

**1 Peter
2:18-25**

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A few months ago, Keren and I had dinner downtown with a couple we look up to. This couple is in their sixties and they have a deep faith in Jesus. They are originally from another country but had to relocate to the US because of persecution for their faith. Because of their faith in Jesus, this couple had over 400 bullets shot into their house with them hiding inside. One of the bullets hit the wall behind them, only two inches from the wife's head. They've had to spend weeks hiding in the forest, sleeping outdoors. They've had numerous close friends and co-workers not only arrested but beaten and killed. Over dinner we heard story after story of difficulty and injustice, but also stories of God's faithfulness and provision. Even though unjust suffering and persecution is higher than ever before in their home country, they are reaching more people than ever before! Their ministry has grown like wildfire. They are literally reaching several hundreds of thousands of people. They've not turned bitter but remain full of faith and humility. Keren and I left that dinner inspired and we said, "It's just like God to do that, to take what the enemy meant for evil, and because of their faithfulness, turn it for good!"

Most of us will never know what it's like to be shot at and chased from our homes, or to experience that level of persecution, but we have injustice in our own context. When someone above you at work takes credit for a job you did. When a family member leaves you out of the will. When a spouse breaks their vow. When grown kids distance themselves from you. When you are falsely accused or taken to court and sued for something you did not do. Injustice brings about some of the hardest moments of life, and that's what our passage is about today. If you have your Bible, turn with me to 1 Peter 2:18-25. Today we are going to learn how we can honor God in the face of injustice.

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. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 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. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 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. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Before we dive into studying this passage, we have to set it in the context of the book. This is a section focusing on honoring God when you are not in control. Most early Christians were on the fringes of society—not wealthy, not politically connected, not influential. They were

marginalized and lower class. So Peter tells them as citizens to submit to political leaders (2:13-17), as slaves to submit to masters (2:18-20), and as wives to submit to their husbands (3:1-6). This section of the book is written to people who have no political, structural, organizational, economic, relational, or professional power, people who oftentimes are under the authority of those who have power and are using it unjustly. This passage teaches us how we can honor God in a situation like that. This passage does not promote dictatorial monarchs as the ideal form of government; it does not affirm slavery; it does not support imbalanced power dynamics in marriage. But it does address reality. In an imperfect, fallen, broken world, when you find yourself without power and facing injustice, how can you still honor God? Peter tells us it's all about Jesus! We are called to trust Jesus, follow Jesus, and cling to Jesus. Our focus is 100% on Jesus.

How to respond to injustice: (1) Trust Jesus

Many of the people who received this letter faced very real injustice. Some of the slaves had harsh, abusive masters who treated them unfairly (2:18). The Greek word translated as “harsh” is *skolios*, which is where we get our word “scoliosis,” referring to a back that is crooked or bent. Peter says, “It is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering” (2:19). The most literal meaning of the Greek phrase translated “unjust suffering” is “unrighteous, ongoing suffering.” It’s not a one-time mistake; these people were subjected to perpetual, systemic wrongdoing. Peter tells us, “If you find yourself in a situation where you are being treated harshly and unfairly and there is nothing you can do about it, turn to God and trust him in it.” If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, it is commendable before God; it is grace in the sight of God. God sees. God knows. God cares. 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you.” Rather than choosing the path of retaliation, or cynicism, or denial, or bitterness, or numbing, we can turn to God! He knows what we are going through. We are not invisible. We are not forgotten. Some of the most God-honoring moments of your life will never feel heroic. They’ll feel quiet, unfair, and lonely—but God will fill them with grace. I’ve seen it time and time again.

