

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

### **Christ's Triumphant Death**

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:18-22

Code: 80-261

Well I've been teaching Easter messages to this church for over three decades now. Somebody might think I would run out of things to say. Somebody who didn't know me very well. I said recently to someone, "I'm not running out of material but I am running out of time." There are so many places in the New Testament where the resurrection of Jesus Christ is presented to us. And I want to draw your attention to a text of Scripture in Peter's epistle, 1 Peter chapter 3.

Here at Grace Community Church when it comes time for me to speak I speak about what is in the Bible. And most often in the New Testament cause therein is the message of Jesus Christ presented to us.

The beloved big fisherman Peter wrote two epistles, 1 and 2 Peter. They are remarkable in all ways for their amazing content. Faithful to, certainly God's intention for Peter as an apostle, he presents to us the significance of the sufferings of Christ. It's so critical that people in our world understand why Jesus died and rose again. That, he did that, many people know. Why he did that, many people surmise. But it is critical to understand the meaning of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, critical to your eternal well being.

Peter writes in verse 18 of 1 Peter 3, "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 he 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."

Peter begins with the death of Christ in verse 18 and he ends with the resurrection of Christ in verse 21. Everything in-between is based upon the death and resurrection of Christ. In his death he accomplished the things Peter outlines and by his resurrection that accomplishment was affirmed by God who raised him from the dead. But before we can understand what Peter has to say there's something else we need to understand.

Our society is very aware of dangers. We are almost hypersensitive to anything that could interrupt the safety, security, and tranquility of our lives. Like no society in human history we have protections,

government agencies, ad infantum abnosium, to protect us from everything. Warning labels, break downs of everything that's in everything, as if we knew what the everything in everything really was. We are told more than we care to know about the dangers that are ever present. And it's a strange kind of paradox because we are the most protected, the most safe, the most secure, the most comfortable society in human history. And, yet, we know more about what could hurt us than any society ever.

In fact, rarely do you ever pick up a magazine or a newspaper or turn on television news without being told about something else that could threaten your life. It might be a terrorist attack, it might be a bomb on an airplane, it might be a criminal, it might be a toxin, it might be a disease, it might be some form of pollution, might be an unsafe food product, it might be a car that fails the crash test, it might be a corrupt business that you invest in with your retirement, it might be the media, itself, that constantly corrupts our children, it might be warnings about secular humanistic education, which pollutes the minds of people; directing them away from what is true to what is not. So in our overexposed lives we are daily made to fear something new. Whatever your fears are today by the end of next week you'll have more.

And what's really disgusting about it all is you find out that certain food supplements are dangerous to your health. The very ones you've been taking for three years to prolong your life. What should you really fear? I mean, what is legitimately to be feared? What should you fear most? What poises the greatest threat to your life, to your well being? When I start narrowing it down you'll begin to follow a path that'll end up maybe in a place you didn't expect.

First of all your greatest enemy is not physical, not material. Your greatest enemy doesn't come in a can or bottle. Your greatest doesn't even come in human skin. Your greatest enemy is not physical. Your greatest enemy is spiritual. And that narrows it down. You're saying, "Ah, I know where you're going - Satan." No, Satan's not your greatest enemy. Your greatest enemy is God. God, the creator of the universe, is your greatest enemy. He is the deadliest, most destructive power in the universe. The very God who gave the universe its life is the same God who will destroy it. The God who gave you life is the same God who will take that life away. God is, Himself, the clear and present danger.

Jesus said that in these words, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." And Jesus was talking about God. "Don't fear what kills the body fear who kills the soul." And God, Himself, is that great destroyer. I don't know that sounds a little unconventional but it's true. You shouldn't ultimately be fearful of anything that can only harm your body and not touch your eternal soul but you should absolutely live in stark terror of the one who can destroy both your body and your soul, who can bring about your eternal ruin. And that is God, Himself. And yet we live in a society where people have a thousand fears of the things that can kill the body and no fear of the one who can kill the soul.

In America, in fact, we evidently believe that God is an American. He's, at least, our friend. We constantly call on Him and ask him to bless us. And that's not new, that's not just since 911. Irving Berlin wrote God Bless America in 1918. So we've been singing God Bless America for almost a century. And we call on God to bless us because we really think we deserve it. We're America. We have, "In God we Trust" on our coins. We have "Under God" in our flag salute. We're for God and God has to be for us. We have presidents one after another talk about God. We think God likes America because we're for freedom, and we're for justice, and we're for happiness, and we're for equality, and we're for taking care of the indigent and the poor and the needy and we're for protecting people and developing medical science and the best kind of healthcare to preserve life. And we spend our wealth, not only on the people in our country who need it, but we spend it on people all over the globe. Dispatching our aid to the world and, even occasionally, sending our troops and a fortune in military costs to defend some nation against an evil aggressor.

