

## EXPOSITION OF I PETER

### Message #15

### I Peter 3:18-22

If ever there were an example of one who suffered for doing what is right according to the will of God it is Jesus Christ. He is the perfect example of One who met every single principle in verses 13-17. He always did that which was good. He always stood for what was righteous. He was never afraid of anyone. His conscience was the best, for He was the Lord. Jesus Christ suffered for doing what was right. His life was spotless; it was sinless. It was His godliness and communication of truth that actually stirred up people against Him.

The group who actually hated Christ and actually wanted to harm Him and kill Him were the religious leaders. The arrogant, dominate religious leaders who were satanically driven to kill him. But what they didn't know is that His death was all part of the plan of God. His humiliation was a prelude to His exaltation. After He suffered according to the will of God, He was highly honored to the right hand of God.

This happens even today now and then in church. A group of vicious, power-crazed, arrogant, evil people will be raised up to attack a wonderful servant of God. They aren't interested in the will of God, in fact they want just the opposite of God's will. But what they don't know is that there is a Sovereign God who is carefully monitoring their diabolical actions and His faithful servant will be raised up and exalted by Him.

When Peter writes these verses, he contextually communicates to us a powerful and encouraging message:

**WHEN YOU SUFFER FOR DOING THE WILL OF GOD YOU WILL SOON BE HIGHLY HONORED AND GREATLY BLESSED BY GOD, AND THE MOST GLORIOUS EXAMPLE OF THIS IS JESUS CHRIST.**

Now this is a text that is rich and mysterious in theology and doctrine. There are five major theological realities in this section. It is deep and complex and it shows how mature and scholarly an outdoorsman like Peter had become in his walk with God.

### **THEOLOGICAL REALITY #1 – Christ died for sins. 3:18**

Peter has already referred to the importance of the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ in dying and shedding His blood for sins (i.e. 1:2, 11, 18-19; 2:24) and now he comes back to it again. This point is the whole point of God's gospel and is clearly stated and developed in several New Testament texts (i.e. Galatians 1:4; I Corinthians 15:3).

The verb “died” is aorist, which means we are looking back to the specific past point in time when Jesus Christ died on the cross. That specific moment was all about sin; not His sin, but our sin. **Now the Greek grammar is important here because preposition “for” (περι) when used with the genitive “sins” (αμαρτιων) clearly emphasizes the cause of His death.**

In other words, Christ died because of our sins, on account of our sins. He did not die as a good example of one committed to a moral cause; He is dying for our sins. He is not dying for any sin He ever committed or anything evil He ever did or said; He is dying for all the sins we have committed.

**You will notice the noun sin is plural “sins.”** Christ died on that cross for all of your sins; every single one of them. The plural noun means we all have committed many sins and He died for them all. The evil sins, the public sins, the secret sins, the moral sins, the immoral sins, the big sins and the little sins - He is on that cross for us to take care of our sins. The death of Jesus Christ can resolve your sin problem forever. His cross-work guarantees that you don't have to have judicial condemnation or eternal liability for your sins if you will believe on Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not die on the cross for good people or self-righteous religious people; He died on that cross to save sinners. People just like you and me. That is the reason He came to this earth.

**Fact #1** - Christ died for sins once for all. **3:18a**

The adverb “once” (απαξ) is very rare and it means “once for all” (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 44). This adverb is used in precisely the same way in Hebrews 9:28 which says “so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...”

Now this is very important theology because under the O.T. economy animal sacrifices were offered on a yearly basis for sins. Over and over again, sacrifices had to be made. Christ put an end to that once for all. His sacrifice is completely sufficient. It does not need to be repeated ever! We don't have to redo it and we don't have to relive it. It is totally and completely final and adequate. As Jesus Himself said, “It is finished.” No further work is necessary.

Every now and then we learn or hear of some misguided religious zealot who thinks he must crucify himself so he can be right with God or be involved in some bizarre physical act or ritual in order to appease God. **The appeasing work for sin is all done.** It is complete. You don't need to do anything. All you need to do is believe in the completed work of Jesus Christ on that cross to save you from your sins.

