

18Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. 19For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 20For 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.

21For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24and 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. 25For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

In Southern California in the 1950's and 60's when I was a child growing up, at school we had to do duck and cover exercises where we would get under our desks and assume a fetal position, arms wrapped around legs in a crouch and head tucked.

It was the "cold war" and no one knew if we would be involved in a thermonuclear war. It seemed inevitable to some. Indeed in April of 1961, then President Kennedy withstood Russia's installation of nuclear warhead facilities a few miles off our coasts in Cuba.

Last week, there was a story about whether schools should re-visit the duck and cover drills since North Korea can now reach the west coast of the USA with nuclear tipped weapons. Mutually assured destruction doesn't seem to work anymore as a deterrent.

It was mildly fun and interesting to visit the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists web page and get the latest update on the "doomsday" clock. It's 2 1/2 minutes to midnight.

If you look at their timeline page, we see fluctuations. 3 min in 2015, 16. 5 min in 2012, 6 min in 2010, 14 min in 1995 and 17 min in 1991. It's been in the final 5 minutes before. In 1984 it moved to 3 min with the icy relationship between USSR and USA. In 1949, post ww2 it was 3 minutes and in 1953 when the US adopted and tested the H bomb, and Russia had theirs 9 months later, the minute hand was at 2 minutes to midnight.

With the news stories last week I couldn't help thinking about what our christian world view should be on these issues, and how they relate to an ancient letter written by Peter to christians in the world abroad who were being blamed and hated and persecuted.

Our situation in the world is very different from thiers, for now, but no one would argue that the tolerance of christianity and christians in the world is not in a quickly changing state of flux.

You can now lose your job almost instantly if you are considered a heretic to the worlds new ideological religion of political correctness and tolerance and inclusion of everything . . . but christians.

So, what does Peter teach his people in their situation that we can take to the bank and draw upon when the day comes that we also need a perspective change?

Peter's audience were a people largely under subservience to others. They weren't in the drivers seat. They weren't free. Some one else was in charge, and the teaching about authority and submission spoke directly to their situation.

God puts governments in place. And God's elect, his people chosen out of this world, yet still living in this world under the control and authority of others are instructed to submit to those authorities. Christians are not subversives trying to sabotage and overthrow the government.

That picture can have myriad possible scenarios. One person can be under the authority of a good and reasonable person, and work with dignity. While another can be mistreated terribly.

A valuable use of time is to take some time and read through the slave narratives that the Roosevelt administration accomplished during the depression era in this country.

In 1935 there were still slaves alive who lived as young people in the final years of slavery in this nation. Many others interviewed were children of slaves, alive at that time. The histories dictated are available for anyone to read online in our national archives.

The stories run the gamut from slaves who worked for reasonable masters with dignity, and those who worked for evil masters under terrible duress. Beatings all the time and work literally from dawn to dusk. Those folk would have read Peter's words and understood them differently than we do.

18 Servants, (oiketes) be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. 19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 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.

These words would have been sweet to American slaves. They could have read this and thought, Peter understands my situation, and although perhaps difficult, the promise is that God sees and understands and, yes, perhaps even is pleased with how I endure the "time of my stay" in this world.

150 years later, these words are foreign to us. We have unions that arose after the civil war, and we have labor relations boards. These days corporations spend gazillions of dollars trying to keep the folks who are even remotely willing to work at all, happy in every way. We are coddled from cradle to grave and God forbid some boss ask us to do anything in a manner that was in any way condescending or expectant.

An unreasonable boss?? Suffer?? Harsh treatment?? Bear up under

sorrows?? The american workforce wouldn't put up with that for 5 minutes. We'd walk off the job and sign up for unemployment insurance. Next day we'd sleep in.

Peter's audience like the americans that endured slavery, didn't have options. They worked mostly in the employ of others and many, perhaps most couldn't think about going somewhere else and working for someone else.

But Peter doesn't make his appeal on a worldly level. He tells christians they are to be good slaves for another reason. Good employees for another motivation. We finished with that motivation foremost last week, and begin our study there again this morning. "*for the Lord's sake*" We exhibit excellence for one reason. For the Lord's sake.

Ultimately, we christians, are citizens of another world. We are slaves of a heavenly master. And what we do, and how we react in this world, during the time of our stay here, reflects back on our heavenly master and King.

During the time of our sojourn here, Peter called it the time of our stay, we're just visiting here, but for that length of time, we are ambassador's for Christ. We may get up every morning and work all day for some earthly master, but our motivation and behavioral performance isn't for them, it is for Christ.

I work for an earthly boss, but this book says I am to do everything I do for them with relish and the best I can be, so that my heavenly Master will be found in a good light because of His earthly ambassador. Me. The world is measuring Christ according to the traits they see in you, and me.

Satan has a book of tricks. Every weakness is catalogued. He wants the church to fail. And the ploy he seems to use most often is to discredit the body of Christ, the true church because of it's failures.

