

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Dale Wallace
Series: Forged
October 15, 2023

Assurance of Victory

1 Peter 3:18-4:6

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. 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, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

Good morning, Harris Creek. How we doing? Let's go. My name is Dale. If we haven't gotten to meet, I work on the college team and it's just an honor to be with you. A few years ago, I was on a flight on the way back from Denver flying to Dallas, and it was probably the worst flight of my entire life. We've all possibly experienced turbulence before, but this was more than turbulence; this was like a roller coaster. And in fact, is anyone here afraid of flying? Okay, this isn't going to help you, Allison. Anyone else? This is not the morning for you; just tune out for just the next two minutes. But it was one of those flights that I'll never forget. I remember sitting in my chair and the pilot comes on; it's like, "Everyone, everyone, everyone, prepare for turbulence." It wasn't calm. It was like, "Everyone get ready." And in fact, the cart was returning while the turbulence hit. It was one of those moments where it was just like, "Oh, what's that cart doing?" and "What's my body doing?" and "Oh, this is why we wear seat belts on a plane." You know you've always wondered that. There was a reason. It was for moments like this. And so, we're just bouncing around all through this flight. And in fact, I remember a moment where I felt like the cart lifted off the ground. I thought it hit the roof. My wife told me it didn't hit the roof, but it felt like it hit the roof. I made eye contact with the ginger ale and I thought, "I've never seen a cart do that on a plane." I just didn't know that that was possible. That's the way the flight was. Hey, side note, that's a little bit of the way this Bible passage is going to be today. That's a little bit of the way it felt as I read it. But let's go back to the story. It was so crazy. As I'm sitting there, this guy behind me is going back and forth to the bathroom. You know, it's causing problems for him. So I pull out the Dramamine; I start passing it to all of my friends and all these people. And in fact, I just turn around and hand him a white pill. He has no idea what the white pill is; he just happily accepted the pill. That's where he was. He was like, "I will take whatever this is. I will

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take it.” That’s how bad it was. And in fact, it was so bad that the people to the left of Jaycee-- Jaycee was behind me--and she was sitting with these people and they started to pray. And Jaycee’s like, “That’s a great idea. What God are you praying too? Let me just double check.” And they’re like, “We don’t believe in God.” She’s like, “You need to. This is very important. Do you know who Jesus is? Do you know what He’s done on the cross?” So they’re all praying behind us and Jaycee is sharing the gospel with them. But the entire time, as all this is happening--this is a long period of turbulence--every few minutes, Jaycee just grabs my arm and goes, “Are we going to die?” “Hey, are we going to die?” And then I say, “No we’re not going to die.” It would keep going and then she’d grab--“Hey, are we going to be okay? Are we going to be okay?” And I’m like, “Yes, we’re going to be okay. It’s fine; everything’s fine.” And I’m just sitting there thinking, “I’m not sure that’s true.” I mean, planes take off and land all the time, so I’m not really sure, but I’m giving her assurance over and over again. I’m giving her assurance. “It’s going to be okay. We’re not going to die. It’s going to work out.” I’m giving her assurance-- and I’m not sure.

What’s crazy is today, as we continue our series through 1 Peter, the audience of 1 Peter is experiencing suffering. I think this is a moment where Peter leans in, grabs their shoulder, and goes, “Hey it’s going to be okay.” “Hey, I promise, it’s going to okay.” No matter how it feels. It doesn’t feel like things are going okay; this is really hard; we’re experiencing suffering and persecution. He’s going to say, “Hey I’m going to give you some assurance that we have victory in Christ. I’m going to give you some assurance so you can be confident and be comforted no matter what is happening around.” And I struggled this week as I read this passage; I just thought, “I’m not sure how applicable it is today.” Do we really need to be reminded that Jesus has won? He’s won. We know how the story ends. He died and rose again. I’d rather, you know, give dating advice or marriage advice or something practical. Then I realized, as I was scrolling through the news, that I had this pit in my stomach of fear because of the atrocities that Hamas had done to Israel. And in the confusion in my mind, I see people celebrating what I see as evil; they’re celebrating it as good. I’m like, “What is happening this week?” This is confusing. This is worrisome. This is like, “Is this going to create a war or world war? What’s this going to do?” This pit of fear. And I thought, “Oh, maybe we do need an assurance of victory in Christ.” Maybe this is a timely passage for us in this world.

