Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Triumph of Christ's Suffering, Part 3
Scripture: 1 Peter 3:20-22
Code: 60-38

First Peter 3:18 through 22. Now we've been learning that the time of our Lord's greatest suffering was also the time of great triumph. And the lesson for us here is plain, don't despair in the times of difficulty, don't despair in the times of persecution, don't despair in the times of unjust treatment, don't despair in the times of rejection, it could be the time of your greatest triumph. That's what Peter wants his readers to understand. He's writing to persecuted rejected believers who are being treated unjustly, unfairly and with great hostility. And he wants to encourage them by reminding them that the time of our Lord's unjust treatment, when He was crucified, was also the time of His great triumph. And we need to look at our own difficulty as a time of triumph also.

Look with me again at our text in verses 18 to 22, "For Christ also 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 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."

This is written, as I said, as an encouragement. Christ who suffered the just for the unjust triumphed in the midst of that suffering. And Peter gives us this marvelous insight in order that we might look at our own suffering as a point of triumph.

Now in examining the triumph of Christ in His suffering, Peter focuses on four aspects...a triumphant sin bearing, a triumphant sermon, a triumphant salvation and then in verse 22 a triumphant supremacy. You remember that we have already examined a triumphant sin bearing. We looked at the first part of verse 18 and we saw that while Jesus was being murdered and killed unjustly, nonetheless it says marvelously He died for sins in order that He might bring us to God. And so while being murdered by men, He was triumphing over sin. And so the unjust and undeserved suffering of Christ provided a triumph over sin that brings us to God. Marvelous thought that is, to know that in the direst moment of the life of Christ He accomplished the bearing of our sin that we might come to God.

And then last time we looked at the second point, Jesus' triumph is also seen in that while being put to death in the flesh, verse 18, He was made alive in the spirit and went and made proclamation, or

preached a sermon, to the spirits in prison. And we noted secondly that there was a triumphant sermon delivered. And I told you last time that I believe Jesus Christ descended to the place where certain demons are imprisoned, demons who sinned in Genesis chapter 6, who sinned by leaving their own natural estate and entering in to a cohabitation with women in order to produce an unredeemable race and to create a situation so that the Messiah Himself could not be born, Satan's great effort to pollute the human stream with some kind of demonic human monstrosity. And because of that, you remember, that we read in Peter's epistle and also in Jude that these demons who did that were put in ever-lasting chains and bound in a place, a prison house where they will be kept forever. At the time of Christ's death, I suppose, the demons assumed they had won the victory and He showed up at the party to announce His triumph. He had accomplished what they feared most, He had bruised the serpent's head, who is their master, even Satan.

By the way, when interpreting this particular difficult text that way, people ask the question: how could demons, fallen angels, cohabitate with women when it says in Matthew 22:30 that the angels do not marry, there is neither marrying or giving in marriage in heaven among the angels, Jesus said? And the point to make is that it says that angels do not intermarry and they do not marry nor are they given in marriage in heaven. And that is precisely the point here, they left their proper abode, they came down to earth, they could not make union with themselves and so they took on some male human form and made unions with women, the daughters of women, as the Scripture says. They took on human bodies and endeavored to corrupt the human stream. Angels in heaven cannot cohabitate with one another, that's the intention of Matthew 22:30. We're not talking about heaven, we're talking about fallen angels who came down to earth having left their proper dominion.

I might also mention to you that it is always true that in demon activity, whether it is Satan worship or the occult, or involvement in demonism to any degree, it always involves perverted...you finish the sentence...sex..always, always, inevitably. And that from long ago.

Now tonight we come to the third area in which our Lord triumphed, and we'll call that a triumphant salvation...a triumphant salvation. As Peter was mentioning the time of Noah in verse 20, the time in which those demons were disobedient and committed their great perversion, as he is mentioning Noah apparently it reminds him about the ark. And as it reminds him about the ark, he moves to discuss the ark and the safety of Noah's family during the flood. Look at verse 20, it says regarding those demon spirits, they were disobedient during the time of Noah. And then he goes on, "During the construction of the ark in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through the water." Having been reminded of Noah, Peter moves into the next dimension of Christ's triumph by following up the story of Noah as an analogy to the triumphant salvation Christ has provided.

You remember the story. Noah had three sons and they had three wives. Noah and his wife and his three sons and their wives all were spared in the flood. The flood came and drowned the entire world, except for eight people. The reason--only eight people believed...only eight people on the face of the

earth believed.

