

This Exiled Life – Part 2

How to Suffer Well

1 Peter 2:21-25
Mark Vroegop

²¹ 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. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:21–25 (ESV)

“Keep trusting the One who keeps you trusting”

If you have been around College Park for the last few years, you have probably heard me use this mantra in a number of different sermons. It is a helpful statement for me, which has been a helpful rallying-cry for my soul when I’m feeling the weight and pressure of life.

It did not originate with me. In 2004, and as we were grieving the loss of our daughter, that statement was how John Piper concluded a condolence email that he wrote to us after a family member sent him an email about what we were walking through.

That statement was meaningful because it distills in eight words the mindset that believers are to have as they walk through suffering. It is a hopeful reminder that 1) I’m called to trust the Lord and 2) He will help me in doing so. The statement is filled with theological depth and simplicity, and I don’t know how many times I’ve recited it to myself, to others, or put it in sermons.

I must have used it often enough because one of our Elders made a sign for their home and put it on their wall in their living room. Providentially they hung it up just a few days before the premature birth of their daughter, and that is when they sent me the picture.

The Unique Suffering of Exiles

Now this mantra applies to all suffering in general, but it especially applies to the kind of suffering that we find in 1 Peter 2:21-25. The kind of hardship that Peter is addressing in our text today relates to situations where Christian exiles are specifically targeted for doing what is right, or the kind of suffering related to false accusations. This kind of suffering is particularly painful and challenging.

While I don’t want to diminish the pain of the loss of family member, walking through an illness, or some other valley, this particular text applies the mantra “keep trusting the One who keeps you

trusting” to situations where you are being verbally assaulted, treated unfairly, or punished for living out the gospel. That is a unique platform for the gospel, but it is very, very challenging.

Last week we discussed the issues of authority and fairness, and I suggested to you that our struggles with those two categories are germane to our humanity. Everyone struggles, at some level, with someone telling them what to do and when things do not seem fair. For Christian exiles, that reality – the innate struggle with authority and fairness – creates a powerful opportunity to live out the implications of the gospel.

If Jesus is King, if our citizenship is in heaven, if we are a holy nation and a people for God’s own possession, then we can use our spiritual freedom, not as a cloak of rebellion and anarchy, but rather as an opportunity to live in way that is remarkably different than the world. Christian exiles are called to live in a way that their normative posture is to be willingly obedient.

When that kind of spirit, tone, and lifestyle are embraced – in the staff break room, in the board room, on social media, in your annual review, or how you watch the news – it creates a very unique platform for the gospel. Thinking and living this way is not only the will of God, but it makes the power of Jesus evident and clear.

How should you think when being an exile creates a platform that invites suffering? How do you persevere through situations where people are saying false and hurtful things about you because you are a follower of Jesus? What are the truths that you should rehearse in your soul as you deal with the pain of suffering as an exile? How do you live with joy in the midst of that season?

Verses 21-25 help us by giving two principles for how to suffer well.

By Trusting God Continually (vv. 21-23)

The first principle in this text as it relates to suffering is to call to trust God continually, and it is found specifically in verse 23 with the words “...but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” It refers to the way in which Jesus continually trusted the Father through His suffering and how His actions become a model for exiles. That’s where this section is headed. But let me show you how we get there.

First, this pericope begins with a connection to the previous verses. “For to this you have been called” is how verse 21 starts, and it is referring to 1:20b.

²⁰ 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. 1 Peter 2:20 (ESV)

The vision here is for the kind suffering that happens when an exile is doing what is right, honorable, and fitting with their commitment to the gospel, and yet they are subject to some kind of suffering because of that. Just to remind you, we are not talking about consequences for your sinful behavior, sloppy work, or negative attitude.

I smiled this week when I saw this satire article in the Babylonian Bee.¹ The title of the article was “*Man Unsure If He’s Persecuted Because He’s A Christian Or Because He’s A Massive Jerk.*”

After getting into yet another argument on Facebook Monday morning, local believer Hank Richert found himself blocked by several of his friends and family members, but the 32-year-old Christian was still unable to figure out if this new wave of persecution was because of his firm faith in Jesus, or because of the fact that he’s a “total jerkwad,” sources confirmed... This isn’t the first time the totally obnoxious follower of Jesus has found himself in this situation. According to Richert, he’s constantly suffering persecution and exclusion in the workplace, among his family members, and even at church—and he’s never entirely certain if it’s his reprehensible personality or his love for Jesus is the cause. “I’m always getting asked to leave restaurants and grocery stores for loudly arguing with people. I guess it’s just my cross to bear in a culture that’s diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus,” he said.

We are talking about the kind of suffering that is due to one’s righteousness, and it is very telling that this text actually says that exiles are called to this. The word “called” is used in 1 Peter 1:15 and 2:9 to describe the essence of the Christian life. Our “calling” is that which is central.

