

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect." With these words, Peter is continuing to show us what it means to live as a Christian in this world, especially as a Christian who has to endure suffering. So he's applying everything that has come before. If you remember from last week, we were talking about what that meant in terms of government: what that looked like, what it meant for a Christian to submit to worldly authority. And now Peter is continuing to talk about that today when he talks about servants and masters.

Now we might hear that, "servants and masters," and be really sorely tempted to tune out. Because frankly, servants can also mean slaves. "Slaves, be subject to your masters." And we say, "Well, I'm not a slave. I've never been a slave. I don't know anybody who is a slave. We don't have slaves in our society. So why then," we might ask, "would we want to listen to what Peter has to say? Maybe he's just telling this to his own time, and it was true then, but maybe it doesn't really apply now." But Christians, whenever God tells us something in the Scriptures, he's not just writing these things for one place and one time that was true then but isn't true now. When he tells us these things, he wants us to learn in every time and in every place, so that this situation--Christian slaves in the Roman Empire--has something to teach us today about what it means to be a Christian, especially what it means to be a Christian in terms of our work. So we don't want to tune out. We want to listen to what God has to say, and listen to what Peter is saying here in this passage.

But to really understand that, I think, we first have to understand a little bit about what Roman slavery looked like. Because whenever we think about slavery, I'm pretty sure we have very specific ideas in mind. And we always think that that's true in every time and every place, that slavery has always been the same. But that's not really true. Roman slaves were a lot like us in some ways. Different in important ways, but a lot like us in the way that they worked, in the way that they lived. Because a Roman slave was usually pretty well taken care of. He was given a place to live. He was given food to eat. He was given clothing to wear. And his master would see to it that he had all of these things so that he could thrive. And Roman slaves were sometimes also very highly educated. They could read and write, some of them, in a time when very few people could. And so slaves were people who took care of money. Slaves were people who taught kids. Slaves were people who did some of the important jobs in society. And that made them very similar to us and our 9-to-5 kind of work in a lot of important ways.

But slavery is still slavery. Where we have choice and freedom in the kind of work that we want to do, a slave, even in Roman times, had no freedom. He had no choice. And so part of the problem that he was dealing with, that Peter is talking about here, is the fact that the situations that he was in, he had no control over them. He couldn't do anything about it. It was a situation completely out of his hands. What was he supposed to do in that situation? What does it mean to be a Christian when you don't have control over the things that happen to you? And then another way that slaves were different from us is a slave in Roman society had no legal rights whatsoever. He couldn't go to the government when something was going wrong. He couldn't complain about his master to the authorities. He was simply bound to his master. People looked down on them. People considered them to be the very bottom of society, the kind of people you just don't pay attention to. We might consider them the little people of Roman society, the overlooked people, the powerless ones, the ones who simply can do nothing. So when we think about slaves in that situation, what are they supposed to do as Christians?

Peter says, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect." Now, that's still a hard word for us to hear, just as hard as it was last week, I think. But what Peter is telling us is this, just like we were talking about last week. God establishes an order in society. He is the one who has put us where we are within that order. If there are people who are over us in terms of authority, God has put them there. If there are people who are under us, people who we are the boss of, God has put them there as well. And so the call for us to submit to worldly authority is a call to submit to the order of God. God has put us here for a good reason. We may not understand why. We may not understand why we are here and not here or over here. But God has put us here for a reason. And for us to submit to authority, then, is a call to listen to God.

Now that's always really easy to do when you have a good boss, isn't it? It's really easy to get along with a good boss or a good employer. But what do you do when you don't have a good one? What do you do when you have someone who is unjust towards you, someone who is working you too hard, or someone who's not giving you the things you deserve? In our society, you might say, "We'll just quit. We'll just go on and we'll do something else. It's not that big a deal." But Roman slaves didn't have that luxury. They couldn't just quit. So what do you do with a bad master? What do you do when your work is unjust? What do you do when it's hard to be a Christian in the jobs that you do?

God calls on us to endure. Because endurance while doing the right thing, Christians, is a gracious thing in the eyes of God. You'll notice that Peter says here that we are not praised for doing the wrong thing. If our master sins against us, if our boss sins against us, and we just grumble back and sin against him because we're going to get what's coming to us, nobody's going to praise that. Not even God. But if we do the right thing and we endure as Christians and suffer because of it while we are doing the right thing, that is a gracious thing in the sight of God. It's not an easy thing, but it is a gracious thing. Because when we do it mindful of God, then we are doing a blessed thing in his sight.

Now, you'll notice I say "mindful of God." This is not just a call to grin and bear it, like we'll just have to deal with it, because that's just life. That's not what Peter is saying here. Peter is saying that when you suffer as a Christian, and you submit to that injustice for the sake of God, because you are listening to what he has to say, we are putting ourselves into his hands. To call on him as Father and as the one who can do something about it. That's why we started out with that Psalm tonight, Psalm 41. It's one of the cursing Psalms out of the book of Psalms. We don't talk about those psalms very often, because people misunderstand them. But the cursing Psalms always call on God to do things, because they trust him. You, O Lord, are the one who can take care of my problems. You, O Lord, are the one who can give me justice. And I look to you, O Lord, because you are the one who will take care of me, no matter what.

That's what the Psalm is saying, and that's what Peter is saying, too. We know that for two reasons here in this reading. The first one is that he's talking to slaves at all. People didn't talk about slaves in Roman society. They didn't look at them. They didn't talk about them. They just kind of ignored them, because they were the outcasts. They were the lower part of society. So if you wanted to talk to a slave, you talked to his master first. But Peter doesn't do that. He talks to the slaves, because God cares about the little people. God cares about the powerless ones of

society. God cares about us so much, in fact, that he sent his Son. And that's the other reason why we know that God cares about us. Jesus came and suffered on our behalf, suffered the very worst injustice of all: to die on the cross for no good reason. Everything that happened to him was completely illegal by every law known to man and God. Yet Jesus did not complain. Jesus did not talk back. Jesus did not fight back, but entrusted himself to his Father, because he knew that no matter what he suffered on this earth, his Father would take care of him and would give him the justice that he could not find. And that's exactly what happened when the Father raised him from the dead and set him at his right hand. Jesus was vindicated. Jesus had the victory over his enemies. And if God did that for his Son, Christians, he will also do it for you.

So the things that you suffer in this life, the injustices that we have to put up with in our work and in the economic realm of our life, entrust yourselves to God. God will not fail you. God will take care of you. And God will deliver you in the day of trial.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.