

Suffering with the Government

1 Peter 2:13-17

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 27, 2017

You can go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the book of 1 Peter. We're in 1 Peter this morning. And as you're turning there, we are in a series called "The Suffering Church" where we're talking about how the church should handle pain and suffering. And I haven't told you this before, but I wanted to take you through this because I tell some really bad jokes from time to time. And I wanted to help you handle it better. This is called "The Suffering Church." I think I just told one of them just now. I'm also still learning about Canada, so you'll have to be patient with me. I get things backwards. I've learned that it's the "Canucks" not the "Conucks". You guys say that all the time so I just thought it was "Conucks" but I was corrected and rebuked. I know what a washroom is but I've never met a "toque" yet. So if you would like to introduce me to a "toque", I think they only come out around winter time. More bad jokes, Okay.

Let's talk about something serious. You can't grow as a Christian if you don't understand suffering, amen? Now that's why we're in this series. You can't grow as a believer without this, without this topic, without a good understanding of it. I've watched some of our children playing in the playground lately and I'd have to say they suffer a lot. They fall down a lot. They get in fights a lot. At least your kids do. My little angel's never fight. But let me ask you, would they get banged up like that if they just stayed at home and watched TV? No, they wouldn't. Would they get in fights and squabble if they just sat on the couch and never did anything? No. You see? But they wouldn't grow either. You've got to get out of the house in order to grow. You've got to get on the playground and get to work. And it's the same way in a Christian life. You've got to be able to endure some type of pain to grow as a Christian, A. W. Tozer said, "It's doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt that man deeply." God actually rises up storms of conflict in order to accomplish a deeper work in our lives. We cannot love our enemies, move mountains, things like this in our own strength. This is graduate level grace and God brings it into our lives to prepare us for greater use. And so, you have to learn how to suffer in order to grow as a believer.

That brings us to another reason why we're studying this topic on Sunday mornings. It gets rid of sin in our lives. Suffering purifies us. It's been said that God brings us into deep waters not to drown us but to cleanse us. Suffering doesn't kill us, it washes us off. You have to be washed in the waters of affliction.

How many of you have ever been blessed by reading the Psalms? Anybody? We all have, right? I've got pages in the Psalms that are actually crinkled because I've read them in the funeral in the rain. Now, why do we do that? Because the authors suffered. They went through tremendous pain. Consider a Psalm like Psalm 51, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness ... wash me from my sin and cleanse me from my iniquity. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned." How many of you have been blessed by that? I think all of us have, right? Well, why we're we blessed by that? Because David wrote it in a time of great pain. He just slept with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah. He'd broken two of the Ten Commandments in a devious way, a deceitful way, and he

was doing his best to hide it when Nathan the prophet shows up and says, "You're the man, David. You did this. And as a result of that, the child that is born to you will die." And as a result of that David has a mental breakdown and he writes this Psalm. It was Psalm 51 that was washed in the waters of affliction. It was bathed in tears. You can almost feel the tears coming off the page.

Think of all the suffering Job experienced. He lost his family, he lost his job, he lost his home. He would eventually lose his health. And his wife, the only one left in his family would tell him to curse God and die. And what was the point of all that? Job tells you at the end of the book, he says, "5 I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; 6 Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes." God did all of that to make Job repent. He did it to get the sin out of his life. Friends, it's the same way with you, the same way with me. God lets you suffer in order to draw the sin up out of your lives. You could look at it, suffering is like a divine syringe that sucks the poison out of your soul. It's like a heavenly oil well that digs deep into the ground and pulls out the blackness in your heart.

