



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

Life Is Not Fair

1 Peter 2:11-25

I have been preaching through the letter we know as First Peter, and will continue today with First Peter 2:11-25: Hear the Word:

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s servants. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

“Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

There was a serious head-on collision that happened on a residential street in Germany. What made this collision unique was that it was a literal head-on collision resulting in serious injuries. It happened in a dense fog. The fog was so dense that an east bound driver, moving at a snail's pace, stuck his head out the window in order to improve his vision, and refusing to pull over until conditions improved, he strained to focus on lane in which he was driving. There was westbound driver moving at a snail's pace and you guessed it, he too had his head out of the window, a literal head-on collision as they passed, smacking their heads together. Both drivers were hospitalized, but their cars survived without a scratch.

Bizarre things happen in this world and sometimes, no, most times, they simply are not fair.

Many years ago, actress Helen Hayes was walking down a street in Paris with Mary Martin, who was wearing the latest designer outfit. A bird was flying overhead, and the inevitable thing happened, an unpleasant problem we have all had with birds, and Mary Martin's designer outfit had to be taken to the cleaners. Helen expected Mary to scream, but instead Mary Martin simply said, "For some people, they sing." I guess that for some people the birds sing and for others they make a mess. It is simply not fair.

Sometimes it is humorous; other times it is tragic. You can hear people say, "I exercised every day, and still had a heart attack." "I ate two cups of Nacogdoches blueberries every day; I got all the antioxidants, but I got cancer anyway." "I gave my heart and soul to a company and I was laid off." "I was just walking home after work, and the police picked me up and charged me with aggravated theft and sexual assault." Life is not fair.

Of course, the advertising industry and the media in general would have us believe that we can micromanage our destinies, but the little bird can come along, or we bump heads in the fog, and we are frustrated by our faith in God who does not seem interested in protecting us, and we become disappointed with God. Maybe one reason for our disappointment is we want to interpret God in our own way.

I received a phone call from someone dear to me who was troubled by the pastor's prayer during worship at the church where she was visiting. In the prayer, the preacher thanked God for his promise to keep us safe. Of course, the problem with that is that God makes no such promise. Even Jesus said, "If they have done it to me, they will do it to you." In our text from First Peter, he wrote about those who received beatings for doing right.

Philip Yancey, in his book *Disappointed with God*, wrote about this issue – the fact that life is unfair and so we blame God.

When Steve Johnson played wide receiver for the Buffalo Bills he blamed God for letting him drop a pass that would have won a game. Following the drop he tweeted, “I praise you 24/7! And this is how you do me! You expect me to learn from this? How? I’ll never forget this, ever!”

It was just a dropped pass in a game, and my guess is that it was not God’s fault. But maybe God had something to do with giving him the skill that makes him millions of dollars for catching passes in the NFL.

In the mid-16th century, a group of 50 Spanish nuns led by Sister Teresa of Avila traveled on foot to a neighboring convent in a rugged storm. Crossing a rickety bridge over a swollen stream, the sisters prayed that the bridge would hold up until they were safely across. It didn’t. Near the center it collapsed, spilling all of the nuns into the water. As they managed to swim safely to shore, Sister Teresa raised her eyes toward heaven and said, “Lord, if this is the way you treat your friends, it is little wonder you have so many foes.”

Wednesday evening we heard the testimony of Verdis Daniels. Back in 1976 he was a great student. Offers were coming in from several colleges. His future looked promising. Then, because of the color of his skin he was picked up one night walking home from work at the Fredonia Hotel and arrested for aggravated theft and sexual assault. It didn’t seem to matter that the description of the perpetrator was of a man six inches taller and wearing different clothes. His whole future changed.

We’ve all been there. Not with a dropped pass, perhaps, or a collapsed bridge, or falsely accused, but there has been a time in our lives when we cried out to God that life is not fair.

Philip Yancey studied this problem at great length and he determined that some people cave in when they feel God lets them down while others use their time of adversity as a stepping stone to a richer and fuller discipleship.

In his book, Yancey introduced us to man named Douglas. He was a good man, trained as a psychotherapist, but he gave up his lucrative practice working primarily with the rich and well-connected and started to work in the inner-city among the poor. You would think that because of this decision God would bless him, but shortly after this noble change in focus, a change where he, at great

personal cost, placed himself in a position to care for the poor, his life started falling apart.

The first thing that happened to him was that his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her chemotherapy treatments affected the whole family. She was always tired and felt sick. Douglas had to pick up a lot of work around the house. The cancer spread into her lungs.

While his wife was undergoing chemotherapy treatment, Douglas' family was involved in a serious traffic accident. A drunk driver crossed the median, and smashed into their car head on. His twelve-year-old daughter and his wife suffering from the chemotherapy were also seriously injured; but the worst injuries were to Douglas. He hit his head on the dashboard and due to his head injuries he now has trouble with his vision and he can no longer read, and he loved to read. For a time he couldn't even walk down a set of stairs without stumbling.

