

Feb 9th 2014: 1 Pet Series #9: 2:13-25 "Godly Endurance That Counts".

When we read the Bible and especially when we read a letter like 1 Peter, we always need to remember that it was written to real people who were dealing with real life issues. And for us to truly understand the message that a passage contains we must begin by finding out what those issues were.

As far as 1 Peter is concerned, this is not hard to do. We have already seen that they were Christian refugees who had been forced away from their homeland into other lands where they had settled but were not overtly welcome.

It is also obvious that they were facing increasing persecution and were being unjustly treated.

We also sense by the fact that Peter, unlike Paul, talks to slaves and not to masters, that the churches were comprised mainly of slaves, and by the way he predominantly addresses the wives we can also surmise that many in the church were women who were married to unbelievers.

Now Peter knew exactly what those persecuted Christians to whom he wrote were enduring. He himself was far from a stranger to persecution and hardship and he meets their situation head on.

He doesn't sugar coat anything. He doesn't tell them that because they are Christians nothing bad will happen to them. Instead he gives them specific advice on how to act in their situation—as v12 says: ***"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us."***

This doesn't mean that Peter wasn't concerned about their suffering. Of course he was, but there was nothing he could do about their terrible hardships. They were part of life for them. What he had to do was to help them to know how they could best endure their suffering as Christians in a way that would count towards God's glory.

Now Peter understood that their major suffering came from three definite areas. **Government oppression**, from which they all suffered. **Being a**

slave, which was the position of many. **Having a non-believing husband** who made life difficult, which applied to just some of them.

Government oppression was the daily norm for them because they were refugees and because they were known to be Christians. The persecution against Christians had begun in the reign of the Emperor Claudius and now under the Emperor Nero it was heading towards an unbearable level. (Hunger games movie)

From v13 onwards Peter lists those involved in this oppression from the Emperor down to the local governors, and for those believers every title was a person they had heard of or personally suffered at the hands of. They would have thought of Governor John who had laughed at them when they complained about his soldiers looting their houses. Or Governor Thomas who had first doubled their taxes and then had them beaten when they appealed, threatening to sell their children into slavery.

And now Peter tells them that they must submit to those leaders and respect them whether they deserve it or not. That God has allowed these misguided men this authority. And in fact he says in **v15 "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men"**.

In fact the CEV puts it this way: **¹⁵ God wants you to silence stupid and ignorant people by doing right.**

That's the task in life God has for you and you won't accomplish it without suffering.

Now I can picture some people listening to Peter's words and getting quite upset and saying: But these officials are corrupt and anti-Jesus. God is in charge of our lives and He has given us the freedom to follow Him first and others afterwards. Surely we can rise up against them. Then they heard Peter's next words in v16. **"Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God"**.

In a similar way we think about some of the decisions of our Society today that are against what we believe like Abortion on Demand.....Martin Luther King Junior.

The second area of being a slave is not something most of us can empathize with. Yet slavery still happens in our world and if we were

brought face to face with it our hearts would be broken. And if those slaves were brothers and sisters in Christ we would feel utterly helpless and bereft for them.

And some of these Christians were slaves. And some of them had harsh masters. And some of them were unjustly beaten.

And to all those slaves Peter says, "**Submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh**". That would have been hard to hear, but Peter had stronger words to say in v21 **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.**

LIVING: For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

MESSAGE: This is the kind of life you've been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step.

The third area related to the Christian wives in their midst who had non-Christian husbands. Their attendance at a Christian gathering would have been seen by some of those husbands as an act of rebellion. As women they had little authority and their Christian faith would at times have resulted in harsh and unfair treatment from their husbands.

These wives yearned for their husbands to become believers and may well at times have caused issues in their families by speaking out about the Lord they followed.

To them Peter said, be submissive to your husbands. This is what God wants from you. It won't be easy, but God can use your submissive behavior to win your husband to Himself. And aim to give to your husband that inner beauty that doesn't spring from a bitter and divisive heart but from a heart in love with Jesus. The fruit of such a relationship with the Lord will shine forth and, says Peter in v4, this will be the thing about you that God will value most.

Now those three issues were massive as far as the churches to whom Peter wrote were concerned, but they are not the main things we struggle with as Christians at CBC today. But the principal behind them remains the same.

Our problem with authorities may be with an unpleasant boss, an overbearing neighbor, or someone in our life who just loves to get under our skin and demean us because we are Christians.

We may not be slaves but there are those in our family who have hurt us so much. They are harsh and domineering or they have wronged us in a callous and cruel way.

Or maybe our marriage has become loveless and demanding and we cry out to the Lord for happiness and an end to what has become an endless battle.

Suffering comes in so many costumes, and there are things we cannot share, and too often we feel that others won't understand anyhow. So we cry out to God and the suffering remains with God encouraging us to grow within our suffering. To be an example of His power at work within us during such times. And it is so hard to accept, and like the Psalmist we cry out, "Lord how long?"

And the Lord's response to us is the same as it was to those suffering Christians in Peter's day. Only as long as is needed and I will be with you to carry you, and to use this time to promote my glory through you and to extend my Kingdom.

And one day soon when all pain and suffering is no more I will honour you in the presence of my angels as my chosen and beautiful one.

(During Jay's sickness)