That is quite remarkable because in 2 Peter 2:5 Peter says that Noah was a preacher. He was a preacher of righteousness. And he preached the message of righteousness for a long long time. In fact, he preached the message the whole time he was building the ark. And it took him 120 years to build the ark, which was approximately the size of the Queen Mary. He was only in the ark a little over one year.

Now imagine this, preaching for 120 years about the coming judgment of God and giving a massive object lesson about it as the ark was being built, and at the end of those 120 years having no converts outside your family. But for those eight who believed, the ark was the means of their deliverance from judgment. As long as they were in it, they were safe. And you remember when the flood came the ark floated and those eight souls among all the human beings on the face of the earth were alone saved. We might say that the ark carried them from a world of wickedness and iniquity into a brand new life. In fact, they passed through judgment by being in that ark, they were not touched. They went through the judgment, the rain was above them and the flood was below them. They were in the middle of the judgment but they were untouched in the safety of that ark. And for Peter, that is a picture of salvation.

Notice verse 21, "And corresponding to that..." stop right there. He sees that as an analogy...corresponding to that, resembling that. This is antitupon, an antetype, a pattern. That term used in the New Testament basically has the idea of an earthly expression of a heavenly reality. It is a symbol or a picture or a pattern or an analogy of some spiritual truth. So in some way, the fact that eight people were in an ark and went through the whole judgment and yet were untouched is analogous to the Christian experience in salvation.

Now somebody will say, "Okay, what is the antitupon? What is the antetype? Is it the ark or is it the water?" And I think the answer is it's the whole thing...it's the whole thing. If you want to emphasize the water, you can since water is neuter and so is antitupon. But the real idea here is the whole idea that just as these people in the ark went through the waters of judgment, so the believer is carried safely through judgment, the judgment of God. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you. Now if were to change that word "baptism" and say "immersion now saves you," we'd begin to move toward the meaning here.

Now let me say something at the outset. I don't think he's talking about water baptism because water baptism doesn't save you. I don't think he's talking about water baptism symbolically. I think he's talking about immersion into an ark of safety that went through judgment. Now follow the thought. He is saying just like Noah was placed with his sons and their wives in an ark of safety and they went through the judgment, they didn't miss it, they didn't really escape it, they were preserved in it, so you have been immersed in some kind of protective ark that has taken you through judgment. They were

put into the waters of judgment. The waters of judgment fell down on the top of them but they were incarcerated in a haven of safety. And he is saying we as believers are put into the great waters of judgment and we too are incarcerated in a haven of safety.

Now, what baptism is he talking about? What haven of safety? Please read further in verse 21. "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh." He's not talking about baptism as water baptism, he's not talking about some ritual. That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You'll notice you probably have some dashes in that sentence. It should read like this if you leave out that qualifying statement in the middle, "and corresponding to that, baptism now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The other statements are qualifiers. It is a baptism that saves you. What baptism? Baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. That's the issue here. As that flood was a furious judgment of God upon the earth in Genesis, as it killed everybody on the face of the globe and yet eight people lived through, though they were immersed in it they were immersed into an ark of safety. So, the judgment of God came upon Jesus Christ...now follow this...the judgment came upon Jesus Christ and you went through that judgment in Him, but you survived, protected in the ark who is Christ...the ark of safety. And you went into His death, burial and out again in His resurrection. That's what he's saying here. He says I'm not talking about a water baptism either literally or metaphorically, it is not the removal of dirt from the flesh. I'm talking about you by faith coming into union with Christ, undergoing the judgment of God that fell on Christ in His death and burial and coming out the other side in the glory of His resurrection, thus you too have been carried through the judgment of God and out the other side by being incarcerated, as it were, in Christ--the ark of safety.

And the eight in Genesis left the world of sin and they came through a flood of judgment. So you have left the world of sin and you came through a flood of judgment. As the ark, in a sense, was a tomb and there was a certain kind of dying to the world as they entered it and sealed it shut, and there was a certain kind of resurrection, that day when it stopped on Mount Ararat and they opened the door and walked out, they walked out to a new life in a new world. So, says Peter, is the majesty of the analogy, as you by faith entered into the ark of safety in Christ, you entered into a coffin of sorts because you died in Him and one day it was open and you burst out in His resurrection and you live a new life. That's the kind of immersion he's talking about. Yes, it is depicted in water baptism. We understand that. Peter is not particularly talking about that, that's why he says explicitly, "not the removal of dirt from the flesh." Water baptism is another issue. He is speaking about this wonderful immersion into Christ. And Peter is certainly in wonderful harmony with Paul, isn't he? Romans 6 where Paul talks about being buried with Christ in His death and then rising in His resurrection to walk in newness of life, it's the same idea.

