



## ***Christ's Suffering and Glory*** **1 Peter 3:18-22**

Well, the new year is a time we go back to our normal routine after enjoying a wonderful holiday season. Decorations are eventually put away, kids go back to school, we return to normal work schedules, and we start using those gym memberships we signed up for this time last year. Today we are returning to our previous sermon series through 1 Peter. We got through the first half of chapter 3 before pausing for the advent season, so we will return to where we left off.

But before we do that it would be good to give a brief review of this letter and the big themes.

Remember, that this was written by the apostle Peter, who was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. And he is writing to "elect exiles," in other words, he is writing to Christians who are suffering persecution and have been scattered for their faith, and he wants to give them encouragement and instruction on how to live as exiles in a world that doesn't share their worldview, doesn't worship the true and living God, and doesn't follow Christ like they do.

So far, we've seen Peter in chapter 1 encourage these Christians by reminding them of the living hope they have in Christ, that even if everything is taken away from them, they can never take away the inheritance they have in Jesus. He's also called them to live holy lives though they live in the midst of an unholy world.

In chapter 2 we saw Peter's call to submit ourselves to every human institution, though we are exiles. In chapter 3, Peter gives instructions to husbands and wives and then says we are to be prepared to suffer for doing good.

That leads us to our passage this morning: 1 Peter 3:18-22, the final paragraph of chapter 3. So, let me invite your attention there this morning and I want to read the entire paragraph and then we will walk through it...

### **1 Peter 3:18-22**

**18** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, **19** in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, **20** because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

**21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from

the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Now, this is a difficult passage to grasp. It is the most difficult passage in all of 1 Peter to interpret and many believe that it is the most difficult passage in the entire New Testament.

In fact, Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on 1 & 2 Peter, “A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means.”<sup>1</sup>

So, light work for me this week...just easing into the new year...

First, we need to see the context of this paragraph before we try to handle these verses.

In verse 18, it begins “for,” in other words, there is a connection to verse 17 the verse just before it...

#### **1 Peter 3:17**

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

And from there, Peter says, “For Christ also suffered...”

So Peter’s teaching in our paragraph comes on the heels of him saying that it could be God’s will for us to suffer for doing good. Which, of course, is not an easy thing to hear, it’s not an easy thing to believe, and it’s even harder to walk through.

But then there is also a connection to the verse after our paragraph in 1 Peter 4:1...

#### **1 Peter 4:1**

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin

So, *before* our passage and *after* our passage Peter is clearly talking about *our* suffering but he wants to connect the suffering of Christians with the suffering of Christ, and this really helps us understand what Peter is getting at in these difficult verses.

There is obviously no way that I can go through the different interpretations of these verses, but the big picture of this passage is: **The reason suffering is not foreign or fatal for the Christian is because Christ paved the way to glory for us *through* suffering.** And keeping our eyes on this truth will help us when we suffer ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 166.

Though Christ suffered, he now reigns in glory. And the same will be true for his people. We may suffer now, but we will live in glory, because of Christ.

And so this passage really is all about Christ, his suffering, and his glory.

Peter points out a number of ways in this passage how Christ's suffering brings us to glory. I want to point out three in particular today...

Look again at verse 18...

**1 Peter 3:18**

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit

The first important truth about Christ's sufferings that Peter points out is that...

**I. Christ suffered as our substitute. (v. 18)**

Again, Jesus suffered as "the righteous for the unrighteous." And he did this "that he might bring us to God."

The Bible tells us of the grand truths of God's holiness, our sinfulness, and the separation that incurs because of those two truths. God is holy, morally perfect, pure, righteous, without fault or blemish. And we are none of those things. We are unholy, morally imperfect, impure, unrighteous, with fault and blemish.

This is true of us in our actions. This is true of us in our thoughts. This is true of us in our motivations and desires. And the result is that unholy man is separated from the holy God.

So, what can we do? Can we try to change our unholiness to holiness? Can we change our impurity to purity? Scripture says no we can't. We are that tarnished and corrupt. And our unholiness is a result of our breaking of God's moral law. Thus, justice must be dispensed on our sin. Judgment is right and necessary.

But Peter here, remember he is an eyewitness to this truth, reminds them, Jesus took the punishment for us. Imagine Peter here as he pens these words, replaying in his mind the scene of Jesus being nailed to the cross and hoisted up to die a miserable death. And with that scene in his mind write, the one who was actually righteous died for you and me the unrighteous. I should have been up there. You should have been up there. But we weren't. Jesus was. And because of his substitutionary death, the righteous for the unrighteous, this separation between a holy God and unholy man can be bridged.