It also re-arranges your priorities. It's another reason why we're studying this. Suffering rearranges your priorities. In his book on suffering, Randy Alcorn, I recommend that book to you by the way. It's called, "Where is God when it Hurts?". Did I get that title right? Brent and Charlene, did I get it right? It's, "If God is good". "If God is good", that's the title. Great book. And, don't read all of it 'cause I've gotten a lot of stories from that book so you guys will ... You've already heard a lot of them. But Randy Alcorn tells of a man named David O'Brien who has cerebral palsy, and he's spent his entire life in a wheelchair, hardly able to move. But here's what he said about this. In a speech he gave before several hundred disabled people, David O'Brien said this about his life. He said,

God tailor makes a package of suffering best suited for each of us. We've all had the opportunity to grow through it and bless God for it. Should I question God's wisdom in making me the way that I am? If God knew what kind of suffering Jesus had to go through to save me from my sins, then certainly he knows what kind of suffering I need to repent of my sins. I'm sure if I were not handicapped, I wouldn't be speaking to you today. Actually, I would be out on a race track probably breaking my neck with the fastest car I could find. But I am in a wheelchair. Why? Because God tailor made my suffering. He used it to rearrange my priorities.

They say that if you eat any of the ingredients of a birthday cake by themselves, they are disgusting. But if you put them all together, they are delicious. Our youngest son just had a birthday, and I'll tell you, when you put a cake in front of a one-year-old, it's hilarious and disgusting and cute all at the same time. But if you put a bottle of sugar in front of that one-year-old, he'll spit it out, right? If you put a cup of flour in front of him, he'll get sick. And it's the same way with your suffering. You take one trip to the hospital, it makes you sick. You take one trip to the funeral home, it's disgusting. It tastes terrible. You go to the cancer ward, go to the unemployment line. Any trial taken by itself is miserable, but you put them all together one day in glory and it will be beautiful. One day, you're gonna look back on all this and you'll say, "Oh yeah, that's why God did that."

I was studying this recently, and I came across an author who said that we often question God's power when we suffer. But in reality, we're questioning His wisdom. We don't doubt whether God is strong enough to stop this. We know He's strong enough to stop it, we just wonder, why? That's a wisdom question. We're doubting His integrity. And we do that because we can't see the full picture, we can't see the full cake. But when you see that, it changes everything. And until then, you have to trust God.

B. B. Warfield was one of the greatest Reformed theologians of the last century. He taught at Princeton at a time when the school was battling some huge issues, became a bulwark of the faith. Many of you have read books from him. He was a mentor to J. Gresham Machen and to John Murray. But what you may not know about B. B. Warfield is that at the age of 25, while he was sailing on his honeymoon with his brand-new wife, she got struck by lightning and was instantly paralyzed for life - on their honeymoon. Life went from this direction to that direction for them in just an instant. And for the next 40 years, he would never leave her side for more than two hours at a time. He would study and do his research, and then he would take care of her. Cook her meals, wash her clothes. He would go out and lecture and then come home and do dishes or sweep the floor every day for 40 years. But here is what he said about that experience. This is what he said about the trial. He said,

My fundamental hope is the universal sovereignty of God. All that comes to me is under his controlling hand. Another comforting thought is the love of God. God loves those whom he chooses. If he governs everything, than nothing evil can befall those to whom He loves, and that includes me, God does it all for my good. He does it all to help me.

And that brings us to the book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter was written to Christians who were probably doubting the goodness of God. It was written to believers who couldn't see the end. They couldn't see the full cake. Verse 1 starts out, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen." If you've been with us, this will sound familiar, so just be patient for a moment. But if you're new, this word "scattered" refers to the time when the Babylonians took over the ancient Near East and scattered the people. They dispersed them everywhere to keep the nations from revolting. They would take over Rome and they would send the Romans to Egypt. They would take over Egypt and send the Egyptians to Rome. This is where the Samaritan race comes from in your Bibles. The Babylonians took over Israel, and they put in foreigners, and they became the Samaritans who've mixed with the Israelites. And I'm sure that when that happened, these people doubted the goodness of God. When this dispersion took place, they didn't think He was helping them. It didn't taste very good. So Peter says, "Remember that you've been chosen." He says, "Remember that God selected this trial for you." It was tailor-made. It was not an accident.

He also says that you were "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God". In other words, God knew what the end result would be when He did this to you. God could see the full picture. You can't see it, you're in this world. You're limited. He can see eternity. And He knows this was done to help you. He says in verse 4 that this was to protect you. Verse 15 says He called you to this. Verse 20 says He called Jesus to this too, which is staggering to think about. Verse 22 says this purifies your souls. But the point is that God is doing all this for your good and this is really important in light of what he says next.

