

"Here's Help for Your Troubled Relationships!"
Weekend of October 9, 2005
Sermon on 1 Peter 2:18-25
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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God the Father once said about Jesus: *See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.* Amen.

This October in worship, we're taking a special look at a few passages from the letters of the Apostle Peter. So, God's Word for our consideration today is First Peter, chapter two, verses eighteen through twenty-five:

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: What Are Your Troubled Relationships?

Dear fellow Christians—saved by Christ Jesus, and servants of Christ Jesus:

Personally, what are your biggest problems in life right now?

I'm sure that among all of us there would be a multitude of answers to that question. I know that some of you are chronically ill or face life-threatening ailments. I know that some of you either lack work or have a mountain of bills, and you just don't know how you're going to support yourselves or your families.

But I'm guessing that: for most of us, there's a different answer to that question. Personally, what are your biggest problems in life right now? Chances are that they have to do with some interpersonal relationships of yours.

Maybe it's that you kind of hate even to go to work: because a coworker is gossiping about you, or your boss keeps misjudging you. Maybe you've got a neighbor: whom you've wronged in no way, but who still purposely tries to make your life miserable. Sometimes it even happens that it's a brother or sister in Christ at church with whom you cannot get along.

Or maybe it's closer to home. Are you estranged from your brother or sister? Is there a wall up between you and your parents, or you and your children? Is it your own husband or wife that gives your life the most grief?

Sometimes such problems even make you consider your options.

There are certain relationships you are free to get out of. If your trouble is at work or in the neighborhood, you might be able to move to a different job or a different part of the community. But even that is not easily done. And who knows whether you might not walk into something worse?

And some relationships you cannot get out of. So, more often than not, the better option is to work at our troubled relationships. And we do! We ought to! But sometimes our best efforts are simply not enough. No matter how hard you work at your relationships to your family members, no matter how hard you work at your marriage, sometimes the going is still tough. After all, other people have a sinful nature, and you have a sinful nature, and so: your world, at least in this world, will never be perfect.

What I'm saying is that sometimes your only option in a troubled relationship is simply to endure it.

Theme: Here's Help for Your Troubled Relationships!

And God's Word to us today gives you help toward such endurance. It says, in effect: **HERE'S HELP FOR YOUR TROUBLED RELATIONSHIPS!** The first part of God's Word to us today assures you: (1) **GOD SUPPORTS YOUR ENDURANCE.** The second part of God's Word to us today reminds you: (2) **CHRIST'S ENDURANCE ACTUALLY ACCOMPLISHED YOUR SALVATION.**

Part One: God Commends Your Endurance

The Apostle Peter was writing this first epistle of his to the Christians in Asia Minor; these days that's the country of Turkey. Peter was probably writing from Rome, some nine hundred miles to the west. And he was probably writing in the late sixties AD, which would have been nearly forty years after our Savior died for us and rose.

Peter's whole first epistle offers his initial readers hope while suffering for Christ. This part of his letter offers hope in various specific sufferings. So, it's natural that we read – and this is God's Word to us today – *Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.* And I need to stop there and explain.

The *slaves* here are literally household slaves. Probably a lot of Peter's readers were such slaves. They may have been quite skilled. They may even have had families themselves. But they weren't well paid. They weren't Roman citizens. And they weren't free. Their *masters* had exclusive authority over them.

But Peter relays to them this Word from God: *Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect – reverence even, literally fear – not only to those who are good and considerate – and that is the way God wants masters or anyone in authority to be – but also (submit with all respect) to those who are harsh – so harsh, in fact, that as we will hear: they deliver beatings to their slaves.*

Whoa! You mean to say that God wanted slaves to submit with all respect even to the masters who beat them? Yeah, as we read: *For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.* In other words: when you do good, and you're beat up for it – no good deed goes unpunished, you know! – when you do good, and you're beat up for it, God still smiles at the good he has caused you to do. Your master may not smile, with your bruises you may find it hard to smile, but God?—God is pleased with you!

So, you who faithfully do your work, and your boss gives you nothing but grief for it, keep on doing good. God is pleased with what he has inspired you to do! You who faithfully do your work, and your coworkers gossip about you – probably because

you make them look bad – keep on doing good. In fact: be sure to do even better. God is pleased with you!

You who are a peaceful neighbor, and your neighbor doesn't have a kind word for you, keep on doing good. In fact, be sure to pick up the garbage from your neighbor's yard, and be sure to shovel his sidewalk, and be sure to defend and speak well of him. God is pleased with what he is inspiring you to do. And you dear faithful church members, who feel persecuted by other church members – and maybe you are persecuted – keep on loving God and others, keep on serving God and others. God is pleased with you!

Part Two: Christ's Endurance Accomplished Your Salvation

It's hard, though, isn't it? I mean: Monday morning comes around, and it's time to go back to work, and you face the gossip and the grief, and you're determined to keep on faithfully doing good, but it's hard. After a short time, it seems like you're running on empty again. What do you do?

Friend, keep your eyes on Christ! That's what Peter writes next. He says: *To this you were called* – when you were baptized, you were baptized also into suffering – yes! *because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example* – a blueprint for your life – *that you should follow in his steps*. A Christian's sweetest desire – really! – is to follow in the footprints of Christ. And since he suffered, we very willingly face any suffering he allows to come our way—and especially suffering that's going to advance Christ's kingdom.

And think of how unjustly Christ suffered! *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."* *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate* – remember his righteous quietness on the cross? – *when he suffered, he made no threats* – remember his holy silence in his trials? And how could he stand it? Well, we read: *Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*. He placed his confidence in his Heavenly Father.

And think of the glorious results! *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree* – yes, it was a pain, but think of the world's gain! – *so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness* – yes, God died, but the world lives through him! – *by his wounds you have been healed* – how deep his injuries! how broad our healing!

So, do you see what this is saying? Do you hear what the Lord is so clearly broadcasting? – He's saying, "Yes, suffering is a pain. But governed by God, it brings a world of gain."

Certainly, that was true of our Lord Jesus Christ.... What misery and lamentation people's sins brought to his life when he left his throne on high to live with us here! But it was exactly that suffering that brought us to heaven. What awful grief it was when our sins were laid on his shoulders during his arrest and trials! But it was exactly that suffering that gives our conscience rest. What crushing, incomprehensible pain it was when the heavy hand of hellish punishment pummeled Christ on the cross. But it was exactly that suffering that pulled us out of hell and delivered to us eternal life.

Now, if that's the good that came from our Savior's suffering, We can trust our good God to bring a world of good out of our suffering, too. So, does your husband or wife bring you untold grief? Endure the suffering. You know him who said: "What God has joined together, let no one separate." And who knows that you aren't doing your best work for him rescuing the soul of your spouse?

Do your family members make you suffer? Endure the suffering. You know him who said: "Honor your father and your mother"; you know him who said: "Parents must save up for their children"; you know him who said: in love, "Why not let yourself be

wronged for another? Why not let yourself be cheated for another?" And who knows that you aren't doing your best work for the Lord: rescuing the souls of your loved ones, who don't treat you with much love?

Conclusion: You Have a Perfect Relationship to God through Christ

So: personally, what are your biggest problems in life right now? If you are suffering sickness and death, Christ will deliver you to eternal life. If you are suffering want and need, Christ will rescue you to everlasting riches. And if you are suffering troubled relationships, Christ will deliver us to that place where we will love God and others as fully as God has loved us and others. *For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* Eternal thanks to God through Jesus Christ! Amen.

God the Holy Spirit once said about us: *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* Amen.