

ARM YOURSELF WITH THE MIND OF CHRIST
(SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 2014)

Scripture reading – Isaiah 8:1-18; 1 Peter 3:17-21

INTRODUCTION

Do we talk too much about the sufferings of Christ?

It perhaps can seem that in church services or in other situations we might speak too often on this subject, to the point that it loses its significance.

There are other subjects, much less important, that we speak about very often – how we are doing, weather, sports, movies, gadgets.

Our problem is not speaking too often about what Jesus Christ accomplished for us, but that we perhaps talk too casually about what our Lord endured.

Speaking about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus should never become boring, something we just do too often.

May God keep us from ever having such an attitude.

I have chosen to take a short break from our regular study in Genesis to look at one of the two places where Peter refers to the account of Noah.

Our passage this morning is a difficult passage.

Though it is necessary to look at some of the difficulties, we don't want to miss what is the main challenge and encouragement of this text.

In this section of his first letter, Peter instructs us again on suffering for the name of Christ.

Suffering is one of the main themes in 1 Peter.

And it is for this reason that this text is also important as part of our preparation for coming hardships, whenever they may come in God's perfect plan.

Specifically this morning we are reminded that suffering for the sake of the gospel is never pointless, even if we do not see what the end result is.

Your own baptism is to always remind you both of what Christ suffered in bringing you salvation as well as being a call and challenge that you be willing to suffer.

The main challenge of our text actually comes from 1 Peter 4:1, but this challenges comes from the verses we have as our central focus.

Arm yourselves with the mind of Christ.

From verses 18-22, we will consider four truths that prepare you so that if God wills you will suffer with the mind of Christ.

1. The suffering of Christ.
2. The example of Noah.
3. Our own baptisms.
4. The ascension and present rule of Christ.

1. CHRIST'S SUFFERING IS THE ULTIMATE ENCOURAGEMENT IN OUR OWN SUFFERING (V. 18)

Verse 18 begins with the word “for” which could also be translated as “because.”

So obviously this verse doesn't stand alone, but rather completes the thought of another verse or section of verses.

In this case we look back to verse 17. **For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**

We could also look back to verse 14. **But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.**

The reason why you are blessed to suffer for the sake of Christ, is not because you might enjoy pain and suffering.

The reason why you should consider yourself blessed and should be happy is **because you are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.**

And verse 18 strengthens this argument, reminding us that our suffering is not in vain because when Christ suffered He did not suffer in vain.

In verse 18, we have at least the fifth time that Peter speaks about the suffering and or death of Jesus Christ.

I am sure that for Peter there was never a day that he did not think about the sufferings of Christ and what that meant for his own life.

It is not surprising that in this short letter, Peter brings your attention repeatedly to the sufferings of Christ.

Verse 18 is thought by some to be a type of song or hymn.

There is a beautiful structure and order to the verse, whether or not it should be classified as a hymn.

There are four main phrases and key things we learn from this verse.

1. **For Christ also suffered once for sins.**

Now did not Christ suffer throughout his entire life and ministry?

Here Peter is speaking about Christ's suffering on the cross.

Though all that he suffered was obviously a part of God's plan of salvation, it was specifically his death on the cross that paid for our sins.

And this payment was made **once** for **all time** for **all those** for **whom he died**.

It is because of the truth of this verse and other similar verses that we rightly reject the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Mass.

The mass is said to be a type of sacrifice and reoffering of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. But Christ suffered once for all time for our sin.

And although we must never forget that Christ suffered and died on the cross, we also reject the image of the crucifix which portrays Christ forever and without change suffering for sin.

Note also the expression, for sins.

A similar expression in the Greek is used over 60 times in the Old Testament speaking of the **sin offering** which was offered by God's people for their sins and of course which pointed to the ultimate sin offering of Christ on the cross.

Our Lord did not suffer in vain, so if you are called to suffer for the sake of His name, you know your suffering will also not be pointless.

2. **The just for the unjust.**

These five words translate just three words from the Greek, and yet they contain a lifetime of thought and study.

The just one suffered in the place of the unjust ones. Paul in similar fashion would say in 2 Cor. 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Here we see importantly a very important difference between our suffering and the suffering of Christ.

Jesus did not simply suffer as an example for us. He certainly gives us an example. But there is so much more, which we see in this expression – the just for the unjust. This is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.

3. **To bring us to God.**

The word **bring** is a term used for introducing someone into the presence of a superior.

If you were to visit the head of some nation, you would likely be introduced to leader by another person rather than just simply coming up yourself and introducing yourself.

Jesus stated in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through Me.**”

We are reminded that we now truly can live in the very presence of a Holy God, who we now lovingly call our Father, for we have been brought to God.