If you look in chapter two, we're gonna read from verse nine down to verse 17 just skipping down a little bit he says, "But you are 'a chosen race, a' royal 'priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession' so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." This is what you were chosen for in other words.

for you once were "not a people" but now you are "the people of God", you had "not received mercy", but now you have "received mercy". Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Just to explain to you what Peter is saying here starting in chapter two, Peter tells you how to respond to all these blessings, how to respond to your choosing and protection and calling. And he says that you need to act. You need to get out of the house and do something. Get on the playground. He says you need to abstain from lusts in verse 11 that wage war against your soul. He says you need to keep your behaviour excellent among the gentiles in verse 12 and glorify God, or help them to glorify God, in the day of visitation. And in verse 13 he ties all this together by talking about the government.

It's interesting this is the first specific entity Peter brings into this letter. In other words, as he's talking about suffering, the first thing that comes to mind is the government. I don't have to tell you that the government can make you suffer as a Christian, you guys all know that. I don't have to tell you they can cause you some pain. When I first moved to Canada it was the day before the inauguration in the United States and everybody thought it was a joke. That I was telling a joke, I was telling people I'm moving to Canada and they would say, "Ha ha, yeah we're all moving to Canada." Every time someone gets elected in the United States everybody wants to go to Canada as if you guys are standing at the border saying, "Please come to us Americans we really need you right now." You guys aren't saying that. And since moving here several people have asked me is it better there? Are politics better in Canada? And I said, "Listen, Canada is a great country, but things are messy here too." Some of you come from countries that are way worse than the US and Canada, people are getting murdered in the streets, children are starving, it's not safe to go out of your house at night. But let me ask you, when that happens, and you come across this, what are you supposed to do about it as a Christian? That's what Peter's talking about in this passage ... When that happens, and the government doesn't do what it's supposed to or it turns on you.

He mentions slander in verse 12, and 13 he mentions the government. In other words, it doesn't take too much brain work to figure out what's going on here, the government is slandering these Christians, putting them down. When that happens what are you supposed to do? Are you supposed to rebel? Take up a flag and start a revolution - some people would say that. Are you

supposed to criticize the government? Take up a blog and start to type in really capital letters and boldface font and all that. Supposed to roll over and die? What are you supposed to do? Let's look into that this morning. This is our next topic in regard to suffering. So if you're taking notes in 1 Peter 2:13-17, Peter gives us some responses to the government in times of suffering as he ties all of this into one specific group. And he'll move on to other groups as we go through this. Next week we'll talk about the workplace, later on we'll talk about marriage, suffering in marriage.

But here's several responses to the government in times of suffering. The first one is this, you need to submit to every human institution. That's how Peter starts verse 13 off. You need to submit to every human institution. Submission is a dirty word for many people today. You say "submit" and they think you mean roll over and die. But in verse 13 Peter says that word, that very word and he says, "Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human institution." The word "submit" here is *hupotasso*, which means "to put yourself under someone". It's actually a compound word in Greek from *hupo*, which means "under" and *tasso*, which means "to put". So the word means "to put yourself under someone". If you notice, it's an active word in verse 13. It's a military term that referred to soldiers going under a commander, they actively follow him. In other words, you are to submit, the idea is not that you are to be submitted. You volunteer for this, in other words. You sign up for it.

He goes on to say what every human institution means. It says, "whether to a king as the one in authority", so that's obviously government. King is the highest government in the land, he says, "or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right," which is another way of saying, the lower authorities. Governors are right below the king. The idea is Prime Minister, members of parliament, those kinds of things. These are the ones you are to submit to, you willingly follow them. You show them your support. He says, "for the Lord's sake", which means you do this unto the Lord. This is an act of worship for you. We'll explain that in a minute. He says, "to every human institution", which means every branch of government. This goes from federal, all the way down to local, no one gets out of this, everyone is involved, from the president all the way to the mayor.

