

1 Peter 3:18-22 – Triumphant in Suffering

"When a man's eye is closed on Christ and the eternal world, he cannot stand the shock of afflictions; but if his eyes clearly see Jesus, you may take away houses and lands, his dearest earthly possessions, his loved ones, still his chief treasure is untouched." **McCheyne**, *The Believer's Joy*, 101.

Peter is very cognizant of the fact that his readers are struggling under the persecution of being a Christian in a very pagan culture, and some are suffering greatly. Often seen as outsiders, dissidents, rabble rousers and even treasonous, they were under constant assault from the culture (Scarlet Letter!). As such, the danger existed that out of fear (**3:13-14**), they might return to their old life. Peter returns to the example of Jesus (as in **2:21-24**), reminding them of the perseverance of Jesus, as well as the assured victory of those who suffer with Him. Far from being a sign of divine displeasure, the path of suffering ultimately leads to glory.

Vs 18a: Jesus suffered (died) to bring us to God.

1. Jesus also suffered. Just as they were suffering, Peter reminds his readers of Jesus' suffering, ending with His ultimate death (**Philippians 2:5-8**). The 'also' indicates Peter's readers were suffering.

2. Jesus died for sins not his own. The wages of sin is death (**Romans 6:23**), so someone has to die for our sins. This spiritual death is what should be feared (**Matthew 10:28**), not what men can do to us (**Psalms 118:6-8**).

3. Jesus died once (*hapax* - "perpetual validity that does not require repetition" - **Vine**) for (all) sins. With the backdrop of the sacrificial system, where literally millions of animals were slaughtered in never-ending sin offerings for the people, this is quite a contrast. Yet all these animal sacrifices came to an end with Jesus, the Lamb of God (**Hebrews 9:11-12**). His sacrifice was ultimate in cost and effectiveness (**Hebrews 7:26-27**).

4. Jesus died vicariously (the righteous for the unrighteous). That He was righteous indicates His suffering was unjust and undeserved. He who had never sinned took our sin upon Himself (**Isaiah 53:4-5,10-11**).

5. Jesus died to bring (*prosagage* – *to bring to, introduce* – as a noun, it would be the person in the king's court you would try to convince to give you access to the king – Jesus introduces us to the Father – **John 14:6, 1 Timothy 2:5-6**) us to God. Jesus' death turned away God's wrath and reconciled us to God (**1 John 4:10, 2 Corinthians 5:18**). The people of God now have direct access to the throne room (**Matthew 27:51-54**).

Vs 18b-20a: Jesus turns certain defeat into glorious victory

1. Put to death in the flesh – Jesus physically died (not a semi-coma condition from which the cold, damp tomb awakened Him).

2. Made alive in the spirit (Spirit is another possibility). Either rendering makes sense to me. Somehow, on the cross when He bore our sins, Jesus suffered the full wrath of God and 'died' spiritually (separation from God). Perhaps that is the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (**Matthew 27:46**)? I have no idea as to the details of how this could happen, but there was a time in which Jesus took our sin upon Himself (literally, became sin – **2 Corinthians 5:21**). But it would appear to have been a short time, for later He cried out, "Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit" (**Luke 23:46**). Jesus suffered eternal damnation for us!

"Rejoice in the result of the substitution: the sufferings are finished; the debt is paid. Justice is satisfied; the Law is magnified; righteousness is established. For all His people's sins, Christ has made a complete atonement; and for their justification He has risen from the dead (Rom 4:25)." **Spurgeon**, *Our Suffering Substitute*

3. In which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. This is a very difficult phrase. But I think we can determine:

A. After being made alive in the spirit (or by the Spirit), Jesus *went* (word indicates He went someplace else) in that state (in spirit, no bodily resurrection yet – His body was still in the tomb).

B. He proclaimed to the spirits in prison. What did Jesus preach to these imprisoned spirits? The message will be determined by the audience, and the term spirits here most likely refers to demons (in **vs. 20**, when talking about humans, Peter says, “persons”). So his audience is wicked angels, but not all wicked angels, only those in prison. Who are these? It would seem there are 2 classes of demons, those who are on the loose and those who are in 'prison' (**Revelation 20:7** speaks of Satan being put in prison).

I believe Peter is referring to the same demons he speaks of in **2 Peter 2:4**, and Jude in **Jude 6-7**. This set of angels is said to be kept in eternal bonds until the day of Judgment.

Peter also tells us when these wicked angels were constrained – during the days of Noah (**vs. 20**).

This time-frame I believe takes us to **Genesis 6:1-5**, where we see the sons of God (i.e., fallen angels) took wives for themselves from the daughters of men. This fits with the description of the sin Jude specifies, where the wicked angels “abandoned their proper abode.” Angels are not to procreate with humans, and the ‘race’ they created was so evil that it brought about Noah’s flood (consider Noah took 120 years to build the ark, and during that time, he was warning the wicked of God’s impending judgment - **2 Peter 2:5** - and yet none but his own household believed him).