Philip Yancey knew Douglas and wanted to interview him for his book, because if anyone reminded him of the Biblical picture of Job it was Douglas.

When they met Yancey said, "Douglas, I'm writing a book about disappointment with God. I thought of all the people I know who have the right to be disappointed with God, you're right at the top of the list. Tell me, what would you say to people who are disappointed with God?"

I understand that Douglas thought for a minute and stroked his beard. Finally he looked at Yancey and said, "You know, Philip, I don't think I've ever been disappointed with God."

And here is Philip Yancey wanting to write a book on being disappointed with God. "Doug, how can you say that?"

Douglas said, "I learned a long time ago and especially through this accident not to confuse God with life. Is life unfair? You bet. My life has been unfair. What has happened to my wife, what has happened to my daughter, what has happened to me, it's all unfair. But I think God feels exactly the same way. I think He is grieved and hurt by what that drunk driver did as much as I am. Don't confuse God with the unfairness of life."

He said, "As I read the Bible, especially the Old Testament, I notice the characters in the Old Testament were able to separate the physical reality of their lives from the spiritual reality of their relationship with God."

Douglas concluded by saying, “If you are ever tempted to confuse God with life, go back and read the story of Jesus, the story of God on Earth. Ask yourself how Jesus would have answered the question, ‘Is life unfair?’ For me, the cross of Christ demolished for all time the idea that life is supposed to be fair.”

Wow! All I can say is that I hope when I am treated unfairly by life, I can have both the wisdom and the faith in God that Douglas has. Just because we are seeking to do the right thing doesn’t mean that life will treat you fairly. Indeed, you could be treated unfairly simply and solely because you are trying to do the right thing. I read earlier from First Peter, **“For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”**

The implication is that you can suffer ill because you are doing wrong and you can suffer ill because you are doing right. Life happens. And we must separate the unfairness of life from the fairness of God.

Life can treat us unfairly. God only seeks that which is good for us. God wasn’t trying to teach Steve Johnson a lesson when he dropped that pass; Johnson simply was not concentrating as he should have. He dropped a pass. It may have been simply bad luck or bad hands, but it wasn’t God’s fault. However, God can help Steve put that mishap into perspective and help him to be a more mature Christian, maybe even a mature believer like Douglas.

And I for one believe deep in my soul that Douglas was right about the fact that the best example that life isn’t fair is the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter continues in our text: **“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”**

That brings us to the good news, for we live on this side of Easter. Resurrection faith is about living faithfully in an unfair world where we profess that Christ conquered death.

Part of what this means is that when life treats us unfairly, we will find comfort by putting our focus on what God actually promises. Remember particularly these words of scripture: **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** It is found in Romans 8:28, and is one of the most abused passages in all of Scripture. God doesn’t cause bad things to happen to us, but God can take the injustice of life and uses it to our good. It does not make injustice good, and I would say that in some cases the unfairness may outweigh the good, but God can use it for good.

That is what was so inspiring about our Verdis Daniels, our speaker last Wednesday evening. He suffered a horrible injustice that affected his entire future, yet today without bitterness he give thanks that God was with him through it all, as well as many good people.

When complimented on her homemade biscuits, one cook responded: “Just consider what goes into the making of these biscuits. The flour itself doesn’t taste good, neither does the baking powder, nor the shortening, nor the other ingredients. However, when I mix them all together and put them in the oven, they come out just right.” Trust that God can put together the bitter, sour and tasteless ingredients of life and use them for good.

Jim Warren, who was the longtime host of Primetime America on the Moody Broadcasting Network, has this tidbit of wisdom, “When hard times come, be a student of life, not its victim.”

I personally find it easy to be a victim. I ask, ‘Why did this happen to me?’

A student of life says, ‘I don’t care so much why it happened. I want to learn what God will teach me.’

A victim looks at everyone else and cries out, ‘Life isn’t fair.’

A student of life looks at life and says, ‘What happened to me could have happened to anybody.’

A victim feels so sorry for himself that he has no time for others.

A student of life focuses on helping others so that he has no time to feel sorry for himself.

A victim begs God to remove the problems of life so that he might be happy.

A student of life has learned through the problems of life that God alone is the source of all true happiness.”

That's wise advice. Be a student of life, not its victim.

Mother Teresa once wrote about a situation she said she would never forget. One day in Venezuela she went to visit a family who had donated a lamb to her order of nuns. She went to thank them and there she found out that they had a badly handicapped child. She asked the mother, "What is the child's name?" The mother gave her a most beautiful answer. "We call him 'Teacher of Love,' because he keeps on teaching us how to love." That was a family that had learned to be students of life, not victims.

Life is unfair, but don't confuse the unfairness of life with God. Trust in God's promises. Look for ways you can turn a mess into a ministry. The most unfair act in history was the crucifixion when the innocent Son of God was slain. But we live on this side of the resurrection. We can see God's power over life's unfairness. And God, through Jesus Christ, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, can help us deal with the unfair events that just happen.