And then he says in verse 15, "For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." In other words, you do this as a testimony to the lost, so the lost people won't have anything to slander you with. These people are already being slandered, they're already being put down, criticized. Christians by the way, throughout the centuries, have always been criticized for being rebels against the government, because we follow a King named Jesus. And that makes other kings nervous. And Peter says, "Don't do anything to provoke that." But this is the teaching of Scripture: You submit to the governing authorities, you put yourself under them. Romans 13:1 says, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Peter says, you submit to every institution. Paul writes, every person is to be in subjection. And that means every person. All of us do this, because he says the government has been established by God. God put the rulers on the throne and in our submission to God, we submit to those He has put there. Titus 3:1 says, "Remember to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient and ready for every good deed." 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says the same thing.

Now before, I get into what this means, we'll talk about that, 'cause Peter qualifies this in the next verse. But let me just mention, the interesting thing about this, as I was studying this, is that Peter wrote this during the time of Nero. Some of you have studied Nero. He was one of the worst rulers in history ever. By all accounts at best, he was a monster. I told you last week, he burned the city of Rome, or he was blamed for it, and in response to that he blamed the Christians. He actually lined the pathway to his gardens with the bodies of burning Christians on crosses. That's how he would have his dinner parties. He said, "You guys burned Rome, so I will burn you. You did this to me, so I'll do this to you." And he ruled that way. He was very vindictive. He kicked his second wife to death and then married a man who looked like her, because she upset him. He went on to kill his mother and his brother for the same reason, they just made him mad. He killed his tutor Seneca or had Seneca commit suicide, because he annoyed him. He killed any member of the nobility who challenged him. He killed ordinary citizens just for the fun of it. He would give singing performances in the Colosseum. And according to ancient historians, he wasn't very good at it. And so, what he would do is, he would have his guards go throughout the Colosseum and if you didn't cheer loud enough he would put you to death. He would take slaves and stage mock battles in the forest and kill them. He killed everybody. His reign was a blood bath. It got so bad that the historian, Suetonius says, "Nothing could restrain Nero from murdering anyone he pleased, whenever he pleased and at long last after 14 years of torment, the earth finally rid itself of him." That was a Roman historian writing about one of the Roman emperors. Even the Romans despised Nero. Even then when the end was near, the army was coming to capture him, he considered poisoning the senate and setting fire to the city again. He was contemplating letting wild animals loose in the streets. This is the man Peter tells these people to submit to. This is the ruler he says to follow. So I know as you read this ... at least if you're like me, I read this and I say, "Yeah Peter, but..." And I start thinking about all the bad politicians we have, right? Let me tell you something, I don't think any of us are every gonna see a leader as bad as this. Maybe, but I can't, I can't see how we could. Our leaders are not poisoning the senate and sending wild animals out in the streets, or at least considering it. They're not kicking their wives to death and marrying a man who looks like her. But even if they are, Peter says, "You still have to submit to them with this qualification."

He goes on to explain what submission looks like and if you're taking notes, that brings us to a second response to government in times of suffering: you need to act as free men. You submit to every human institution and as you do that you act as free men. Kind of defines the term "submit". You do this out of freedom. It's what Peter says next in verse 16. He says, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God." The Bible says that when you become a Christian you are free. The Son has set you free, you're a what? You're free indeed. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." This is, by the way, why Christianity appealed itself to slaves in the first century. All this talk of freedom, and what this means is that you're free from sin. You're not free from every human institution, well, you are and you're not. But ultimately this means, you are free from the consequences and the wages, and the bondage of sin, which is what verse 16 means, when it says, "Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil." In other words, you can't say, "I'm gonna do whatever I want to, now that I'm saved. I don't have to listen to anybody, now that I'm a Christian, I can do my own thing." No, you can't. You have to listen to God. You have to obey Him, and He tells you to obey every human institution, unless, and here's the qualification of this, unless it tells you to sin.

