

HOW TO SUFFER WELL

Mark 15:1-20

Many of you are familiar with the name William Booth for starting *The Salvation Army*. But what many don't know is that the ministry didn't start out as *The Salvation Army*. In 1865, it started out as the *Christian Mission Society*, designed to reach out to the poor in London's East End. But not long after they set up a tent, it was destroyed by gangs and thugs. So they moved into a more secure location in a warehouse, but the meetings were still met with loud disruptions outside and people continued to throw stones and fireworks and various items through the windows.

In 1879, the *Christian Mission Society* decided that they were at war and their name was changed to *The Salvation Army*. Booth was renamed General William Booth and their publication, *The War Cry*. By 1889, some 669 members were assaulted, some killed. It went on like this for years.

Many Christians today could say that they went through a similar experience on an individual scale. They were excited about the new life in Christ and excited to share this good news with others but began to experience opposition and some social rejection. They felt like life in Christ was a cruise ship, but as bullets started whizzing by, they looked around and realized they were on a battleship because the gospel is countercultural and reveals who we really are. Many Christians throughout the centuries have experienced incredible suffering for their faith in Christ.

Here are just two things the apostle Paul said in prison: "*All who live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" And, "*For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*" Well, Mark is writing to an audience like that. They were suffering for their faith in Christ and lives were on the line. So when they come to the text we're at in Mark's gospel – written not to reveal every chronological detail of Christ's life but to minister to this group of saints – they read about Jesus and the incredible injustice He experiences with the mocking and beating and crucifixion, and they're highly comforted & encouraged by it. They see that their own Savior can empathize with them (Heb. 4:15) and them with Him. They share experience.

And even though deadly persecution is not our story in the United States, the opposition is increasing, and there times when we have faced social backlash or unjust mistreatment for our faith in Christ. How do respond to that? **How do we suffer well for Christ? How do we suffer well in a suffering, fallen world?** Peter says to learn from Jesus and model Him.

I want to read 1 Peter 2:18-23 because it's a good introductory text that exposes a key principle for suffering. The more I study Mark and think like a persecuted Christian, the more I see the importance of this text. "*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. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are treated harshly, 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.*"

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, 'who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;' and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered not threats, but kept entrusting Himself to the One who judges righteously; and 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."

Look at the one key step that Jesus took when suffering injustice: **He entrusted Himself** to the Father. *But what does that mean to entrust yourself?*

Entrust = to hand over; to give over; to surrender

Like you give something to a friend, saying, I am entrusting this item to you for safekeeping until I get back. But you can hand something over in a negative sense or a positive sense.

In a **negative sense**, we're going to read about Jesus being "handed over" or "led away" **4 times** today. It's the **key verb or thought** pattern in our passage (vv. 1, 15, 16, 20), like verse 15, "*after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.*"

But in a **positive sense**, it's like Peter says, Jesus knew full well what was going to happen – that it wasn't going to be pretty – but He said to the Father, "*I trust You. My confidence is in You. I know that if I die, You can raise Me again. My life is in Your hands.*" He surrendered to the Father. Peter says, He is **our example** – our model that we imitate in suffering. Because He *suffered* for you, you *follow* in His steps. I guess you could say we weren't totally done with the modeling Christ series, huh? *How are you going to serve Christ and stand for Christ in a culture that doesn't want to hear it? How are you going to suffer well?* You have to **entrust yourself** to the One in whose hands is your life and breath.

To do that it requires that we do away with the bubble wrap theology that thinks God will protect me from everything difficult. He doesn't. Life is hard, even for Christians. That's the reality in a fallen world where Satan and sinners live. But Jesus never said to the Father, I will only trust You if You protect Me from this cup. He trusted the Father with His life and received it back later.



Entrusting yourself to God requires remembering that God is good, even when life is hard.¹ (Gen. 50:20)

Jospeh was one of those who remembered that. Think of all the hardship Jospeh went through. Sold into slavery, lied about, lied to, falsely accused. Yet at the end of his life said what you meant for evil, God meant for good.

Chapter 15, Verse 1

"Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate."

So Jesus is still on trial and there's just a lot of consulting going on. A lot of discussion.