We sing our victories alone, for the glory of God, but the whole world joins in to sing our failures. It's a double standard. They sing no glory

to our God when by His grace we get it right. But let us fail, and it makes the headline news.

And that's what Peter has been exhorting his beloved aliens and strangers living abroad, sojourners in this fallen world, to live like. The world is watching how we live, and for the Lord's sake, Peter says, we live differently than the rest of the world. And by so doing, some of this world's residents will be silenced, and some even will be saved.

But Peter's premise is very foreign to modern Christians living in America. Let's look at the verses.

*18 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.
19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.*

We'll take just a moment to look at the word translated *Servants*. It is not our usual word, *doulos*, which is the word for a person owned by another person who has no rights at all.

The word Peter uses is the word for household servants. *Oiketes*. These are servants who live alongside their master in his house.

Peter is building on a metaphor. We are strangers and aliens. We saw that those words would be used for sojourners living along side the citizens of a foreign land. Now Peter expands that same idea of living within the household of a master, alongside his family, as a household slave.

We are a part of, but separate from, this world. Here we are slaves, or servants, if that makes you less queasy, living in the household, but we aren't really members of the household. We aren't part of this world's family. We're visitors here, sojourners, but while we're here, we work along side them.

The metaphor is a picture of our status. Sojourners in the world, but not of the world. Christians stand apart from this world. Or do they? And

Peter exhorts us to be respectful and submissive to our earthly bosses, even if they do not return that respect. We do that to make our King from our homeland look good.

Vs. 19 looks at our motivation for excellence, even in difficult situations. *19For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.*

The word in the original language translated conscience has a lot more going on than just that. It means God consciousness. It's relational for us. We do what this book commands not out of legalism, but out of relationship.

We have a personal relationship with the creator of the universes. But disobedience hinders that love relationship. Like a child who dis-obeyes a parent, there's trouble in the relationship until it's resolved.

We obey this book because we love our Father and want to please Him. We want that love relationship present. That's our motivation to endure patiently what an unreasonable temporary authority over us may deal out.

20For 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.

Remember in the 10 commandments back in Exodus. God keeps telling us He's a jealous God. When we do what's right, when we bear up under suffering, and keep our behaviour excellent because we long for His friendship, that pleases our God. He's jealous for our affection. And when that affection is chosen even in hardship, it cost us something, that pleases Him.

What does that mindset look like? Do we have an example of someone who did that? I'm glad you asked.

21For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

For you have been called for this purpose. . . What purpose.

In the context of the passage, the purpose for our calling is that we would choose and value our relationship with God above all else. No matter what this world throws at us, good boss, bad boss, trouble, persecution, liberty, freedom, evil government, good government, no matter what possible situation, your friendship with God who redeemed you, is first choice. Everything else is second. In fact; everything else hardly matters in comparison. *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,

Do you realize that suffering has been the norm for christians throughout the centuries. Religious freedom is an anomaly, not the norm. We have a hard time getting our minds around what Peter's talking about here, because we have lived in a bubble. An anomaly.

Religious freedom. It cost exactly nothing to be a christian. Compared with the rest of history, that's just weird. *since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,*

For all of the centuries except the 2 we woke up in, those words would ring true. Suffering in this world that is ruled by Satan is normative. So, let's look at His suffering, and hopefully we'll be able to draw some conclusions, even in our non-suffering, it-costs-nothing-to-be-a-christian world.

22WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

That's our model. But how does it work for american christians? Nobody is reviling us. Nobody is threatening us. Nobody is crucifying us. No one is tempting us to sin through ill treatment.

Satan is no dummy. It took him a while to figure out the most devious plan of all. What happens to christians when this world is attractive and literally full of limitless possibilities? What happens when there's no cost involved in being a christian. What happens when being a christian is reduced to an optional engagement that simply enhances all of the other possibilities this world has to offer.

What happens when life is good. When we have spare time and money to engage in worldly pleasures? When our kids have opportunity galore. College. Marriage, or not. Exciting job possibilities. Freedom to choose. Maybe just stay at home and let mom and pop work.

We have become a society that doesn't need God. Even christians consider Him an ornament to take off the shelf from time to time. Keep Him handy in case you need Him, but He stays on the shelf . . . most of the time. He's an implement in our tool closet. Use as needed. We keep Him at arm's length, because He's kind of bossy.

In America, christians look just like everybody else, but we have a value added God, in case we need him. That's what our children saw, and that's how they now live.

Like the old illustration in the 4 spiritual laws tract, we are at the center of the wheel and the spokes radiate out to all of the things we call on to make our lives what we want them to be. God is at the end of one of those spokes. Just in case. There if we need Him.