One commentator, Allen Stibbs(?) writes, "The ark passing safely through the flood provides a figure of God's method of saving men out inevitable judgment. First, God delayed the day of judgment long enough for an ark to be prepared. Then the souls that went into the ark did not avoid the judgment,

rather in the ark they were saved through the very water which drowned others and because of it they thus passed out of the old world into a new world. When they emerged from the ark, they literally found that old things had passed away and all things had become new. The figure," he writes, " is fulfilled in Christ. He was prepared of God to come in the fullness of time. The judgment due to sin and sinners was meanwhile delayed. Then the judgment fell on Him as the flood waters upon the ark. And when sinners take refuge in Him, they do not avoid the judgment due to sin, they are saved through its falling on Christ and because of it instead of meeting their own doom they are brought safe in Him to God." Marvelous analogy...marvelous, rich analogy.

And Peter makes it clear in that qualifying statement when he says, "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh," we're not talking about some external rite. "But an appeal to God for a good conscience." What are you talking about? What does this mean? Well the word "appeal" is the word that is used as a technical term for making a contract. It is a technical term for making a pledge, agreeing to certain conditions or demands of a covenant. This is a very important statement. Here it says that what places you into the ark of safety is a covenant or a pledge or a contract or an agreement to certain conditions in regard to God. That's what he's saying.

It is a confession of faith in desiring a covenant with God. An appeal to God for a good conscience. Sinful man have only an evil conscience. The point here is the sinner is sick of his evil, he's sick of his sin. He is sick of his accusing conscience. He wants to be delivered from the burden of sin. He wants to be delivered from the guilt of sin. He wants to be delivered from the crushing intimidating fearful anticipation of judgment. He wants to have a good conscience. He wants to experience what Hebrews 9:14 says, "The blood of Christ will cleanse your conscience." Hebrews 10:22 basically says the same thing, it says, "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience."

What is he saying? He is saying in verse 21, there is an immersion into Christ that saves you. It isn't an external ritual of washing. What puts you into Christ is not a water baptism. What puts you into Christ is a pledge to God, an appeal to God for a clean conscience. In other words, it's a pleading to be forgiven for...what?...for your sins. It is repentance, that's what it is.

What saves you? Not water baptism, but immersion into the ark of safety who is Christ in whom you go through the death and burial and resurrection and the judgment of God falls but it falls on the ark and not on you.

What saves you? Not some external ritual or external rite, but a heart longing to be delivered from the crushing burden of sin that plagues your evil conscience and wants to covenant with God to live an obedient life. And it leads you through the judgment out the other side through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That celebrates, that completes the salvation triumph.

I was reading a book and the writer was discussing some of these things and gave an interesting personal account. He said, "Some people think that this particular passage illustrates how today people are saved by baptism in water." Then he writes this, "I once asked a Mormon elder who advances this idea if he would please tell me who were baptized in Noah's day...the saved or the lost?" Fair enough. "Who got wet? Not a drop of water," he says, "touched Noah and his family. All those that went into the water 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 Savior 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 1 Peter does not say we are saved by baptism, it says that baptism is a figure...both Noah's ark and baptism. Prefigure the same thing, that is the work of Christ, as He bore our sins and rose victoriously from the dead."

So you see in the cross triumph. Not only a triumphant sin bearing and a triumphant sermon but a triumphant salvation was provided for us. Do you realize that while hell was throwing at Christ all of its fury and venom and while the wicked men of this world who wanted Him dead were casting their hatred at Him, while all of that pinned Him to the cross, He was for all the redeemed of all the ages an ark of safety. And all of them in Him went through the judgment without a drop ever touching them. Glorious truth. And because of our union with Jesus Christ we were safe in Him. And we came out the other side through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed a triumphant salvation provided for us.

Finally, a fourth point, Peter looks at the cross, he sees not only a triumphant sin bearing, and a triumphant sermon is preached to defeated demons, and he sees a triumphant salvation accomplished as when Christ Himself is undergoing all of the fires of judgment and all of the hatred of demons and men, He is an ark of safety for all who believe for all ages, He sees yet beyond that a triumphant supremacy. Verse 22, "This resurrected 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."

Now, beloved, there is the glorious final note of triumphant. Who is at the right hand of God? Do I have to say to you that all throughout the Old Testament and on into the New and all throughout eternity the right hand of God is always seen as the seat of highest preeminence? The right hand of God is the place of strength. The right hand of God is the place of authority. And it simply says that when Jesus had accomplished His work at the cross, He was exalted to the right hand of God, the place of prominence, honor, majesty, authority and power.