You submit to the government, unless the government commands you to sin. You obey your leaders, unless they tell you to disobey the word of God. There is such a thing as civil disobedience for the Christian. There is such a thing as godly resistance. You know on the wall to the stairway of our house, is a page from the Geneva Bible, from the 1500s. I've bragged that I think it's the oldest thing on Promontory Mountain, I'm not sure about that, but it's probably close. Some of you've seen it, but apparently, what they've done with some of these old Bibles that are kind of damaged in parts, they've taken pages out and sold them. And a friend of mine bought it, and gave it to us as a Christmas present, but it was the Bible the pilgrims took with them on the Mayflower. It was the Bible, the first English study Bible. You can actually see the notes printed on the side of it in old English. It's kind of neat. But as the story goes, that translation of the Bible, was the catalyst for the King James Bible. Because in the study notes of the Geneva Bible, it says you must submit to God before the kings. John Calvin taught that and his English followers in Geneva printed it in their Bibles, in their study notes. It so infuriated the king of England, that he commissioned his own translation of the Bible, where he left that out. It became known as the King James Bible, or the KJV as we call it today. But this is what Peter is saying here, you submit to God before the king. You follow Him above every earthly authority. You are free to do that, you are free to serve Him. But in doing so with every chance you get, you submit to the government.

And John McArthur has a helpful book on this, called, "Why Government Can't Save You," and I recommend it, if you want to know more about this topic. But towards the end of the book, he asked a question, he says, "What does this look like? What does it mean to balance freedom and submission?" And he says, if it's commanded in the Bible, you do it. That's your authority, that's the Word of God to you. But if it's not commanded in the Bible, then you obey the government; it's as simple as that. So, if the government tells you to go the speed limit, you go the speed limit. Everybody hang your head for just a minute, I just said that. When the Bible doesn't tell you how fast to drive your car, there's freedom in that and so if the government says, do it, then that's what you do. If the government tells you to pay your taxes, then you pay your taxes. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, give to God what is God's. If the government tells you not to litter, you don't litter. If it tells you to sort out your trash, and alphabetize it and colour coordinate it and give it a hug ... It's one of the bad jokes, I was talking about. Sometimes I feel like I've got to hug my trash, before I throw it away, but you know what, if the government says you do that, that's what you do. But, if it tells you not to murder someone, or if it tells you to murder someone, you can't do that. If it tells you to lie, or go out and steal something, you can't do that either. You draw the line there.

I think a lot of ... I think the reason a lot of believers scoff at this idea of submission, is not because they misunderstand what the government says, but because they misunderstand what the Bible says on some of this stuff. They say, "Well the government says I can't have as many rights as people from other religions. I can't speak my mind whenever I want to." Well, friends, let me ask you, open your Bibles and tell me where it says, you can speak your mind whenever you want to. Show me where it says, that as a Christian you're going to have as many rights as people from other religions. It doesn't say that. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you what it says, it says, "A slave is not greater than his Master, if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you." That's what it says. It says, "all who live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." But it doesn't say you're gonna have equal rights. They say, "Well the government says I can't shout at people like

the atheists do. I can't belittle them on the radio." Well, where does the Bible say, you're supposed to shout at Atheists? Where does the Bible say, you're supposed to belittle them on the radio? They say, "Well the government doesn't support our Christian schools. It's taking away our benefits, we're gonna lose our special status as a non-profit institution." Listen, I understand all this, and I'm not saying those things aren't important, off course they are, and I'm not saying that we shouldn't speak out about them. We can do that, we can let our voice be heard, but when we do that, and here's what I'm saying, when we do speak out, we do not let our freedom be used as a covering for evil, that's what Peter says. We can't say that "Because I'm a Christian I can do whatever I want." We can't say that "Because I'm a Christian, I'm going to make my preferences the law. I prefer free speech, and so, I'm gonna shout and holler and threaten until I get it." No - you can't do that. You speak out while you're submitting to the government.

John MacArthur says,

It's not your primary calling to change your culture, reform its outward moral behavior and change its convictions according to some evangelical Christian blueprint. Instead it is your calling to be His witnesses before a lost and dying world. Such a mission is far more good and profitable than any amount of social and political activism.

