October 7/8, 2017

Called for This Purpose

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 2:18-25

Pastor Bryan Clark

I want to begin this morning by sharing something pretty profound. I'm going to put this in the category of "Newsflash". You're probably going to want to write this down. Here it is: Sometimes life isn't fair! It's kind of in the newsflash, "Hey, Newsflash, sometimes life isn't fair!" I think we all understand there are a variety of reasons why we might feel that way, but sometimes life isn't fair because the people around us treat us unfairly. Well, that's the question we want to wrestle with this morning. How do we as *the people of God* respond when people treat us unfairly?

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 2. If you are visiting with us, we are working our way through 1 Peter; we find ourselves in chapter 2. Peter has told us in verse 9 that we are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession*. Why? *So that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*. So how do we do that? How do we proclaim this life-changing message? We learned last week that God's will for each of us as Christians is that we *abstain from fleshly lusts* and that we do right. We *do good* in order to silence the critics who want to slander us. Then he begins in chapter 2 to go through different, specific kinds of arenas or areas where we are to *do good.* Last week we looked at what it means to do good as *a citizen in submission to the governing authorities*. This week we pick it up in verse 18 and we talk about what does it mean to do good *as slaves*? He says:

> **Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect...** (*NASB, 1 Peter 2:18a)

The word **servants** there is the Greek word that refers to a household servant. So there is another word that deals with maybe a little more intense level of slavery, but servant isn't completely accurate. This is a slave; it's just a household slave. But it does open all kinds of discussion—things we need to talk about to make sense of this passage. Over the years I've heard some people say that the Bible is kind of an archaic book, and it promotes slavery. That would be a completely ignorant statement, both on the basis of not understanding what the Bible says, and not understanding 1st century Roman culture. One of the things that's critically important is to understand the dramatic differences between slavery as we experienced it here in America and slavery in the 1st century Roman empire.

So first of all, to understand what happened here in America, there is no question that it was sinful, it was offensive, and it totally grieved the heart of God, for it was contrary to everything we believe as people made *in the image of God*, all of us equal before God in every way. There may have been those in that movement that used the Bible to defend their position, but people have misrepresented the truth of Scripture for two thousand years. That doesn't mean that's what the Bible actually says. It's also helpful to remind ourselves that the movement to abolish slavery, both in the UK and here in America, was driven by people who understood the truths of Scripture and were passionate about acting on what God had to say in the Bible. It's equally true of the Civil Rights Movement in the 60's; it was generated as the outflow of the truth of Scripture.

In a 1st century Roman culture, there were many differences to what we would think of as slavery today. So for starters, it had nothing to do with race; it wasn't race-based at all. Some of the slaves were prisoners of war, which was common in the ancient world. So that would have been some of these Roman slaves, but by this time in the Roman Empire it was more likely to be those who were simply born into slavery because their mothers particularly were in slavery. There were even those in the Roman Empire that willingly sold themselves into slavery, for some people could actually live better, and prosper more by selling themselves into slavery than life apart from that. About one-third of the Roman Empire was made up of slaves. Slaves in the Roman Empire could be educated; many of them were highly educated—educated more than their masters. They were doctors; they were teachers; they were business men and women. Slaves could own property; they could have families; they could raise children. They were paid a reasonable wage and it was entirely possible, out of that wage, to save up enough money to buy their own redemption. Usually by about age thirty, slaves had purchased their own redemption and were considered to be free. Most of the slaves generally were treated decently, but slaves were considered to be the property of the master. Therefore there was always potential for abuse and that did happen. In the 1st century Roman Empire you have to remember these are Christians, most of them Jewish, that have fled Palestine because of the persecution. They have fled into Asia Minor, so they are *strangers* and *aliens*. There is a level of persecution that is about to intensify dramatically under Nero, so to imagine that these Christian slaves could somehow bring about dramatic change in the Roman Empire is really rather ridiculous.

