

My discourse to you is regarding the visions we see from the sufferings of Christ. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 3:18-22, as we continue our systematic, verse by verse study of this epistle. We have a special privilege to hear the heart of the beloved apostle in the final weeks and months of his life. It's fascinating to think what might be on our heart if we knew that we didn't have long to live, especially if we knew, as Peter did, that we would be crucified for our Lord's sake. For Peter, his heart's desire was to both edify and encourage those suffering saints, those spiritual aliens that were journeying through a world for which they were not suited in the first century, even as we have much the same today. Saints that were enduring mounting persecution, saints that were scattered abroad. As we look at this we see once again that Jesus was the song of his soul, the One with whom he had spent so much time. The One who had called him to Himself and discipled him and even rebuked and protected him, and most of all loved him with a supernatural love beyond his understanding. Likewise the same Lord Jesus that has lavished His love upon us all. I can only hope that in my final days Christ will be so exalted.

Let's read the text. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

Obviously the longing of his heart through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was to share some exhilarating visions of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially themes that related to our Lord's sufferings when He was here on earth. For when we grasp the undeserved suffering of Christ, we can better be able to cope with the sufferings that we well deserve, but frankly are seldom asked to endure. Those of us in the United States today know very little of suffering, certainly nothing like the severity and scope of suffering they endured in the first century, those that loved Christ. However, I am convinced that as we look around us, suffering is mounting. The persecution is coming. There are ominous clouds of hatred that are gathering in the skies of our educational systems. You see it in our colleges and universities, those that mock Christ, mock His Word, mock those who love Him. We also see it in our political institutions, not to mention many of the false religions that are proliferating in our country. We even see it, unfortunately, from apostate Christian churches. As we look around, we see Bible-believing Christians continue to be marginalized and maligned and mocked. I believe we would all do well to prepare ourselves.

Here in the text before us we have four visions of Christ that emanate from His suffering. His sufferings that accomplished four magnificent realities. I believe these will bring comfort and encouragement to everyone who is asked to somehow persevere in some crucible of grace, knowing that God has ordained our afflictions, knowing He has a glorious hope that is present in the midst of our great adversities. This was true of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our supreme example. So in the text before us, we see that because of Jesus' faithful endurance of His sufferings, as He endured to the very end, He became four things. First, victor over alienation. Second, victor over Satan. Third, victor over sin, and fourth, victor over all. And even as God had marvelous and eternal purposes in the suffering of His only begotten Son, we must remember that likewise He will accomplish His glorious purposes for all who endure hardship on His behalf.

First we see that Jesus' faithfulness in suffering was rewarded in that He became the victor over alienation. Let me explain this. It's important for you to understand this, and we will see it flow out of the text. Sinful man is alienated from God. I know this is a horribly offensive thing to most people. Be that as it may, it is the truth. The Scripture is very clear about that. Man is alienated from God. He lives apart from regenerating grace. He lives in a state of separation due to his sin nature. Prior to the transformation that occurs when we come to a saving knowledge of Christ, sinful man is so alienated from God that Paul says in Ephesians 4:18 that he is "separated from the life of God." To bring this home, all of us who have friends and loved ones who do not know Christ, we must understand that they are alienated from God. They are separated from the life of God. To bring it home even more, many of our precious children who have not yet placed their faith in Christ are separated from the life of God. They are alienated from Him.

In fact, the apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 1:21 that before we were saved, "you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds." Evil deeds is described in John 3:19 where we read how men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Darkness is the defining characteristic of the unregenerate. It's the defining characteristic of all those who are alienated from God. They live apart from God who is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. In fact, later on in 1 Peter 2:9, we see that He has "called (us) out of darkness into His marvelous light." A little theology here: man by nature is sinful. He is born a sinner. To put it a little differently, man is not a sinner because he sins, but man sins because he is a sinner. Apart from regenerating grace, all that we are and all that we do is fundamentally offensive to a holy God. The very essence of sinful man's nature is that he does not conform to the character and desire of God. Apart from regenerating grace, man does not love what God loves and man does not hate what God hates. He does not desire the things that are the desires of God. Therefore he is alienated from Him. Apart from salvation, man's state of alienation from God is marked by moral and spiritual blindness. Sinful man is hostile to God. He is dead in his trespasses and sins. He is a slave to sin. He is a slave to the lusts of his flesh that dominate his personality. Sinful man loves the world and therefore he is an enemy of God, according to James 4:4.