And so I’m excited to turn to 1 Peter 3:18 through 4:6. That’s where we’re going to be if you want to open your Bibles. We’re going to see that Christ triumphed over evil; that no matter the suffering, we do God’s will; and that everyone will give an account. As we’ve been learning in this series, “Forged,” Peter’s writing to this group of people who are suffering. They’re believers who are suffering in modern-day Turkey. Really, the first half of the book was an encouragement of identity. “This is who you are. You’re elect exiles. You’re a chosen race, a royal priesthood. This is who you are in Christ. As followers of Jesus, it’s this comfort and this confidence that we have in Christ.” The second half has been about suffering. Even last week, we talked about suffering for good; it’s all for the purpose of pointing people to Jesus. Our response to suffering, our response to persecution, is all an opportunity to give grace where it’s not deserved because we’ve received grace where it’s not been deserved. This whole thing is just Peter writing to people in suffering and in persecution. It’s just comfort in this week, as I’ve already told you; he’s

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going to lean in and give some assurance. “Hey, this is why you can be sure: Christ has won and that changes things.”

So, as we jump into the text, here's your friendly reminder that this is a bumpy passage. There's a lot of what I would call interpretive challenges--think moments where you read and you think, “What in the world is this talking about?” We're going to go through each of those as they come up. So, let's jump into verse 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.” This is the good news of the gospel, but what does it mean? That He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. You see, Peter talks about flesh differently than Paul. Paul sometimes talks about flesh and it's more like “sinful nature.” When Peter is talking about flesh in this passage, he's really saying the flesh is the “visible realm,” or the physical. “Flesh” equals “physical,” and then “spirit” equals a spiritual realm—“invisible.” So, “flesh-physical,” “spirit-invisible spiritual realm.” I want us to be encouraged in these moments and not discouraged. If you read the Bible and you read this phrase “being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,” that doesn't mean close your Bible because you don't understand what it means. That doesn't mean jump over it. That means put a question mark, underline it, go back, text your Life Group, go to gotquestions.org, use an ESV study Bible, and ask God to give you discernment. What does this mean? Do not be discouraged, friends, when you read your Bible and there are moments where you don't understand it. It's part of learning more about who God is. It's part of falling more in love with the Scriptures. I really think that some of these bumps that we hit lead us to fall more in love with Jesus and more in love with His Word because we better understand what it's talking about. Don't be discouraged as you read God's Word and you come across these things.

Verse 19, let's jump back in. Jesus suffered once for sins, that we might be brought to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. **“In which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.”** Jesus went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison--that's a big bump. That's a ginger ale, eye contact kind of bump. Jesus went to who? In the what? Where? He went where? That's the bump here. Let's get to that in a second. **“because they, the spirits, 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.”**

Now let's talk about this bump, or this interpretive challenge. Some people believe that “the spirits in prison” are human spirits of those who died in the flood of Noah's day. That's what some people believe. I believe that this passage is talking about, when it comes to those spirits in prison, they're either angels or demons. They're angels who have fallen. They're angels who have sinned. Here's why. This is Bible time. This is so fun. This is amazing. This is beautiful. In all of the New Testament, almost always when the word “spirit” is used, it's talking about the spiritual realm. It's talking about angels and demons. Almost always, it's talking about angels or demons. Then, I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter. If you brought your Bible, turn to 2 Peter 2:4. Peter seems to know something that you and I don't know, and as I read this, it becomes more clear. Peter's talking about Jesus going to spirits in prison, proclaiming something to them, and then he talks about it here again. **“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast**

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them into hell, (we're going to go back to the word hell in a minute) **and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.**” Peter knows about how there were angels who sinned who God had put into hell. The word “hell” here, this is the only place it's used in the Bible. Other interpretations of the word “hell” use a different word. This word for hell would be like the image of a grain barn. Y'all know anything about silos? Okay, this is Waco; you should know this. So, we have a silo. It'd be like a silo that somebody has been dropped into that does not have a way to get out. That's what this word for “hell” that Peter uses means. That's the image that he's talking about. There are angels who sinned who God put into a silo. I believe that's what Peter is saying; Jesus went down to proclaim to those spirits, fallen angels, who were in a silo, that had been punished. I believe, truly, that that what He's proclaiming to them is victory. He's going to proclaim the victory of what He's done with His perfect life, His death, what He's going to do in resurrection, and what He's going to do in returning. He is proclaiming victory to the spirits in prison. That's what I believe this passage is saying. Some would even go further. They'd say that, in Genesis 6, there's a story of some angels who came down to Earth, cohabitated with women and sinned, and created the Nephilim. Some would even go on to say that that's who Jesus has punished and put into the grain barn, in the silo, and that's who he is going to proclaim to. And so ultimately what this is saying is that Jesus declared victory.