I. THE SANHEDRIN'S EARLY MORNING CONSULTATION. (V. 1)

Remember that like we saw last week, during the night Jesus was illegally tried by the corrupt Jewish supreme court and found guilty of **blasphemy**. But they had to **wait a little longer until daylight to formalize their conclusions** and their charge against Himⁱⁱ just to give it some appearance of legitimacy. And even though blasphemy was a charge worthy of the death by stoning to the Jews, they are under Roman authority and Rome wasn't allowing them to execute **capital punishment**. Rome would generally allow certain people groups or local governments they presided over to govern their unique way with their cultures and traditions, or even their gods, but **in recent power struggles they removed the Jews' authority the execute – some say that very year** – which tells you how prophetic Jesus' words and the OT prophets were that Jesus would be crucified. Had the Jews retained their right of capital punishment, He would've been stoned. They want Jesus hung on a cross anyway because the Law said *“cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.”*

But the Romans wouldn't execute Jesus for blasphemy, so they **had to find an acceptable charge against Rome like treason**. And you have to enter a bit into their thinking here: to be Messiah was to be a king, and another king meant opposition to Caesar and possible insurrection. That was common at Passover because it's a celebration of independence for the Jews. So that's the main charge they come up with and what Pilate will work with.

One of the things verse 1 starts to emphasize is that out of the Sanhedrin, **the chief priests had a leading role** in what takes place (vv. 1, 3, 10) and each time their counsel is heeded, Jesus is handed over further. But ultimately we've got to remember it wasn't these priests or Pontius Pilate in control. Not even Caesar is in control. Who is in control? The Father is. Isaiah 53 says the Father was pleased to crush Him for our sins.

❖ **Entrusting yourself to God requires the acceptance that life is unjust but God is sovereign.**ⁱⁱⁱ **Remember that.**

Isn't that how Daniel and his friends stayed firm in Babylon? They drew lines in the sand to stand with the God of Israel and they had confidence in Him. They said, *“God can save from your hands, Nebuchadnezzar, but even if He doesn't, we won't worship your idol.”* They understood God was in control and can set up, humble, or tear down any ruler any time. And God did with Nebuchadnezzar. They knew their life was in God's hands. Many Christians in Mark's audience had to do the same. They used to stand before Caesar in a similar way, but as one meme said, *“Caesar is now a salad dressing, but Jesus is still King.”*

Verses 2-5

“Pilate questioned Him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And He answered him, “It is as you say.” The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, “Do you not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!” But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.”

II. PILATE'S CONSULTATION WITH JESUS. (VV. 2-5)

Bright and early, the Council delivers Jesus to Pilate who was probably in the northwest area of the temple platform, known as the Antonia Fortress. He was a Roman governor appointed by

emperor Tiberius and ruled Judea from AD 26-36 and he was a crude man, a power-hungry individual. Mark only mentions the conversation with Pilate, not how he goes to Herod and back to Pilate. Mark refrains from including that to fit his purpose & style of writing.

The 3 charges against Jesus are this: 1) we found this man subverting the nation (not true). 2) opposing to pay taxes to Caesar (not true). 3) claiming He is the Christ, a king. The 3rd is true & that's what Pilate understands that as a specific charge, but he isn't convinced his kingship yet.

Jesus' response, "*It is as you say*" is an **affirmative response** but's it's a bit confusing because its **impersonal**. That's because **their two concepts of His kingship are a bit different**. I think it's Jesus way of saying, "*Yes, I am a king, but not as you think.*" John adds that Jesus said, "*I am a king but my kingdom is not of the world [realm]. If it were my kingdom would fight for Me.*" Jesus' spiritual response about His heavenly kingdom seems to quell Pilate's interrogation. Other than that, Jesus doesn't say much and Pilate is amazed. He's fulfilling prophecy the OT prophecy about the Lamb who would be silent before its shearers, giving His life for our sins.

It's fascinating the contrast here between **Jesus, the King who has divested Himself of all the kingly glory to become a servant for us, next to one who is grabbing for any power and glory he can get**. Pilate put his career above people and above principle. Pilate was living for Pilate, living with the idea that the one with the most toys and most power in the end, wins.

