

In His Steps

MEG JENISTA

How do you learn to face suffering? That is a big question; bigger than any one of us can answer; bigger even than the whole host of books that have been written about the so-called problem of evil; but Peter has one simple, very helpful suggestion: Look at Jesus. Face suffering the way he did.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee, and I am with Meg Jenista and Dave Bast today, and we have been discussing 1 Peter, where the Apostle Peter counsels believers to face Christian suffering by looking to Jesus' example.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we come now to the second chapter in 1 Peter, around the middle of the chapter, about verse 11, where he starts to give a series of detailed instructions. They are sort of like rules for the household of the Church. I remember when our kids were little and we would go out; we would leave a list for the babysitter – the do's and don'ts. This is what you do, this is what you don't do; do this at this time. The New Testament epistles often have passages like that that really are quite similar. There is often a lot of overlap. So, here in Chapter 2, and into Chapter 3, Peter is going to throw out a whole bunch of commands and principles in different contexts. Here is how you live as a citizen of your country. Here is how you live in your family, husbands and wives. Here is some general stuff; and then, in the middle of it, he has counsel for slaves. Then it gets to be a little bit difficult and problematic.

MEG JENISTA

Before we get there, though, I think it is important to remember how 1 Peter begins; and it begins with a declaration of our citizenship in Christ and in the kingdom, and our allegiance and our identity primarily being bound up in Christ; and so, it is only from that foundation – it is only recognizing that you fall into this conversation about the rules. You are not expected to follow the rules of a family that you are not part of.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think that is an extremely important point, Meg; that over-arching is his reminder: Look, we are really the people of God, and we are exiles and strangers here. We are sojourners – we are resident aliens. Now, we do have a number of secondary relationships in our lives. We have relationships to our bosses, to our employers, our countries as citizens, to our family members – that is even secondary. You know, you talk about family values; a lot of Christians hype family values as the be all and the end all. No, our primary allegiance and our primary identity is as the people of God – the followers of Jesus Christ; and everything else comes under that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and Peter has already established in this letter that if you do that, and if you do that well, you are going to be weird; you are going to be considered odd, and the world is going to poke fun at you, at least; and it might do even worse to you that, on account of your being faithful. So, as he moves into this second chapter, now, he says things like this from 1 Peter 2:

¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that although they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. ¹⁵It is God's will that by doing good, you should silence

the ignorant talk of the foolish.

So, in other words, you do it right, you live like Jesus, you are going to be considered an oddball, but do not respond to that by giving it back to them. Do not give them actual fodder for their criticisms of you; just keep doing good; and who knows, they may run out of things to criticize you for if you do.

DAVE BAST

Maybe they will even feel embarrassed a little bit when they see how you react; but his expectation clearly is that Christians are going to be criticized – maybe even slandered; or perhaps we should put it this way: If you are criticized, make sure it is slander. Make sure it is not justifiable criticism because you have been doing something stupid.

Okay, here is the passage, then, that we come to that we need to discuss and try to make sense out of. It starts in 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. ¹⁹For it is commendable if you bear up under the pain of unjust suffering because you are conscious of God; ²⁰but 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.

So, what is he saying? If you are punished or you suffer or you are in some abusive situation, make sure you do not deserve it; but assuming you do not deserve it – that you have done nothing but good – just endure it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which, to put it mildly, is a very tough pill to swallow; and I think in this passage it is so important to remember, he is talking to the slaves here, not the masters, right? He is not saying: Masters, yeah, go ahead; beat up on your slaves because you have the power and they will endure it because they are Christians. No, no; he is just saying to slaves: Look, try to be like Jesus here in taking abuse. Just be sure that you do not respond to that in such a way that you are liable to further abuse, and then justifiably so.

DAVE BAST

Let's be honest. This passage is probably exhibit A in the case that is often made against Christianity. Look, you justify slavery. You Christians use the Bible to put down slaves and make them submissive – and it is true. I mean, historically Christians in the South in the United States used this as a key text in their argument that slavery was an institution approved by God, and slaves should be submissive, and we know what is best for them; and we are still trying to live that down as Christians.