It was to these “spirits in prison” that Jesus went and proclaimed His victory over sin and death. Satan had done his best to defeat God’s plan of redemption. He had Jesus betrayed, killed unjustly, and thought Jesus’ death was a victory – Satan had won! But Jesus conquered sin, death, and Satan, and rather than securing victory, Satan had actually helped in ensuring his own demise (**Acts 2:23-24, Colossians 2:15**).

“Satan came against Christ; he had in his hand a sharp sword called the Law, dipped in the poison of sin, so that every wound which the law inflicted was deadly. Christ dashed this sword out of Satan's hand, and there stood the prince of darkness disarmed. His helmet was cleft in twain, and his head was crushed with a rod of iron. Death rose against Christ. The Savior snatched his quiver from him, cut them in two, gave Death back the feather end, but kept the poisoned barbs from him, that he might never destroy the ransomed. Sin came against Christ; but sin was utterly cut in pieces. It had been Satan's armour bearer, but its shield was cast away, and it lay dead upon the plain. Is it not a noble picture to behold all the enemies of Christ?—nay, my brethren, all your enemies, and mine, totally disarmed? Satan has nothing left him now wherewith he may attack us. He may attempt to injure us, but wound us he never can, for his sword and spear are utterly taken away. In the old battles, especially among the Romans, after the enemy had been overcome, it was the custom to take away all their weapons and ammunition; afterwards they were stripped of their armour and their garments, their hands were tied behind their backs, and they were made to pass under the yoke. Now, even so hath Christ done with sin, death, and hell: he hath taken away their armour, spoiled them of all their weapons, and made them all to pass under the yoke; so that now they are our slaves, and we in Christ are conquerors of them who were mightier than we.” **Spurgeon, Christ Triumphant**

Vs. 20b-21: God saves His people in the midst of extreme circumstances

Using the example of Noah, Peter reminds us that when God destroyed the whole world with a flood, He brought 8 people safely “through the water.” Noah had to endure at least 120 years of assault by the wicked culture. Yet his suffering culminated in the glorious deliverance by God in the ark.

“The ark passing safely through the flood provides a figure of God's method of saving men out inevitable judgment. First, God delayed the Day of Judgment long enough for an ark to be prepared. Then the souls that went into the ark did not avoid the judgment, rather in the ark they were saved through the very water which drowned others and because of it they thus passed out of the old world into a new world. When they emerged from the ark, they literally found that old things had passed away and all things had become new.” **Alan Stibbs**

“**Baptism corresponds to this**” - Peter sees the deliverance of Noah and his family through the ark as a type (pattern, symbol) which corresponds to baptism.

- Peter is not speaking of water baptism (**vs 21** - “not as removal of dirt from the body”)
- The water corresponds to the judgment of God upon the entire world
- Noah and his family were 'saved through the water' in that the judgment of God via water served to destroy all wickedness (righteous Noah and his family were preserved through the judgment)
- Noah and his family were safe while the destructive forces of the water were unleashed upon the whole world. The ark was the place of safety (though deluged by water from above and below, those inside were saved from certain destruction)
- Likewise, Peter says, the believer is united with (immersed in) Jesus Christ, and passes from certain death to new life (**Romans 6:3-5**)
- This baptism results in “*an appeal (request) to God for a good conscience*” - Difficult phrase, but I think the most straight-forward interpretation is that what is signified in baptism is the appeal of the believer, on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for their consciences to be cleansed and their sins forgiven (**Schreiner**). This is akin to what the writer of Hebrews says in **Hebrews 10:19-22**. As the inhabitants of the ark emerged from the ark to a renewed world where sin had been destroyed, so also the believer, when united with Christ, dies to sin and is raised to righteousness in Jesus.
- This good conscience proves the superiority of Christ over the sacrifice of animals (**Hebrews 10:1-4**).

“As the ark, in a sense, was a tomb and there was a certain kind of dying to the world as they entered it and sealed it shut, and there was a certain kind of resurrection, that day when it stopped on Mount Ararat and they opened the door and walked out. They walked out to a new life in a new world. So, says Peter, is the majesty of the analogy, as you by faith entered into the ark of safety in Christ, you entered into a coffin of sorts because you died in Him and one day it was open and you burst out in His resurrection and you live a new life.” **John MacArthur**

vs. 22: The Exaltation of Jesus after Suffering

Jesus suffered unjustly to the point of death (the ultimate), but now Peter tells us He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God. The suffering servant has now been exalted to the place of prominence at the right hand of the Father (**Philippians 2:9-11**).

Peter also emphasizes that Jesus rules over all angelic powers and beings – Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (**1 Timothy 6:15-16, Revelation 19:16**).

Peter's message to his persecuted hearers is simple: Jesus Christ suffered unjustly at the hands of evil men and wicked Satanic powers, to the point of death, but this path of suffering led to ultimate deliverance and exaltation. So also, Noah and his family endured suffering, but were rescued by God though the whole world was utterly destroyed (**John 6:37-40** – Jesus will not abandon a single one of His own). Though believers are called to suffer, Jesus has not surrendered them over to the powers of evil. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has conquered the forces of evil and death, and as believers united to Him by faith, we too will experience victory after suffering (**2 Timothy 2:8-13**).