

A Grace Thing – 1 Peter 2:18-21
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If we had time this morning, we could spend some serious time sharing difficult-boss stories, because I'm pretty sure we all have at least one, and probably multiple stories we could share. Well, get one of your difficult bosses in mind this morning. Now, how did you handle yourself in that challenging situation? Were you passive aggressive...nice to their face, but aggressively looking for ways to secretly make their life miserable or, better yet, get them fired? Did you bad talk them with your coworkers and encourage each other to find ways of getting revenge. Did you "lose it" on your boss, and quit in a huff on a particularly bad day? Or did you patiently endure mistreatment, continue to respect and submit to your boss, refuse to bad talk them, and continue doing a good job until the Lord opened another door for you?

My very first boss was a challenging one: my own Dad! He wasn't really a terrible boss, but he was my Dad, and that complicated things. The first big job he gave me was a summer job, and it involved spraying the weeds and cutting out willow bushes from the 10-acre field surrounding my Dad's radio station tower. It always reminded me of a Dr. Seuss book where a little boy was responsible for mowing a huge field that was SO big, that by the time he finished mowing it, it was time to mow it again. How depressing! That's what my first summer job, starting at age 9, felt like. And I don't think there was ever a summer when I completely finished that job.

Finally, one summer in high school I had had it. One of my cousins was visiting from Alabama and I really just wanted to hang out all summer and fish and have adventures with him. Working in the field and at my Dad's radio station was going to be very distracting from all the fun I wanted to have with my cousin. This working thing was overrated! Plus my Dad and I were not getting along at all in family life, and then having him be my boss at work as well was really irritating. I can definitely say I was not being respectful to him, and was secretly plotting some way to quit in a huff. So, when we had a disagreement one day, I lost it on

him and said: “That’s it! I quit! I’m done working for you!” Surprisingly, he let me do it. Although he made it clear that I couldn’t quit my home responsibilities like mowing the lawn, hauling wood, etc.

Well, I had a really fun summer with cousin, but soon found that the money to do some of our adventures was in short supply. And after my cousin left, I had to make up with my Dad and sheepishly ask for my radio station job back. I think that was my last summer in the field. But one thing is certain: I most definitely did not glorify God in this situation. In fact, I didn’t even consider that factor. Instead, I just proceeded based on what I wanted and I justified lots of disrespect and hurtful words in order to get what I wanted and try to punish my Dad out of anger toward him.

Did I have some legitimate reasons for being frustrated with my Dad? Of course. He was not the perfect boss. In other words, he was human and therefore flawed, as every boss is. Some are easier to work for than others, and occasionally we have a wonderful boss that we just love to pieces. But in reality, none of our bosses are going to be perfect, and many of them are going to be downright difficult to work for. Some could even be cruel and vindictive. So how will we handle ourselves? Will we consider what glorifies God and accomplishes his purposes, or will we just consider what’s good for us, what we want, and what feeds our hurt feelings and our sense of justice?

Well, as you might imagine, Peter has something from the Lord to share with us on this subject. And he’s going to do it in the context of a servant-master relationship. So, let’s read the full passage to begin, and then we’ll bite off the first half today and finish the rest next week. If you’re not already there, turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:18-25. Peter says:

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 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. 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.

May the Lord bless the reading of his word.

By way of context, just remember that Peter is in the process of showing us how to glorify God and live the new life we've been given in many different real-life situations. He's fleshing out what this looks like in our day-to-day lives, and this section deals with servant-master, or employee-boss situations.

THE COMMAND GIVEN

So let's begin with verse 18. I've called this first section in your sermon notes: *The Command Given*. In verse 18, Peter lays out for us the central command of this passage. He says: ***Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.*** So, first, notice that Peter's talking here specifically to Christians who are servants or slaves. In Peter's context, in the first century A.D., a slave or a servant was a "*person totally responsible to and dependent upon another person*. Slavery was [actually quite] prevalent and widely accepted [at the time Peter wrote this letter]. The [economies] of Egypt, Greece, and Rome [were] based on slave labor" (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*).

And Listen to these amazing statistics about slavery: "In the first Christian century, one out of three persons in Italy and one out of five elsewhere was a slave...[Those are some big numbers!] Legally, a slave had no rights; but...most were treated humanely and were better off than many free persons...[How did people end up in slavery? Well,] a person could become a slave as a result of capture in war, default on a debt, inability to support and 'voluntarily' selling oneself, being sold as a child by destitute parents, birth to slave parents, conviction of a crime, or kidnapping and piracy... [And interestingly,] industrious

slaves could make and save money and purchase their own freedom” (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

So, as we think about servants and slaves as they existed when Peter wrote this letter, we realize that in most of the world today we don't have the exact equivalent. However, there are still clear applications in these verses to employee/boss situations for us, or other relationships where someone is in charge of us. Though as employees today we can leave at will and move on to another job when bosses become difficult or unjust, still the principles for how servants are to relate to their masters have application to how we as employees are to relate to our bosses while we are under their authority. And the principle from verse 18 is this: We are to **be subject**...In other words, we are to submit, to bring ourselves under, to obey...ALL those in authority over us. And we are to do this with ALL respect.

