

3. Blameless Suffering

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[0 : 00] 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 11 to verse 25. This is our third study under the heading of The Imitation of Christ, and we have been looking at particular episodes in the New Testament where we are commanded to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And today Peter points suffering Christians to the example of Christ, beginning reading at chapter 2, verse 11. Amen.

Whether it be to the Emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood.

Fear God. Honor the Emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and Gentile, but also to the unjust.

[1 : 37] For this is a gracious thing when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure?

But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 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.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

We thank God for his word. Let's just begin by praying together. Our gracious God, our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for calling us here today.

[2 : 57] We thank you that because of your great mercy, you have caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for us.

We thank you, Father, that by your grace, we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for your own possession, that we might proclaim the excellencies of you who called us out of darkness into your marvelous light.

Lord, as you are holy, help us to be holy in all of our conducts, all of our conversation, in church, in the street, in the office, in our workplace.

As we gather to sing your praise, to read your living word, to wait on your spirit, Lord, help us to be holy, to put away all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.

Teach us to abstain from the passions of the flesh which war against our souls, and to keep our conduct honorable in this world. Father, we ask now that you will strengthen us for those occasions when we are spoken against or slandered, when we are mocked or suffer for the name of Christ.

[4 : 18] We pray that you will teach us to rejoice that the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. Help us to rejoice that we share in his sufferings, that we will rejoice when his glory is revealed.

We remember very especially, Lord, our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are suffering for the name of Christ. We pray very particularly for the 200 pastors from China who were prevented from attending the Congress in South Africa this week.

And pray, Lord, that they will be rejoicing that they share in his sufferings. So we ask you now to open our ears and to bend our wills to obey you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. A few months ago, a friend of mine wrote a very short article for a national newspaper.

And this article proved to be quite controversial. It generated a huge amount of electronic responses. I think there were 1,261 when I last looked.

[5 : 22] He received all kind of personal correspondence himself. Somebody wrote to him and said, did you realise you're mad? And I suggest you get some help.

Somebody, in fact, went one better and wrote to his employer and said, do you realise the kind of man you are employing? There's something obviously wrong with him. What was it my friend had said?

Well, all he'd done was, he'd written an article and it was to do with the government's policy of compulsory teaching of evolution in schools. And he'd suggested, well, why don't we teach the other side?

Why don't we teach the children that perhaps, maybe, there might be a creator. There might be an intelligent designer behind the universe. And that was it, wasn't it?

He'd hit the button and 1,261 hostile, mostly hostile, emails later, letters to him, letters to his boss. He'd spoken up on account of his faith and as a consequence he was being spoken against, slandered, maligned, mocked and ridiculed.

[6 : 25] Well, that is precisely what the Christians in Asia at the time of writing were experiencing. Peter writes to Christians who have come to know new life.

They have been born again to a living hope, chapter 1, verse 3. And it was a wonderful hope, wasn't it? Stored up for them in heaven and they'd been brought together into fellowship with one another, chapter 2, verse 9.

A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, that they might proclaim the excellencies of him who called them out of darkness and into his marvellous light.

They'd begun a new life and they were just overflowing with joy and proclaiming the marvels of God to those around them. But what they learned was when you begin to speak about God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, people begin to speak against you.

And at this time they weren't being physically persecuted, but it seems people were beginning to mutter against them. Chapter 2, verse 12, we're told they were being maligned as evildoers.

[7 : 31] Chapter 2, verse 15, he describes the ignorant talk of foolish men. Chapter 2, verse 16 again, they're being spoken against. And in chapter 4, verse 5, it turns out that people were just heaping abuse on them because they had turned away from their former way of life and were now seeking to be holy.

Chapter 4, verse 3, says, 4, verse 4, sorry, your friends are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you.

One translation has it, they heap abuse on you. People had changed. They changed what they believe about God. They changed their behavior. So they were living holy lives. And as a consequence, they were being spoken against, mocked, and slandered.

And that, of course, raises the question for them, well, how are we to respond to that? The natural human response, and I'm sure the way many of them wanted to respond, was to fight back, to speak out, to shout at those people who were speaking against them, perhaps even to take them outside and give them a talking to in the car park.

Who knows? But Peter writes to them and says that is not the Christian response. And the Christian response to verbal persecution ought to be one of blameless suffering.

[8 : 53] And he points them in this passage to the example of Christ in chapter 2, verse 21. So we want to look very particularly at that example and just see what Peter says to them and how that applies to our present situation.

I want to begin at chapter 2, verse 11, down to verse 17. Because in these two paragraphs, Peter spells out how Christians are to conduct themselves in a hostile world.

