

Rock Solid Faith In a Rocky World When Suffering Happens

May 7, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: 1 Peter 2:19-25

For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Commentary:

The author of 1 Peter hits some of the same notes for the entire Christian community as he does for previously for slaves in verse 18. These themes include suffering for doing good not evil and Christ as example and shepherd. In these common themes, we can see that how Christian slaves are to live out allegiance to Christ is actually paradigmatic for other believers in their community — a powerful commendation of their influence in “God’s own household” (4:17). Peter is intent on ensuring that any suffering that comes to believers comes because they are pursuing good — allegiance to Christ Jesus (3:15) — and not because they are doing evil. By living out this

ethos, their more vulnerable members would actually be protected. "Readers were instructed to comply with the standards of popular society as a way of preserving the basic safety of the most at-risk readers; yet, in each case, social conformity was balanced by some form of resistance which cautiously challenged existing social structures"⁴ (Williams, 277).

The address to slaves is the longest of the Petrine household code because Peter provides them with the example of Jesus himself as an extended word of hope for all those in dire situations (2:21-25). Jesus is the example to follow for these slaves but also for other believers. Jesus did not retaliate when he was maligned. He was innocent though insulted, and, even then, he did not respond in revenge (2:21-23). Instead, he entrusted himself to God, the final judge of all injustice (2:23) — something Christians are exhorted to do at 4:19.

And for all the beauty of the reality of Christ as example for his followers, Jesus suffered *not only* as example *but also* "on your behalf" (2:21). This truth leads the author to reflection on the servant of the Lord figure from Isaiah 53. He cites Isaiah 53:9 in 1 Peter 2:22 and adapts phrases from Isaiah 53:4-6 in the subsequent verses: "he himself bore our sins" (53:4) "by his wounds we were healed" (53:5); and "we had all gone astray like sheep" (53:6). Echoing the promise of Isaiah 53, Jesus has, through the cross, returned us "to the shepherd and guardian of [our] souls" (2:25).

That said, 1 Peter's 1st Century strategy for coping with unjust suffering continues to remain troublesome for readers, particularly African Americans and women. It does not question the legitimacy of the Roman Empire's slave economy nor attempt to take down the patriarchal structure of the household. It does not address the sanctity of free speech and the prophetic role of speaking truth to power, values we hold dear in the 21st Century. Instead, 1 Peter offers a compelling strategy of nonverbal resistance that is patterned after Jesus. It speaks to the power of non-retaliation and the strength required to wield our words in ways that honor God. The substance of our response is reflected in the integrity of our actions and our awareness that we live in service to a God who will have the last word.

-Adapted from online commentaries by Jeannine K. Brown and Janette Ok

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. What do you make of the assumption that pain and suffering are part of life, especially the Christian life (in the 1st *and* 21st Centuries)?

2. 1 Peter asserts that Christ suffered *for* us to return us to God. Can you relate to the image of a straying sheep? How might Jesus be shepherding you in the right direction now?
3. How does the New Testament affirmation that Christ suffers *with* us impact you as you live your life in a world that is not pain or trouble-free as people of faith?
4. 1 Peter asserts that instead of retaliating when others hurt him, Jesus did not return abuse, but *entrusted himself to the one who judges justly* (v. 23). How can the *example* (v. 21) of Christ trusting God to make all things right in the end inform how you deal with adversity in the moment?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.* (1 Peter 2:24-25).