

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expositional Journey Through **1Peter** **1Peter 3:18-22**

39- Baptism, A Good Conscience, and Suffering

December 9, 2018

1 Peter 3:18-22

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison,

20 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.

21 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,

22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

To the Glory of God

Now as I told you last time, these few words from the Apostle Peter are some of the most bizarre in the entire New Testament. And so, even though Peter uses some very interesting terminology here, I think it best to keep things in their proper context.

As I have repeatedly told you, the single most dominant subject that Peter has been dealing with in this entire inspired "Letter" is the subject of Suffering. And to be more specific, "Why God's people suffer?" And that has *universal* and *eternal* importance to *every* generation and to *every* believer. Because, if being saved is the removal of all of God's Wrath against us, then why do believers suffer? Why doesn't God make it so that genuinely forgiven and "born from above" saints can live in this sinful world *without* being persecuted and maligned and tortured

and treated horribly and even killed? Why doesn't God stop the evil? And this Question has bothered people for most of the time that Christianity has been on the earth. And historically, there have been three possible answers that people have given as to why God doesn't stop the pain:

1. God is not Sovereign
2. God is not Good
3. God is not

One explanation is that God is really *not* Sovereign in the truest sense of the word. So, in this framework, godly people suffer because God either doesn't have the Power to stop evil people from doing what is in their hearts to do, or He has voluntarily *limited* His Sovereignty to preserve the concept of "Human Free Will" or "Human Self-Determinism"¹. So, while most of the people, who believe this first Reason, will agree that God is "Sovereign" in the sense that He created all things initially, they do *not* adhere to God's Sovereignty in other matters like Salvation and Suffering.

The second Reason people believe that saved people suffer is because God is not really "Good". And this has more to do with these people thinking that God is distant and aloof, and doesn't really care about our day-to-day lives and needs and requests. And this is the ancient heresy of "Deism", which agrees that a Sovereign God created all things. But in the mind of the Deist, God set everything up by creating all things and the "processes" by which the created things operate (like Gravity and Centrifugal Force), and then God just "walked off" and stands at a great distance from Man, totally unconcerned about His people, *especially* on the level of being "personal". So, "Good" and "Evil" are not really controlled or even monitored by God, but are simply the natural consequences of people living around each other and of the earth spinning on its axis. What is interesting is that Deism has

¹ Both "Human Free-Will" and "Human Self-Determinism" are Man-made terms that are not found or taught anywhere in the 66 Books of the Holy Bible. These false concepts teach that Man is a "Free moral agent", who has the ability to "choose" or "decide" for himself what he will do and what or when he will believe and be saved- *without any external help* (other than Commandment). These Concepts are at the very heart of the ancient heresy of Pelagianism (which has morphed into modern "Secular Humanism"), and is best understood by analyzing the great confrontation between Pelagius and Augustine late in the third and early in the fourth Centuries, which helped us to understand what the Grace of God really is and why we need Grace to be saved and to obey God after Salvation. For more information see, "The History of Heresy" in the Sermon archive at www.covenantofpeace.net

much more in common with Buddhism and Hinduism than it does with Christianity, because the New Testament is filled with examples of God deeply caring about the weakest and most insignificant people on earth, and not only the rich and powerful.

But even though many people start out by either doubting or flat out denying that God is "Sovereign" or that God is "Good". eventually, they all end up at the same conclusion. Sooner or later the people who deny one or all of God's Characteristics end up by denying even the very existence of God. And many of them become atheists.

But the Reality is that God uses the harshness and seemingly unfairness of Suffering as one of the most gracious and merciful Gifts to His people. Hear the Word of the Lord about Suffering from **Hebrews 12:4-17**:

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

... so, the writer of **Hebrews** tells us that there are *several* reasons why God allows us to hurt and to be persecuted, and why He brings "Divine Discipline" into our lives:

- ✓ So that we will Endure
- ✓ To confirm our Adoption into God's family
- ✓ So that we may share in God's Holiness
- ✓ To yield the "Peaceable Fruit of Righteousness"
- ✓ So that we will not "Come Short" of the Grace of God
- ✓ So that no "root of bitterness" will trouble us
- ✓ To prevent us from being "profane" like Esau

... which are all Wonderful and Kind and Merciful and Loving and Good things that will *guarantee* that God will be glorified and that our Joy will be made full.

So, those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and that it contains all that we need for both Life and Godliness, understand the great Paradox that the Issue that causes the greatest amount of pain and agony, the Suffering of God's people, is the Issue that brings about the greatest degree of Glory to God and Joy to us!