It would be like thinking of a Christian in North Korea today. What is the chance of a Christian or a group of Christians in North Korea protesting the government and living to tell about it? It's that same kind of dynamic. The Bible isn't promoting slavery, but Peter understands that many of these believers are slaves in a very dangerous environment. There is really nothing they can do to change it right now, so they need to be very thoughtful about how they live out their lives for their sake and for the sake of the other believers around them. Again, if you think about a group of Christians in North Korea protesting the government, it's likely that many would be slaughtered because of it. So it isn't just your life, but the lives of many that are at risk. So that's kind of the flavor behind Peter's instruction for how they are to live as slaves in the Roman Empire when he says: **Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect.**

That word **respect** is the Greek word from which we get our word *phobia*; it's a word that means *fear*. It carries the idea of being genuinely afraid of their masters, in the sense that if they displease or make them angry, the potential of what they could do to them is unimaginable. These masters could pretty much do as they please with no recourse. So what he's saying to these slaves is, "You need to be very thoughtful and aware of the potential damage they can do if you upset them."

There was a bit of a problem. As these people were coming to faith in Christ and understanding their freedom in Christ, there was a potential for rebellion. "I am now free; I don't have to do that anymore." As a matter of fact, a lot of the *slander* that Peter referred to last week had to do with the idea that Christians were rebellious against the government. Go all the way back to Jerusalem, and as Christians exploded after the resurrection of Christ—tens of thousands—the religious establishment that ran the show were now accusing them of being rebellious, of not submitting to authority. There was this understanding that the Christian's ultimate allegiance was to God and not to Caesar. Therefore they were rebellious against Rome, and there was this undercurrent of Christians being troublemakers and being rebellious, which was behind a lot of these comments. That's why Peter said to them, "Yes, it is true you are free in Christ, but you are not free to sin; you

are not free to rebel. You are free to be a bondslave to Christ." Therefore, last week: "Be a good citizen." This week: "Here's how to conduct yourselves as slaves:"

> **Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable...**perverse, crooked, unfair is what that word means. Verse 19:
>
> **For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.**

When it says **this finds favor,** that word **favor** is the Greek word *charis,* typically translated *grace*. Basically the idea is this: that you as a Christian—we as *the people of God*—are part of the grace story. This amazing story where we once were not a people of God, and were under condemnation —declared to be enemies of God—but now we are *the people of God*. We are God's own possession; we are God's own children—all on the basis of the grace and mercy of God. So the grace story is our story. Therefore the idea is: if you are to respond rightly, not only to those that are kind and gentle—everyone responds rightly to them—but how you respond to those that treat you unfairly, reflects the reality of the grace story in our own lives. We are *conscious* is what Peter says, if you are conscious of what God did for you, then he is asking you to offer the same to those that treat you unfairly. Verse 20:

> **For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.**

So basically what he said is: it's not just when people are kind and gentle—everybody responds well to that—and if you are receiving some level of punishment because you have disobeyed, you're not going to impress anyone even if you *endured patiently* because people are going to say you had it coming; it's your own fault. What provides the opportunity for a powerful witness is when we respond rightly when we are treated unfairly. The natural instinct is to react back. So when we as *the people of God* respond with patience, we respond with grace and mercy to being treated unfairly, there's something different about that. There's something distinct; there's something that would cause the critics to back up and wonder what is going on and what makes this person different?

So let's be clear. We're talking about 1st century slaves with no real recourse when they are being treated unfairly. So Peter is instructing them how to respond to rightly represent Christ. We would not understand that to mean that if someone in 21st century America is in some sort of an abusive relationship, it somehow pleases God to just put up with it. That would be a terrible misunderstanding of the text. You were not a 1st century slave; you do have choices; you do have a recourse. God would not be pleased to see people just endure abusive relationships.

So with that understating, we move it to just relationships that are difficult, that are unfair—ways you are treated at work, ways you're treated in your family, ways you're treated at school, ways you're treated with a coach—that kind of just unfair treatment. Maybe at work there's a lot of politics and you don't play that particular game but you are treated unfairly as a result of it. Whatever it may be, it's that kind of an application for us today, which probably describes all of us in many environments. So how do you respond?