Several years ago, a friend of mine was interviewed by World Magazine, because he was ministering to the politicians in Illinois and they were looking for someone doing ministry in the worst state in the United States. And so, they contacted my buddy, 'cause he was doing it in Illinois, which was ... They considered it to be the worst state in the United States. Four out of the last seven Illinois governors have spent time in prison. They put the state 203 billion dollars in debt and they haven't balanced the budget for, I think, it's been like five years now. And so, they keep going further and further into the hole. And so, this magazine contacted my buddy and asked him what he was doing to help? He was an evangelist who would do Bible studies with politicians and meet with them and pray with them, and he said this, he said,

Things are bad here, but it's my job to tell people there's hope in the Gospel. It's not my job as a missionary to protest and lobby for change. It's not my job to picket and twist the governor's arm. It's my job to tell people about Jesus. That's what I do, that's my mission.

And if they trust in Him and they change, then the politicians will change the laws. Friends, that's our job as well, we are to be His witness to a lost and dying world. Listen, if politicians in Canada come to Christ, I promise you they will change the laws in Canada, amen? And God has set us free to do that. And it leads to one more response to the government in times of suffering.

And this one really summarizes all we've talked about: you need to fear God and honour the king. You need to submit to every human institution, you need to act as free men, and you need to fear God and honour the king. Verse 17 summarizes all he's talked about so far, it's almost as if Peter is writing this and he realizes these people may misunderstand what he's saying. The government can be a tough topic to talk about, and so he rounds it all off in verse 17 by saying this, he says, "Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." If you notice all those four verbs are in the command tense, they're also in a tense in Greek that shows that they're continuous, they're ongoing, so you could translate this, "keep honoring all people, keep loving

the brotherhood, keep fearing God, keep honoring the king." It's to be a habit in your everyday life, it's to be what you do over and over and over again.

The first one here, "honor all people," – "all" means every member of the human race. So he's been focusing on government, but now he backtracks for a minute and says "Honor should be paid to all no matter what their station in life. Yes, you submit to the king and his governors, but you honor everyone." I found an interesting story about this; the story is told of the Governor of Massachusetts going to a fund raiser in his honour. And while he was there he asked the cook for another piece of fried chicken and she said, "Only one piece per customer," he said, "Well, don't you know who I am, I'm the Governor of Massachusetts, this fund raiser is being held in my honor," to which she said, "Don't you know who I am, I'm the cook who serves the fried chicken, only one piece per customer." I like that story. That's what Peter is saying here, it's one piece per customer. You honour everybody, even the cook. I would say you really need to honour the cook especially, because they might spit on your food if you don't.

Then he says, "love the brotherhood," which is another way of saying love the church, love the body of believers. Honour everybody, show love to your fellow Christians.

And finally, "fear God and honor the king." These are the last commands. And if you notice, he puts God before the king here. You serve God before the king, God is first, the king is second, that's the order, that's the way the Lord has arranged it to be. Also, if you notice, he tells you to fear God, but he doesn't say that about the king. To my knowledge there is nowhere in Scripture where it tells you to fear your leaders, you honour them, you submit to them, but fear is reserved for God and God alone. You are to tremble before Him, you live in dread before Him. Jesus says, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." That's the idea here, you have a holy dread of God. Sir Thomas More was King Henry VIII's chancellor in England around the time the Geneva Bible was written, and he was sentenced to death, because he rejected the king's marriage to Ann Boleyn. He thought it was sinful and he told that to the king and as a result the king arrested him and put him to death, but at his trial, Sir Thomas More addressed his judges this way. As these men were sentencing him to death, here's what Sir Thomas More said to them, he said, "As the blessed Apostle Paul consented to the death of Stephen and kept their clothes that stoned him to death and yet they're now both saints in heaven and shall continue there friends forever, so verily I trust that we shall be the same. Though you kill me I pray that I will one day see you again in heaven. I forgive you." What a response, amen? That's to be your response to the government. Fear is reserved for God, trembling is reserved for God, but honour is to be given to our leaders.

And if you're wondering what this looks like, let me just mention a few things here, and we'll round this off. How do you honour your leaders? Here's a couple of things. The first is this: you need to pray for them. You need to pray for the governing authorities. If you read the letters of the ancient church, one thing that's interesting is how many prayers you see that address the politicians. Can you imagine sitting in a prayer service and listening to someone pray for Nero. You'd almost laugh out loud, wouldn't you? Well, they did that. I mean, he wasn't the only murderer that led the Roman Empire, there were lots who came after him. And Tertullian in the second century said,

Without ceasing for all our Emperors, we offer prayer. As we pray for prolonged life, for security to the Empire, for protection to the Imperial house, for brave armies, a faithful Senate, of virtuous people, and we pray for a world at rest.