❖ **Entrusting yourself to God requires you to let go of worldly glories and living for what really matters in eternity.**

We can't live for His kingdom if we're still building our own like Pilate. You can't give yourself to God if you're still living for fame and fortune. Jesus said you can't serve two masters.

III. PILATE'S CONSULTATION WITH THE CROWD. (VV. 6-15)

Verses 6-10

"Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews? For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead.

So during Passover, a custom had developed in which the Romans would release one Jewish prisoner as a goodwill gesture^{iv} and Pilate is using this as an attempt to free Jesus. Why though? Pilate, at this point in his life, is vulnerable. He's already fumbled enough governing situations in his career and made a royal hash of them that he's on thin ice with Rome. He can't afford more complaints against him. His career is on the line.

He brings out a prisoner named **Barabbas** and basically says, "*I tell you what. I'll let you choose between him or Jesus*" hoping they'll choose Jesus over Barabbas. Normally Romans would

release someone with a minor offense but Matthew calls Barabbas a notorious prisoner. All the gospels together tell us he's a **robbing, murdering insurrectionist** who had actually killed someone in an attempted revolution against Rome. He's a genuine threat to the empire, **guilty of the crime that Jesus is being accused of and actually worthy of crucifixion**. Jesus isn't guilty, and He's being tried for it.

What's interesting is Barrabas' name. From other sources we know his name is also **Jesus (Yeshua)**, a common first-century name. But even more ironic is **Barabbas**. Barabbas' name means "son of the father". Bar = son. Abba = Father. They have a choice between two "Jesus", who are sons of the father." One is a divine Son of God the Father. **They choose Barabbas out of envy**. Envy meaning they don't want the divine Son to take their power and money and influence.

Verses 12-14

Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!"

So basically the more Pilate tries to release Jesus, the more insistent they are. Pilate keeps saying, "Why, what evil has He done?" They have nothing so they just shout louder. The answer is nothing though, right? He's **the sinless Son of God** so the story is just dripping with **irony**. And this is what everyone need to know about Jesus. Because He was sinless, means He didn't deserve to die, yet He died as the perfect, sinless sacrifice so that everyone who believes has eternal life.

† **Jesus suffered and died unjustly so that you could be justified before God.**

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He who knew no sin, died on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." He took Barabbas' place on the cross and offers the same to us.

Verses 15-20

"Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified. The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him."

IV. **THE RESULTS OF ALL THE CONSULTATION. (VV. 15-20)**

First thing we see here is that Pilate caves to the social pressure. His first mistake is **wishing to satisfy the crowd out of self-preservation**, somewhat like Peter last week – denied Jesus out of self-preservation. It's another principle we must apply if we're going to entrust ourselves to God.

❖ **Entrusting yourself to God requires caring more about what God thinks of you than what the crowd thinks of you.**

One of the greatest fears of man is not belonging – not being accepted. So when we go to make decisions, we're tempted to just line up with crowd, putting self-preservation above principle, not really thinking for ourselves and acting based on principle. As Christians though, we are called to draw some lines in the sand, lines that the world doesn't always like or understand but are for the good of this world. Jesus said His kingdom isn't of this world but He didn't say His kingdom isn't for this world. We could recall Daniel and his friends again. They understood they would make some decisions that would bring some literal and social backlash but they knew that ultimately God would honor that.

Because Jesus is a man of principle, He goes through another round of mockery and beating and even scourging – this time from Gentiles. They dress Him up in **purple**, the color of royalty. They put a **reed** in His hand to mimic a king's scepter that they end up using to beat Him with. The **crown of thorns** should remind us of Genesis. Thorns are some of the physiological effects of the fall into sin. **Jesus is taking the thorns we deserve. He is bearing upon Himself the Adamic Curse (Gen. 3:18).** But then He's also **blindfolded** as they punch Him. They would stand in a circle around someone and make them guess who hit them and if they're wrong, they keep going. The punches are worse blindfolded because you can't see where the punch is coming from. There's no reaction to the coming punch so it lands full force.