MEG JENISTA

Well, I think it is important to jump on what Scott said earlier, that this letter is written to those who had no power; and they could not change their circumstances. There have been times in the fight for the abolition of slavery where there has been opportunity to change circumstances. The reality was the people who were enduring hardship and persecution could not change the circumstances of their persecution. So, in that sense, they were powerless; but what Peter was doing was giving them a power to respond in a way that identified themselves with Christ, and gave them a power within their powerlessness; and I think that that is significant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is also significant, I think, that Peter in this letter – here and elsewhere... In this particular passage he is talking to slaves – literal slaves, but he will make it clear: This applies to all believers. We are not supposed to hit back. We are not supposed to respond to violence by perpetrating more violence ourselves; and of course, again, this is tough for all of us because... I mean, just think of the terms that the world uses for Christians. We are called... it almost looks like we are being encouraged to be a doormat or a wimp or a punching bag, a whipping post; and the list goes on. These are things we do not want to be, which is why we are tempted when somebody talks harshly to us in society, we want to talk harshly right back; and Peter says: That is not the way to go. That is not Jesus. You need to imitate Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, I think this is not a stick to be picked up by somebody trying to make somebody else submit to them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That is a misuse of scripture of the first order. All of the submission texts in the New Testament, whether it is here, slaves to masters, or there are passages that talk about wives submitting to their husbands; or for that matter, in the Church Christians submitting to each other. Whenever one partner of that transaction tries to say: Look, you have to submit to me. That is a misuse of these scriptures because they are being addressed to the person who has to do the submitting; the person who maybe finds themselves in a situation where they do not have many options.

There were sixty million slaves in the First Century in the Roman Empire. The vast majority of most of the Christian churches consisted of slaves; and they had no option. They had no defense. What are you going to do? And that is what Peter is talking about. I think it is best for us to apply this to ourselves. What am I going to do if I find myself with very few options and I am being treated unfairly – I am being treated unjustly; whether it is some bureaucrat out there, or some employer or boss, or a government – whatever; what am I going to do?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and Peter's advice is: What are you going to do? Be like Jesus. We can talk more about what that means coming up.

Segment 2

MEG JENISTA

You are listening to *Groundwork*. I am Meg Jenista and I am here with Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee. When I was a college student, I read a book that was very popular in those circles at the time by Charles Sheldon called *In His Steps*, and it asked the question that later got popularized by bracelets: What would Jesus do? But before that was a popular question, it was a scriptural question, and it comes directly out of our text in 1 Peter.

DAVE BAST

Right; Peter has been counseling slaves who find themselves unjustly treated – kind of caught without any options – to submit to it – to endure it – not to retaliate – and his argument on which he bases that counsel is the example of Jesus. He says follow Jesus, and here is a famous passage:

2:21 To this you were called; (he writes; that is, to patiently endure wrong); because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. And then this beautiful description of what happened when Jesus went to the cross, and how he was insulted and he did not retaliate, and he suffered and did not threaten. Instead, Peter writes, ^{23b}He entrusted himself to the One who judges justly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; which is the example of Jesus, and it is the exact opposite of how the world usually works and how we are tempted to react when the world is tough on us. I mean, you can even see it sometimes in little children, right? One kid punches one kid in the arm and the other kid punches right back. It seems to be a natural reaction that we have.

You know, there was that movie some years ago called *The Untouchables* about Eliot Ness, who was cleaning up the Mafia in Chicago; and at one point, an ex-cop gives him some advice when he talks about how to deal with Al Capone and his heavies. He says: They hit one of yours, you put one of theirs in the hospital. They put one of yours in the hospital, you put one of theirs in the morgue. That is the Chicago way.

DAVE BAST

That is our way – that is the human way, isn't it? I mean, that is what I want to do.

MEG JENISTA

Right.