Therefore, this means that suffering for righteousness sake is actually part of what it means to be a Christian exile – it is part of the calling. This is not the only place where the Bible talks like this. Let me give you two examples:²

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. John 15:18–20 (ESV)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12)

That’s really important to consider. These texts remind us that suffering for doing what is good should not be surprising to us, so that when it happens we should know that this is part of what it means to follow Jesus. Unfortunately, some people come to Jesus, and they don’t count the cost. But this also means that if you never have any suffering for your faith, it might be that you are not enough of an exile. If you never share your faith, never take a stand for what is right, never offer a biblical perspective on an issue, and just blend into the culture, you will not experience this kind of suffering that seems central to what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

So for some of you, the challenge this morning may not necessarily be to go on the hunt for suffering, but to ask yourself if your Christianity is too hidden, and maybe too convenient. We don’t need “jerkwad” Christians, but we also don’t need incognito Christians. Suffering is a part of our calling.

¹ <http://babylonbee.com/news/man-unsure-hes-persecuted-hes-christian-hes-massive-jerk/>

² See also John 16:33, Acts 14:22, 1 Thess 3:3.

This also means that we better listen closely today to what this text is teaching, but every follower of Jesus, at some level, is going to face this issue.

The text moves on and talks about the example of Christ in suffering. The second half of verse 21 makes it clear that Jesus' suffering for us was not only for the purpose of securing forgiveness, but it was also designed to be a model.

Now if you are not yet a follower of Jesus I want you to listen carefully to what follows here. You see, the message of the Bible is that Jesus provided a sacrifice for our sins so that we could be forgiven. Jesus' death on the cross makes it possible for sinful people to be cleansed of their sins. You become a Christian and you are saved from your sins by trusting in what Jesus did for your salvation. But you also need to know that the way in which He did it – the way that He suffered – becomes a model for how Christians are to live. In this way, Jesus becomes both our Savior and our example.

The word "example" has a powerful meaning. The Greek word is *hupogrammon*, which means puts two words together – *hupo* (under) and *grammon* (to write). The idea is that there is something written underneath that you might trace. In the same way that children learn the alphabet by tracing the pattern, so believers are to learn how to suffer by tracing the life of Jesus. Peter intends for these exiles, and us, to look at the life of Jesus, see what He did, and pattern our lives after His.

So how did Jesus suffer? The text tells us very clearly.

First, He suffered unjustly and perfectly. Verse 22 tells us that He "committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth." This statement is nearly a direct quotation of Isaiah 53:9, a text that Peter will draw upon at least four other times through verse 25. Peter is connecting the sufferings of Christ to the historical pattern of the suffering Messiah in the Old Testament. And he is identifying that Jesus' suffering fit the pattern of righteous suffering completely. No one suffered for righteousness more than Jesus. He is the ultimate pattern.

The writer of Hebrews says the same thing as a strategy for battling weariness and faintheartedness:

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:1–3 (ESV)

Suffering exiles need to consider Jesus because His suffering is the ultimate example.

Second, we see that Jesus did not do what is a normal reaction to suffering: retaliation. When He was insulted or verbally abused, He did not respond in kind.³ He didn't trade verbal insult for verbal insult. Oh how tempting this is! And how hard it is to sit by quietly when some treats you unfairly or inaccurately! But there's more. Jesus also didn't threaten when He was poorly treated. He would have

³ See Isaiah 53:7

had every right to intimidate them by virtue of His power. He could have said, "You hit me now, but when I come back to life I'm going to find you." But that's not who Jesus is.

And that leads us to the final aspect of Jesus suffering and the main point of these verses. He suffered by entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. This is the key to how Jesus suffered righteously, and it is the key, according to Peter, for every Christian exile. This is the pattern that we are to trace. This is the example that we are to follow. These are the steps that we are to walk in.

The word "entrust" means to hand something over or to give it to someone else. It means total release. It is the same word used for Jesus' betrayal in Mark 14:10, and in Paul's handing someone over to Satan due to their disobedience in 1 Cor. 5:5. Other commentators suggest "entrust" means to lay it at the feet of your heavenly Father. What's more, the tense of the verb indicates that it is something that has to be done regularly or continually.

Here's how it might sound: *"Father, I'm hurting so badly right now. I'm mad and everything within me wants to respond. You know the words running through my head right now. And you know the plots that are running through the dark parts of my heart. However, you know the whole story. You see everyone's hearts – even mine. And I believe that one day you will make everything right. I'm not God, but you are – so I'm going to lay what they said and what they did at your feet. I'm going to let you take care of my name and reputation. Since I'm free in Jesus what ultimately matters to me is what you think of me. So I'm giving all of this mess – what they said, what they did, and all of what I want to do right now – to you. It's yours. I'm going to pray for those who have hurt me, and I'm going to love them anyway. I'm trusting that trusting you is better than trusting in my revenge."*

Now there are some of you who need to pray that kind of prayer right now. When we are finished today you may need to come forward and have one of our Elders pray this prayer over you. There are others who are going to have to remember this prayer and this moment in a few days or a few weeks.