Do you do that? Do you ever pray for your leaders that way? Give you another way to honour your leaders, speak respectfully to them or speak respectfully about them. They shouldn't be the butt of all your jokes, our leaders should not be the object of all of our ridicule. They slander us, but we don't slander them back. They persecute us, but we don't persecute them back. Peter didn't do that, Paul didn't do that, Jesus didn't do that, Jesus is standing before Pontius Pilate, Pontius Pilate says, "I'm sentencing You to be crucified." You know what He should've said? "Oh yeah? You're going to hell in a couple ... " He didn't talk like that. He was respectful to him.

Now, interesting story about this, Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived at the time of Nazi Germany. So one of the worst governments in modern history. And he was a theologian who said that the last time God commanded a holy war was in the time of the Old Testament. Other than that, He has told the church to submit to the governing authorities. Reading the Old Testament, he told the Jews to go in and attack the promised land, right? He told David to do that. He hasn't given us that command, which is kind of interesting, because Dietrich Bonhoeffer was part of a plot to assassinate Adolphe Hitler, so I don't know if he quite put his theology with that. But here's the point, speak respectfully to your leaders.

You should also witness to them, that's another way to show honour to them. Share the Gospel with your politicians. Paul does that in the Book of Acts, when he comes before Felix and Festus and king of Agrippa, Paul witnessed to all of them. As a matter of fact, one of those politicians that Paul is witnessing to says, "In a short time are you going to persuade me to become a Christian" - what's the answer? "Absolutely. What do you think I'm standing here for?" He said, "I would wish to God," Paul says, "that all who hear me this day might become such as I am except for these chains." We witness to our leaders.

You should also encourage them in the good they're doing. As bad as things are, I promise you our leaders are doing good things and you want to encourage them in that, build them up in that, support any Christian politician as they come our way, that's a no-brainer. You have the power to vote in this country, use it. Vote believers into office. Vote for Christian causes, pro-life, pro-marriage that sort of thing, you have the power to do that.

This is how you respond to the government, this is how you respond in times of suffering. You submit yourself to every human institution, act as free men and fear God and honour the king, and as you do that you pray for them, speak respectfully to them, witness to them and support the good they're doing. I don't think there's any better way for us to stand out as believers to a lost and dying world than in the way we respond to government. I mean, as the persecution kicks up and they come after us more and more and more, I think there's no better way for us to stand out in the darkness than to handle it in a God-honouring way.

A little boy was walking with his dad one night and all they had for light was a little lantern and the boy said, "Dad, I'm afraid, 'cause this light's not going very far." And the dad said, "Yes son, it's not, but if you let it, that light will show you the way home." Friends these are dark times,

they're scary times. I've talked with several of you and I would say the same thing about the United States. It's not the country it was when I was growing up 30 years ago. But if you let Him, God will show you the way home through this, and if you let Him by his grace, He will show others the way home through you. And that's our goal in these dark times. Let God take you through the dark. Let's pray and ask Him for grace in doing that.

Heavenly Father, as we talk about the topic of government, there's so much that could be said, and there's so many things that we have to explain, and there's a lot of fear and worry on this topic, because of the dark things that we're seeing happening in our country. But Lord, we trust that You are a God who is in control over all of this, and if you gave these words to a people, living in a darker government than ours, then surely, they apply to us today. So Father, may we take this to heart, and may we honour You with it.

Lord, we thank you for the example of the first century church, how much they endured, how much pain, how much suffering, how much heartache. And yet, Your words spoke true to them. May it speak true to us this morning.

Father, we do pray for our leaders. We do pray they would come to Christ in salvation. We know that if that happens, this country will change, and we pray for that. Lord, we pray You'd help us as we go out this morning into a dark world to give you glory and honour for them. We pray all this in your blessed Son's name, who has saved us into the light, Jesus Christ. Amen.