Certainly God should bless America. We're good. We're on the right side of things. We're the defender of justice. And I think even personally people think God is friendly towards them. I'm always amazed when, you know, somebody wins a boxing match and thanks God. Or somebody wins the lottery and thanks God, or the Super Bowl, or a little league game, or an Emmy, or an Oscar. Or somebody who thanks God for providing a parking place in a crowded mall. And when things go well we just sort of think God is blessing us. He's our friend and he looks kindly on us. And I think there are Christian people who, with good intentions, aid and abet this idea by constantly saying, "God loves everyone unconditionally." And portraying God as this benevolent lover of everybody who just wants to bless us, give us good things.

Well, let me rain on that parade today. Let me bring some truth into the sentimental imagination of such thinking. God is our ever-present deadly danger. It wasn't the terrorists who wreaked the real havoc on the people who died in the tower and in the Pentagon. All the terrorist's could do was kill their body. It was God who dispatched their eternal souls into everlasting punishment that wreaked the real havoc. There is no enemy like God, not even close. Because, as Jesus said, "He's able to destroy both soul and body and hell."

And that is why the Bible makes it crystal clear that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. You haven't even begun to be wise unless you've learned to fear God. Book of Proverbs rehearses that a number of time, particularly in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter and the 10<sup>th</sup> verse, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." There are many things that might harm your body. There is only one who is deadly to your eternal soul and that is God. And wisdom dictates, "Fear Him above all others." It goes against the grain of everything we're told. Even in our culture we're told that God is on our side and he's friendly toward us. In our churches we're told that God loves everybody with an unconditional love and seeks nothing but their well-being. And the truth of the matter is God is the enemy of every sinner, the avowed and eternal enemy of every sinner.

That is why Deuteronomy 4:27 says, "The Lord, your God, is a consuming fire." Psalms 7:11, "God is every day angry with the wicked." Ezekiel 8:18, "God said I will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice I will not hear them. It was Isaiah 63:3 and 4, where God portrays Himself as a vintner, as somebody who was crushing grapes. A container full of grapes would be prepared. A man would go in and stomp with his feet and crush the grapes and juice would flow out the bottom and be captured to press the wine. And that's the image of God. Isaiah 63:3 and 4, God say, "I have trodden the winepress alone, for I have trodden them in my anger and trampled them in my fury. Their blood is sprinkled on my garments and I have stained all my robes. For the day of vengeance is in my heart." God literally crushing the blood out of his victims splattering it on his robes.

It was that passage that gripped Jonathan Edwards when he preached that great sermon, Sinners in the hands of an Angry God, a sermon, which literally catapulted people into the Kingdom of God out of the terror that it engendered. This is what Edwards said, "If you cry to God to pity you he will be so far from pitying you or showing you the least favor that instead of that he will only tread you under foot. And though he will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading upon you, yet he will not regard it but will crush you under his feet without mercy. He will crush out your blood and make it fly and it'll be sprinkled on his garment, so as to stain all his clothing. He will not only hate you but he will hold you in the utmost contempt," end quote. Frightening language, frightening reality.

A few chapters later in Isaiah chapter 66 and verse 15, the prophet wrote, "See the Lord is coming with fire and His chariots are like a whirlwind. He will bring down his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire." The imagery is of an army, a marauding deadly army coming at a people. And coming so fast and so furiously that the dust kicked up by the horses and the wheels looks like a tornado. This is the picture of God coming to do destruction. And a question comes then, "Who is God coming after?" And the answer is, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, Romans 1 says, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." God comes after all who are ungodly, all who are unrighteous, all who suppress the truth about him. And the biblical record is clear about this.

God came in fierce judgment against Adam and Eve and cursed them. Then he came after their son Cain and cursed him. And then he came after the entire world in the days of Noah. "Millions of people he drowned, spared only 8," as Peter noted in the passage we read. After the flood and anger God scattered the human race, confused their languages, giving birth to deadly conflict throughout all of human history, which we still see on the front page of every day's paper. It was God who killed all the first born in Egypt who didn't . . . families of the first born who didn't do what he told them. He destroyed the entire Egyptian army, drowning them in the Red Sea. He killed the Israelites who worshipped the golden calf. As Exodus 32 tells us, "He consumed with fire those who displeased him." In Numbers chapter 11, "He killed with snake bites those who were disobedient." Numbers 21.