About fifteen years ago, my mom worked for a company that laid off a few employees in her department. That meant for three years, she was doing multiple people’s jobs and working a great deal of approved overtime. A new HR leader came in, didn’t like the overtime my mom was getting, even though it was approved and necessary, and fired her. As my mom was telling me about this, as her son I was outraged, wondering how they could do that to such a hard-working and faithful employee. I wanted to hire a lawyer and sue them for wrongful termination. My mom agreed it was unjust and it might be legally actionable, but she said she was going to pray and trust God. As it turned out, because they fired her when they did, she got her pension based on her most recent three years of take-home pay, which included all that overtime. The company ended up paying her entire salary for the rest of her life.

There have been several occasions in my life where I’ve been treated unfairly by someone in authority, someone I should have been able to trust. I was hurt in meaningful ways. When that happens, everything in me wants to scream, “This isn’t fair! This isn’t right!” I want to

take matters into my own hands and fix them immediately as I think is best! But I remember this passage. I remember the example my mom set. And I remember: God sees, God knows, God cares, and God can advocate for me a million times better than I could ever advocate for myself. Even when it's hard, I can trust him! Even if a remedy doesn't come this side of heaven, I can trust him! God is a perfect judge, and soon or later, he will set everything right.

How to respond to injustice: (2) Follow Jesus

This is so powerful and practical. The Bible doesn't only give us instructions, guidelines, or suggestions; the Bible gives us the perfect example of Jesus.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 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. (1 Peter 2:21-23)

Jesus suffered injustice and his response shows us how we are to respond. No other religion has this theology of suffering. Christianity is built on the historical reality that God himself came into the world, not as a conquering king, not as a privileged ruler with power and wealth, but as a poor villager. When he was an infant, his family had to run for their lives from a wicked king who ordered Jesus' execution. The religious leaders of his day misused their authority and constantly maligned Jesus. Toward the end of his life, he was unjustly arrested and accused by false witnesses. Then he was brought before Pilate, the political leader of his day. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. Pilate's own wife had a dream about Jesus and told Pilate, "That man is innocent! You should have nothing to do with him." But he still ordered Jesus to be stripped, beaten, and then executed. God subjected himself to the highest injustice imaginable—and he absorbed it without retaliation. Jesus had the ability to turn the situation on its head. Jesus could speak a word and calm the storms or raise the dead. Jesus said he had tens of thousands of angels at his disposal. He could have fought for himself or had others come and fight on his behalf. But Peter says, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats."

By doing that, Peter says that Jesus gave us "an example" that we should "follow in his steps." This phrase translated "an example" in the Greek is *hupogrammos*, the ancient word for a traceable writing tool. I have a kindergartener and a first grader in my house. They know their letters, but daily we make them trace the letters to learn good penmanship, to write out letters in the appropriate way. In the same way a little child learns how to write by following an example, a pattern set before them, we learn how to respond to unjust suffering by following the example of Jesus. Unjust suffering is so hard! Responding to unjust suffering well is incomprehensibly challenging, so Jesus doesn't just say, "I'll be there for you; *trust me.*" He also says, "I'll show you the way; *follow me.*"

What did Jesus do that allowed him to respond to unjust suffering like he did? Jesus “entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (2:23). He did not retaliate; he didn’t fly off in anger; he didn’t throw a tantrum; he didn’t slander; he didn’t become embittered; he made no threats. He simply entrusted himself to God. He knew God was in control from the beginning, in the middle, and all the way to the end. Here are two foundational truths that help us entrust ourselves to God: (1) Nothing can happen to us that doesn’t pass through God’s sovereign hands. (2) Nothing can happen to us that God cannot redeem. If God could bring redemption from the cross and the tomb, he can bring redemption from anything. *If God could redeem the ultimate injustice, he can redeem any injustice.* Sometimes we see redemption on this side of heaven, sometimes on the other side, but nothing is wasted in God’s plan.

