

1 Peter 3:18-22

“The Just For The Unjust”

As we pick it up in Vs 18 we're continuing in the context of suffering for righteousness sake realizing that the eternal reward will by far outweigh any temporal affliction. Peter says that should you suffer for righteousness sake you are blessed, therefore don't be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. God will not be a debtor to man, you won't "pay a price" for Him that leaves Him "owing you" in the end. Your reward will radically overwhelm any price that you may pay for following after righteousness, God will see to that personally. So sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that lies within you, with meekness and fear...For it is better (if it is the will of God) to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. If you've done wrong and are suffering the ramifications for that well...what do you want? You deserve what you get, it's far better that you not be in a place that you deserve it yet you endure it to the glory of God realizing that the crisis will create an opportunity for you to witness for Jesus Christ.

That's the exhortation, follow after what is good, be committed/submitted to God's plan and purpose for your life (even should you be persecuted for righteousness sake) and you'll maintain a good conscience and great will be your reward.

As for Peter's illustration he points us once again to Christ Himself. The chief example in following what is good, being committed and submitted to God's plan refusing to compromise, suffering for it yet in the end being rewarded greatly being exalted to the right hand of God, all authority being given unto Him both in heaven and on earth, angels, and authorities and powers being made subject to Him. He humbled Himself greatly, therefore God greatly exalted Him (blessed Him beyond measure).

Now; we're heading into a passage of scripture that contains the most complex train of thought in the entire letter. But I think it will help us if we maintain the "aerial" view, keep the big picture and the overall context in mind. We're talking about the transition from suffering to glory, that should you suffer for righteousness sake, God will bless your life; if not in some tangible way presently, you can count on your reward for all eternity.

Vs 18-22

Vs 19 and 20 form a passage that has had scholars debating for centuries. There was a time when I thought I had a pretty good grip on what was being said there, however the more I study it, the more uncertain I become of it. That is, I don't really feel that I can give you definitive exposition or give you any real conclusive arguments. However I won't avoid the Vs and I'll share with you what many believe when we get to them and you can form your own opinion concerning them.

The good news is that there's nothing of "major bible doctrine" contained in those 2 Vs. There's nothing that will make or break your salvation depending upon what you believe about them. But trust me when I tell you that the more you endeavor to "crack" Peter's "code" there, the more you dig in and seek to learn exactly what's being said, the more confusing it seems to become. So many respected guys, incredibly scholarly guys with varying perspectives; thankfully the primary point that Peter is making is something that we *do* know and can *easily* understand.

That suffering wrongly for righteousness sake leads to great glory concerning eternity. Look at Vs 18 (read).

Essentially what we have here is what? The gospel message. The fact that Jesus suffered for the sins of the world and that we're brought *to* God, that is made right *before* God and have access into the very presence *of* God in Him.

There is so much jam packed in this single Vs I found it difficult to decide where I would even begin. "Christ" (the just) (our Kinsman Redeemer) "suffered once" for what purpose? "For sins (that is for the unjust, translation = you and me the ones who deserve to suffer). We're talking here about a substitutionary death, a vicarious sacrifice whereby Christ died on our behalf.

Now there are a # of things that we can draw out of this; 1st of all let's spend some time on the "once" for all principle that's presented in this passage. Christ suffered "once." How is it that one Man could suffer on the behalf of all of mankind throughout all of human history and that be found "acceptable" in the sight of God? That's a good question and there's a couple of things we need to touch on with regard to that.

#1 The bible is clear, "*For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*" 1 Cor 15:21-22 Which is to say that God will recognize the federal headship of man, one man representing all the people. We have a "federal" government 1 man (the President of the U.S.) is supposed to represent us and reflect us as a people to the world, he is the global representative of the U.S. "By the people, for the people." Now, the bible teaches us that Adam was the "federal head" of mankind, he is the quintessential representative of mankind, he's the best we have to offer. It's like sending Michael Phelps to the Olympics, he was the best we had to offer, if he couldn't beat those other swimmers none of us could, he's the one.

