

The Triumph of Christ's Suffering, Part 3

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:20–22

Code: 60-38

INTRODUCTION

The time of our Lord's greatest suffering was the time of His greatest triumph. The lesson for us also is not to despair when enduring difficulty, rejection, persecution, and unjust treatment—it may be the time of our greatest triumph. Peter wrote to encourage believers in difficult circumstances, and that includes us.

First Peter 3:18-22 says, "Christ . . . 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."

REVIEW

I. THE TRIUMPH OF BEARING THE SINS OF HUMANITY (v. 18a)

"Christ . . . died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God."

II. THE TRIUMPH OF DECLARING VICTORY TO THE ENEMY (v. 18b-20a)

"[Christ was] 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."

A. The Condition of Christ's Spirit (v. 18b)

B. The Journey Christ Made (v. 19a)

C. The Proclamation Christ Gave (v. 19b)

D. The Audience of Christ's Proclamation (v. 19c)

E. The Imprisonment of Christ's Audience (v. 19d)

F. The Sin of Christ's Audience (v. 20a)

Some wonder how demons could have cohabitated with women since Matthew 22:30 says, "In the resurrection [God's children] neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." It would seem that because angels do not marry, they do not procreate. But that's what made the sin referred to in 1 Peter 3:20 so heinous: because the angels now in prison could not procreate among themselves, they assumed a human form and did so with women, thus corrupting the human race. Matthew 22:30 speaks of angels in heaven—not of what happened when some of them left their proper domain and cohabitated with women.

There seems to be a correlation between demonic activity--whether it's Satanism, witchcraft, or the occult--and perverted sex. That's nothing new--it's as old as the sin of the demons to whom Christ proclaimed His victory.

LESSON

III. THE TRIUMPH OF SAVING HIS PEOPLE FROM DESTRUCTION (vv. 20b-21)

"[God was patient 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."

A. The Ark (v. 20b)

"[God was patient 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."

Peter used the historical account of Noah and his family as an analogy for the triumphant salvation provided through Christ. Genesis 6:9[en]-8:22 tells how Noah and his family were delivered through the Flood. They were the only people who believed God's warning of the coming worldwide catastrophe. As a result all mankind was drowned in judgment, except them.

It's remarkable that so few believed God's warning--Noah, "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5) preached the righteousness of God for the hundred and twenty years it took to build the ark. It was a massive structure about the size of a modern ocean liner (Gen. 6:15), and was sure to attract attention. Yet that tremendous effort was spent on building a vessel he would spend only a year using. Imagine what it would be like to build that ark and preach its meaning for over a century, yet have only your immediate family believe. It must have been discouraging. Yet those were the people who were safe from God's judgment when it did come. The ark carried them from a world of wickedness and iniquity (Gen. 6:5) into a new world and life. The ark served as their shelter from the encompassing judgment of God. For Peter the experience of Noah and his family was a graphic illustration of salvation.

B. The Antetype (v. 21)

"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."

"And corresponding to that" translates a Greek phrase containing the word antitupon, which means "antetype" or "copy." In the New Testament it describes of an earthly expression of a heavenly reality--a symbol, copy, or analogy of a spiritual truth. Peter understood the preservation of the believers in the ark to be symbolic of salvation in Christ.

1. What it is

Some believe that the antetype Peter speaks of is the water of the Flood because the Greek words for "antetype" (v. 21) and "water" (v. 20) are both neuter gender words in Greek. But it seems better to understand the antetype to be the whole experience of Noah and his family: the preservation of believers in an ark while the earth was immersed in the judgment of God. That would make Noah and his family a true antetype of salvation in Christ, which is a preservation through judgment.

2. What it is not

The baptism Peter speaks of in verse 21 is not water baptism. The Greek word translated "baptism" (baptiz[ma]o) is more specifically translated "immerse." Noah didn't experience Christian baptism, but was immersed in judgment though protected by the ark. Noah and his family didn't miss the judgment--they were there--but were preserved through it. That's what happens to believers in Christ.

Peter made it especially clear he wasn't talking about Christian baptism when he said, "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh." He wasn't speaking of an earthly ordinance but a spiritual reality: "an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (v. 21).