And it was Numbers 25 where God, Himself, killed 24,000 people in a plague. And in 2 Samuel 24 he killed 70,000 in a plague. That's only 2 Samuel, there's plenty more Old Testament still to go. "And some day, Revelation 20 says, God is gonna gather into his throne room, a great white throne, all the dead of all human history and bring them before his throne and judge them and cast them into the lake of fire forever." This is the deadliness of God.

And though most of humanity is spared, a sort of Holocaust-type death, no one is spared death. And whether you die in a tornado or a flood or whether you die in a war or whether you die in a car accident or whether you die of old age, you will die. And when you die you will face eternity and the destruction of your soul. Human history is just a long list of epitaphs like Genesis 5, "And he died . . . and he died . . . and he died . . . and he died." And the Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, "It's appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment." And nobody escapes that. All have sinned and the wages of sin is death. Nobody escapes.

In Romans chapter 3, Paul says, "There's none righteous, no, not one. There's none that does good. There's none that understands that none seeks after God." And down in verse 18 he says the reason. "Because there's no fear of God in their minds." The problem with people is they don't fear God. They're not afraid of God. They're afraid they might lose a bank account. Afraid they might lose their health. They're afraid they might lose their fitness. They're afraid they might lose their marriage partner, children. Who knows what? The one they really should fear is God. And when there's no fear of Him before their eyes they are in eternal danger. Men don't fear God.

Romans 1, again, says, "When they knew God they glorified Him not as God. Were foolish in their imaginations. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools. They turned the glory of God into an image. They got rid of God and replaced him with their own religion." And, still, we say, "God bless us. God bless America. God bless me. Do this, do that for me," and we forget the truth of Psalm 113, 13. You might want to write this one down. Psalm 113, 13 says, "The Lord will bless those who fear Him," that's the Hebrew. The Lord will bless those who fear Him. If you want God to bless you you start there. The path to blessing starts with holy dread. It starts with holy terror before God, the one who, alone, casts sinners into eternal punishment.

Now let me sum up what I'm saying by giving you three reasons to fear God, three motivations. Number one, he has established absolute moral law reflecting his holy perfection to which he requires flawless obedience. Let me say that again. Here's the first reason to fear God. He has established absolute moral law reflecting his holy perfections to which he requires flawless obedience. Sin is any violation of that law. And since God requires flawless obedience any violation of that law renders the sinner guilty and due punishment as a violator. He has established the law - we break it. That's what sin is. It's a violation of God's law.

I think people sometimes . . . well a lot times . . . are confused about what sin is. They think when their bad conscience bothers them, when they feel guilty about something, they might think that that's a true assessment of their sinful condition. Well it's really not. Everybody's life includes things that disturb us. Great dissatisfaction. You can feel bad about the way things are going in your life. You can feel badly about your own failures, your own struggles. You can feel badly about your own sin and how it cripples you. Like the alcoholic who is so distressed because he can't get over his drink and it's just ruining all of the areas of his life. You can feel remorse about that and dissatisfaction. Failing to attain your personal goals and achieve your personal ends and exercise your personal disciplines.

And, secondly, you can feel bad about the fact that, not only does this devastate your own sense of well being and break you down and make you feel wretched and miserable, but it also messes up all your relationships, so that you're embarrassed and you're ashamed about what people see and think of you. That's not the essence of sin. A manifestation of it but that's not the essence of sin. The essence of sin is not what it does to you or what it does to some other person the essence of sin is what it does to whom? To God. The very idea of sin is it's an offense against the Holy God. Not that it's an offense or an attack against your self-esteem or your reputation but that it's an offense against God. Not that it's disrupted your own well being or your relationships but that it is literally devastated your relationship to God and made you God's enemy.

Sin is not a psychological concept, it is not a sociological concept, it is a theological concept. And you never really know what sin is until you think of it in terms of God. And you measure it, not by your own standard of well being or your own reputation, but you measure it by the yardstick of God's absolute demand on your life. You need to grasp the idea that feeling bad about your sin because of what it does to you and what it does to somebody else is not conviction of sin. It's never conviction of sin until you come to grips with the fact that you are alienated from God. Jesus is not a super psychiatrist. He is a redeemer of sinners who are the enemies of God. So we need to understand sin for what sin really is. It is a violation of God's law. As David said, "Against the only have I sinned." And that puts us in a serious situation. We've all sinned; therefore, we're all guilty before God. We've all broken his law, therefore, as a just moral law giver and a judge he hold us guilty. That is a just conclusion of our offenses. We are violators of his law. We are as guilty, therefore, to be punished.