Well, Adam was the one, if he couldn't lead a sinless life than none of us could and when he fell his sinless nature was now a sin nature. You can't pass on what you no longer have, so in Adam we all fell. You couldn't be conceived apart from sin because sin is now somehow woven in to the genetic structure of man, it's like it's encoded in our DNA or something. So the bible teaches that sin is present in each of us from the very moment of conception, Adam couldn't give you a sinless nature, he didn't have one therefore as the bible declares all sin and have fallen short of the glory, the perfect sinless standards of God.

Now, if by 1 man all can be condemned to death, even so it would only take 1 Man to *save* us all from death. If one Man with out a sin nature could lead a sinless life and make amends for the sin of mankind, could somehow atone for it, than even as in Adam all die, in Him all could be made alive. Ok; there's only 1 problem, if man can't pass on what he doesn't have mankind can't produce a sinless man because we have Adam as our father (ultimately). But, if there were One who were sinless, holy and righteous who had a Son there would be hope. But here's the deal if the Son is anything but fully Man we can't be saved because how can someone or something other than a Man stand in the gap on behalf of man? It's impossible that a bull or a goat or something other than man can atone for the sins of *man* right? I need a *Kinsman Redeemer*... Well, you know the story

God overshadows Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit and Christ (the 2nd person of the eternal Triune God) becomes a Man, born through Mary (meaning fully 100% human) but He doesn't have Adam as His Father, God is His Father (meaning fully 100% God, holy, righteous, completely sinless). The stage is set.

Now the bible declares that the soul that sins shall surely die, that the life of the flesh is in the blood and that it's the blood that makes atonement for the soul. So if Christ is atone for the sin of the world 2 things have to happen #1 He has to shed His blood, and #2 He has to die; the wages of sin is death.

You heard me say before that for every NT principle there is an OT picture, though they happened literally God paints portraits for us practically in the OT so that we can understand more fully the principle in the NT. On the Day of Yom Kippur, the annual Great Day of Atonement in the nation of Israel in the 7th month on the 10th day of the month the high priest would take 2 goats, one would be a sin offering and the other would be a scapegoat. As for the sin offering his blood would be spilled, he would be sacrificed upon the altar and his blood sprinkled on the mercy seat in the holy of holies cleansing the most holy place due to the sins of the people. The scapegoat would then be taken, the high priest would lay his hands upon the head of the goat, confess all the iniquity, transgressions and sin of the nation putting it as it were on the head of the goat. Then they would release the goat to be lost forever in the wilderness, the idea being that blood had been shed and their sins had been carried away.

That whole ritual was merely a foreshadowing of the substance to be found in Christ who would have the sin of the world placed upon Him, He would shed His blood and lay down His life upon the altar of the cross and in Him our sins would be carried away as far as the east is from the west. Now the high priest had to do this every year, why? Because the sacrifice was insufficient, Christ only died *once*, only suffered *once* for sins, why? Because His sacrifice was completely sufficient, He *finished* the work, He satisfied the righteous judgment of God against the sins of mankind. The writer of Hebrews said it like this, “...*not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another — He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*” Heb 9:25-28 In Christ your sin has been *put away*, He died *once* for *all*.

He suffered *once for sins*, His blood was shed, His body was ripped open by the flagellum, He was beaten brutally beyond being able to recognize Him as a man (His visage was marred more than any man), He was nailed to a cross and hung there in open shame, He bore the full brunt the full fury of the wrath of God against sin, Christ suffered...for your sin and for mine. Being as it were our scapegoat, our kinsman redeemer, the federal head for humanity, the “last Adam” as it were...the just for the unjust.

What does that mean? It means that Christ did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He made a way where there was no way, the innocent on behalf of the guilty. Listen, the sin of all the world, past present and future has been dealt with and put away in Christ.

But that blessing won't be imputed to you until *you're found* in Christ. What that means is that there are billions of people out there remaining pointlessly in their sin because Christ has already atoned for it. Yet they're trying to deal *with it* or somehow makes amends *for* it on their own through various religious regimens or ascetic efforts to punish themselves or do something that somehow will please God and gain the favor *of* God. Yet their sin continues to haunt them; why? Because we can't absolve the sin issue on our own, if we could Christ wouldn't have come, all our efforts are already tainted because of the sin nature we inherited in Adam. You struck out before you ever got to the plate... But here's the good news, it's not about what we need to *do* it's about what Christ has already *done* and simply receiving it by faith.