3. What it describes

a) Believers are safe in Christ" "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience" qualifies the statement, "Baptism now saves you." Read without that qualifying phrase verse 21 reads, "Baptism now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The only baptism

that saves a person is one into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter's point is that just as the Flood immersed in the judgment of God everyone yet some passed through safely, so the final judgment will fall on all, but those who are in Jesus Christ will pass through judgment safely. Being in Christ is like being in the ark: we ride safely through the storms of judgment. Believers go through the death and burial of Christ because of their union with Him, and come out again into the new world of His resurrection. b) Believers are entombed in Christ. The ark of Noah was a kind of tomb--those in it died to their world when they entered it. When they left it atop Mount Ararat, they experienced a resurrection of sorts by entering a new world. That, Peter tells us, is analogous to the experience of every Christian: spiritually we enter Christ and die to the world we come from, and one day we will be resurrected for a new world and life. That's similar to what Paul said in Romans 6:3-4: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Allan Stibbs wrote, "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 were become new." This figure is fulfilled in Christ. . . . He was prepared of God to come in the fulness of time. The judgment due to sin and sinners was meanwhile delayed. Then the judgment fell upon Him, as the flood waters upon the ark. When sinners take refuge in Him, they do not avoid the judgment due to sin, they are saved through its falling upon Christ; and, because of it, instead of meeting their own doom, are brought safe unto God" (The First Epistle General of Peter [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], pp. 139-40).

4. How it applies to us

Our safety in Christ comes not by "the removal of dirt from the flesh" (water baptism) but by "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (v. 21). The Greek word translated "appeal" (eper[ma]ot[ma]ema) was a technical term used in making a contract. Here it refers to agreeing to meet certain conditions required by God before being placed into the ark of safety (Christ). Salvation requires the desire to obtain a cleansed conscience from God and a willingness to meet the conditions necessary to obtain it.

Unregenerate men and women have consciences that condemn them. One who appeals to God for a good conscience is sick of his sin and desires to be delivered from the load of guilt he bears. He has a crushing and intimidating fear of coming judgment and knows only God can deliver him. He desires the cleansing that comes through the blood of Christ (cf. Heb. 9:14; 10:22). So he repents of his sin and pleads for forgiveness. It's not baptism that saves, but the security of being placed safely in Jesus Christ--our ark of salvation.

Who Got Wet?

Some time ago I read a book in which the writer discussed the interpretation that 1 Peter 3:21 says people are saved by water baptism: "I once asked a Mormon elder, who advanced this idea, if he would please tell me who were baptized in Noah's day--the saved or the lost? Not a drop of water touched Noah and his family; all those who went into the water of baptism were drowned. It puzzled him a bit and he replied, 'Then, what does it mean when it says they were saved by water?' The answer is that it means just what it says. They were saved by water, but not the water that fell on them, for none fell on them. They were saved by the water that fell on the ark. The water burst from beneath (typical of man's hatred and wickedness that nailed the Son of God to the cross), and the waters came from above (typical of the judgment from above which our blessed Saviour bore on the cross). Yes, those waters typify the waves and billows of judgment which lifted Christ--our Ark of

safety--up on the cross. It is by that redemptive work that we are saved. Those waters of judgment fell on Him; not on us. Like Noah and his family we who are believers are safe and secure in Christ. We are saved by the baptism of judgment Christ knew at Calvary; not by the baptism of water. The text in I Peter does not say we are saved by baptism. It says that baptism is a like figure. Both Noah's ark and baptism prefigure the same thing; they picture the work of Christ as He bore our sins and rose victoriously from the dead" (August Van Ryn, Acts of the Apostles [N. Y. : Loizeaus Bros. , 1961], pp. 42-43).

When Christ suffered on the cross, hell threw all its fury at Him and wicked men vented their hatred on Him. Yet through that suffering He served as an ark of safety for the redeemed of all ages. He went through judgment without allowing a drop to touch any who are in Him. And because He triumphantly provided salvation through His suffering we are safe in Him through judgment and will emerge in a new world through His resurrection.

IV. THE TRIUMPH IN REIGNING SUPREME OVER ALL (v. 22)

"[Christ] is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

After describing all the suffering Christ endured, Peter ends this section of Scripture in a glorious final note of triumph. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the right hand of God is affirmed as the place of preeminence, power, and authority for all eternity. That's when Jesus went when had He accomplished His work on the cross, and that's where He rules from today.

A. Christ's Position

1. Hebrews 1:3-6--"[Jesus Christ] is the radiance of His [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee'? And again, 'I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me'? And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him. '"

2. Hebrews 10:12--"[Jesus], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God."

3. Hebrews 12:2--"We are to be "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

4. Romans 8:34--"Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." His position at the right hand of God gives Him authority over all created things.

5. Philippians 2:9-11--After describing how Jesus suffered, Paul then said that "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

B. Christ's Ascension

Christ came to the right hand of God "having gone into heaven" (1 Pet. 3:22)--a reference to His ascension.

1. Acts 1:9-11--"He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven. '"

2. Hebrews 6:20--At His ascension "Jesus . . . entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

C. Christ's Work

Christ now intercedes for us as our High Priest.

