

Theme: The Shepherd suffered to lead you through suffering

When it comes to the question of suffering and dealing with it, it's good to hear the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 7:14, "*When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made one as well as the other.*" The truth that good and bad are given to us from God's gracious hand for our eternal good gives us pause when we consider how we react to suffering, especially unjust suffering. When suffering unjustly, we hold in high favor individuals who can't stand it and stand up for themselves, but what's often held in high esteem by us as exemplary, isn't always by God. What is favor from God to us is enduring unjust suffering because that's what Jesus did. So does that mean we don't fight to put an end to it?? Do we just let it go on?! Not to others, good heavens no! But for ourselves, the threshold is so much higher. And to top it all off, we're to rejoice during it! Why?? Because we know Christ suffered for our sins to save us from them and because we know that since Jesus lives, suffering produces in us perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. Hope doesn't disappoint because the Holy Spirit himself poured it into our hearts when he poured Christ into our hearts in Word and Water.

Here's what Peter, a guy who did suffer unjustly for Jesus, yes, but also because he did some super foolish and relatable stuff, has to say on the suffering unjustly and what Shepherd Jesus does for us during it. Peter highlights a cruel station of life which is a definition of injustice: slavery. He says, "*For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.*" So, what's favorable and commendable in God's eyes? Not the tough guy routine, but to endure evils you know don't deserve mindful of God. And to slaves Peter says this! For clarity, slavery is a great evil, but slavery in Rome was different than slavery in the U.S. Slavery here was racist, hateful, ignorant brutality. In Rome, it wasn't based on skin color, but war or economics. Still, because one person was owning another, the power disparity was abused. To endure this is the instruction. God sees this passive meekness favorably and reminds that the enslaved believer is the Lord's freed person who will wear a crown and stand in judgement with him.

What God doesn't find favorable is this: "Lord, I got busted for doing something sinful, but I endured my consequence like a champ. Pretty good, right??" Don't expect an extra bright

smile from God for enduring suffering you deserved. It's the unjust suffering God blesses. Why? Listen, *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."* God has called you to a life of unjust suffering. You're a Christian, aren't you? God's holy person? How'd that happen? The sinless Jesus shed blood and died. Unjust suffering defines God's kingdom, it's what Jesus did, it's the gospel, it's how you go to heaven. Sisters and brothers, God made you to suffer unjustly because he has made you new and pure in his Son's image. It's not optional and it is going to happen, but God will hold you extra dear during it and empower to follow your Savior's steps. So follow them striving to do what Jesus did is what the Father loves. That usually boils down to giving mercy to people, front loading grace and doing so honestly because the other person needs it, not because we expect a divine kickback. What's the reaction of people to that? Curiosity about the kingdom!

This is what it looked like for Jesus. Relying on the prophet Isaiah, Peter writes, *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*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.* Better than most, Peter knew just how innocent Jesus was and just how intensely he suffered because of our sins for our salvation. When he was verbally abused, mocked and sneered at on the cross, this injustice in addition to the others, did not rouse in Jesus even the slightest inkling to hit back harder and come out on top. Instead, knowing that he was the perfect offering to redeem all sinners with whom the Father is well-pleased, he entrusted himself to his Father who'd judge according to the standards of the kingdom he was establishing through suffering and be merciful to the sinners. God's justice isn't fair at all because the sinner is not held accountable. God's own Son was held accountable for our sins. This is our salvation and example.

I've not done a wonderful job of following Jesus' steps in this regard. Who has? Usually we think, "Well, yeah, Jesus didn't take revenge, he's Jesus! I'm not like that!" Christian, if this is part of your thinking, get rid of it. In the eyes of your Father, you are like Jesus because you believe in him. You are holy, you are absolutely delightful, and you are loved. Because of Easter and Pentecost, you have the power to not let the injustices you endure be the reason you revile someone. Jesus already made them right and he knows what you endure because he is your

endurance. This is your life and power: *“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.”* You were in an abusive relationship with sin. By destroying sin, Christ freed you from it. Sin did nothing but hurt you, it tried to kill you! Don’t get back together with it! Don’t resurrect something that needs to stay dead. When Jesus died, you died too, your sin stayed dead, but in baptism you have been raised to live a new life of being right with God in peace! The purpose of your life is to seek further righteousness wanting to know all about it and do it because you so love the Jesus who gave it to you that whatever he loves and does you love and do also! Drawing a blank on what Jesus loves? Read the Bible! Then do what it says in gratitude knowing you’re God’s saved person and that doing Jesus’ will is nothing but blessing for you. Pray for the Spirit to fill you with such love and gratitude that you live to righteousness by suffering unjustly. He answers that prayer!

Jesus leads us in this, which is good because we need all the help we can get! How good does it feel to know that he gives it? Cup overflowing table prepared before us in the presence of our enemies type care with the back drop of eternal life in the house of the LORD to get you through the dark valleys complete with their unjust sufferings. Your Good Shepherd Jesus is there with you protecting and guarding you, body and soul. Follow the path Jesus laid out for you, enduring suffering knowing that by it, God produces hope in you which stands on Jesus who laid down his life and took it up again so you would be his very own and live. Amen.