One of the things that Peter is wanting the suffering Christians in exile to remember is that, suffering can feel like things are going terribly wrong. Suffering, especially for doing good, can seem like God doesn't care or that we are doomed to never ending despair. But, Peter says, look to Christ and see what his suffering accomplished. It wasn't wasted. It wasn't for nothing.

Again, Peter, one of the disciples, knew that feeling of despair when he saw Jesus suffer. He rebuked Jesus for saying the he would die, he denied knowing Jesus at his trial and crucifixion. Jesus shouldn't have died, he did nothing wrong, in fact he was the only person ever to only do what was right, and Peter believed he was the Son of God, God in the flesh, *and yet*, there he was being killed for no just reason.

But Peter didn't understand, Jesus didn't come to evade suffering, he came to endure suffering, because that was the only way to bring us back to God. What seemed like an utter defeat turned out to be the path of ultimate victory.

So, don't despise suffering for doing good. Jesus suffered unjustly as the only righteous one, and he did it not because he had to, but because he chose to, for you and for me.

But let's go on. Verses 19 and 20...

**1 Peter 3:19-20**

**19** in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, **20** because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

Verse 19 has been debated for centuries about what that means that Jesus went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. I won't go into the different interpretations but I will say that I believe that it means that Jesus proclaimed victory over the rebellious angels who have been in chains,<sup>2</sup> this through his death and resurrection.

Now, even with that view, there is debate as to when that happened. Some would say that is what happened on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Some would say that is what happened after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. I am going to wait to explain those views until our Apostles' Creed sermon series in a few months, because a line in the creed has stated that Jesus "descended to the dead." And if that's not confusing enough, some versions of the creed stated that Jesus "descended to hell." So, we will talk more about that then.

But the main point I want us to see in these verses is that not only did Christ suffer as our substitute, Peter wants his readers to see that Jesus suffered as our ark.

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<sup>2</sup> See also Jude 6.

## 2. Christ suffered as our ark. (v. 19-20)

Peter recalls the story of Noah in Genesis 6-9 to explain this idea.

If you don't remember the story of Noah in Genesis 6, the Bible says that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). So things were not good. The effects of sin had grown to its natural end and God decided it was time to bring judgment. However, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8), so God told Noah to build an ark, this large boat, in which he, his wife, their three sons and their wives would find shelter and safety as the flood waters came killing all those who were on the outside of the ark.

So, in Scripture, the story of Noah is used often to warn of coming judgment. And I think this is key to understanding what Peter is trying to teach here.

Jesus used the story of Noah to speak of coming judgment at his Second coming...

### **Matthew 24:37-39**

**37** For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, **39** and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

So Jesus said that he is coming again and when he comes he will bring judgment just like it was in Noah's day. The rest of the world will be going on with life as usual until the judgment comes upon them. This is a serious and sober reminder of what is to come when Christ returns.

But the story of Noah points to not only judgment but also salvation. Noah and his family were saved from judgment and saved for life. And they were saved by being found in the ark. Ultimately, the ark in the story of Noah is a picture of Jesus. That by our faith in the finished work of Christ we are securely placed in the ark, so to speak, and when the judgment floods come we will be brought safely through to eternal life.

So, Peter reminds the believers, and us, remember Jesus suffered as our ark. Just as Noah's ark endured the wrath of the winds and the waves of the flood, so too, Jesus, our ark endured the wrath of God on sin. And in a world that despises him, we love him. In a world that doesn't believe that judgment will come, we do and we believe that we need an ark for safe passage. Even though the world, like those in Noah's day, mock us for our belief in these things, we keep our hope on the security of the boat, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And there is an important word of encouragement here as well. Peter specifically mentions that "a few, that is eight persons" would be saved in the ark. That's important

to grasp, because I think that as Christians, we know what it feels like to be numbered among the “few,” especially in the part of the country that we live in.

I can remember when we moved to Italy as missionaries we had first rented a short-term apartment, like an Airbnb, until we could find a long-term apartment. And I remember talking with an Italian pastor there and asking him about different parts of the city and trying to get his opinion on where we should live, because we wanted to choose where in the city we would live with intentionality, we wanted to think missionally about what neighborhood we would plant ourselves in. And after talking a bit about this, he said, “Just pick any neighborhood. You will be the only believers there.” And that was a stark reminder of the spiritual state of where had moved.