And that leads us to the second thing you need to understand about God. The first one has reference to sin. The second one is that God is not only the moral law giver and the judge but he is the warden and the prison keeper who has prepared an inescapable prison of suffering, sorrow, and wretchedness forever to be occupied by the guilty. He is the warden. He is the prison keeper who has prepared an inescapable prison of suffering, sorrow, and wretchedness forever to be occupied by the guilty. The place is called hell. Sin is punished with hell. Hell is the place where the violators go and remain, unconscious punishment, forever.

Thirdly, God ought to be feared because he is, not only the judge and law giver, he is not only the warden and prison keeper, but he is the executioner. He is the one who brings the just judgment of body and soul. And that judgment is death. Death is what sends us into another denomination of life, everlasting punishment. It is then God's holy law, which we violate by our sin, that causes us to be rendered guilty before God and sentenced to eternal hell, which sentence begins when we die. Fear God for those reasons. For sin and hell and death sake fear God. And why am I saying all this? Because all of this is critical to understanding the wonder and the beauty of the sufferings of Christ. Not until you understand this do you understand why Jesus died.

And with that in mind let's go back to our Scripture text in 1 Peter chapter 3. Peter gives us some good news, the best news. That's why it's called the gospel, good news. For Peter will unfold for us in these few verses that I read earlier how that Jesus Christ triumphs over sin and hell and death. Precisely where our fear lie. Anybody with a rational mind should be terrified to be held guilty before a Holy God, sentence to eternal punishment, and catapulted there by death. But that is the truth. But Jesus comes and Peter says his sacrifice deals with each of those three areas. First of verse 18, "For Christ also died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that he might bring us to God," and we'll stop at that point.

The operative word here is sins. That's that key word. Everything comes from that. Christ died for sins. Somebody has to die for sins. The wages of sin is death. But the good news is Christ died for sins. This is the greatest, joyous, most blessed, hopeful, comforting truth ever. His suffering was ultimate. He died. Why? Why did he die for our sins? He was without sin why did he die for our sins? Because that was what God required, the wages of sin in death. Somebody has to die, either the sinner or a substitute. And so Christ died for sins. Not his, ours. Sins put him there. Not his sins, he didn't have any. Ours. And I want you to notice that he died for sins once, hapax, in the Greek, hapax. Important word, means one time only. It means an event that occurred one time with perpetual validity without requiring repetition.

It's very rare that some event, some act is hapax. That is to say, done once, never needing to be repeated. And securing by that one act all that was intended. But that is exactly what happened in the death of Christ - that against the backdrop of a Jewish sacrificial system, where they were literally, over the century, slaughtering millions and million and millions of animals as sin offerings. Animals were dying by the millions, not once, but by the millions and could never take away sin. They were only raising the frustration level. The wages of sin is death. And Jewish people were literally bathed in blood from birth to death as they went through the sacrificial system. Realizing the wages of sin was pretty easy for them they could see that it caused death. They could also see that God was willing to provide a substitute for the sinner. But there never was a substitute whose work ended the sacrifices till Jesus came. And his death once and the sacrificial system was over. By the way, it doesn't exist today. It's gone. It's gone.

And when Jesus died on the cross and made the final sacrifice the temple area where the holy of holies was, a place that no one could ever go except a high priest once a year, the curtain that separated that was split from top to bottom and the holy place was thrown wide open. There never needed to be another sacrifice. It was hapax; once, never needing to be repeated. It was also comprehensive. It was once for all. It was for everybody. In the Jewish system, as a father, I would have to make an offering for myself and for my family. And you would have to make an offering for yourself and for your family. Particularly at Passover every family had to have its offering. But that's not the way it is anymore. We don't each need a different savior. We don't each need a different sacrifice. Jesus died for all the sins of all of his own and he died one time for all. Comprehensive and vicarious.

It says in verse 18, "The just for the unjust." And this is the amazing . . . he is the just or the righteous or the pure or the sinless or the holy and he died for the unjust, the unrighteous, the unholy, the impure - that's us. Peter had said that earlier in chapter 2 verse 24, "He bore our sins in his body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed." He bore our sins in his body. That is to say God killed him for our sins. God literally transferred our guilt to Jesus, put him on a cross and poured out his wrath on Jesus. He who knew no sin, Jesus Christ was made sin in that sense that we might be made righteous.

Hebrews 9:28 says, "He suffered once to bear the sins of many," so the just and holy and pure and sinless Christ. In Acts 3 Peter calls him, "The holy and righteous one." The just one took the place of the unjust and paid the penalty for sins. He bore our sins, he took our penalty. It was unjust suffering at its most extreme because he was perfect and holy. And, yet, he deliberately took our place. And God poured out his wrath on Jesus and was satisfied. God was propitiated; he was satisfied by Jesus' sacrifice. That's why, as the end of the passage says, "He raised him from the dead," because he was raising him to exalt him to his right hand, having accomplished a perfect redemption.

Now this sacrifice of Jesus for sins was effective. Continue in verse 18, "He did it in order that he might bring us to God," and that's exactly what happened. Prior to this we are enemies of God and alienated from God. Through the death of Jesus Christ we are brought to God. This is the accomplished purpose of his suffering, to bring us to God. Reconciliation; Paul calls it the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5, "And he brings us to God," that's an interesting Greek verb. The noun form of the verb is an introducer, somebody who brings you to somebody else. Prosa gogos the word in the Greek, an intercessor or an introducer or a giver of access. A king would have an official who had the responsibility to screen everybody and determine who got through the door to the king's throne room and who was given access to the presence of the king. Well that was Jesus. He is the introducer who opens the door and let's us in to the throne room of God.



Hebrews 2:10 says, "He brought many sons to glory. He shows us the father, he takes us to God. And no longer is God our enemy but God is our friend, not just a friend, but our Father." "And no man comes to God, Jesus said, except by me. He alone provides the sacrifice that introduces us to God." The goal of any and every religion is a measure of reconciliation with whatever God is in that system. They're trying to appease God and somehow have some reconciliation so that God doesn't hurt them or is no longer indifferent to their problems. That's all just an illusion of false religion. There is, however, a true and living God, who, by his mercy and grace, has provided a reconciliation with the enemies, that's us, through the death of his Son. So, Jesus, in his death, rescued us from the guilt of sin.

And, secondly, we said God should be feared because of hell. And I want you to notice what Peter says about that. Back to verse 18, "Having been put to death in the flesh," that is Jesus was killed on the cross physically but alive in the spirit. Jesus you remember died on the cross that Friday afternoon, he was buried, was there on a portion of Friday, Saturday, Sunday morning and then he rose from the dead. While his body was in the grave the question is where was his spirit? He didn't go out of existence. He's the eternal Son of God. He was alive. What did he do? It tells us in verse 19, "He went his spirit 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." He went to a prison, a fa loc a. He went to a prison, is what it is, a prison with spirits in it. The word spirits never used of a human in the New Testament. Who are these spirits? Who are imprisoned spirits? Well it tells you they were disobedient when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah. Back in the days of Noah there were some spirits who were disobedient. They, therefore, would not be holy angels they would be demons, Satan's legends of demons.

If you go back to Genesis 6 you will read about their bizarre conduct. How they came, these demons, and infested the bodies of men, cohabitated with women, polluted the world with their demonic, perverted sexual activity. And God determined that they had gone too far. God keeps his controls on even Satan in his kingdom. And they had gone too far, too vile, too wretched. And so he took the demons that did that and found them, Peter says, "Elsewhere in pits of darkness." And Jude says, "In everlasting chains." There are demons running loose in the world but there are some that are bound. Demons don't like to be bound that's why the demons that Jesus confronted one day said, "Don't send us to the pit." They don't want to go there until they have to. They know, ultimately, in the end he will send them all to the pit, which is the lake of fire, ultimately, which is hell where all Ungodly sinners and all Ungodly spirits will dwell forever. But there are already some occupants in that place because God sent them there in the days of Noah. And when Jesus' body was in the grave his spirit went to hell. Went into the place, the prison, and made a proclamation.

Galatians 2:15 Paul tells us, "The proclamation was that he had triumphed." That he had triumphed. Maybe there was a party going on with the spirits in hell because Jesus was dead. Maybe they

thought they had defeated God and there would be no salvation and hell would be literally occupied by everyone. And Jesus showed up at the party and said, "That's not the way it is." He proclaimed his triumph over them. The end of verse 22 indicates this, "Angels and authorities and powers were subjected to him." Jesus literally showed up in hell to tell them they had been conquered and hell was not going to be occupied the way they thought it would be. Millions would be rescued from eternal punishment. Fear God because of what sin can do but Jesus takes care of sin. Fear God because of eternal punishment in hell but Jesus rescues million from hell.