I might also add that man's alienation began in the garden when Adam and Eve sinned. As a result of that sin they were separated from the presence of God. We saw this separation as well pictured in the strict prohibitions God gave Israel against approaching Mount Sinai when God came to give the Law. We saw it when the men of Beth Shemesh violated the sanctity of the ark of the covenant when they looked inside it when they recovered the ark from the Philistines. As a result of their disobedience, as a result of the fact that they were to be separated from the presence of God and therefore not to even touch the ark and yet they did, as a result of that there was a great slaughter of many men. And in horror they cried out in 1 Samuel 6:20, "Who is able to stand before YHWH, this holy God?" We can also see an example of this separation in the veil that separated sinful man from the holiness of God in the holy of holies in the tabernacle and later in the temple. The veil that was a perpetual reminder of the barrier of sin.

Indeed, sinful man is so separated from God because of his sin that he cannot even grasp that separation. He is blind to it. Of course the most profound example of this spiritual alienation was pictured when Jesus drank the wrath of God to the very dregs while He hung upon the cross. At that incredible moment, He cried out because of the separation and the anguish of the alienation from the Father, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" What a graphic illustration of sinners who live their lives alienated from God. And we have family and friends that are living that way. They are

spiritually dead, and unless they repent they will die physically only to experience the wrath of God eternally; unlike the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived His entire life in perfect fellowship, spiritually alive. Then He died physically and yet was exalted once again into eternal glory.

Child of God, I don't want you to miss this. It's extremely important. Christ Jesus became our victor over alienation in His death and resurrection and through Him we can all be reconciled to God. Back again to Colossians 1:21-22 we read, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds...yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." This reconciliation is precisely the concept that Peter is describing in the text we have before us in verse 18, where we read, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God." Here we see Christ as victor over alienation. His sacrificial death as our substitute therefore brings us to God. In Ephesians 2:13 we read that "...in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Because of this, because of Christ's death, because of His atoning work, you will recall that the veil in the temple was torn asunder when Jesus finished His work upon the cross of Calvary. We read in Matthew 27:50 that "Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." This had to have astounded the worshipers that stood there on that day. Suddenly they were exposed to the presence of Jehovah God. They didn't understand what we now understand. That is, what was once a symbol of separation was now torn away and was now an invitation to come into the presence of God through Christ. Because of Christ's death we have access to God. Those who place their faith in Jesus Christ can be brought near to God. The separation is over. We are no longer at war with God nor He with us. The alienation is over. The apostle Paul spoke to this in Romans 5:1-2, "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand." What a marvelous reality. With the Law there was judgment, but with grace there is forgiveness. We have peace with God.

In Hebrews 10:19-20 and 22 we have a description of the effects of Christ's victory over alienation, and the new pattern of worship that is ours. We read there, "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh...let us therefore draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." He says by the blood of Jesus we have a new and living way. It's interesting, as a footnote, the term *new* in the original language means *freshly slaughtered*. But it also has the meaning of something that cannot grow old. The Lord Jesus Christ was the freshly slaughtered Lamb of God, whose atoning work would never again need to be repeated. It was finished. What He did will never grow old, it will never be outdated. So we have a new, as well as a living, way. Isn't that an interesting paradox? You see, only death could conquer death. What an amazing thought! Only death could conquer death. Christ had to die in order that we might live. This is resurrection truth. His flesh was like the veil in the temple. It had to be rent, it had to be torn asunder, because only a crucified Savior could bridge the infinite gulf between a holy God and a sinful man. Only the Lord Jesus Christ could reconcile us to God. Only He could, as Peter says, "bring us to God."

Now Jesus is behind the veil, we must understand. In Hebrews 6:19-20 we read, "This hope we have as an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus." So Peter reminds all the suffering saints from that day to

ours in verse 18, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh."