But mostly we don't. Life is good. Work is good. Play is good. Hobbies are good. Health is good. Family is good. Insurance has us covered against losses. Retirement account is ballooning at the moment in the current stock market bubble. We have too much to eat. All the boxes are checked. Who needs God. Nice that He's there, but . . .

So how do we relate to Peter's lesson and encouragement to people who really are suffering? What application does Jesus example of suffering hold for us?

We thank God that we're not suffering. But we need to realize the danger of the situation we're in. The danger of what I just described. The danger of ultimately being "luke warm" christians.

We need to question whether God and our love relationship with Him is first and foremost in our lives. Is He the center spoke of the wheel. Is everything else revolving around Him?

And we need to hold onto this world and all of the good things of this world, lightly. We need to remember that this world and all of its good things; is perishing. We need to live in a way that if all of it is gone tomorrow, we are still in possession of the main thing, Jesus Christ, and the other stuff really doesn't matter.

And, if by God's pleasure, choices should come during our visit here in this world, choices that cost us something in order to keep Christ, we need to glorify our Father by giving this stuff up in order to have Him.

It was normal in Peter's time for the christians to lose their property as a direct result of being christians. It was normal for some of them to go to prison. It was normal for others to be slaves to worldly masters that were horrible. And it was normal for some of them, to die in order to keep Christ.

They were better suited for all of those choices than we are. Satan's plan for christianity in America is brilliant and wildly dangerous. Ease. Wealth. Freedom. Property. Rights. If I had a nickel for every time I've heard people on the liberal radio station talking about our "fundamental rights"!

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Peter's words to us are like a wake up call. Like a slap in the face of a

dazed person to bring him out of slumber. This is normative.

I began this section, if you'll recall, talking about thermo-nuclear holocaust. The doomsday clock is at 2 1/2 minutes to midnight. How do Peter's words apply? How will I possibly tie the current events and Peter's exhortation to saints 2000 years ago together this morning. How is his exhortation relevant to us?

God is sovereign. He has every event in His control, ready to take place on His schedule for His glory. Governments rise and fall at His command. Nations collapse and vanish away according to the word of His pleasure.

If nothing else, we need to pinch ourselves awake. Are we the lukewarm believers I described? Or are we wide awake, ready for whatever may happen next. Holding onto this world lightly. Ready for anything, as long as we can keep our God close in our hearts. As long as we can have Him, everything else pails by comparison.

A tidal wave could roll over this nation. That line in the national anthem is closer than ever before in my lifetime. "*The rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air . . .*" Or a worse horror. The stock market collapses. Our 401K's vanish along with all the other computer digits in cyber space.

Are we ready? For anything?? Because the church I see in America is not ready. The tidal wave will engulf most of them. I'd like it if 25 people in Tonopah were ready for anything.

*And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth:
**Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;**
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.*

Luther's old hymn. Let goods and kindred go. This mortal life also. That in a very few words is the example that Jesus left for us to follow.

24and 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. 25For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

We'll end here this morning and begin here next week. These verses are so very important, it's good for us to consider them more than once.

In the context of our thoughts this morning though I prayed over what to say about these 2 final verses. No immediate answer came, so I thought, well I'll go out and tinker in the garage, and by and by the Holy Spirit will answer me.

Then last evening, or I should say this morning after midnight, the idea came. It was a verse the Lord showed me earlier out on the range at work. Driving and listening, this verse came alive and I wrote a note to myself for later. That verse is 1 Peter 3:15

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

As I drove out to where I would be working and considered this command, I thought, well, no one ever asks. Those opportunities

described in this verse are rare because nobody ever asks. Nobody wants to know. Nobody cares.

And in the context of our thoughts this morning I thought, no wonder. Nobody asks because nobody sees anything different in our lives to ask about. In America the christians are indefinable from everyone else.

We aren't distinct, and beyond that, in this land that provides entertainment and every thing else in such abundance, who needs God.

Number one, they don't see us as distinct. Number two, they don't need God. Why would they ask.

Like I said, Satan is no dummy. The great American experiment. Abundance. Opportunity. Ease. Christians that are indistinct. Why would they ask about some hope that is in me.

What if God moves in judgement and all of that changes, before we leave this place and go to our real home in heaven? What if all of a sudden there is mass panic? The rug is pulled out from under everyone.

Will we be ready. Will we be distinctly those who are effected, but not devastated. When everyone else falls down, will we still be standing. Will those questions finally come.

Why is it that you christians who have lost everything just like everyone else, don't seem particularly perterbed? What is the reason for the hope that is in you. How is it that you still have joy and hope and peace while others are jumping out of office windows?

We don't know that something like that will happen. Maybe not. But never the less, the command in that verse stands. We are to be ready. The gospel that makes the difference is supposed to be in our hearts and on our lips, ready.

Next week I want to spend some time talking about that gospel. These verses, 24 and 25 are a launcing board into thinking about the gospel we are to be ready to tell any one who asks. We want to understand our

position well enough to share it with anyone who would ask.