And, thirdly, we said fear God because of death; death and then the judgment. God wields the power of death, even though he delegates it to Satan and there are many causes of it. He, in the end, reserves the power. Notice how Jesus' work on the cross and through the resurrection ends our fear of death. Verse 20 in the middle, Peter talking about the demons who were incarcerated in the days of Noah is also reminded that at the time of Noah there was the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is 8 persons, were brought safely through the water. Peter remembers how that incredible event happened when God drowned the millions of people in the world and saved only 8. God told them to build a boat, well actually a barge, and to get inside because something was gonna happen that had never happened in the history of the world - rain. Not only rain, but the whole crust to the earth, the whole service to the earth was gonna break up and massive vaults of water in the core of the earth were gonna come out and flood the surface, as well as the water canopy around the earth inundating and flooding the earth in immeasurable deluge. God was gonna drown the whole world. And he said, "I'll spare you 8. You get in the boat. The water will come down on top and the roof will protect you. It'll come up from the bottom and the bottom of the boat will protect you and you'll sail right through the middle of the judgment. And the rain will stop and the water will recede and you'll walk out in a new world." That's what happened. That's exactly what happened. Millions were dead, drowned in the flood, but one day Noah and his family walked out into a new world, having been literally taken through the flood and the safety of an ark.

And in verse 21 Peter writes, "And corresponding to that, very like that, baptism now saves you." Now when you see the word baptism you think of water baptism immediately because that's the common Christian concept. So he quickly says, "No, not the removal of dirt from the flesh. I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about a rite or a ritual." The word baptism means immersion, and it could be used metaphorically. You could be immersed in your studies, you could be immersed in anger, you could be immersed in happiness. There're a lot of uses of the term. What he's saying is there is an immersion, there is a being put into that saves you, not water, but an appeal to God for a good conscience. What's that? Repentance. I'm tired of my accusations. I'm tired of my guilt. I'm tired of the burden of sin. I want my conscience cleansed. And you cry to God for, not an outward washing, but an inward cleansing, which is available through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, you recognize Jesus died for you and he rose again and that, therein, is the provision of salvation and the sinner comes and says, "God, through the work of Christ, wash me on the inside."

God, in his grace, places you into Christ and literally you go through judgment in Christ. The judgment of God falls on him. He's the ark. It hits him from the top, it hits him from the bottom, but it never touches you. You literally go through the judgment of God in Christ like Noah's family went through the flood. And in the end judgment is over and you step out into eternal life. So death then is really simply the ark of Christ that transitions you from this world to the next. That's why death has no fear. And so it is that at every point where we have to fear God Jesus comes to remove our fear. We fear God because of our sins. Jesus bears our sin away in satisfying the justice of God. We fear God because of the dread of hell. Jesus rescues us from hell and announces the triumph over it. We fear God because of death and the judgment. Jesus is our ark who takes us through the judgment into eternal life.

Yes you fear God if you are wise. But know this that the same God who is your enemy does love you. He loves you enough to have provided a way of reconciliation. He loves you enough to throw open the curtain to the holy of holies and invite you in through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. And so you can actually feel eager to run into God's presence. All fear dissipates, in the sense of dread and terror. And you cry aba, father, papa, daddy, because you know he's a father, a loving father, a lavishly loving father who will spend forever and ever and ever lavishing on you all the goodness of his mercy and grace and making you a joint heir with Christ of everything that God possesses in eternity.

How wonderful is it that God goes from being our avowed enemy to being our loving father? But only through Jesus Christ can that happen. He, alone, is the one who paid the price for sin once for all. No other price paid and it's applied to all who believe. He is the one who triumphed over the forces of hell and hell itself. He is the one who makes death a welcome transition and not a frightening event. And, thus, we say the sufferings of Christ are triumphant, not only for him, but for all who trust him.

Father may you, today, place into the ark of safety, Jesus Christ, some souls who can be, even in death, brought through the judgment to find themselves on a glorious shore of eternal bliss. We thank you for what the death of Christ means in turning you from our worst enemy to our dearest friend. From the one who hates to the one who loves. From the one who curses to the one who blesses. From the one who indicts to the one who exonerates. From the one who punishes to the one who praises. From the one who destroys to the one who gives life. All because Jesus perfectly satisfied your just requirement and took our place. Such a perfect sacrifice that you affirmed it by raising him from the dead and exalting him to your right hand. It's in Him we place our trust. Amen.

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