We as *the people of God* understand at one time we were sinful and offensive to God, nothing more than sinners and misfits and losers, and yet rather than experiencing the condemnation and rejection we deserve—which would be justice—we have received grace and mercy. We have experienced God's forgiveness. He has made us His people. Our story is the grace story. If that's true, conscious of that's how God has treated us, then what God is saying is, "I am asking you as a witness to the life-changing power of Jesus in you, to respond to those who treat you unfairly as I have responded to you, in order to proclaim the excellencies of *Him who has taken us from darkness into His marvelous light."*

Now stop and think about how dramatically different this is than the culture in which we live. Because we as a culture have decided to be our own gods, we are moving down this pathway of secularism—that everything in life is about me. It's about my little world; it's about what I think is right and wrong. Therefore we are selfish and self-centered to the core, and because of that we are keenly aware of everything that seems unfair to us. Every week we are constantly viewing ourselves as victims; we are offended by everything. Now one of the things that is interesting about this is that we, as a culture, claim that there are no moral absolutes. We claim to be relativists—that there are no moral absolutes, that morality is relative, and yet every week we're offended by the way people treat us. Now stop and think about this: If we were true relativists, the best we could do is say, "I don't like the way you're treating me," but I can't say that it's right or wrong because there is no such thing as right and wrong. But we don't say that. We say, "I have a moral standard, and you have violated it, and by the way, you are wrong! You are so wrong you owe me an apology," which is, in essence, saying, "My moral standard applies to you and you have violated it; therefore, you owe me an apology." It's just a reminder that, at the end of the day, nobody actually lives that way. Nobody fully buys into this relativism; we all think there's a sense of right and wrong, and when somebody violates that, we don't hesitate to say so. I've been convinced for years that relativism is nothing more than an excuse to do as we please, but nobody actually lives that way.

So, in a culture that is so selfish, that is so self-centered, that is constantly offended by everything, think how dramatic it would be if there was a group of people, when treated unfairly, who respond with grace and mercy. We endure with an unusual patience that is so *other than* the rest of the culture, that it causes people to kind of back up and wonder, "Who *are* these people and what makes them respond so differently? How serious is this? Well verse 21:

For you have been called for this purpose... (Vs. 21a)

This isn't like a suggestion; this is not something to just sit around and chat about. The language is very strong; this is actually your *calling*. How do we declare the excellencies of the One who has transferred us from darkness into light? It's not just with words; it's not by leaving tracts on the table; it has to be something in our behavior that reflects the grace story—that something radical has happened within us that makes us different from the rest of the culture. It is a reminder that when we trusted Jesus as Savior, we did not board the love boat; we did not board a cruise ship. This is not your best life now. The most common metaphors in the New Testament for the Christian are military metaphors. There is a sense that you have a sense of calling, that you are on a mission, that there's a responsibility being *the people of God*.

Of all people on planet earth, the people who should talk about fairness the least should be us as *the people of God*. The last thing we want is fairness. Justice meant we were condemned; justice meant we are subject to God's judgment for our sin. We don't want fairness! Fairness is hopelessness! We wanted grace and mercy—that we might be *the people of God*! But if that is our story, if we are part

of the grace story, part of our calling necessary to proclaim the excellencies of the One who has saved us is to treat others the way that God has treated us—giving them just a taste, just a little sampling, a little hint of the grace and mercy that is possible, that God offers through the message of the gospel. So, he says:

> **For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...** (Vs. 21)

This is what Christ did for you and he asks you to do the same for Him. Then he quotes a number of passages from Isaiah the prophet:

> **...WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled** (which means verbally abused), **He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously.** (Vs. 22-23)

Now remember, this is Peter writing these words. This is Peter who was an eye witness to the horrors of the cross. This is Peter who was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when the mob came to arrest Jesus. It was Peter who drew his sword and was ready to fight. He cut off Malchus' ear when Jesus stops him and Jesus looks him in the eye and Jesus says, "Peter, we are not going to do that here. Don't you know if I wanted to, I could call down the armies of heaven?" But Jesus was choosing to be obedient to the will of the Father, in order to provide salvation for us. Now think about that. Jesus said those words directly into the eyes of Peter. Peter is now reflecting that back—that this is what Jesus did for us willingly, choosing to respond this way in order that we might know salvation. Verse 24:

> **And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross...** (Vs. 24a)

That phrase **bore our sins** is a technical term taken from the temple. It was used to describe the priest carrying the sacrifice to the altar. What Peter is saying is Jesus was, in essence, carrying Himself as the sacrifice that would be placed on the altar, which is the cross, in order to shed His blood to pay for your sin and mine.