That was the whole point of His mission, to reconcile us to God; notice, “That He might bring us to God.” That He might restore a broken relationship and bridge the gap between sinful man and a holy and righteous God. Or as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” and

Again Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*” Eph 2:13-16

“Being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit” which in reality (as pertaining to a personal application) is the testimony of every child of God, right? Eph 2, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*” Eph 2:4-5 You and I were dead in sin, yet Christ has made us alive to God by the power of the Holy Spirit by grace through faith in Him.

But we see in the scripture the Tri-unity of the Godhead involved in the resurrection. Here we’re told that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, Rom 6:4 gives the Father credit, in Jhn Ch 2 Vs 19 Jesus said that He would raise Himself; contradiction? No, complete consistency, there’s only 1 God, 3 distinct persons yet clearly 1 God (Isa 45 There is no other God besides Me), the fullness of Godhead took part in the glory of the resurrection.

Now, if Jesus did all this to “bring us to God” how wrong is it for to not come *to* God and spend time in fellowship *with* God? This word “bring” means “to create access” you have access *to*, you have an audience *in* the Father through the work of Jesus Christ Rejoice *in it*, take advantage *of it*, be blessed *by it*. “Put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit...”

Vs19-20

Now if you’re new to this whole “bible study” thing you need to understand that as a general rule the scriptures are simple to understand. But occasionally we’ll come to a passage that perplexes us, it’s like a passing statement with out real explanation. Peter says a whole lot here, but unfortunately there’s even more that he doesn’t say so we’re left kinda scratchin our heads going, “What *exactly* are you talking about!?” Who are the spirits? What did He preach? What prison is he referencing and what does it have to do with Noah? Now remember there’s a big picture going on here, Peter’s not seeking to create doctrine in these 2 Vs, this is his support text regarding the fact that suffering for righteousness yields huge dividends and his primary case in point is Christ.

Few things I want to point out quickly before time gets away from us. There are a few primary theories here, I'll highlight them, you can do with them what you want. One is that Jesus went and preached the gospel to the disobedient in the days of Noah who were in prison in Hades and gave them the opportunity to be saved. We have huge problems with that for a number of reasons. #1 We have no scriptural evidence whatsoever that anyone ever gets a 2nd chance after they die to decide their position on Christ. To the contrary just the opposite is stated, what you decide now, will determine your eternal destiny. #2 Why would He preach just to the people in Noah's day? What about everyone before and after Noah? There's just buckshot all through that theoretical bucket, it doesn't hold water. ☺

Another theory is that He preached the gospel to those in Abraham's bosom, in paradise where after He led captivity captive (Eph 4) and ushered them into heaven. We understand the scriptures to say that prior to the cross those who believed in faith went to Abraham's bosom, (Luke 16) not directly into the presence of God because there had been no sacrifice yet for sin. Of course the problem with the theory that He preached to the believing souls is that Vs 20 calls them the disobedient.

Still yet others think it's a reference to Christ (by His Spirit) preaching through Noah that 120 yrs while Noah was building the ark to those disobedient on the earth at that time. Again to me that seems a bit unstable through the simple reading of the text. It seems to be an obvious reference to the interim period between His death and resurrection.

The other thought (and the direction I probably lean most toward though I'm open to a better understanding) is that the "spirits" He preached to weren't human spirits but rather demonic spirits and this is why. The word "preached" here simply means "to proclaim" and the scriptures do employ the word with reference to the word of God, obviously. However there aren't evangelical overtones to this word, it simply means to declare something. Some 54 in the NT the word for "preached" isn't this word at all, it's a word that specifically means to evangelize. This word simply speaks of making a proclamation, a declaration of sorts.

On top of that the word used for "spirits" here is very rarely employed for human spirits (and is a different word that Peter employs for human souls in Vs 20). Now, this word "spirits" can be a reference to angelic beings, depending on context it can reference the Holy Spirit, it can reference demonic spirits, the point is that by and large it's a reference to a supernatural spirit, not the spirit of man.