4. **Being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.**

This is one of the difficult parts of this text.

It is certainly not saying that Jesus died physically but only came back to life spiritually.

Jesus died physically. Spiritually he also suffered the greatest punishment in bearing our sins, suffering the full curse for our sins.

Peter is emphasizing the physical death of Christ and also emphasizing that our Lord was brought to life not through earthly or fleshly power, but through divine power.¹

The word Spirit perhaps should be capitalized referring to the Holy Spirit. Some versions leave in the lower case, signifying that Jesus was raised from the dead not by any earthly power.

For this reason, then suffering for the sake of the gospel is never without purpose or meaning, because Christ also suffered. And because He was raised to new life, we share in His victory...²

2. THE EXAMPLE OF NOAH ALSO BRINGS US ENCOURAGEMENT

Verse 19 is a short and easy to translate verse, but very difficult to understand.

There are at least **5 major views** on what exactly is being described in verse 19 and how it relates to verse 20.

The view which I believe is the most simple and straightforward view is that verse 19 is speaking about Christ preaching through the preaching of Noah.

This view was first suggested by Augustine in the 4th century and was taught during the Reformation and is still found among some commentators today.

Verse 19 alone is a mystery. But verse 19 connected with verse 20, I believe is understandable.

¹ Note the comments of John Calvin and Wayne Grudem.

² Note the comments of Achtemeier, p. 251.

Turn in your Bibles back to 1 Peter 1:10-11. **Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, ¹¹ searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.**

I believe these verses are part of the solution to understanding verses 19 and 20. What is the connection?

The prophets of old were directed by the Spirit of Christ, that is the Holy Spirit, so that they were able to write and speak about the fullness of the salvation that would only come in the ministry of Christ.

And in verse 19 I believe we have a similar description of the work of the Holy Spirit in the preaching of Noah.

Why does Peter here speak of the account of Noah?

How does it connect with his message at this point?

Wayne Grudem in his commentary shares 7 points of connection.

(1) Noah and his family were a minority surrounded by hostile unbelievers; so are Peter's readers.

(2) Noah was righteous in the midst of a wicked world. Peter exhorts his readers to be righteous in the midst of wicked unbelievers,

(3) Noah witnessed boldly to those around him. Peter encourages his readers to be good witnesses to unbelievers around them being willing to suffer, if need be, to bring others to God.

(4) Noah realized that judgment was soon to come upon the world. Peter reminds his readers that God's judgment is certainly coming, perhaps soon.

(5) In the unseen 'spiritual' realm Christ preached through Noah to unbelievers around him. By saying this Peter can remind his readers of the reality of Christ's work in the unseen spiritual realm and the fact that Christ is also in them, empowering their witness and making it spiritually effective (cf. 1:8, 11, 12, 25; 2:4). Therefore, they should not fear (v. 14) but in their hearts should 'revere Christ as Lord' and should 'always be prepared' to tell of the hope that is in them (v. 15).

(6) At the time of Noah, God was patiently awaiting repentance from unbelievers, before he brought judgment. So it is in the situation of Peter's readers: God is patiently awaiting repentance from unbelievers (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9) before bringing judgment on the world (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10).

(7) Noah was finally saved, with 'a few' others. Peter thus encourages his readers that, though perhaps few, they too will finally be saved, for Christ has triumphed and has all things subject to him.³

What do verses 19-20 then show?

1. It was through the work of the Spirit that Christ was preaching through Noah. As Noah faithfully built the ark amidst the ridicule of the world, he was also preaching to the unbelieving world the message of the gospel.

Noah did not give up either in building the ark or in being a witness, even though the entire world around him rejected his message.

When you seek to faithfully share the gospel, you also are assured of the presence of Christ with you, so that you should not give in to discouragement.

I was reading recently about the testimony of Adoniram Judson, the American missionary who labored for many years in Burma, the country now called Myanmar.

It was five long and likely lonely years before Adoniram and his wife, Anna, preached and lived the gospel in Burma before they baptized the first of their 700 converts.

2. The **spirits** mentioned in verse 19 are the souls of those who rejected Noah's preaching—the entire population of the world at that time.

Because they rejected the preaching of Noah and of Christ, they are now in prison, waiting for the final judgment.

3. In the midst of this great rebellion, God was patient. But eventually the flood did come and Noah and his family were saved through water.

The water which brought death to perhaps untold billions also brought deliverance for Noah and his family.

Through water they were rescued from an evil world.

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 168-169.

3. YOUR BAPTISM IS TO ENCOURAGE YOU IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

Verse 21 is another challenging and important part of this chapter.

Before we look at this verse in greater detail, it must be said that Peter's words concerning baptism must have been written to people who would have understood the meaning of baptism beyond the few words that Peter gives in this passage.