One of the ways God redeems injustice is through the witness of the gospel. I have a good friend who was a host for a college foreign exchange student from Asia. He spent time with this student once a week for almost a year. He obviously wanted to be a good friend to this student, but he also hoped for a chance to tell him about Jesus, because the student was from a country that is less than 1% Christian. My friend looked for opportunities and openness for an entire year, but found no real chance to talk about Jesus, until the very end of the exchange student’s time in the US. My friend asked the student if there was anything else he wanted to do before he went home. This college-aged Asian student said, “Yes.” My friend thought he was going to say something like, “I want to see Niagara Falls” or “I want to go to an NFL game.” But he said, “Yes, there is one more thing I want to do. I’d like to meet some Amish people.” This was not what my friend was expecting. He was confused and asked why. The student said, “We heard years ago that there was a shooting in America where a man killed six little girls in an Amish school house. Daughters were killed and families were torn apart, but after the shooting the Amish community publicly forgave the man who did it and even provided financial support to the murderers’ widow and children.” He said, “I don’t understand how anyone could do that. I want to meet them and ask them how they did it.” This man had the chance to learn about Jesus for the first time in his life, and he was eager to learn, because people who believed in Jesus followed the way of Jesus in unjust suffering.

How to respond to injustice: (3) Cling to Jesus

We can’t respond to injustice by ourselves or in our own strength; we must cling to Jesus. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’ For ‘you were like sheep going astray,’ but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:24-25). Here we learn the ultimate purpose of Jesus’ suffering. He didn’t suffer only so that God could know what suffering was like, though that was necessary for him to be a fully qualified high priest. Jesus didn’t suffer only to provide an example for us on how to suffer well, though we all needed that example. Jesus endured unjust suffering to save the unjust—and that means you and me. Everything he endured he endured because we were sinners, we

incurred a debt we could not pay! The Bible says the wages of sin is death. Cosmic justice requires a price to be paid for our sin. And God, not wanting us to suffer, came and paid our debt in full. That salvation is threefold.

- Salvation by substitution—“He bore our sins in his body on the tree” (2:24). Our sins were placed on him, so by his wounds, we are healed. John Stott said: “The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man.” That is what Jesus has done for us!
- Salvation by transformation—“We might die to sins and live for righteousness” (2:24). Jesus not only pays off our debt, but he also transfers ownership. We no longer belong to the kingdom of darkness. We are not under the power of sin but under the power of God! We were once in darkness but now we have been brought into the light, so the Bible says we live as children of the light. We take off sexual immorality, impurity, lust, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, and we put on the righteousness of Jesus as we walk in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love, joy, peace, faithfulness, and self-control.
- Salvation by association—“You have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (2:25). We are sheep. We don’t find salvation by overthrowing wolves. We don’t gain salvation by out-strategizing wolves. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Our only hope for salvation and deliverance comes by clinging to the shepherd, by returning to the one who will look over and protect our souls! Jesus is called the good shepherd. He protects us. He says he will not lose any sheep the father has entrusted to his care. He makes us lie down in green pastures; he guides us besides quiet water. He restores our soul. And no one can scratch us out of his hand. Bullets may fly. Courts may fail. People may betray. But the Shepherd never loses a sheep.

Unjust suffering is one of the hardest experiences we will ever go through in life. When we talk about unjust suffering, you likely have something very specific in your mind you went through in the past. For some of you, it’s something you are going through right now. God’s Word teaches us how to honor God in the hardest moments of life. God’s word shows us how to avoid the cliff on either side of the road. We are not called to stay in abusive situations that are within our control to influence. We are not called to ever become complacent in sin. We are also not called to let the darkness we endure seep into our hearts, fill us with bitterness and resentment and retaliation. Every once in a while, my kids will end up fighting with one another. Addie will do something one of her brothers doesn’t like. Hudson or Luke will get ready to get even. Then Addie braces herself and yells out, “Don’t repay evil for evil.” We’ve all had evil things happen to us—unfair, unjust things. It’s not child’s play. It’s real. It’s painful. It’s hard. But this passage promises that God will meet us in that place with his grace! This passage shows us how we can trust Jesus, follow Jesus, cling to Jesus, and in so doing, not only become more like him through suffering, but also allow the world to come to know him as well.