As in our last message, we again see these ALL words that are so troubling. They don't seem to provide us a way out, an exception, or a justification for in certain situations setting this aside. Again, the only biblical exception we have is when a boss asks us to do things that are clearly sinful and would involve disobedience to God. In those cases, we always obey God rather than men, no matter the consequences. In all other situations, God's word teaches us over and over again to continue subjecting ourselves with all respect to our bosses...even to the cruel, unjust and unreasonable ones!

Are you kidding me? That's not the American way! What about my rights? My feelings? What about the injustice? Surely, I'm justified in bad talking, retaliating, and trying to set things right when my boss is cruel, unjust and unreasonable? Is that so? Is the Christ-follower justified in these situations? Worldly common sense would certainly say: “Yes! Absolutely!” But does God's word agree?

1 Peter 2:18

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

Colossians 3:22–25

22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Luke 6:35-36

35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Be like God. Be like the One you're following: Jesus Christ. Love your enemies. Do good to them. Be kind even to the cruel, unjust and unreasonable bosses, and continue to do a good job. Be subject to them with all respect at all times. In other words, set yourself aside for the glory of God, so that they too can see Jesus and be set free from the death-trap they're caught in. In so doing, you'll be serving Christ and learning to be like him in your daily life. Your reward in heaven will be great. And you'll see God use you to powerfully draw others into his kingdom.

THE GRACE PROVIDED

Well, Peter has good news for us as we seek to live this challenging command he's given us...this command that's so opposite from the way the rest of the world is operating. Let's look at verses 19 to 20. I've labeled this section in your notes: *The Grace Provided*. Peter continues: ***For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 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.***

Twice in these 2 verses, Peter uses the Greek word, *charis*, translated, "gracious." It's the Greek word for *grace*: God's undeserved favor and provision poured out on people in desperate need. You might re-state these verses something like this:

This is a grace thing, when you do this...when you continue in respectful submission to those in authority over you, even when they're unjust and unreasonable. What's a grace thing? It's something that arises out of your own experience of God's undeserved favor, and it's something that's bountifully supported by God's amazing grace...his abundant provision for our deepest needs. In other words, our experience of God's amazing grace in our own lives, moves us to offer that same amazing grace to other people. And as we do, God's continuing grace, God's provision, God's empowerment, flows to us, making us able to live this way for his glory and for his purposes. This is *a grace thing*. That's the only explanation for how we can become people who live this way, no matter what it costs us in an earthly sense.

Secondly, notice in verse 19 what causes us to live this way, acting radically different than those around us. We do this because we are *mindful of God*. We've come to the true knowledge of him and how his world works and what's important to him. We've embraced the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, knowing his Holy Spirit now dwells inside us. That should keep us sober-minded! We're following God's Son, Jesus, and seeking to be like him in the way we live our lives. So instead of just letting our earthly wants and desires and passions continue to guide us, we are now looking to God and his purposes and his glory in every situation. We're walking around with him everywhere we go, drawing on his strength and seeking to follow his will instead of our own. Our mind is full of God, and that's why we're willing to live so differently from those around us.

And what is it that God and his amazing grace will motivate us and empower us to do that's so different from worldly common sense? It's there at the end of verse 19, and restated in verse 20: God and his amazing grace will lead us and empower us *to endure sorrow while suffering unjustly...to suffer for doing good*. The key is there in verse 20: that the unjust suffering is the direct result of *doing what's good and right no matter the cost*. The suffering being spoken of here is not the result of wrongdoing on our part or the result of our stupidity or mistakes. Peter's not talking here of just suffering for suffering's sake or of deliberately trying to make our life miserable so we can get points with God. Instead, the suffering he's speaking of here is suffering that's not deserved and that's the direct result of choosing God's ways always, rather than just following our selfish interests and desires along with the rest of the world.

And guess what? If you live as God intends you to live...if you truly follow Jesus to boldly speak the truth he spoke and do the things he did and choose God's ways always, *you will suffer in this world*. Don't believe me? Then believe Paul in 2 Timothy 3:12:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...

If you follow Jesus to truly take up God's purposes and boldly open your mouth as he did, you will experience opposition, persecution and injustice. You can count on it.

But do you know what else Paul shares in that 2 Timothy passage? He says that God and his amazing grace will see you through it. Immediately preceding that verse I just shared with you, Paul spoke of the persecutions he endured and then said: ***yet through them all the Lord rescued me***. There's that ALL word again. In every persecution, Paul experienced *the grace thing*. He experienced the Lord abundantly providing and giving him everything he needed to patiently endure the injustice and persecution that resulted from the godly, Spirit-led life he was living. *The patient endurance of unjust suffering as a result of doing good relentlessly* is the fruit of God's amazing grace and a means by which lost and trapped and hopeless people come to experience it for themselves and see the living God at work today. This is a gracious thing in God's sight!