Remember, his purpose also here in verse 21 is not to give exhaustive instruction on baptism, but rather the encouragement that even baptism is to be to God's people as they prepare to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

Part of the connection of the Old and New Testament is the language found in verse 21 of types and antitypes.

What is called a **type** in the OT is a person, event, or other thing that pictures the even greater reality in the NT, which is called the **antitype**.

The Passover Lamb was a type, obviously pointing to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

The water's of Noah's flood were a **type**, a picture of salvation, fulfilled specifically in the sacrament of baptism.

Just as the waters of the flood saved Noah and his family, so Peter says you should be encouraged by your own baptism. **Baptism now saves us.**

Now in the OT there were different types of washings or what could be called baptisms.

For example if you came into contact with a dead body, what did you have to do?

On the third and seventh day you would have to purify yourself with water and then you would be clean.

Bodily discharges also made a person unclean, sometimes just until the evening, where after a bath or washing they could be considered clean.

Peter says that baptism now saves.

But it saves not in some mechanical fashion or purely ceremonial fashion.

Baptism is not like just getting wet or taking a bath, something that Peter's readers likely would have been familiar with from the OT.

Rather baptism saves because of the inward spiritual reality that it represents.

Specifically here Peter states it saves because it pictures the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These final words from verse 21 are difficult to translate. **The word answer may better be translated as appeal.**

An appeal to God for a good conscience can mean a request for forgiveness of sins and a new heart, which baptism pictures.⁴

And ultimately this appeal God answers because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The sign and seal of baptism should be to each of you an encouragement.

If it points to our salvation in Jesus Christ and your union with Him in his death and resurrection should it not also bring you encouragement if you are called to suffer for the sake of Christ?

The sign that has been given you is more than just something that took place on a Sunday, perhaps many years ago.

It still stands to you this day as a sign of God's present grace and his present work in your life.

And I would at this time encourage those of you this morning who are trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation that if you have not been baptized, that you take action in seeking to have the sign and seal of baptism given to you as Scripture instructs.

Please either speak with me or another elder or deacon in the church.

Word of encouragement also to those who have been baptized as children.

It is not good that we neglect the signs that Scripture gives to us even as we recognize that they are not what save us.

4. CHRIST'S PRESENT REIGN BRINGS US COMFORT AND ASSURANCE

If you look at verses 18-22, you see how Peter connects the last word or phrase in a verse with the start of the next verse.

So for example from verse 18, Peter connects the working of the Spirit to the beginning of verse 19.

The spirits in prison at the end of verse 19 are the ones who in verse 20 disobeyed the message preached to them.

The water of Noah's flood at the end of verse 20 are the type of baptism in verse 21.

⁴ Grudem, 171-172.

And from the end of verse 21, Peter naturally goes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ to his ascension and session now in heaven.

There is then a link to all these verses and an encouragement in each of them as preparation for suffering.

There are of course many things to consider from each of the three things that Peter speaks of in verse 22, but in our time remaining we shall just consider several.

First consider the significance of Christ' ascension into heaven. His ascension of course speaks of His triumph over all things.

But his ascension also means that Christ is of course no longer physically present on the earth.

John Calvin comments, "He recommends to us the ascension of Christ unto heaven, lest our eyes should seek him in the world; and this belongs especially to faith."

Because Christ is in heaven, you must not simply judge your own earthly experiences as to whether Christ is truly with you.

For example, recall the fear of the disciples in the midst of the storm, while Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

Remember also the words of Martha to Jesus in John 11.

²¹ Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Because Christ has ascended you must by faith know that He still watches over you and is as concerned for you as if He were directly physically present with you.

Christ has not merely left us, but He sits at the right hand of God. And so we should never doubt His power to save and deliver us in whatever situation we face.

The last part of verse 22 speaks of angels, authorities, and powers having been made subject to Him.

In the OT and in Jewish thought, there is especially the connection between these spiritual powers and the rulers of nations and peoples. "Thus even the evil powers behind the rulers who persecuted and still persecute Christians had been subdued, and the final outcome was not in question."⁵

⁵ New Bible Commentary, s.v. 1 Peter 3:22.

Conclusion:

Arm yourselves with the mind of Christ.

- He knew His suffering was not in vain.
- He suffered not because He was weak, but because He submitted Himself to the will of His Father.
- And so when He suffered, as we see in chapter 2, He did not revile or threaten those who persecuted Him.
- Jesus suffered in strength because He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

If you are called then to suffer for the sake of Christ, keep in mind His sufferings. Remember you have been baptized with Him. Since He rules over all, your suffering will not be in vain.

Closing Hymn: 468

BENEDICTION – JUDE 24, 25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen