

Suffering, Vengeance, and Victory

1 Peter 3:18-22

Introduction – If we suffer for doing good, it is a good thing, because we are then like Christ. We partake in His sufferings. We are reminded of His vengeance completed and His vengeance to come. We share and proclaim His victory over all His enemies. But what does this have to do with Noah and baptism?

Christ Suffered (v18) – Suffering comes up over and over in this epistle, and so we return to it again and again. Christians will be called upon to suffer in innumerable ways. Christ suffered and in doing so, we see the most ‘unfair’ suffering possible, accomplishing the greatest good. The just dies for the unjust, and in doing so demonstrates His righteousness, “*that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*” (Rom 3:26)

Death and Life – Jesus Christ’s death proclaimed the justice of God and His judgment over sin. God does not let sin go. He is holy in His vengeance. But Jesus was made alive as well in His resurrection, declaring Him to be the Son of God with power (Rom 1:4).

Salvation for the Unjust – Here is the offense of the cross. Jesus did not die for any who are self-justified. He only died for sinners, enemies of what is good and true.

Judgment Proclaimed (v19) – We are taught in the Apostle’s Creed that Jesus descended into Hades (or hell – but not the place of Final Judgment). Hades (in Greek) was Sheol (in Hebrew), the place everyone expected to go to when they died. Jesus’ story about Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-21), indicates that Hades was divided, and the Greeks understood the place of torment to be Tartarus (2 Pet 2:4), a term Peter is willing to use. Jesus tells the thief on the cross that ‘Today, you will be with Me in Paradise’, but had earlier taught that “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven...” (John 3:13).

Proclaimed, Not Evangelized – The Greek word is not “preach the good news” (see 4:6), but rather a more general herald or proclamation of victory. Christ ‘preached’ His victory over disobedient spirits in prison (Tartarus). His suffering provided the opportunity for the proclamation of His victory over the Fall, and His judgment upon the disobedient spirits. In His ascension, He carried up those who were in Paradise (Elysium), having the keys of death and Hades (Rev 1:8).

Justice Poured Out (v20) – The proclamation of judgment at the death of Jesus is compared to the proclamation of judgment in the days of Noah. For 120 years, Noah preached as he built an ark. What was he proclaiming? The waters of judgment were coming and only those who are in this ark of salvation will be saved through the water.

The Comparison of Longsuffering – God was longsuffering in those days, waiting patiently for the appointed time to pour out His wrath. Peter, in encouraging the saints that “the end of all things is at hand” (4:7), compares this time (prior to the 70AD destruction) as a time of suffering and waiting. God was to be avenged.

Baptism Saves (v20-21) – Baptism, that is, being placed in the ark, saved Noah and his household. Peter calls this a ‘type’ of baptism. When the waters of judgment fell, only those in God’s care passed through.

Baptism Saves? – Peter quickly condemns the ‘wooden’ understanding of this. There is no magic in the waters of baptism. Baptism does not save automatically like water automatically washing off the dirt.

Baptism Saves – Baptism, that is, the answer of a good conscience, saves. Just as Noah had to be placed in the ark in order to be saved through the waters of judgment, so we must be placed in Christ, because forgiveness does not come without a price. “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” (Gal 2:20).

Christ Reigns Now (v22) – Noah came out of the ark into a new creation, where God reestablished His covenant, instructing Noah to ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’. Jesus Christ, having come through the flood of the wrath of God the Father, and bringing His household through that flood, now establishes us in His New Covenant, His New Heavens and New Earth, and instructs us to fill the earth as well (Matt 28:18-20). We do so as His household of faith while He reigns at the right hand of God the Father, having made all angels, authorities and powers subject to Him.

Some Application –

God is Longsuffering, But – it does come to an end. Today is the day of salvation. No one knows the day of his end. And when the floodwaters come, you must be in the ark. There is no second chance (Heb 9:27).

Jesus’ Suffering Came to an End – and so will yours. Not only that, you are to embrace that suffering as part of your discipleship. More on this in the next chapter.

Vengeance Will Be Completed – Everyone will be judged. No sin will go unpunished. You will be judged in Christ, in the ark, and you will come through the water, or you will be judged finally at the Last Day.

Christ is Victorious – over all of His enemies. But more than vengeance, this is the good news. For Christ’s victory is our salvation, and the salvation of the world.

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