

1Peter 3:17-22

Victory through Suffering

As Christians, there will be times in which we will suffer for doing good.

Sometimes that suffering is the ridicule and rejection of colleagues, friends and even family members because of our beliefs and our way of living.

Sometimes that suffering is threats, restrictions of our basic freedoms, physical abuse, imprisonment or even death, because of the expression of our faith.

Sometimes the suffering is spiritual attacks on the mind which can take the form of waves of fear, doubt, or discouragement, or, spiritual attacks on the body which can take the form of headaches, pain, disease, cancer, other forms of sickness, or injury from accidents, which can often follow as a result of sharing your faith, or exercising your faith.

Not all suffering is a spiritual attack, but often it is.

And when we suffer for doing good, remember that we are following in the footsteps of Christ.

And as the suffering of the cross led to victory in the life of Christ, so to in the lives of His followers, when we suffer for doing good, we can be confident that the end result is going to be victory over evil.

1Peter 3:17 ESV, "For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."

And when we suffer for doing good, remember that we are following in the footsteps of Christ.

1Peter 3:18 ESV, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit..."

Why do we suffer for doing good? Verse 18 says, it is because we are followers of Jesus in a hostile world that is at enmity with our Master. Therefore, as they treated Him, so they will treat us.

Notice that verse 18 says that, "***Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous..."***"

Old Testament animal sacrifices were not perfect sacrifices, they could only temporarily cover sin, but could never remove it, therefore they had to be offered over and over again, basically every time you sinned.

But in massive contrast, Jesus only died once for our sin. His sacrifice was perfect, sufficient in value to pay the penalty for all of humanity's sin, and therefore it was final, never to need to be repeated again.

The Catholic mass is performed as a bloodless sacrifice in which they believe they are offering the body of Jesus Christ again and again for sin. That is blasphemy.

It denies the sufficiency and worth of Jesus' death on the cross.

Verse 18 says, ***"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God..."***

We were separated from God because of our sin, Jesus suffered so that He might bring us into relationship with God.

Following in His footsteps, this is why we will also suffer, because the enemy opposes our mission of leading his captive souls to God.

The last part of verse 18 says, ***"...being put to death in the flesh*** [this refers to His crucifixion in a mortal body] ***but made alive in the spirit*** [this refers to His physical resurrection in a glorified state] ***..."***

Jesus lived as a sinless man with all the limitations of a human, and with all the limitations of a mortal body. And He died as a man (though He never ceased to be God—He lived and died as a man).

But He was physically resurrected in the spirit, meaning that He was raised to life, with a new glorified body, in the spirit, meaning in the *realm* of the spirit—no longer living with all the limitations of a mortal being—no longer capable of suffering and no longer capable of dying. (Karen Jobes, p. 242)

And this is the pattern and the hope that we have. When we die in the realm of the flesh with all of our human limitations and suffering, because of Christ's suffering for us, we too will be raised physically to new life in the realm of the spirit—with new, glorified, immortal bodies that can never suffer pain and that will never grow old or die.

This is what is taught in ***1Corinthians 15:42-49***, "[Speaking of] *the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.* ⁴³ *It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.* ⁴⁴ *It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. ..."*

1Peter 3:18-19 ESV, ⁴⁸ ***...being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,*** ¹⁹ ***in which*** [meaning in His resurrected, glorified body] ***he*** [Jesus] ***went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison..."***

Some people interpret verse 19 to mean that when Jesus died, He went into hell and ministered the gospel to the spirits of dead people and then afterward, on the third day, He rose.

But that interpretation creates all kinds of theological problems, leading to doctrines of purgatory, universalism, and second chance to be saved after we die.

And verse 19 follows His resurrection in verse 18, so it more logically implies that verse 19 took place after His resurrection.

So who are the spirits in prison that Jesus went to in His glorified state, after His resurrection?

We have to read verse 20 to get a clue.

1Peter 3:20 ESV, “*because they [the spirits in prison] formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.*”

We have some hints of who these spirits are given for us in scripture:

2Peter 2:4-5, “*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned [these are spirit beings known as demons], but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness [this description sounds like spirits in prison], to be reserved for judgment;⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly...*”

And these fallen angels, bound in chains, are connected by Peter to the judgment of the flood in Noah’s day.

Another passage of scripture that gives us a clue is Jude 6.

Jude 6, “*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...*”

What is this talking about? Jude seems to be referring to some event that he assumes his readers know about.

A few verses later, Jude, quotes a prophecy given by Enoch, the seventh from Adam. Enoch was the great grandfather of Noah.

Enoch’s history is recorded for us in **Genesis 5:21-24**, “*Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah.* ²² *After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters.* ²³ *So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.* ²⁴ *And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.*”

Hebrews 11:5, tells us that Enoch did not die because God took him.

There is no prophecy by Enoch recorded in the Old Testament, so where did Jude get the prophecy of Enoch from?

In the days of the New Testament writers, there was a very well known book of Jewish tradition called “1 Enoch”. In that book is recorded the prophecy that Jude quotes in the Bible.

And the things that Peter is talking about are also described in this ancient book of 1 Enoch.

Therefore, although 1 Enoch is not part of the Bible, it was well-known in Peter’s day and it had enough credibility to be quoted by Jude and referred to by Peter.

The book of 1 Enoch refers to an event, described in the Bible, that took place shortly before the flood.

Genesis 6:1-8, *“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them,² that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.*

³ *And the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”⁴ There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.*

⁵ *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.⁶ And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.⁷ So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”⁸ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.”*

First Enoch, chapters 12-16, talk about fallen angels, known as Watchers, who had abandoned heaven, slept with human women, and produced children, referred to as “giants” from whose bodies “evil spirits” have come.