How many times do you need to believe on Jesus Christ to have your sins washed away? The answer is once. He died once and you need to believe once. There needs to be some point in time in which you acknowledge to God that you are totally and only trusting in Jesus Christ to save you.

There are some churches that get people to try and go forward time and time again to be resaved. You don't need multiple times of salvation; you need one. You don't need to keep re-crucifying Jesus Christ; you need to believe once because He died for your sins once.

**Fact #2** - Christ died for sins; He was the just dying for the unjust. **3:18b**

The words “just” and “unjust” refers to the one who is righteous by the standards of God, dying for those who aren’t righteous by the standards of God. The contrast is between the character of the One dying in comparison to the character of those for whom He is dying. The preposition “for” (ὕπερ) means that Christ died in our place, in our stead with a sacrifice that was way above and beyond anything we could ever offer.

Jesus Christ is very judicial and very legal when hanging on that cross. This is about the righteousness of God and about our unrighteousness in a judicial setting. You may make a very legitimate application if you put your own name in this phrase. Jesus Christ died for our sins, once for all, the just for the unjust. The just and the righteous Jesus Christ died for the unjust and the unrighteous, *add your name*. Put your name there and you begin to sense the judicial and personal nature of all of this.

In the Bible there are three main judicial imputations or calculations God makes concerning us and sin. 1) Adam’s sin is imputed to us along with the penalty for sin (Romans 5:12); 2) Our sin is imputed to Christ along with and including the condemnation we deserve (Isaiah 53:6; I Peter 3:18); 3) Christ’s righteousness is judicially imputed to us (II Corinthians 5:21). The just (Jesus Christ) dies for the unjust (us) so that we might become righteous before God by judicial decree. By judicial edict of God we have the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us the moment we believe.

**Fact #3** - Christ died for sins to bring us to God. **3:18c**

One might ask, why would He do this? Why would Jesus Christ the just and righteous One be willing to die for one like me? The answer is clear here; in order to give us a relationship with God. See this and don’t miss this. See this and believe this. He died to bring us into a relationship with God. The sufferings of Jesus Christ are redemptive in nature.

The verb “bring” (προσάγω) means Jesus Christ died on that cross for our sins so that we could be brought to God; so that we could approach God and have access to Him (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 383). You and I do not have access to the Holy God on our own. We are born dead in trespasses and sins. We are alienated from God and at enmity with God. We have sinned against God in word, in thought and in action. Our works are as “filthy rags” in the sight of God. But Christ went to that cross, to reconcile us to God. The aorist tense of the verb “bring” indicates this all happens at one point in time, one punctiliar moment of action.

In other words, the moment you believe on Jesus Christ, Christ’s work on that cross judicially gives you access to God and brings you into a relationship with God. There is nothing you can do on your own to have or to earn a relationship with God. You must go via Christ’s cross. The moment we by faith believe on Him we have instant access to God, for that is why He died, to bring us to God.

## **THEOLOGICAL REALITY #2 – Christ was made alive after His death. 3:18d**

Jesus Christ really did die in a human body. He was not some “docetic phantom” hanging on that cross. His body was very real. Jesus Christ was no angelic emanation. His body was physically nailed to that cross. He experienced all of the real pain of every bit of it.

There have been all kinds of views as to what this means. The Greek construction here is designed to contrast something that happened on the one hand - He died in His body, with something that happened on the other hand in Spirit - He was made alive. When you first read this statement “put to death” “made alive” you immediately think of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, which is exactly what I think Peter wanted us to think about.

There are two grammatical issues that catch my eye in the original Greek. First, the phrase is introduced in Greek by specific particles designed to a present sharp contrast (μεν, δε). Second, there is no article either before the nouns flesh or spirit. This anarthrous construction means Peter is emphasizing the quality of something in the contrast. He is contrasting the character and quality of His death, with the character and quality of His life after death.