So, it was very lonely at times knowing that probably no one else we came in contact with knew the gospel and knew Christ, but that is why we moved there. And to be honest, we didn’t even face real persecution for our faith, other than people maybe thinking we were weird or part of a cult. We have missionaries and brothers and sisters in Christ in parts of the world where they are one of a few believers in their towns and they are hated for their faith. They truly suffer. We can’t imagine the feelings of loneliness that they must endure at times.

But even if we aren’t in those situations, it can still feel lonely at times here can’t it. Maybe you are one of a few or the only Christian you know at school. Maybe you are one of a few or the only Christian at your workplace. Maybe you are the only Christian in your family. And this experience of being on the outside of the majority, if we aren’t careful, might cause us to start thinking we are on the outside of what is right and true.

It is easy to think, well, most of society or the world isn’t suffering for these beliefs I hold, they aren’t being marginalized or ridiculed for their beliefs, but I am, so, maybe I’m in the wrong here. Maybe I’m the one that should change my view on Christ, Scripture, and morality. But the story of Noah reminds that being in the minority is not an accurate gauge of what is right and wrong, of what is true and false. Only eight people believed the Lord while the rest of the world mocked him.

And even more importantly, Jesus died alone. All of his disciples bailed, the city cried out for his execution, even one of those who was crucified with him mocked him. But that didn’t change the truth of who Jesus truly was and did.

So, the question for us is will we stand firm to biblical truth though we might suffer unjustly, or will we conform to the beliefs of the rest of the culture though it is not biblical? It is better to find shelter in the ark with a few, than face the flood with the many.

So, Peter says, though you suffer unjustly, remember Noah and his family, but even more, remember Jesus who carries you through to life.

Now, let's go on in the passage...

**1 Peter 3:21-22**

**21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Now, the reason that this passage can be so difficult to interpret is because of, first, the idea of Jesus proclaiming to imprisoned spirits, but second, because it seems to say that we are saved by our baptism.

Now, to be clear, there are a number of groups and denominations that believe that. It is a belief called "baptismal regeneration," that we are regenerated, born again, when we experience water baptism.

However, I want to make sure to say that is not a position we hold here at Grace Road. We believe that we are born again, we are regenerated, we are justified before God by grace alone - which means there is nothing we can do, no amount of religious ritual or action to perform that would earn salvation - and by faith alone - which means that our faith in the finished work of Christ is counted as righteousness because the righteousness of Jesus is credited to us.

And we believe this because the New Testament is full of passages which say just that, including many from the pen of Peter himself. It is the point of the gospel. It is the reason we call the gospel, good news.

So, with that said, it sounds like Peter, here, is saying something else! What is he getting at?

The key to grasping this by looking at each phrase. So, "baptism..."

"...corresponds to this..." That is, baptism is a picture or a type (the Gr. word here for "corresponds" is literally "antitype") of the flood waters in the days of Noah, this coming judgment. Water is an agent of death when we are submerged and can't come up for air.

I've had some people tell me they are afraid of getting baptized because they are afraid of going backwards in water, as if we aren't going to bring them back up.

When I was in Bible college, I was in a pastoral training class, and we were learning about baptism and our professor actually planned for us to have a day where we went to a local church in the area and we would all get in and baptize each other so we could practice the actual act of it. Well, my best friend in that class was a big dude, much bigger than me and we were paired up to baptize each other, and of course, he

dunked me and picked me up with no problem, but then it was my turn to baptize him. And you know how everything under water is really light until you have to lift it out of the water? All of the weight seems to come back? That's how it was with him and he had to literally grab the sides and put his feet down to help me pull him up out of the water.

Obviously, too much time under water leads to drowning. And so, with the flood waters of Noah's story in view, baptism in Scripture has been used in this way to describe death.

In fact, Jesus described his death this way...

**Mark 10:38-39**

**38** Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

**39** And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized

That cup and that baptism being death. In Luke we have the words of Jesus when he says...

**Luke 12:50**

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

Jesus knew, of course, what awaited him in his earthly life. The flood waters of God's judgment on sin would engulf him and he would die.