There's an important note here. Peter continues his theme that we read in verses 16-17, a theme that stresses the importance of having the proper attitude and manifesting a Christlike character when we are called upon to suffer for Christ. He continues that theme here. He's underscoring an important principle. If the sinless Savior would willingly suffer and die for the unrighteous, how much more should we who were once sinners be willing to suffer and to die for the sake of righteousness? That's the point. What folly it is for we who are new creatures in Christ who are freed from the penalty and the power of sin to continue in that sin, to return to it, to even be persecuted at times for it by man, not to mention forfeit blessing and suffer divine chastening because of our own wickedness. What a foolish thing that is.

So to help us understand this, Peter reminds us that Jesus died as our substitute. The just for the unjust, the righteous for the unrighteous. The sinless for the sinful. We deserve death, for the wages of sin is death, but He did not deserve that. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read that "He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." So glory be to God, because of this, Jesus is the victor over alienation.

Secondly He is the victor over Satan. Notice in the middle part of verse 18 it says, "...having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient." It's a curious statement here, "having been put to death in the flesh." It's a reference to Jesus' physical death on the cross. Remember, the incarnate Christ was the God-man, He was both God and man in the flesh. You will recall in John 1:14 that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." In 1 Timothy 3:16 we see a description of Him as the one "who was revealed in the flesh." In 2 John 1:7 we read that "those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" are deceivers, they are heretics.

But notice here, He was "made alive in the spirit." Without getting too technical, I want to point out that grammatically in the original language there's an indication here of a contrast between His flesh, in other words His physical body, and His spirit—which never died and was reunited with His glorified body three days later at His bodily, physical resurrection. This is a picture of what all saints who die will experience at death. As a footnote, likewise our spirit, our immaterial part, will never die, though it will be separated from our physical bodies. According to 1 Corinthians 15:23 we read that "those who are Christ's" in other words believers, will also be resurrected and we will likewise receive a glorified body. This will happen to three different groups of saints in three stages. Let me give them to you briefly as a footnote. It's very important because some have been confused about this even of late.

First, those who are saved between Pentecost and the rapture of the Church, in other words the Church Age, will join the saints that are still alive on earth to meet the Lord in the air and will ascend into heaven. We read about that in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. That's when their spirit/soul will be united to a glorified body. There's another group of people in another stage and that's the people that will be saved during the time of the tribulation just before our Lord's second coming. In other words, those that are saved after the Church has been snatched away, those tribulation saints as well as Old Testament saints will receive their glorified bodies when Christ comes back to earth to establish His earthly kingdom, His millennial kingdom. We read about that in Revelation 20:4. And then there's

going to be those saints who will die during the millennial kingdom. Remember there will be many that will go into the millennial kingdom with a normal body like ours, and eventually they will die and we believe they will be instantly transformed and receive a glorified body at that point. You might ask the question, what about unbelievers? They too will experience a resurrection at the end of the millennial kingdom at the great white throne judgment where they will receive a body that will be suitable for eternal torment. We read about that in Revelation 20:11-15.

Now back to Peter's statement concerning our Lord. He says He was "put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which," in other words while His body lay in the tomb, His spirit "...went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient." This is a fascinating piece of information that the Spirit of God gives us. Notice it says He "made proclamation." The term *kerusso* in the original language, it means to proclaim or to announce or to herald something. What was He announcing to these spirits in prison? His victory over sin, His victory over Satan, His victory over death. Who were these spirits in prison, which by the way is literally the pit of abyss or the bottomless pit, described seven times in Revelation as a prison for the most vile, wretched, loathsome of all of the demons. We have further insight into that in 2 Peter 2:4 where we read that "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment."

These were demons who once were disobedient. The text says in the days of Noah, when Satan and his minions conspired to corrupt the human race. In Genesis 6 we read of the *Nephilim*, a term that transliterates a Hebrew word meaning "the falling ones" or "those with great power that are able to crush another." These I believe were demons that entered into men and possessed men during that time. We read in Genesis 6:2 that they cohabited with females, "the daughters of men." We don't know for sure, and we can't be dogmatic with this, but perhaps they were trying to produce some type of mongrel progeny that would not be totally human and thus destroy the human line, "the seed of the woman" as we read about in Genesis 3:15 from which Christ was promised to eventually come.