1. Hebrews 8:1--"We have . . . a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." That's the position from which He intercedes for us.

2. Hebrews 9:24--"Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

D. Christ's Supremacy

Christ assumed His position of supremacy "after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (1 Pet. 3:22). That looks back to when Christ declared His triumph to the demons in prison. It clarifies that the cross and the resurrection are what subjected the angelic hosts (angels, authorities, and powers are all descriptive of angelic beings) to Him. That's Paul's point in Ephesians 1:20-21: "[God] raised Him [Christ] 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" (emphasis added). First Peter 3:22 uses the Greek word hupotass[ma]o ("to be lined up in rank under") to describe the present status of the angels in relation to Christ. He is supreme over all.

CONCLUSION

Christ triumphed through unjust suffering. Peter's point in showing us that great truth is to exhort us to follow the same path into glory. Paul made the same point:

Romans 8:17--We are children and heirs of God "and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."

2 Timothy 2:10--"For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him." The path to glory is always through suffering.

Philippians 1:29--To us "it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

2 Corinthians 2:14--"Thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." Christ will always cause us to triumph even though we suffer unjustly. Don't underestimate the potential of unjust suffering for Christ's sake.

There are many possibilities that arise out of unjust suffering for Christ's sake. God may use your suffering to lead someone to Christ. He may use it to help you triumph over demonic persecution. It may enable another who sees your godly response to persecution to respond in the same way.

Whatever the triumph of your suffering, you may be sure of one thing: if you suffer for Christ's sake, God will lift you up and exalt you into His very presence. So endure whatever suffering comes your way in the light of your coming triumph in Christ!

Focusing on the Facts

1. The time of our Lord's greatest suffering was also the time of His greatest _____ .
2. Does Matthew 22:30 mean that because angels don't marry they therefore can't procreate? Why or why not?
3. What did Noah do while building the ark (2 Pet. 2:5)? What was the response?
4. What did the ark serve as for Noah and his family?
5. How is the Greek word antitupon used in the New Testament?
6. How does the whole experience of Noah and his family parallel salvation in Christ?

7. Is 1 Peter 3:21 speaking of water baptism? Why or why not?
8. What is the baptism that saves a person?
9. In what way can Jesus be said to be like an ark?
10. In entering the ark Noah and his family entered into a kind of tomb. How is that analogous to the experience of believers?
11. How does the Greek word eper[ma]ot[ma]lema describe the believer's relationship to God through Christ?
12. What is characteristic of the consciences of unregenerate men and women? What has happened when a person appeals to God for a good conscience?
13. Because Christ triumphantly provided salvation through His suffering, we are _____.
14. Where is Christ now? What is the significance of that?
15. How did Christ arrive at His present position? What is one way in which He represents us there?
16. Who are the angels, authorities, and powers Peter refers to in 1 Peter 3:22? In what relationship does Christ stand to them?
17. In what ways may we triumph through suffering?

Pondering the Principles

1. In The Almost Christian Discovered the Puritan Matthew Mead shows the extent to which a person can apparently suffer for Christ without actually being in Christ (Beaver Falls, Penn. : Soli Deo Gloria, n. d. , pp. 97-98):

A person may suffer not because he belongs to Christ, but because he is religious.

A person may suffer on Christ's behalf yet have no love for Him.

A person may suffer thinking it will ingratiate himself to God.

A person may suffer not to glorify God, but to benefit himself materially by association with God's people.

A person may suffer because of the opinions he holds rather than his relationship to Christ.

Often when we suffer we take comfort in the fact that Jesus said we would suffer--and that's a good thing to do. However, the fact that a person can seemingly suffer in Christ's name yet not be a Christian ought to make us reflect on what precisely we are suffering for. Look at your life: Are you suffering for Christ's sake or because of your own thoughts, attitudes, and behavior? The triumph that comes through suffering comes only to those who suffer because of their relationship to Christ. When you suffer, make sure it's for the right reason.

2. The Puritan pastor John Flavel said to reason this way before committing to Christ as Savior and Lord: "If I open to Christ, this I shall gain, but that I must lose; I cannot separate Christ from sufferings: Christ will separate me from my sins; if I seek him, I must let them go; if I profess Christ, Providence will one time or other bring me to this dilemma, either Christ or earthly comforts must go. It is necessary, therefore, that I now propound to myself what Providence may, one time or other, propound to me. He hath set down his terms: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' " (Christ Knocking at the Door of Sinners Hearts [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978 reprint], p. 183). God will accept "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (1 Pet. 3:21) only on His terms. That requires a willingness to walk as Jesus walked and suffer as He did. Have you counted the cost and found yourself willing?

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