DAVE BAST

I do not think we have to look very far afield; just look into our own lives and hearts and minds. When somebody does something to you, my first reaction is to get mad. I mean, why do you think there is so much road rage? That is what we call it: Road rage. Somebody cuts me off – I want to go after them and do the same to them. Let them know. They are not going to get away with that. And that is how ego reacts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is exactly how history went all along, right? There is this Latin phrase called *ad totam seriem calamitatis*: The whole series of calamity that started with Adam and Eve and all of history is one person hitting and another person hitting back, and the cycles of violence repeat in a kind of bad momentum, until finally Jesus came and said: It stops with me. I am going to take it and I am going to absorb it, and I am not going to give it back; and somehow – you know, what C. S. Lewis called the deep magic of the universe – that is what brought salvation when Jesus finally snapped that cycle and did not hit back.

DAVE BAST

Right, Scott, and that is exactly what Peter points to as he goes on in verses 22 and 23 of 1 Peter Chapter 2. Jesus committed no sin. 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

So, there it is. Somebody has done you wrong; somebody is abusing you. How do you react? How do you respond? Do you get angry? Do you try to get even? Do you retaliate? No; you follow in the steps of Jesus, who had all of this done to him completely unjustly. He did not sin, Peter said. He is doing it for us and he accepted it and just sort of trusted God, and went to the cross.

MEG JENISTA

Okay; let me push back on that and ask this question, though. Didn't Christ suffer injustice so that we might be free? I wrestle with this passage of scripture, and I wrestle with it because some people naturally respond with ego and pride and anger when they have been wronged; but there are also plenty of people in our world who have been taught that that is not going to work, and they respond by taking the abuse; by continuing to make themselves nothing, and not in the way that Christ made himself nothing; but in a way that in no way resembles the Gospel truth that I believe and stake my life on; and it is just not that simple in its outworking. I have done work with domestic violence shelters and these are the passages of scripture that women will quote to me as justification for continuing – perpetuating a cycle of violence.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; which would be... Again, Peter is not writing to those with power; he is writing to people without power; and that would certainly be an abuse of this passage; either if someone themselves said: I am not going to get out of this abusive marriage because this is what I need to do for Jesus. Certainly it would be an abuse if somebody else said: No, you cannot leave your husband. Just take it, because look what Peter... No, no, no. We always have to read these verses in context, and the wider context of the whole New Testament is: We are also bringing in the kingdom. We are also new kingdom people; and in the kingdom of God, that kind of thing does not go on, and we do not just bat our eyes and say: Oh, well. No, we live into the kingdom.

We live into that living hope that we have; and that alone is reason to say: No, you do not stay in that situation. That is not what God wants either. So, it is always again a both and. If we make it too simple, then we probably will abuse the passage.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is pretty clear this is not simple. We have to avoid the temptation to just sort of quote this and say: Well, that settles it. God said it. I believe it. That settles it. So, let's talk a little bit more in just a bit about what this does not mean, and what it does mean, as we face unjust treatment.

Segment 3

Dave Bast:

Hi; you are listening to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast, today joined again by Meg Jenista and Scott Hoezee; and okay; we are just talking about submitting to unjust treatment and following the example of Christ and walking in his steps; and Meg, you brought up a very troubling experience that we have all faced, probably, as pastors, and that is counseling people who are maybe in some sort of an abusive situation – maybe it is a marriage or something – and we tell them, just stay there and put up with it. That does not sound right; and I do not think it is right. I think this is not telling us that we cannot defend ourselves. I mean, if somebody tells me that, that this is what they are experiencing, I say: Get out of there. Go see a lawyer. You do not just put up with that. That is not what Peter is trying to say, I don't think, is he?