Now we know that Christ’s spirit never died, just like our spirit never dies. In fact, when Christ did physically die, He Himself was in complete control over His own spirit (John 19:30) and, according to Dr. Luke, He handed His spirit over to His Father (Luke 23:46).

We think it best to believe that this is a contrast between being put to death with being brought back to life. Jesus Christ was put to death in the flesh, but that flesh was made alive again by the Spirit. One refers to His crucifixion and the other refers to His resurrection.

We do know that the resurrection is specifically named in this very context (v. 21). We think it has to do with the fact that He died in His flesh, but He was made alive by means of the Spirit of God, something the Apostle Paul specifically said (Romans 8:11). In other words, death was not the end of Jesus Christ; it was that which launched Him into His new spirit-glorified state.

Your sufferings and difficulties are not the end of you; they are that which will put you into another level of spirituality. They will put you into another level of glory. They will develop you spiritually.

## **THEOLOGICAL REALITY #3 – Christ’s saving work was proclaimed. 3:19-20**

In over 20 centuries of Biblical study, these two verses have left Bible expositors and exegetes still scratching their heads. Martin Luther said this was perhaps the strangest and most obscure passage of Scripture in the entire New Testament (Cited from Patterson, p. 134).

Now we know that when Christ died, He turned His spirit over to His Father (Luke 23:46). We also know from Paul’s pen that Jesus Christ did apparently descend into the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9-10; Colossians 2:15), to make some triumphant display over evil powers.

There have been a bunch of views as to what this means and we will give you five of them:

- 1) Between the death of Christ and the resurrection He descended to Sheol to offer a second chance for salvation to those who died in the flood. There is no Scriptural support for any second chance gospel in any dispensation.
- 2) Between the crucifixion and the resurrection, Jesus descended to Sheol to announce His victory to the God-mocking and rejecting spirit world. He appeared to those spirit beings who had aligned themselves with Satan and showed them He just beat Satan.
- 3) Between the crucifixion and resurrection he descended to Sheol to announce to the spirit world that He had secured their judgment (II Peter 2:4).
- 4) Between the crucifixion and resurrection He descended to Sheol, the upper side - the Abraham's bosom side, to fellowship with O.T. saints who were awaiting His shed blood and their Kingdom (Luke 16:22).
- 5) The reference is to Christ's Spirit preaching through Noah for 120 years in O.T. times (Genesis 6:3) in which only eight were saved. The emphasis is on the fact that "few" are ever really saved and the vast majority are heading to final judgment, terrible judgment. Peter will actually refer to this in his second epistle in making this very point (II Pet. 2:4-9).

I actually think all of the above except #1 are true. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the most blessed moment for the few who believe and it is the most threatening moment for the majority who don't.

#### **THEOLOGICAL REALITY #4 – Christ's saving work saves by Spirit baptism. 3:21**

There is a baptism that will put you safe into Christ just as Noah and his family were safe in the ark. There is a baptism that will keep you safe from God's wrath and will link you to Jesus Christ and His resurrection. There is a baptism that will leave you with a good conscience before God. The only baptism that can do this is Spirit baptism, which puts you into Christ the moment you believe (I Corinthians 12:13).

The baptism being referred to here is not water baptism; it is Spirit baptism and it is this baptism that actually saves you from wrath. At the moment you believe on Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit baptizes you into Jesus Christ, and you are so identified with Him that you are saved from God's wrath. Your flesh is not cleaned up, but you are so in Jesus Christ, just as Noah and his family were in the ark, and you are forever safe. The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees that you are alive unto God forever.

#### **THEOLOGICAL REALITY #5 – Jesus Christ is now glorified. 3:22**

Jesus Christ suffered terribly, but now He is at the right hand of God and is in heaven and every thing, every power is subject to Him. He now has total dominion and is dominate over all powers.

Jesus Christ suffered terribly, but now He is honored immeasurably. If you stay focused on doing the will of God and obeying the Word of God, even when you are hurting, you may know that your future is bright. Great blessing and great honor will be yours and the greatest example of that is Jesus Christ.