Now, back to 1 Peter, it is baptism that saves us "not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience," in other words, there is nothing magical about the water that if you get in then your sins are washed away like its the fountain of youth or something like that. But it is an appeal to God for a good conscience. It is saying to the Lord, shown in this act of obedience to you, I am believing that by my faith I am united to the death of Christ.

This is what baptism symbolizes according to Paul in Romans 6. Salvation is being united to Christ, so much so, that his death becomes our death. So when we are put under water we are showing that in salvation we have died with Jesus and have been buried with Jesus...BUT that is not all baptism shows...

Peter continues, all of this "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." In other words, just as Jesus endured God's judgment on sin and died, he also emerged to new, resurrected life. And we too, being united to Jesus in his death and burial, when we are brought up out of the water we are symbolizing that are united to Jesus' resurrection as well!



Peter has said Christ is our substitute, Christ is our ark, but third, Christ is our resurrection.

### **B. Christ is our resurrection. (v. 21-22)**

And this is the basis for our good conscience, we know that we are united to his death shown in the waters of baptism, but we are reminded that we are also united to his resurrection as we emerge from the water. And this is why watching baptisms are so special isn't it? We get to watch as new believers show their faith in the Lord and we are given a physical picture of what has happened in their lives spiritually. And we are reminded that if we are followers of Christ too, what we witnessed of them is true for us as well. And our consciences are comforted, our souls strengthened, and our hope renewed.

And this is what Peter is reminding them of. So, the act of water baptism isn't what saves us according to Peter. He is teaching that we are saved in our baptism into Christ, which happens at our conversion by faith when we are united to Christ. Water baptism is the "type" or picture of this truth.

Again look at the last verse...

#### **1 Peter 3:22**

who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

The elect exiles needed to hear this in their situation. In a world that despises them because they despise their Lord, they needed to be reminded that their despised Lord is the reigning Lord over all.

So, don't forget, Christian, Christ has already secured victory over the enemy. And because we are in Christ, his victory is ours as well.

When Christians endure suffering for their faith, we are on a road marked by suffering but we remember that that road ultimately leads to glory. And with eyes fixed on eternity we find the perseverance to trudge down the road even when met with hostility and opposition. This is the message of Peter in this passage.

And this is a message that needs repeating over and over again. In fact, Peter would do just that in his second letter in our New Testaments...

#### **2 Peter 2:4-9a**

**4** For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; **5** if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; **6** if by turning the cities

of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; **7** and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked **8** (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); **9** then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials

Don't lose heart in your unjust suffering. Christ suffered to bring us to glory. We will see that one day. But until then, we continue on in faithfulness to the One who went to the cross for us to bring us to the Father.

## **CONCLUSION & COMMUNION**

In fact, just as baptism is a physical picture of the spiritual act of union with Christ, Jesus gave us another physical picture to remind us of these truths as well, in observing communion.

When we eat the bread we are remembering the flesh that Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, took on, to allow it to be torn for us. When we drink the wine we are reminded of the blood that he spilled to make atonement for our sins.

Again, all of this done as a substitute. It should have been our flesh. It should have been our blood. But it was his. And so as we partake we are saying we believe in the sufferings of Christ, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. We believe that we needed a Savior and that Jesus is that Savior. And we do this finding comfort in this truth that the perfect sacrifice was made and the One who died now reigns at the right hand of the Father, where we will one day be.

So, with that said we invite you, if you are a Christian, if you believe Jesus is the Son of God who died for your sins and repenting of your sins and self-righteousness trust in his finished work on the cross, to partake with us. If that is not you, we would ask that you do not partake.

So, I am going to pray for us and then anytime during the next two songs you are welcome to take the elements when you'd like.

## **VERSES**

1 Peter 3:18-22

1 Peter 3:17

1 Peter 4:1

1 Peter 3:18

1 Peter 3:19-20

Matthew 24:37-39

1 Peter 3:21-22

Mark 10:38-39

Luke 12:50

1 Peter 3:22

2 Peter 2:4-9a

## **SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why might it be important to connect our sufferings as Christians with the sufferings of Christ?
2. What did Cody mean when he said that suffering is neither foreign nor fatal for the Christian?
3. Explain the importance of Jesus' substitutionary death.
4. How might the story of Noah encourage us today as we live in a world that doesn't hold the same beliefs that we do?
5. Why is baptism such a special moment for the local church? What does it picture?
6. How does Peter's reminder that Jesus reigns over all encourage you in your suffering as a Christian?