Let's keep reading, verse 21. Oh, I forgot something important. Sorry. People disagree on this, people that love Jesus. Ultimately, I'd encourage you, if this interests you and you want to learn more, we have resources on our website at harris creek.org/forged. For every series, we have extra resources. If you go to that page and you click on “resources,” you can learn more and read more, because there's Bible scholars that land on both sides and we'll all be in heaven together. It's going to be amazing, so if you want to learn more, you can turn there.

Let's keep reading, verse 21. **“Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you.”** There's a bump. Does baptism save you? Peter clarifies this immediately: he says, **“Not as a removal of dirt from the body.”** It's not that the baptism is the thing that does the forgiving or the washing away of sins but it's **“an appeal to God for a good conscience,”** because of the faith that we have in Jesus. It's a step of faith **“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”** Peter explains, “It's not baptism that saves you. It's that, upon salvation, the first step of faith is baptism. And as this happens, this happens in in our belief that we have a good conscience because of what Christ has done in the resurrection.” Baptism doesn't save you but it is the first step of faith, so it's a part of following Jesus. Ultimately, Peter's writing to these believers in suffering and persecution to say, “Because of what Christ has done, He has victory over evil. Christ has triumphed over evil. See Him proclaiming it to the spirits in prison. See the way that He saved Noah. And see baptism--buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life.” All these things point to victory in Jesus and Christ's triumph over evil. That's our first point this morning. That's how Peter is giving assurance to those that are going through challenges: He died. He rose again. He's defeated sin, death, evil, sickness. He even has told us that in this world we're going to have trouble but take heart--for He has overcome the world. And so, we get to look at this thing that Christ has done in the past that gives us assurance in the

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present. And knowing that this will all come to fullness in the future when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. Christ's triumph over evil.

1. Christ has triumphed over evil.

We must understand that this is helpful to us and here's what I mean by this. Did any of you go to the Baylor National Championship game a few years ago in basketball? Anyone there? Was I the only one there? Are you serious? Let's go. We've got a true fan. Man, the first service had way more Baylor fans. Okay, so when we were there, I just want you to know I got to go there with some family friends and it was one of the highlights of my life. I want you to imagine you were there with me. It is amazing. We're at the National Championship. There are people everywhere. We're getting to cheer on the Bears. This is amazing. Here's the deal. I was stressed the whole time. I want to confess that to you. We were up by a lot of points; we scored a lot of points. It wasn't enough. You know, if you're a Baylor fan, you're always worried you're going to pull a Baylor. There aren't enough points that we could have in any sort of game to be not stressed and to be at peace. So, I'm at the game and I'm just waiting for Gonzaga to make a comeback, for Gonzaga to score some points. Every time Drew Timme touches the ball, I can't even watch. I can't even. I can't watch; he's going to start scoring. He's going to come back. They're going to beat us; this is terrible. I stood the whole game. I screamed the whole game, even though halfway through I lost my voice. The whole game was just this crazy fun time where I was stressed. I was stressed. Here's the deal: there were even some moments where our players were on the ground, or they'd get a block and they'd fall over, and I'm like, "Oh no, Davion; he's out. Jared's out. We're in trouble. We can't win without them." When there's no hope, you know. Every time something happens, I am worried. I'm not sure if we're really going to be able to win.

