wilberforce did the same thing for slaves in Britain. But this came after they were healed greed and selfishness by the love of Christ. Inside- out!

### Our Case

Slaves case, our case. Unfair treatment? That's where *we* draw the line. Cut me off, you get the finger. Pass me up for the promotion you get gossip. Rip me off and I'll yell in your face. Do me wrong in customer service and you don't wanna know. These are petty mistreatments! If we can't endure minor mistreatments, what are you going to do when someone really cracks down, when life deals you a blow? You've got to have a sense of calling, of purpose in suffering, or you won't make it through. Well, you might survive but you'll be a *twisted, bitter* version of your present self. David Brooks: "*For most people, there is nothing intrinsically noble about their suffering.*" Peter says you can have an ethic of suffering that allows you to endure hardship and *flourish* in it. How do you do that? Verse 19: *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.* It's possible to see suffering as a gracious thing, literally *a grace*. How?! By being mindful of God. The word mindful is the word conscious. **Being conscious of Christ in all you do.** He's there in the background, motivating, leading, correcting, warning. Don't lock Jesus up in a room and only let him out when its convenient. Let him go with you everywhere. Why? Because he's your Master, your Lord, the Healer of your soul. You'd be crazy not to take him with you. Luther called it *Coram Deo*, before the face of God, always. Now how does this help suffering? *Because when you suffer for good it's a gracious thing in the sight of the Lord* (20). When you're snubbed and you don't seethe; when your spouse hurts you and you don't retaliate; when you don't get the service you deserve and you bless, [when a biz partner lies to you, takes your intellectual property, and shorts you on your share of the company, when suffering in ministry your wife stops sleep and literally goes insane and you drive her to an institution, when you try to get pregnant for years and then lose your babies] suffer in the sight of the Lord. When you suffer unjustly, remember, he's got his eye on you. This is not any old eye; its god's eye. Nothing goes unnoticed. And guess what? He's a just judge. God goes with you noting every injustice. God doesn't trivialize your unjust suffering; he takes note and takes vengeance so you don't have to: Vengeance is mine says the Lord and I will repay (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19), which is what got Jesus through his suffering! *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly* (23). He knew there would be a just reckoning.

And his suffering had a redemptive purpose. He didn't come out bitter and twisted he came out beautiful and whole. So you see it's a grace to suffer conscious of Christ, and there's an even deeper *grace* when you suffer in the sight of the Lord, in the steps of Christ. Even if you *can* escape the suffering (and sometimes you can and should), using vengeance, divorce, gossip, murder, yelling and hatred don't enable you cope psychologically or emotionally with unjust circumstances. In fact, they injure you more. When your boss demeans you or passes over you, when you have a spouse that belittles when you are crushed by life, you have the promise of Christ with you: **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.** It's a calling, to suffer as Christ did, unjustly. Your biography, in places, will look like Christs. And that is a grace because it takes you deeper into the heart of God, Jesus Christ the Suffering Servant. And its there, in crucible, in the ditch of agony, you can hear the unjust cries of your messiah, who gave his innocent life for your condemned one. And you get a sense of the profound love of Jesus Christ *for you*. And suffering becomes a *grace*. It sweetens your life as you drop down into the story of the suffering savior and soak up more of his love and kindness. And looking back on unjust suffering, you will say with tears in your eyes, I wouldn't change a thing. Because you came face to face with the Shepherd of your soul.

### Jesus' Case

The remaining verses piece together passages from Isaiah 53-54. This is significant because these chapters foretell the coming of a Suffering Servant who would bear our griefs and our sorrows, our sins and our transgressions, to give souls peace with God. Verses 21-25 have a poetic structure in the original language, which is quite appropriate since the topic of unjust suffering takes us to the heart and soul of the Christ story. I'll read them and briefly comment. Verse **22**: **He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.** Jesus was innocent and pure, a spotless lamb. Scorned yet true to the end. **23** **When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.** Though he was the Son of God, he did not take matters into his own hands. *While mocked, he did not mock the men he created though they whipped the Creator.* He put his hope for vindication in the Great vindicator. **24** **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.** Jesus had not a speck of transgression, and yet was covered with the sin of the world. Why? Not only that we might be forgiven and accepted, brought into the heart of God, but *that* we might live to righteousness, to sink our story into the story of Christ, seeing unjust suffering as a grace to be more conscious of Jesus. If that were not enough. **By his wounds you have been healed,** by his stripes made whole. He works inside-out, in reverse; He wounds his Son to heal his sinners. Out of pain comes joy, out of death comes life. Surely there is no greater poetry, than God dying to heal the world: **25** **For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.** All glory be to Christ. All glory be to Christ. Amen.