Now what do the days of Noah have to do with any of this. When you read in Gen Ch 6 you find there a mention of the "sons of God" (which the book of Job clearly indicates that phrase as belonging to the angelic beings) seeing that the daughters of men were beautiful began to take wives unto themselves, perverting the human race, polluting the human race (I

believe) because the promise of the Messiah had come and they were seeking to snuff out that possibility. Shortly after this mention we read where God grieved over the condition of man, that the thoughts and intents of their hearts were on evil continually and He opted to simply destroy humanity from the face of the earth with the exception of Noah who'd found grace in the sight of God.

When you read Vs 6-7 of the book of Jude you find this, *“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”* Jude 6-7 It seems to me that Jesus probably preached to the demonic spirits who'd been bound declaring judgment upon them in light of His victory at the cross. We read in Phil 2:8-11 regarding Jesus, *“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Of course we could reference Colossians 2:15 concerning the public spectacle that Jesus made of principalities and powers having disarmed them, triumphing over them at the cross.

Now you can do with all that as you choose, research it for yourself, it gets pretty heady and you can miss the main point if you're not real careful. That Jesus suffered for righteousness sake, that He triumphed over evil through good and God blessed Him and rewarded Him for it. Same with you, same with me, obviously not the degree of Christ, because we can't compare to Christ, but the principle is in effect nonetheless.

Vs21-22

Note again the emphasis on Christ's authority over any/all supernatural entities... Now obviously time will forbid us to deal with all the questions that surround baptismal regeneration, does baptism save you, and all of that. Perhaps we'll touch on it a bit more next time as we move into Ch 4.

For now, he speaks of an “antitype” or a “corresponding picture” that applies to us. Even as the flood pictures water washing over and in essence “cleansing” the earth, taking Noah from one life to an altogether new life, the waters of baptism create a picture of our cleansing, being made a new creation, being given an altogether new life.

But bear in mind that it wasn't the water that saved Noah, it was the *ark* that lifted him out and protected him from the wrath of God. The ark bore the wrath, those in the ark were spared...what am I saying? That Christ becomes a picture of the ark upon which the wrath of God "rained down," but you've been placed *in Him*, and there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are *in Christ Jesus*. Abide in Christ, we're saved from God's wrath in Him, you see it's not the removal of the filth from the flesh that saves anyone. There's nothing mystical or magical about the water, it's a demonstration outwardly of the cleansing you've received inwardly through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism speaks to the fact that you're in Him, and that you identify with His death and His resurrection, you're dead to the old you, the person you used to be is now dead, crucified with Christ. As Paul said, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Gal 2:20 You see left to ourselves our conscience isn't good (Vs 21) it's guilty. It's the work of Christ on our behalf and imputed to us, freeing us from guilt, liberating us from the chains and bondage of sin that give us the answer of a good conscience toward God. It's through the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we're justified before God. He was delivered up for our transgression and raised up for our justification...the work of redemption is finished, Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him... The just for the unjust, receive it, rejoice *in* it, be blessed *by* it, come to God and praise Him *for* it...

Prayer Points:

Jesus as we're reminded today of the fact that You *suffered* once for our sins, our hearts are moved to give You praise, and to worship You for all that You've done out of Your matchless love for us. Help us to love You more, we thank You for bearing the full fury of the Father's wrath, that we might be spared from the wrath to come in You. May we not take Your work for granted and may we be moved to spend more time in fellowship with You, more time in communion with the Father through the access that You've created through the precious work of the cross, teach us to honor You with our lives.

Jesus suffered for your sins, and for mine; He made a way where there was no way, He's built a bridge and spanned the gap between sinful humanity and the holy and righteous God. Atonement for your soul has been made through the shedding of His blood, the forgiveness for sin can be found for you today at the cross of Jesus Christ Will you respond to Him today? Or will you resist His call upon your life? There's no reason for you to bear the guilt, He already has, you can be made a new creation right here, right now...all you have to do is respond to His call, if He's knocking at the door of your heart, simply open it and say, "Jesus, come in..."