SCOTT HOEZEE

No. Again, we said earlier, we also have to know that we do all of this as kingdom people. We are supposed to be reflecting the kingdom that has come and is coming; and in that kingdom, you do not put up with injustice. God doesn't. Jesus didn't in his own ministry. In some ways I think of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement as maybe being a really good embodiment of this paradox; this both/and. Martin Luther King, Jr., made very clear to his supporters: No violence. Do not respond to violence with violence. You do not do that. We will do sit-ins. Do not respond to violence with violence, and that is what they did; and yet, simultaneously to that, working on legislation, lobbying President Johnson, lobbying the Senate to pass civil rights laws to protect people. So, you do both. The kingdom means you do both. You act like Jesus; you do not return violence for violence; and you work for this bigger vision. It is both.

MEG JENISTA

And I think Martin Luther King, Jr., is a great example, but there is also precedent for that in Acts 16, with the story of Paul and Silas, who are flogged and unjustly imprisoned. They had recourse to the fact that they were Roman citizens; but at the start, they did not use their right to step away from their participation in suffering with Christ, and as a result, they were able to see God releasing them from prison, and to participate in the salvation of the jailor; but then after the fact, when the magistrates wanted to release them quietly, they said: No. At this point, we need to stand up and say we are Roman citizens in order to confront you with the fact that you have done something unjust, and that you have been in the wrong in the hopes that your behavior might change by this encounter with truth.

DAVE BAST

One of the clues, it seems to me, to how we actually put this into practice is Peter's repeated references in this chapter to shame; the putting to shame those who are doing the mistreatment. By your conduct, you sort of embarrass them. You call attention to it in hopes that maybe somehow they will stop and say: Wait a minute, I know better than this. I know this is wrong. I know what I have done is wrong. And there is where that civil rights movement comes in. So much of it took the course of public shame on the part of these professed Christians who were behaving so unjustly, and so, what did they do? They had a march. They bring the glare of publicity. They focused the camera's eye on what is happening; and in that way, they are working to bring justice, not only for themselves, but for others; because certainly Christians are never to be indifferent to injustice inflicted upon others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, there is a very famous picture from the civil rights movement of both black people and white people, young people, college age people. It was a segregated lunch counter, and they all just took up a seat on the barstools at this lunch counter; and refused to leave when they were told no, the black people cannot be here. The white people – the black people – they refused to leave. So the other people in the restaurant started pouring ketchup and mustard on them and emptying sugar packets on them and creamer packets on these people, and the picture that was published in newspapers all over shamed the world that this happened. These people were just sitting at a lunch counter, and look at them. They are getting doused with mustard. What kind of people do that? And there was that shame element. They are not doing anything wrong; and yet, when they endure abuse like that without retaliating; without squirting ketchup back, it had a much greater effect than if they had stood up and hit them. Then it just would have been a brawl and people would have said: Oh well, yes.

DAVE BAST

Right; or a riot, yes. Look at them, they are violent.

MEG JENISTA

I do not think, though, that this is... It is not a retaliation of shaming so that we can gain the upper hand...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

MEG JENISTA

Rather, I am reminded of what it says in the Heidelberg Catechism of what is it that we need to know in order to be saved? And the first answer is: How great my sin and misery is. And for those people who are in power, it can be difficult at times to be confronted by the fact that we are in the wrong. That our sin and our misery is that great; and so, when that shame is produced, it is always to the end that people might recognize their need for the Gospel, and might become part of this identity of God's chosen people, and might choose to align themselves as exiles, even though everything in this world would speak to their maintaining the upper hand.

DAVE BAST

Yes. You know, Peter also points out that Jesus entrusted himself to the One who will judge. You know, there is this future sense, too, that we are able, maybe, to let go a little bit of our desire for revenge because we know that God is in the business of righting all wrongs, and that is also what judgment means. Judgment does not just mean punishment – it does not just mean separating the sheep from the goats – it also means righting of all wrongs; and that someday this will be done on a cosmic level and all of the truth will come out, and things will be set right again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we are able to endure with that kind of confidence, again because we know Jesus did already do it; and that loops back to what we looked at in an earlier program from the first chapter of 1 Peter; we do have that living hope; and it endures. No matter what happens, it endures because Jesus did it and we can leave it up to him in the long run.

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and do not forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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