A mongrel race both demon and human, perhaps an attempt to so corrupt the human strain as to prevent the incarnation of Christ and then to possibly thwart His dying on our behalf, a man dying for men. A plot that was so diabolical that God had to prevent it with the flood. Maybe they were trying to prevent the atonement or our salvation, rob God of His glory and so on. As a footnote, it's important to note that the children of these unions were fully human, though profoundly influenced by demons, as many are today, because we know that 120 years later when the flood came and they were drowned, in Genesis 6:3 they were described as people of flesh that were drowned.

To help you grasp this incredible thought, of this group that Jesus spoke to while His body lay in the tomb, you will recall that Satan tried to attempt this very type of thing with Eve in the garden, promising her immortality, a transcendent, supernatural, higher life. Isn't it interesting that this continues to be the theme of many charlatans or false teachers today? All you have to do is turn on the television and they're going to tell you some unique formula to have some transcendent, supernatural, powerful life where you can name it and claim it. In the garden this was very appealing to Eve. And to think this was appealing to her before sin and death even entered the world. How much more appealing would it be many years later to those who were living in the days before the flood who were experiencing the tragic consequences of sin, who were experiencing death and disease and war. The compounded experiences of sin, experienced by generations of wicked people. This would be a very appealing thing for Satan and his minions to somehow tempt them with such thoughts. We know that

this was a wickedness so heinous that God permanently bound these demons, according to 2 Peter 2:4, "in chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment." Moreover we read in Jude 6 that they were those who "did not keep their proper domain."

The exploits of these wicked demons that Jesus' spirit came to speak to are compared to the sexual perversions in Jude 6-7, "of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh," of course a reference to the wickedness, the abomination, of homosexuality, and they were therefore "exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." Back to the days of Noah, you will recall that finally in Genesis 6:5 we read, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...He was grieved over their sin." In verse 7 He says, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."

What is fascinating to understand is that 1,656 years after God created Adam, He destroyed the whole world. A conservative estimate is that there were about seven billion people in the world at the time of the flood. And God killed them all except eight people who found favor in the eyes of the Lord: Noah and his wife, and their three sons and their wives. As I was thinking about this, I was thinking about Adam and how he lived long enough to see the world into its ninth generation. And then he dies one generation before the flood. A man that longed for righteousness to reign, longed for Satan to be defeated. He longed for God to fulfill His promise to Eve that He would give her a seed that would crush Satan's head. And now, it happens. Christ dies, His body is in the tomb, and His spirit goes to these spirits in prison as the victor who has triumphed over His foe. All of that while His body awaits resurrection. And now His eternal spirit appears to these wretched serpents and declares His victory. In Colossians 2:15 there's a description of this scene. There we read, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

Now, we might ask, what does this have to do with Peter's encouragement to suffering saints? I'm glad you asked! The answer is: everything. He is in essence saying, "Because Christ has triumphed over Satan and his minions, the very ones that cause such wickedness upon the earth, the very ones that cause you so much grief and so much pain, because He has triumphed over them, your battle against the powers and principalities has already been won. You're merely waiting to join in on the triumph." In other words he's saying, "Jesus suffered in the flesh but triumphed in the spirit, and so must we. Trust Him, wait upon Him, keep your hope in Him. He is the victor over your alienation as well as the victor over Satan." That's why the apostle Paul would say in Romans 8:37 that because of Christ, "we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."

So we see that He is victor over alienation and Satan, and thirdly He's victor over sin. Notice in verses 19-21, "He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark." For one generation, the Lord's longsuffering grace was extended to those wicked people while Noah built the ark. A fascinating thought. He warned them of the impending judgment. We know in 2 Peter 2:5 that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." Eventually, as God promised, the waters of judgment began to rise and flooded the entire world, preventing any possibility of escape. Yet we know that He preserved a remnant of faithful people by providing for them a means of salvation through the ark. What an incredible thought. At the end of verse 20 it says that, "in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water."

This is a marvelous picture of salvation. It is a picture of all who repent and plead for a righteousness that is not their own, that God provides salvation, an ark of safety from divine judgment. We read in Hebrews 11:7 that “By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” Then Peter says something that has troubled some people—unnecessarily so, I might add. In verse 21 he says, “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you.” This is interesting. It’s important for you to understand something a bit technical and then I will hopefully make it very clear to you.