Notice Hebrews 1. In Hebrews 1 verse 3, it speaks of the Son of God, namely Christ, and it says He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature. Then He upholds all things by the word of His power. Then this marvelous statement. "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high." There's the same thought. And He had become much better than the angels. In fact, all the angels of God are told to worship Him in verse 6. Yes, when Jesus Christ entered into the glory of the presence of the Father after His resurrection, when He ascended to the right hand of God, He did so as the supreme one.

In Hebrews again, this is a constant theme, in Hebrews we are reminded in chapter 10 and verse 12 that He, Christ, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time sat down at the right hand of God. And we find also in chapter 12 of Hebrews verse 2, "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." Numerous times it says He went from the cross to the right hand of God. That is the seat of honor. That is the seat of authority. That is the seat of power.

Romans 8 says, "Christ Jesus is He who died," verse 34, "yes, rather who was raised who is at the right hand of God." Over and over it says that. He died, He rose, He went to the right hand of God. And at the right hand of God He is given all authority over the angels and over all created beings. Do you remember our study of Philippians 2? It tells you how exalted His position is. Philippians 2 and verse 5 talks about Christ and His humiliation. And then in verse 9 it says in response to His humiliation and His death on the cross, verse 8, verse 9 says, "Therefore...because of His death on the cross...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." From the cross to the grave, out of the grave to the right hand of God to be proclaimed Lord, and every knee shall bow.

And so says Peter that this one, Jesus Christ, marvelously triumphed even in the midst of His dying and He is at the right hand of God...look at the next phrase..."Having gone into heaven." That's speaking about His ascension. Acts 1:11 says He was taken up into the air in a cloud into heaven. Hebrews repeats over and again the fact that He ascended into heaven where He sits, Hebrews 6:20, He has entered, having become a high priest forever. And, of course, He is interceding for us. Hebrews 8:1, now the main point in what has been said is this, we have such a high priest who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. Hebrews 9:24, Christ didn't enter into 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.

And so listen, beloved, when Jesus went into the grave and out the tomb, He ascended to heaven. And there is in that a triumphant supremacy. Every knee bows to Him. And what is He doing there at

the right hand of the Father in the place of authority and power? He is interceding for whom? For us. You see, because He was willing to submit Himself, God highly exalted Him and it was through His suffering that He triumphed in that He now ranks above all beings. And so verse 22 says, "After angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." I believe that looks back not only to the moment that He descended into the pit and declared His triumph and announced His victory, but to the fact that it was through the cross and the resurrection that all those spiritual beings called angels, authorities and powers, and those last two words are just different terms for angels, have been subjected to Him. All ranks of spiritual beings must submit to Christ, He is preeminent. It says in Ephesians 1, remember these words in verses 20 and 21, I'm sure you will, it says that Christ was raised from the dead, seated at God's right hand in 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, and He put all things in subjection under His feet. It was through His suffering and the obedience of suffering that God highly exalted Him. And every being is hupotasso, lined up in rank beneath him, a military term.

So, it was through unjust suffering that Christ found the path of triumph. It was through unjust suffering that Christ gained His great and glorious victory. It was through unjust suffering that He triumphed in sin bearing, He triumphed over spirits, He triumphed in salvation and He triumphed as the supreme being at the right hand of God.

What is the point of this? Peter is saying, "Look on your unjust suffering as the path of triumph. Look on your unjust suffering as the path of victory. It was for Christ, it will be for you."

Listen to Romans 8:17, it says, "And if children we are heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...listen...if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." It is for us through the path of suffering to reach the place of glory...as it was for Him.

Remember the words of Paul to Timothy, 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 of glory is always through suffering. And Jesus is our example.

Do you remember Philippians 1:29? "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake." Beloved, Paul put it this way in 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." He will always cause us to triumph, even as Christ triumphed in the midst of unjust suffering. He triumphed over sin to bring us to God. He triumphed over all of the spirit beings that would stand against God and His people. Put them in their place, as it were. He provided an ark of safety in order that He might triumph over the judgment of God and He

entered into the supreme place at the right hand of God. Don't underestimate the potential triumph in unjust suffering.

It may be that when you suffer unjustly, you too might have the opportunity because of how you take that suffering to lead someone to Christ. It may be that when you suffer unjustly the Lord will give you great and glorious triumph over the demons with whom you wrestle. It may be that when you suffer unjustly, you might become a source of safety for someone else who sees how you weather that storm. And it will be that should you suffer triumphantly, the Lord will exalt you and lift you up. So look not away from the suffering, look through it to the triumph.

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