THE CALLING REVEALED

And this brings us to our final section in our sermon notes today: *The Calling Revealed*. Let's look at verse 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***. Oh my! This is *our calling*. God has called us in Christ to follow Christ into suffering for the good of other people and the glory of God. Your calling and my calling in this world that's not our home is to endure suffering for doing good relentlessly. Have you recognized this as your calling in life and have you taken it up? ***To this you have been called***. That sounds serious! Yet I wonder if we take this calling seriously and if this what we expect to happen in life as we follow Christ?

Why are we called to this? Because Someone did the same for us...Someone set himself aside for our good and for our salvation... Someone endured suffering and injustice and persecution *so that* we could see God in action and experience his love and receive his amazing, life-giving grace...Someone took the punishment we deserved and bore the wrath that was due to us for our sin, so that he could rescue us. And now that Someone teaches us to follow him and do the same thing for the good of other people who don't deserve it...just like we don't deserve what he did and continues to do for us.

And, of course, that Someone is Jesus Christ. And if you're saved by him today, you are called *to follow him*...to be his disciple...*to be with him to learn from him how to like him* in your life today (Dallas Willard). And, as Peter notes in this passage, he has left us a clear example to follow: ***Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*** The Greek word translated, "example," here is an interesting one. It literally means "an under-writing...from [another Greek word that means] to write under, to trace letters for copying by scholars" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). The picture we get here is looking closely at the life and words and actions of Christ and duplicating them in the context of our own lives today. Imitating, copying, seeking to be just like Christ in the way we live right now...taking up his priorities, his practices, his mission, in the context of our own day-to-day life right now...including at our jobs under the authority of imperfect and oftentimes self-centered and unreasonable human bosses.

At our jobs we ask: "How can I walk in the steps and words and priorities of Christ as I relate to my boss and my co-workers? How would Christ conduct himself at my job if he were me? How would he respond to what just happened to me? What would his top priorities be at this job I have right now?" *Getting a promotion? Getting recognition for a job well done? Getting a raise? Getting treated well?* **None of these!** Instead, his top priority at your job right now would be to glorify his Father and accomplish his purposes, no matter the cost. And he would be willing to endure suffering and injustice and persecution without limit to do just that. Why? Because that's who God is. His love and grace is overflowing and relentless.

Jesus knows and lives in the perfect, steadfast, life-giving love of the Holy Trinity...our Three-in-One God...and he's invited us to live there as well and bring

many others along with us. He wants all people to be freed, forgiven, and restored to right relationship with their loving Creator, and he's willing suffer on their behalf to get them there...to show them the living God and his amazing grace. This is the example we have to follow. And God's grace is bountifully available to enable us to do just that, as we set aside ourselves daily for the glory of God. Next week we'll see more details on this example Jesus left us to follow.

CONCLUSION

But as we wrap up today, let's just reflect on a couple of takeaways from this powerful passage. First of all, the message is clear, isn't it? We're called to bring ourselves under and submit to all those in authority over us, always treating them with respect, even when they are self-centered, cruel, unreasonable or unjust. By the grace of God, with our eyes on his purposes, we refuse to give up doing good, being respectful and speaking life-giving words. Though they don't deserve it, neither do we...so we treat them the way we are treated by God...with grace...with undeserved favor. Why? Because so much more important than earthly glory, earthly benefits, earthly recognition, is that spiritually dead, lost, trapped, hopeless people would come to eternal life as we have. And God will bring this about as they see him powerfully at work within us...as they see us, by God's amazing grace, living our lives the way Christ lived his; radically different from anyone else they've seen in life.

Fortunately, in America today, we aren't literal slaves in our jobs. We have the freedom to leave and find another job when bosses are cruel, unreasonable, or unjust. However, we are still called to respect and submit to those bosses and treat them with God's grace at all times. And many times the Lord may call us to stick it out and endure difficult jobs and bosses, praying that they will see God at work in us and come to know him themselves. We shouldn't be people who lash out in anger and quit instantly in a huff, like I did with my Dad. What if instead, we took a deep breath, prayed for God's strength and guidance, and continued behaving respectfully, doing a good job and refusing to bad talk the boss. And if, after diligent prayer and seeking of the Lord's will, he indicates it's time to move on to a new job, we always did it honorably and with appropriate notice to the employer... keeping the glory of God at the forefront.

One more application thought as we close today. When's the last time you experienced suffering for doing what is good and right? For speaking the truth in love? For living a godly life? For sharing the knowledge of God. **The biblical truth is this: if we're fully living and opening our mouths the way God intends us to do, we will be persecuted and mocked and treated unjustly.** God lead us to live as true disciples of Christ, doing good relentlessly and opening our mouths with your truth to the point where we begin to experience some backlash, some mockery, some earthly cost! Where we begin to look and act radically different from those who don't know you, and they see you in action whether they like it or not!

Doing good and suffering for it...***to this you have been called***, [my friends], ***because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*** Are you ready to follow? Are you ready to answer the call? I can assure you, God's grace will abundantly provide as you do, because this is a *grace thing*, fully supported and empowered by God himself!