

Unjust Suffering
John 19:8-16

There is a different type of calling in the Christian life. This calling isn't about who you are going to marry or where you are going to live or what kind of job you are going to do. Of all the callings in the world, this calling is arguably the most like Jesus' calling; it's the calling that most mirrors His life.

What is this unique and precious vocation of the Christian experience?

It is following in Jesus' steps even when it is unfair. It is being called to endure insults, hurts, not getting credit that we think we deserve, having our "good" spoken as evil, being disregarded and neglected.

Peter describes this calling in 1 Peter 2:20-23:

But if you do good and suffer and so endure, this finds favor with God. For to this you were called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps, when they hurled their insults at him, he did not answer back; when he suffered, he threatened no retaliation, but committed himself to God who judges justly.

Do you have a co-worker who is adversarial or nasty?

Do you have an unjust employer who passes you over time and time again?

Is your ex-husband/wife or family member dragging your name through the mud?

Is there a neighbor that is the bane in your existence?

Not only do unjust people and circumstances exist, but God calls us to faithfully endure in unjust suffering. In John 19 we see the example of Jesus that we are called to follow.

**Follow Jesus even when it's unfair;
entrust yourself to the shepherd and guardian of your soul.**

⁷ The Jewish leaders replied, "We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God!" ⁸ When Pilate heard what they said, he was more afraid than ever, ⁹ and he went back into the governor's residence and said to Jesus, "Where do you come from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ So Pilate said, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you know I have the authority to release you, and to crucify you?" ¹¹ Jesus replied, "You would have no authority over me at all, unless it was given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of greater sin." ¹² From this point on, Pilate tried to release him. But the Jewish leaders shouted out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar! Everyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar!" ¹³ When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus outside and sat down on the judgment seat in the place called "The Stone Pavement" (Gabbatha in Aramaic). ¹⁴ (Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover, about noon.) Pilate said to the Jewish leaders, "Look, here is your king!" ¹⁵ Then they shouted out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" The high priests replied, "We have no king except Caesar!" ¹⁶ Then Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus. (John 19:8-16)

There is something that happens in Pilate when the Jewish leaders say that Jesus "claimed to be the Son of God" (vs. 7). There was common Greco-Roman thinking that the gods could come down and take on human form. When Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14), they healed a man lame from birth. The crowds shouted, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" and they called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes. This Greco-Roman thinking is what made Pilate fearful. Did he just whip a man who was divine? Early Jesus claimed to be from another kingdom (18:36); where does this leave Pilate with the gods?

Pilate

Pilate asks, "Where do you come from?" but Jesus gave him no answer (vs. 9). In his fear, Pilate basically asserts, "Don't you know who I am, and the power I possess? Your life is in my hands. I have the power to release you. I have the power to crucify you. Don't you know what I can do to you if you don't cooperate? Your fate is in my hands."

Jesus

Jesus' response, "I understand that you have certain power and authority, but you should understand that yours is a God-given authority. If you are trying to instill fear in Me, it won't work, because you do not have the power to harm Me unless My Father hadn't already given it to you. I am from heaven. You can't do anything to Me that is not being allowed" (John 10:18).

Even though Pilate is threatening, Jesus takes the time to explain that Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin have committed the "greater" sin because of what the Jewish people have been entrusted with. Paul describes *"to them belong the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, by human descent, came the Christ, who is God over all"* (Rom 9:4-5).

Pilate is in charge and He is the governor and his word is law. He can kill people if he wants to; he can let them go if he wants to, but the one constraint on Pilate is what people think of him back in Rome. Pilate wants to release Jesus and tries for the 4th time (18:38, 19:4, 6, 12), but the Jewish leaders cry out "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar!" The threat of what Caesar might think is the secret weapon the chief priests have been keeping up their sleeves all this time. When they notice Pilate is wavering, they bring it out and Pilate is at a loss.

According to NT Wright, "Provinces and cities would take their case to Rome, insisting on justice against the man who had been ruling them in Rome's name. There were famous instances of ex-governors paying heavy penalties. Under the empire, if the emperor decided someone was a nuisance, or surplus to requirements, he was quite capable of sending a message advising the man to commit suicide, to save his soldiers the bother of killing him themselves."

The crowd has their eye on Pilate, but their other eye was on the judgment/bema seat located on the place called the "Stone Pavement" or Gabbatha (vs. 13). As they all prepare for the Passover Sabbath, there is great anticipation for him to sit on that judgment seat and it's there where they will hear the official Roman judicial sentence on Jesus. The moment Pilate declares his judicial sentence from that seat, it can't be undone. Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" The high priests replied, "We have no king except Caesar!" (vs. 15) Since the days of Samuel, Israel was clamoring for a human king like the other nations and God provides them with the perfect King of kings and lord of lords from the line of David (2 Sam 7:8-16). Instead they cry out, "We have no king except Caesar!" Then Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified and they took Jesus (vs. 16).

How can you entrust yourself to the shepherd and guardian of your soul?

When it comes to suffering and responding to unjust pain, people and circumstances, it just feels unsettling. We have to go into that pain with the knowledge in our hearts that we are exercising muscles and putting down roots in new soil that is centered in the life of Christ.

In Adam we know how to fight, retaliate and blame. In Adam we experience that surprisingly unfulfilling skill of spending our whole lives defending ourselves.

Instead, Jesus is asking us to embrace our unique suffering and let go of the pain that lives there. We are given this amazing gift because God judges justly and because God truly is the shepherd and guardian of our souls. God also wants to reveal in us our brokenness and self-serving and self-vindicating behavior in order to heal us. God wants us broken and embarrassingly dependent on Him.

We must also begin to trust that our current experience of pain and emptiness is not our final experience. Even in the midst of these unjust circumstances, we are being held in love.