Then there's the **scourging**. Scourging is a preliminary punishment to crucifixion that involved whipping. **Jewish scourging** was done on the back with a leather whip with short lashes. It wasn't deadly. However, **Roman scourges** used a **flagellum whip** with longer lashes that had **shrapnel** tied to the ends – sharp metal, bone, stone, jagged lead balls. So when this hit the flesh it didn't bounce off but would cut into them, eviscerating the victim and exposing their insides, Josephus said. The victim's hands were usually bound to a post, and the entire body was scourged, not just the back, and including the face. And the 2 **lictors** who carried it out knew how to beat someone within an inch of their life and stop. Bodies were turned into an unrecognizable pulp, where even family members couldn't even recognize them.

That's what Isaiah 52:14 prophesied hundreds of years earlier: *“his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.”* It was so bad that even if Jesus wasn't crucified, He would have likely died from the wounds from this. Most fainted and it wasn't rare for them to die. It's so bad He won't be able to carry the cross on His own.

But Jesus being unrecognizable because of His suffering isn't strange, if you think about it. That's why He was rejected by many. He didn't come the way they imagined He would. The Jews were expecting Him to come from the sky in glory first but He came as an infant in a manger to a poor family. Many want God to come and speak with them but in some crazy, out of this world fashion. *But what if He simply became a man and spoke in our language and showed His love for us by dying for us? By entering into our mess and empathizing with us and taking the punishment we deserve?* This is the kind of God we have. He incarnated Himself. He took on flesh. He entered our mess. **He is the Servant King of a kingdom that doesn't do things the way this world does.**

In His kingdom that the last are first and the greatest are the servants. And **if we're going to be servants like Him, we ought to expect some opposition too.**

Maybe you're suffering from some **rejection** and **injustice** today. It could be related to a false claim in a work incident; some conniving individuals set you up or lied about you; someone making your life hard simply because you're a Christian; you're up against your own hypocritical and corrupt Sanhedrin; getting a raw deal somewhere in life. Whatever it is or was, the refreshing river of justice never flowed, leaving you longing for retribution, maybe hopeless, maybe lonely, feeling powerless to set things right. *Can I offer a few resolutions based on what Jesus' response?*

Resolution #1 – Let go of expectations for perfect justice in a fallen world system^v of misplaced values. Perfect justice just won't flow until Jesus comes. One day He will balance those scales that we as moral beings crave but until then, life is unfair but God is still good.

Resolution #2 – Forgive the guilty party and be set free. Joseph modeled that with his brothers in Egypt who sold him into slavery. Jesus modeled that by crying out on the cross, "*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*" Forgiveness sets us free from the bitterness and resentment.

Resolution #3 – Remember that this is one of the ways we model Christ.

We get to model Christ in suffering too. Peter said this is our **calling**, our opportunity to **incarnate the character of Christ**. Those who experience injustice share an experience with Jesus Christ and have a deeper understanding of what He went through on that day. It's a special experience to share with Christ and if we don't bail out, He will use it (Is. 57:4). One man described opposition as like wind to a boat. A little wind opposed to the boat actually allows it to steer well.

This resolve also has a tone of **rejoicing** with it. I can't help but think of the jailbird apostles in Acts who rejoiced they were worthy to suffer like Christ, experiencing the fellowship of His sufferings.

Resolution #4 – They can take everything but my eternal joy in Christ.

Jesus entrusted His life to the Father and received it back in the resurrection with the eternal joy of redeeming us who will live with Him forever. Suffering has a way of stripping away what doesn't matter and reminding us to live for what really matters – eternal things.^{vi} The world can take our money, our freedom, possessions, our health, our whatever... but it can't take our joy in Christ. That's evidenced by Paul writing a letter about joy to the Philippians in prison! No matter what happens to us, our future in heaven is absolutely glorious – so glorious we can't put it into words.

ⁱ Chip Ingram, *Effective Parenting in a Defective World, How to Prepare Your Kids to Win Life's Biggest Battles*.

ⁱⁱ Lou Barbieri, *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1545.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ingarm.

^{iv} Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective, Vol. 4* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2017), 82.

^v Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Volume 2* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 381.

^{vi} Bryan Clark, John 16 sermon, www.lincolnberean.org