There are some of you who act as though you'd rather be God than trust God by virtue of the way that you retaliate verbally or in your actions to get even. And in that moment you are not only forgetting who God really is, you are also forgetting about the example of your Savior. Christian, suffering is a part of your calling. Unfair treatment because of Christ is a badge of honor, not something to be shunned. How do you embrace that? By trusting God continually, just like Jesus did.

By Knowing Jesus Personally (vv. 24-25)

The second sustaining grace in the midst of suffering to help Christian exiles in suffering is the personal nature of their relationship with Jesus. In other words, exiles don't suffer for a cause, for a philosophy, or some ideals. They suffer for a person, and it is this person who is everything to them.

Verses 24-25 rehearse the close connection between the person of Jesus, the gospel, and His role in the life of the believer even now. How do you make it through suffering for Jesus? By knowing Jesus personally in and through the gospel.

Notice that Peter, for emphasis, says “he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” Peter is going to personalize our suffering, and he starts into that theme by reminding us that Jesus personally went the distance for our sins. He personally paid for our sins on the cross.

Oh how helpful it is to set our sufferings in this context! It is a beautiful reminder that it was the personal suffering of Jesus that paved the way for our sins to be forgiven, and for the possibility of a right relationship with God to be established. How valuable is that to you? How costly was that sacrifice? How much did it transform you?

Whenever suffering comes, the question “Is this worth it?” surfaces. Endurance through suffering happens as we see the worthiness of Christ. This was the secret of Jesus’ endurance according to the writer of Hebrews: “... *who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising its shame*” (Heb 12:2b). A follower of Jesus endures suffering because of the glory of something greater:

¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18 (ESV)*

This is part of the value of corporate worship – it assaults the values in the world and reminds believers what is truly valuable. Theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen says, “*Every time the Church assembles to [worship], to ‘proclaim the death of Christ’ (1 Cor. 11: 26), it proclaims also the end of the world and the failure of the world. It contradicts the world’s claim to provide men with a valid justification for their existence, it renounces the world: it affirms . . . that it is only on the other side of death to this world that life can assume its meaning: on the other side of death to this world, that is, in resurrection with Christ.*”⁴

Our Bible reading, our memorization, our Small Group gatherings, and our singing together all serve to make war on the things that would tell us “It isn’t worth it!”, “Keep your mouth shut”, “Just go along with everyone else”, “Don’t mention his name!” To suffer well, you must rehearse the gospel often.

What’s more, the purpose of the gospel was not only to save people from their sins, it was also designed to help us live immediately in righteousness. Jesus personally died so that “*we might die to sin and live to righteousness... by his wounds you have been healed*” (v 24). In other words, the fuel for your endurance is the transformation that came through the gospel.

I was having a conversation with a pastor some time ago about some of the painful and unfair things that were happening in his church. He started to hear rumors and some confirmations about what people were saying, and it was so painful. And after hearing about it and telling him how sorry I was, I reminded him that this kind of moment with all its pain and unfairness is exactly why God called him to be a pastor. I reminded him that all of his training, all of his experiences, and all of God’s grace were designed to help him die right now. This is the moment you dreamed about, my brother!

This is the beautiful paradox of suffering – it reminds you how valuable and important Jesus really is. And it reminds you that the gospel is so powerful that it can cause you to not retaliate when everyone

⁴ Hicks, Zac M. *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* (p. 82). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

else would. Jesus is worth not getting even. The gospel is powerful enough to make you hold your tongue!

The final personal appeal is intimate and authoritative. Using language again that is taken from Isaiah 53:6, Peter reminds Christian exiles where they would be without Jesus and who He is. Every Christian exile was a “straying sheep.” But Jesus rescued each one. Every believer has a story of what Jesus did to pull us out of our wandering. Peter brings that image back in to remind us, again, why suffering for His name is worth it.

But then he uses two terms that are a beautiful blend of personal care and positional authority. He calls Jesus “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” The idea implicit in these two words is that Jesus is our leader and our guardian – “*He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul*” (Psalm 23:2-3). Because Jesus is our shepherd we can follow Him, and because He is our overseer we can trust Him.

Jesus is personally involved in leading them through moments that are difficult and hard.

¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Matthew 10:18–20 (ESV)

And when life is scary and you wonder what will happen, even then you have the promise of Jesus’ ultimate protection.

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38–39 (ESV)

So when – not if! – you find yourself in a situation when you are called to name the name of Jesus, or take a stand for the sake of the gospel, or do what is right when everyone else is doing what is wrong, remember that you are doing this for Jesus. Not a cause. Not a religion. Not just a belief system. A person.

And not just any person. You are a Christian exile because of everything that Jesus means to you.

When that gets embedded into your soul, you are able to let go of your desire for revenge, your natural tendency to retaliate, and the knee-jerk reaction of threatening. Instead, you can entrust yourself to Him who judges justly while looking to Jesus as you keep doing what is right.

By God’s grace you can suffer well by trusting the One who keeps you trusting.

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