Verse 11 says, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct, your behavior among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Now, some time ago in America, Billy Graham was just beginning to do his preaching and one night he and his friends gathered in a small town called Modesto and they had dinner in a motel and they

were beginning to talk about all the criticisms people had about traveling evangelists and it was their experience that people rejected Christianity not because of its claims to truth or because they'd studied it but simply because they'd had a bad experience of a preacher and the things that seemed to go wrong were preachers were dishonest with money.

They would often pass a bucket and keep the money for themselves. They were not faithful to their wives they had illicit relationships with people of the opposite sex and they would often boast they would often inflate the numbers of converts to try and boost their own reputations.

[10 : 36] So at that point Billy Graham and his colleagues said, right, well we're going to do it differently we're going to be completely transparent and open we're going to publish all of our finances we're never going to be publicly seen with another woman on our own and we're not going to boast about the number of people who make a professional faith.

We'll just be very honest about it. They realized that they had to keep their conduct honorable so that people could not level charges against them. And that's what Peter is saying here in verse 12 keep your conduct honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds rather than living as they'd always lived engaged in the passions of the flesh the debauchery the drunkenness of first century Roman life they were to devote themselves to good deeds to love to service to care and concern of others.

And Peter says when that happens whenever someone brings a charge against you it will be abundantly obvious to everyone that it is a false allegation simply because you have a reputation for good deeds it will not stand up so to speak in court and more than that says Peter it might even lead to them glorifying God they may glorify God on the day of visitation and what he is saying by that is that your conduct is so honorable so attractive that it may itself lead people to ask the deeper questions of life and they may ask you for the reason for the hope which you have in you and they in turn might come to embrace Christ as their Lord for themselves.

He says the same thing across the page to the wives chapter 3 verse 1 Wives be subject to your own husbands so that even if some do not obey the word they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives.

Keep your conduct honorable why? So that when people accuse you as evildoers it will be obvious that they're making it up and secondly so that others might be won by your Christian lifestyle.

[12 : 48] And he goes on to expand this in verses 13 to verse 17 to describe the Christian's relationship to the state. Be subject to the Lord's sake to every institution whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good for this is the will of God that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Again he's saying the same thing he's saying make sure you live such a holy and a consistent life that you will have a reputation for doing good therefore whenever anyone brings a charge against you it will have nothing to stand on and in particular he says make sure you are submissive to the governing authorities and this was particularly important because when the Christians first started moving out into the Roman Empire people didn't quite know what to make of them and they accused them of all sorts of things sometimes they accused them of being atheists because they didn't believe in the Roman gods they accused them of being cannibals because they spoke of eating the blood eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ they accused them of funny relationships because they spoke of a love feast which was really a Sunday lunch after a service and the first Christians were very keen to write to the Emperor a great many of them wrote what are called apologies in which they said well you accuse us of all these things but actually we are the very best of citizens because we pray for the

Emperor we submit to his laws and we seek the welfare of the Empire one of them was actually quite naughty and he said there's so many Christians if we wanted we could raise a huge army and have a revolution but we don't because we pray for the Emperor and we seek the peace and welfare of the cities in which we live so Peter says you must be blameless in your conduct and you must be blameless in your relationship to the governing authorities it's not just the first century of course that's a problem in we saw it this week with these 200 pastors from China who have not been permitted to travel to South Africa for the Lausanne Congress in the interests of state security there's still that suspicion isn't there these men just want to go and they want to pray and sing and read the Bible for a few days with their brothers and sisters but that is considered a threat to state security and so Peter says keep your conduct honorable and submit to the authorities over you well

we need to remember that as well as

Christians in our day and age where the government is perhaps a little bit anxious sometimes about what Christians do we need to ensure we pay our taxes we drive according to the speed limit we don't defraud the benefits office that we join parent teacher associations that we vote in elections that we seek the peace and welfare of the cities in which we live so says Peter be blameless let your conduct be honorable that accusations will not stand but then in verse 18 he moves on to a slightly different topic and he makes the point that even if you live a completely blameless life it is almost certain that you will still suffer some kind of persecution for your faith and he writes to servants he writes to employees and tells them to be subject to their masters with all respect in verse 20 he says what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure what he's saying is if you're a bad employee it's no credit if you suffer if you're punished for that if these chaps turned up for work late if their shirts were always hanging out if they spent all day on Facebook or whatever it was they used in the Roman Empire and they got beaten for that Peter says that's no credit to you but verse 20 if when you do good and suffer for it you endure this is a gracious thing in the sight of God for to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving an example so that you might follow in his steps what Peter is saying is if you want to live a blameless holy life it is very probable you will still suffer and you will be punished in a way you do not deserve very probable in fact verse 21 for it is to this that you have been called because that was Christ's experience and in verse 22 he reminds us that Christ was blameless and in verse 23 he details his suffering 22 he committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth earlier in his letter