The concept of “corresponding to that” in the original language is one of a resemblance, a copy or a counterpart. In fact, the term that is used is *antitupon*, and we get our word antitype from that. The original term in Greek meant “the exactness of correspondence between a stamp and the die.” So when he says, “And corresponding to that” he’s referring to a copy or a resemblance or a counterpart, a type or a model. And the theological concept that some of you may have heard, that of an antitype, is derived literally from this term, and it literally means “answering to the type.” In other words it is a counterpart. We read in Hebrews 9:24 that the sanctuary of the holy place of the tabernacle was a counterpart or copy, an *antitypa*, of the true tabernacle in heaven. That’s the idea here.

So an antitype is merely an analogy or a symbol of a spiritual truth. So when Peter says in verse 21, “And corresponding to that,” in other words referring back to what God did with Noah and his family and the ark, he says, “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you.” Friends, you must understand that baptism here has nothing to do with water baptism. It has nothing to do with that. The term in the original language simply means to immerse. You don’t want to get confused here. He’s saying that baptism, which is a reference to our figurative immersion into Christ at salvation, baptism is a counterpart, an analogy, a symbol of Noah’s ark that God used to save those who trusted in Him from the waters of divine judgment. That’s simply what God is saying. No one can be saved from divine judgment unless they are, catch this, by faith baptized or immersed into Christ Jesus who alone is our ark of salvation.

In fact, notice how Peter goes on to make certain that no one confuses spiritual immersion into Christ with water baptism as unfortunately many people do, when he adds there in verse 21, “not the removal of dirt from the flesh” which is pictured in water baptism. Salvation doesn’t come by the application of water. Salvation does not come by some religious ceremony or by some ritual. That would be salvation by works. So he says it’s “not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

No one can enter the ark of salvation apart from appealing to God in repentant faith, and therefore be united to Christ, be baptized or immersed into that spiritual union with Him. That’s Peter’s point. Salvation is solely by faith. It’s not by works. There’s nothing mystical about water baptism. In Romans 10:10 we read that “With the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” We have no power to do that alone, especially through some ceremony of water baptism, which you might remember, is merely a public sign or symbol of what has taken place on the inside, how we identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and we’ve been raised to walk in newness of life and so on. Therefore, we appeal, as Peter says, “to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

We place our faith in the ark of Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation. For indeed His resurrection demonstrated God's acceptance of Christ's atoning work, His substitutionary atoning work. If I can put it this way, we have an ark of salvation that floats. It's not going to sink. The waters of judgment will not cause it to capsize. Our salvation is secure. Christ will save us. This is the glorious reality that undoubtedly brought profound encouragement to those first century saints that were suffering, as it should for all of us. For here we see Christ as victor over sin. And because of that we dwell safely in the ark of His salvation. So, come what may, our hope is in the ark of His saving grace.

So, in the sufferings of Christ, Peter brings great comfort to every child of God who finds himself in the midst of some great crucible of grace because in the accomplishments of His sufferings, we can understand that He is the victor over alienation, He is the victor over Satan and all of his minions, He is the victor over sin, and finally He is the victor over all. Notice verse 22. He "who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." Oh child of God, what a thrilling statement this is. How this should cause our hearts to leap with joy and triumph. You will remember that at His ascension Christ returned back to His eternal throne to reign supreme over all of His creation. Over all of the angels, over all the demons, over all authorities, over Satan and his minions, all of which "had been subjected to Him," the text tells us. Which means literally that they were forced to line up and rank themselves under Him.

This is the God we love. This is the God we serve. This is the Savior of our souls. He is the one that is the victor over the alienation that once was ours when we were separated from God because of sin. He is the victor over Satan, the victor over sin, the victor over all, the One whom God the Father glorified, and this is described so perfectly by the Spirit of God in Ephesians 1:19-21. "In accordance with the working of the strength of [God's] might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come."

What comfort we have in Christ. What hope we have in His victory, which also shall be ours. My prayer is that we all will be able to see in the anguish and the sufferings of Christ the triumphs of His grace, and thereby be strengthened in our trials and comforted in our pain.

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