This week, I went back and watched that National Championship game, and it was fun. I had peace every time Drew Timme touched the ball. I thought, "He doesn't score many points." I wasn't nervous when some of our players made a mistake or fell over or looked like they might have been hurt. I wasn't worried when the opposing team scored. I wasn't worried. Why? Because I knew how it ended. I knew how it ended. I could look back. I know how it goes. The difference between me in the game and me knowing how it ended are very different. We think about our lives, and we think about all the things that are going on around us that are bringing stress to our lives, that we are concerned about, our circumstances. In all these different things, you must understand, it's almost like we should be living like we know how it ends. The challenge is that this is really, really easy when life's going well. We live in the victory of Christ and the triumph of Christ over evil. Living in this when life is good or even fine is easy, but then you insert tough things: a diagnosis. Your child isn't even one and has some things wrong with their body. It creates confusion and concern, and you have dysfunction within your family. Dysfunction is a nice way to describe it. You have brokenness. Then you add on the things that are happening even around us in wars: death, people murdering innocent children. In those moments, that's when we must remind ourselves Christ has triumphed over evil. We can be comforted in that. We can hold on to that even when it doesn't feel true. On that airplane, it didn't feel like we were going to land. We could trust this. Even this morning at 2:00 AM, I'm holding a baby with 102-degree fever and I'm just thinking, "Man it's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. I'm just caring, I'm caring and she's going to be okay." Her fever has gone down since then.

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But this morning, in the middle of the night, I was just reminding myself of this. Christ has triumphed; it's going to be okay.

The other ways that it changes the way we live, Peter goes on to give us. Chapter 4:1--What is Christ's triumph over evil? How does it change the way that we live? Verse 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."** Bump! Alright, if you've suffered then you don't sin. This isn't talking about perfection; this is just talking about how, once you start to experience suffering in this world, you will find it more easy to turn away from sin. And as you suffer and as you turn from your old way of life, which we're about to get to, you will look different. You will cease from sin. You will sin way less. It's almost as if you will have been born again as you start to follow Jesus. That's what this is talking about. **"For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God."** We no longer live for our own passions but now we live for the will of God. We arm ourselves with this mindset. **"For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you."** What Peter is saying is, as you start to arm yourself and suffer like Christ and choose God's will in this world over your own will, over your old life, and old ways, as you do this--they're going to malign you. You will experience some form of suffering, persecution, gossip, slander, curses, all those things. And he's saying, "No matter what happens, no matter the suffering, do God's will." That's my second point:

2. No matter the suffering, we do God's will.

Prepare yourself for that. Arm yourself. It's like a battle; you must prepare yourself. As you're choosing to do God's will, be prepared for these things. And in fact, it's expected that they would turn on you. It's expected that they would malign you. It's expected that you experience suffering. Here's what this looks like: as you become a believer, things just change in your life. You realize and come to believe that Jesus is the way to find fullness of life. He's the way, the truth, and the life. He died and rose again for the forgiveness of our sins and that starts to change the way that we live. Everywhere we go, it changes things. It changes what we talk about, changes who we hang out with, and, in fact, I would even say that it changes our playmates and our playgrounds. We find ourselves having to turn away from sin and turn away from our old ways. Our old playmates and our old playgrounds look at us now and our new life in Christ, and you know what they think? They hate it. Because we've left them. Our new life in Christ condemns them. Our new playmates and playgrounds condemn them. It's okay. It's expected that they don't like the change that God has done in our lives. It's part of following Jesus. What Peter is saying is, as we renounce sin, we should expect to receive suffering. As we renounce sin, we should expect to receive suffering.

Here's the problem: as we've been going through 1 Peter, some of us have thought, "But I don't really experience suffering in Woodway, TX. How do I experience it in Waco? Or at Baylor? Or wherever." You're like, "I don't really experience suffering." There are some questions we can

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ask to see if there's a reason for that. One of them is, "Have we renounced sin?" Or are we still hanging out with the same old drinking buddies? Same old golfing buddies, which are also our drinking buddies? The same old gossip buddies? The same old same old. Have we turned? That's one reason we might not be experiencing suffering. The other reason we might not be experiencing suffering is because we have turned from sin, we've renounced sin, but now we've created a holy huddle. We don't have a single person in our lives that we are engaging. It's our mission statement: "engaging the lost." That's part of who we are, that's part of what we do, that we go therefore and make disciples of all nations. We ought to be in a place where we stand out and we look different. At some point along the way, as we're engaging the lost, you will experience suffering. The best part of it is, you just share again and show them grace, and show them grace, and show them grace. That's what Peter is saying the strategy is: as you experience suffering and persecution, give them grace, tell them about Jesus. That's how we will win the world. It will be different. They'll go, "They shouldn't be caring for me. They're blessing me when I've cursed them" as we learned last week. Then people start to follow Jesus. They go, "That's different. Whatever they believe in, it must be worth it." Jesus is. Jesus is. No matter the suffering, we do God's will.