[17 : 43] Peter has told us that Jesus was a lamb without blemish or defect he was entirely pure entirely holy entirely innocent entirely righteous entirely perfect when he was called for trial false witnesses were brought out and they couldn't find any charges they couldn't make their testimony agree when he was brought before Pilate he said I find nothing wrong with this man no charge to bring against him and Pilate's wife had come that morning hadn't she and said I've had a terrible dream have nothing to do with that innocent man so Peter reminds his readers that Christ was entirely blameless no sin in his mouth no deceit but that he suffered verse 23 that he was reviled as he travelled around Israel and he showed love to the sinners and the tax collectors people said to him oh look a glutton and a drunkard a friend of sinners and tax collectors and as he used his wonderful divine power to heal the sick and to free people from satanic oppression they said it is by the power of Beelzebub that he drives out demons when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he was taken for trial and accusations levelled against him he did not open his mouth to defend himself when he suffered when he was beaten by the soldiers when he was crucified he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly how did

Christ deal with opposition undeserved suffering he did not revile he did not fight back he did not threaten but he committed himself to God who judges justly and we see that in the garden of Gethsemane he is with his disciples the great crowd comes and Peter chops off the servant's ear and he says put away your sword do you not realize that I could call twelve legions of my father's angels to help if I so wanted but he didn't because he had just prayed Lord let your will not my will be done he committed himself to him who judges justly but why did he do that well 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 11 tells us that it was prophesied wasn't it the spirit of God had inspired the prophets of the Old Testament to predict the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories he knew that he was to suffer but he knew that God would glorify him that he would raise him from the dead that he would vindicate him and that after his suffering he would enter into his glory for the joy set before him he endured the cross and so says Peter to his readers this is your example the example of Christ when you suffer in a way in which you do not deserve simply for living as a Christian for speaking as a Christian for obeying as a Christian when people speak against you when they revile you when they mock you perhaps even when they beat you you are not to revile back you are not to threaten back but you are to commit yourself to God knowing as he tells us in chapter 4 that if we share in Christ's sufferings now we will share in his glory when it is revealed when he was reviled he did not revile in return and Peter goes on verse 24 to 25 to explain a little bit more about the theology behind that he explains that as Jesus suffered he was in fact bearing our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls and I think what he's saying is this Christ suffered he suffered terribly but he was suffering for us he knew no sin he

committed no sin there was no deceit in his mouth but in verse 24 he was willing to bear our sins in his own body on the tree to be placed under the curse of God that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds we have been healed

Christ was taking our sin upon himself that we might be forgiven that we might live new life obeying God in perfect righteousness we were straying but he has called us to himself and returned us to the shepherd and overseer of our souls so says Peter Christ was willing to suffer this for you are you willing he says to his audience to suffer a little something for him to suffer some mocking perhaps suffer a few jokes made at your expense to suffer people speaking behind your back or perhaps even speaking to your face to suffer being passed over for a promotion or perhaps even being offered redundancy because of your Christian profession Christ bore our sins and his body on the tree are we willing to bear a little reproach for his sake well these were words Peter's readers needed to hear in Acts of course we're told that the way the

Christian faith it was described as the faith which is everywhere spoken against and as we look along church history we see that in every century the Christian faith is in fact spoken against in every day and age and especially it seems in our own so Peter's words are very contemporary are we willing to suffer a little bit for our Lord Jesus who suffered for us and are we willing to rejoice in that suffering knowing that we will rejoice when his glory is revealed let's pray together father father we do thank you for the example of Christ we thank you that for our sake he was willing to bear our sins upon the tree that we might be forgiven of all of our sins and that we might follow in his steps lord we pray that you will strengthen us give us backbone as we go back into the world that if we are mocked or reviled for his sake that we might rejoice and be glad that the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us help us to be bold lord help us to be gentle with those around us always being prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within us and we do ask lord that by your spirit you will help our conduct to be so honourable that others might be one to

[24 : 52] Christ sometimes perhaps without us even saying a word and so we thank you for this great hope we have unperishable undefined kept in heaven for us and we pray that you will fix our eyes upon that as we for a little while face trials of many kinds and so we thank you for this word together in Jesus name Amen