These evil spirits that came from the bodies of the giants fathered by the Watchers through human women were stirring up much of the human evil that led to the great flood during the time of Enoch’s great-grandson, Noah.

This is not scripture, but it is the widely-accepted tradition that many scholars believe is the background behind Peter’s teaching in chapter 3.

These fallen angels who had intermingled with human women, and the evil spirits they produced, were, at the time of the flood in Noah’s day, locked into prison as part of God’s restraining power keeping them from perverting the human race.

And the Jewish tradition, passed on through Enoch, had recorded a prophecy that the day was coming in which God would bring judgment upon these evil spirits. (*Jobes*, p. 244; *Edmund Clowney*, p. 160-61)

Revelation chapter 9 describes fallen angels and evil spirits that will be released from the abyss at the time of God’s judgment in the Last Days, during the Great Tribulation.

All of that to say that these imprisoned spirits, who are awaiting their final judgment, are who 1Peter 3:19 is referring to.

Many Christians believe that following the resurrection of Christ, Jesus went and proclaimed His victory and triumph over the powers of hell, confirming the certainty of their future doom.

Colossians 2:15, describing the victory obtained for us through His finished work of the cross, declares, *“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”*

1Peter 3:20b, “...when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared...”

God’s patience during the years before the flood is the same as His patience in these last days, postponing judgment.

2Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

It seemed like the prophesied judgment would never come, but one day, when the rest of the world was going about their regular routine of life, the rain began to fall, and great underground reservoirs of water burst upon the earth, and the deluge of water didn’t stop until the entire world was covered.

It is the same thing today. It seems like the prophesied judgment of God will never come upon the earth.

But one day, God will say, “Time is up—this is the day.” And God’s Tribulation judgment will begin to fall upon the earth.

1Peter 3:20b, “...God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.”

1Peter 3:20 says that eight people from Noah’s family, “**were brought safely through water.**”

The water was a symbol of God’s judgment. The water destroyed the entire earth, but not a drop of water fell on any of those in the ark.

Genesis 7:23, “So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.”

But notice what the water, which destroyed the wicked, did to the believers who were in the ark:

Genesis 7:17, “Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.”

The same act of judgment that destroyed the wicked lifted up and removed the believers from the earth.

This parallels what the Bible tells us of the final judgment of the last days. The very thing that takes us to safety, brings destruction upon the earth.

2Thessalonians 2:7, tells us that He who now restrains the tide of evil—who now restrains the Antichrist and the full onslaught of the demons of hell, will do so until He is taken out of the way.

When God’s final judgment begins to come upon the earth, we pilgrims and foreigners, will hear, “*a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God calling us home, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*” 1Thessalonians 4:16-17

1Peter 3:21 ESV, “²⁰ ... [as the flood waters of judgment began] *eight persons, were brought safely through water.* ²¹ *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...*”

The rescue of Noah and his family corresponds to baptism which saves us—not the symbolic act of being dunked in water (not the removal of dirt from the body) but the spiritual reality, that being dunked in water symbolizes—being baptized into Christ in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4).

This happens when we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

Like Noah, after he suffered ridicule and persecution while building the ark, he was delivered from the judgment that came upon his persecutors.

And like Jesus, who after He was persecuted, and put to death—death could not hold Him and He rose from the dead and ascended to His home, and ours.

And because we are one with Christ, symbolized by baptism, like we rose up out of the water, symbolizing death and judgment, so we will not be harmed by either death or judgment, but will rise up above it and ascend, with Christ, to our home.

Baptism is also described in verse 21, as a pledge to God (some translate appeal).

When you were baptized in water, you were asked to publicly declare your faith in Christ, and the whole ceremony is a declaration, like a wedding vow, or a pledge of your allegiance to Christ.

Baptism is a declaration that implies a pledge of unconditional permanence, on the part of both parties, both the believer and God—for better or for worse, we cannot be separated.

Peter reminds the church in this verse, that when they face the hard times of persecution for Christ, to remember their pledge to God.

And the result of this pledge is a good conscience before God.

Do you have a clear conscience before God? Can you enter boldly into His presence knowing that there is no stain of sin and guilt upon you.

Do you know how good it is to have a good conscience before God?

Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...”

1Peter 3:22, “who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

Philippians 2 tells us that when Jesus came to this world, He humbly submitted Himself to authorities, He took on the form of a servant, and gave His life for the salvation of mankind.

But after He had suffered and died, He rose and ascended into heaven and now all authorities and powers are under His authority, as He watches over us.

Philippians 2:8-11, *"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. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

And after we have suffered, and some will die, like Jesus—with Jesus, we will rise from this earth and go into heaven.

Luke 17:26-27, 30, *"But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶ And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷ They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all... ³⁰ Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."*

We will be among those who, like Noah, escape the judgment because we have been baptized into Christ who took our judgment for us.

This is symbolized when we rise up out of the waters of baptism—it is Christ's pledge that we will rise up above the judgment that will fall upon the wicked.

Noah witnessed boldly to those around him by his witness and his demonstration of faith. His greatest witness was probably the building of the ark—a demonstration that he believed the message that he was proclaiming to the people.

How are we demonstrating that we believe that judgment is coming upon this world and everything in it, but our home is in heaven?

Noah believed that judgment was soon coming upon his world.

God waited patiently for repentance of unbelievers before He brought judgment.

One day, judgment did come, and Noah and those who believed with him were saved.

And one day soon, judgment will come again upon this earth, and only those who believe will be saved.

Are you ready?

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