> **And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.** (Vs. 24)

This is what we celebrate this morning in baptism. It is, in essence, a reenactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. When we choose to be baptized, we are identifying with the fact that we are dead to sin. Through Christ we died to the bondage of sin, to the penalty of sin, to the condemnation of sin. We died to sin; we are buried and resurrected in the life of Christ, resurrected to righteousness. This is what Jesus has done for us. Verse 25:

> **For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.**

We were all *lost sheep* is what Isaiah says. But now, on the basis of the grace and mercy of God, we **have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls**, to understand that the grace story is our story! We were sinners, deserving of condemnation. We were lost with no hope. What we deserved, what would be fair is condemnation and rejection. Instead, we received the grace and

mercy of God, that we might experience salvation based on the fact that Jesus paid for our sins... Himself...on the cross, that we might experience new life in Christ. If Jesus did that for us, if that is our story, then what He's asking is that you see that as a pattern to follow in how you respond to people that treat you unfairly in this world.

How do we *declare the excellencies of Him who has called us from darkness into light?* It is with words, but it's not with words alone. Words alone will never do it. It's got to be more than just leaving a tract at the table. There has to be something in our behavior that is so radically *other than* the world in which we live, it causes people to back up and wonder, "Who are these people, and what is it that has made them so radically different?" When we respond to those who treat us unfairly with grace and mercy, it gives people just a taste, just a foreshadowing of what God offers them if they are willing to accept His gift of salvation. This is not a suggestion; this is not something to go home and chat about. It is *for this purpose that we have been called as the people of God*.

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that You are a God of grace and mercy. That is our story and we have no hope apart from Your grace and mercy. But, God, if that is true, it comes with responsibility, that we as Your people might proclaim that message to a dark and hurting world. And, Lord, we do that with our words and we do that with our behavior. May we take our calling seriously, that the people around us might come to know Jesus and His salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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1 Peter 2:18-25

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Opening Discussion

1. What comes to mind for you when you hear the words, "life isn't always fair?"

2. Give some examples of ways you've been treated unfairly over the years? How did you respond to that treatment? Do you think your responses to unfair treatment attracted others to the Gospel? Why or why not?

3. Why does it seem like everyone is offended by everything these days? What does it reveal about our focus as a culture?

Bible Study

1. Do a quick review of what Peter identified as "God's will" for us in I Peter 2:11-17.

2. Read I Peter 2:18-20. The theme of submission continues for Christian slaves in the Roman Empire. What do we know about first century slavery? How did it differ from slavery in America? Is Peter advocating for slavery or simply instructing Christian slaves how to live as Christians in a difficult and dangerous circumstance?

3. The word "favor" in the text is the Greek word "charis" which is the word for grace. What is "grace living" according to this text? While there are obvious differences, there are many correlations between first century slavery and modern day employment. How might this discussion apply to our everyday life at our jobs?

4. In 2:9 we are commanded to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. How does unfair treatment provide the opportunity to do that?

5. Read I Peter 2:21-25. What is the basis by which God calls us to respond as described in the preceding paragraph? What did Jesus do for us and how is that a pattern for us to follow?

6. In what ways is the selfish, self-centered, "what about my rights" attitude in our culture contrary to the pattern of Christ? What circumstances are likely to provide the most strategic opportunities to shine the light of Jesus into the darkness?

Application

1. For what purpose have you been called? What does that mean for you?

2. What are one or two areas of your life where you can practice your calling in the next few months?

3. What are some practical things you can do to respond rightly when you are treated unfairly?

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