Let's keep reading in verse 5: **"But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead."**

Bump. The gospel was preached to the dead? We'll get back to it in a second. **"That though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does."**

Verse 6 is simply talking about Christians that have died. That's all it is. The keywords here are "the gospel was preached," past tense. This happened in the past. They have since died and they're in the spirit with God, which means they're believers. That's how we know they're Christians. That's how we work through that interpretive challenge in verse 6. Let's jump back to verse 5--that those that are persecuting us will give an account to judge the living and the dead. That's my third point:

3. Everyone will give an account.

All the suffering and the mocking is temporary. There's going to be a day where judgment will come. There's going to be a day where, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, in the silos, and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus is Lord. When you're getting made fun of, you can rest assured it's okay. You can rest assured it's okay. What's crazy about that "everyone will give an account" thing is that it gives us comfort for the people that are doing evil; they're not going to get away with it. As we see the news, we don't have to worry that they're going to get away with it. We can trust that they're not going to get away with it. But the other thing is, the fact that everyone's going to give an account, should make us quick to share the gospel with those around us. It sounds like bad news, but it's not bad news because we have good news. And that good news needs to be shared with everyone. But ultimately, we can be comforted as we're persecuted and experiencing suffering because everyone's going to give an account. The only way we give an account one day, the only way we get through the judgment, is because of what Jesus has done for us. There's no good that we get to bring to the table. It's not coming to Sunday morning at Harris Creek. That's not going to get you in. It's just what Christ has done for us. And everyone's going to give an account for who

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they say Jesus is. In summary, Christ has triumphed over evil; no matter the suffering, we do God's will; and everyone will give an account.

I had a friend named Nabeel Qureshi and I got to know him a few years ago. His story is amazing. He grew up a devout Muslim and then somebody shared the gospel with him. He came to know Jesus and he started traveling the world. In fact, he wrote books. He wrote the book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* and *One True God*. He just really became this amazing communicator of the gospel. As he started to travel around the world, he had some opposition. Even his family disowned him, that's part of his story. He experienced opposition and suffering for being a Christian. One day, I got to know him. Right about the time that I got to know Nabeel, he had been diagnosed with Stage 4 stomach cancer. It struck me because Nabeel came to Waco and spoke at the ministry that I was part of called Vertical--it's on Monday nights at Baylor. And Nabeel came and spoke and it really challenged me. You see, he's experienced all this opposition, all this suffering. In fact, he's so hated, when he shows up to speak somewhere, he requires police to be there to keep it safe. He's experienced all this persecution and suffering in his life differently and I noticed that already. Then, he's experiencing Stage 4 stomach cancer and the opposition grows. "This is what you deserve. This is what you get." And he said some things when I was with him that struck me. The first thing that he said with confidence and humility was, "Jesus is going to heal me." All the Baptists: "What? Is he allowed to say that?" Then he said, "If He doesn't heal me, He's going to raise me from the dead." Even more: "Did anyone vet this guy? He thinks God's going to resurrect him?" And with confidence and humility and Stage 4 stomach cancer, looking death down the barrel, he says, "And if He doesn't raise me here and now, he will raise me when it matters." Nabeel went on to be with the Lord shortly after that and some would say Nabeel lost. Nabeel lost. He missed it. And the reality is that he didn't. He had assurance in victory. He had assurance in Christ and it changed the entire way that he lived. He lived as if it was true that Jesus died for his sins and rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and will one day return. And it struck me. Do I live that way? Do I live with the assurance of Christ's victory? My question for you: "Friends, do you live that way?" Let me pray that we would.

Father, would you help us to just live in the victory that we have in you? Lord, would you help us to turn from fear? Lord, would you comfort us in challenging circumstances that I can't even imagine, in a room like this, what people might be going through? Lord, would you comfort us that we know how this ends? Lord, would you change the way that we live? Would we really believe this with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength? Would that change our actions, would that change our words, with that change the way that we live? Jesus, would this mark our body? Would it bring people to know you? Would you use us in a way--would our response to suffering and persecution, would our response to loss--would it lead people to Jesus? I pray that it would grow us and multiply us because it would be something that marks us that we are sure, not in ourselves, but of you, Christ. Help us, Lord. I pray all this in your name. Amen.