One of the saddest of all possible things is to see people, who profess a real and genuine love for Jesus, walk away and turn back to sin because of Suffering. So, the very Issue that God has mercifully designed to *change* us, so that we will be able to endure, and so that our Adoption will be confirmed, and so that we may share in the very Holiness of God Himself, and so that the "Peaceable fruit of Righteousness may be yielded from us, and so that we will not "come short" of the Grace of God, and so that no root of bitterness will trouble us, and so that we will not be profane like Esau, is the very Issue that satan uses to destroy them. And that doesn't mean that Salvation can be lost. It simply means that the fact that these people did not persevere to the end proved that their Salvation experience was not really genuine.

And yet, Suffering is the main subject that Peter deals with in this Epistle. And even more specifically, here at the end of Chapter 3, Peter is very *narrowly* teaching why "*Suffering for doing what is 'Right' is 'better' than 'Suffering for doing what is 'Wrong'.*" And just in case you might be wondering *why* Peter wants to talk like this to believers in the

21st Century here in America, just try to imagine him teaching this to the “scattered aliens” of the 1st Century who had lost all of their worldly possessions and had been made to be refugees precisely because they had done what is “Right”! So however hard it might be for *us* to hear Sermons like this, it must have been infinitely *harder* for the beaten and persecuted believers of Peter’s day to hear it. And yet this is what Peter taught.

So, unlike the normal activities of those who try to minister to the needs of refugees in our day, who are interested in giving the persecuted people four basic things:

1. Food
2. Water
3. Shelter
4. Clothing

... Peter was interested in encouraging these believers to remain faithful and to not become bitter, and to keep their consciences’ clean before God *while they were suffering!* And that tells me that the primary Objective for genuine believers in their time of Suffering is *not* to merely “hang on”, hoping that they can “outlast the pain”. But the Objective is that we actually “thrive” *in the pain*, that we “rejoice” as we burn. And we won’t do this because we are brave or courageous, but because we understand that the change that God is affecting in our lives through our Suffering is so wonderful, so needed, so important, that we actually praise God for the Gift of Suffering!

So, Christians understand that they don’t merely *endure* the suffering, but that we actually become *more* godly, *more* pure, and *more* holy *through* the Suffering than we would if we had never suffered at all. So, the Reality is that, while evil men think they are exercising their wickedness upon us at the inclination of their own Human Free Will, we know that God is absolutely Sovereign, passively *allowing* them to do what is already in their hearts to do, but only to the degree that by Him allowing this Evil to be perpetrated on His Own children this Divine Allowance will bring forth a much greater Glory and Good. So, in actuality, satan, and the evil people through whom the Suffering comes, are merely a “means of Grace” to purify those chosen for

Salvation! And this explains why Peter tells the believers of his day, and us, what is seemingly ridiculous and preposterous:

1 Peter 1:6-9

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Now last week, we began to “look over Peter’s shoulder” and we were trying to understand why he was using illustrations like “Noah and the Ark” and the “spirits in prison” to explain to these persecuted refugees why “Suffering for doing what is ‘right’” was “better” than “Suffering for doing what is ‘wrong’”. And I want to pick back up on that effort this morning.

First of all, we need to try to grasp the fact that our Suffering is actually us “proclaiming” the Glory of God. Look again at **1 Peter 3:18-20**:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which 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.

Now, first of all, the phrase, “**put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit**” is usually thought to refer to Jesus’ Resurrection. But when Jesus was raised from the dead, He was raised “*physically*”, *not* just “*spiritually*”. The Bible teaches that Jesus’ Resurrection was a “literal” and a “physical” and a “bodily” Resurrection, and not a “figure of speech” or a “spiritual allegory” or some “mystical aberration”. And Jesus was raised from the dead in the very *same* Body that He died in. So, Jesus’ glorified Body had all the scars and all the marks and all the wounds and the nail prints inflicted during His torture and Crucifixion.

And that is only true about Jesus. Jesus will be the only one in Heaven with scars and wounds. Everybody else will receive a *glorified* body that has no faults or failures in it.

So, this phrase is *not* referring to Jesus' Resurrection, but to Jesus' dual Nature as both God and Man. So, because Jesus was fully Man when He died, His body died, his heart stopped beating, His brainwaves flat-lined, and the Blood in His veins stopped flowing. But because Jesus was also fully God, He *could not* die, and so, Jesus continued to live on, *spiritually*, even though His Body was dead.

Now there are a number of reasons why Peter saw the need to say this. Many of the people who were Peter's immediate audience would never live to become old. They were already refugees and many of them would die and never see the end of their suffering. And so, Peter said these things to encourage them, that even though they may die, their spirit will live on.

But even at that, we have to exercise caution here. Because evidently, Peter understood some things that we simply don't have any information about. So, look again at the phrase:

“made alive”

Peter says that Jesus was **“made alive in the spirit”**. Now to “make” something “alive” *presupposes* that it is already dead. So, does this mean that, at some point, Jesus was actually “dead” in the spirit and then He was later “made alive”? On the surface, we would say “No!” But we probably need to pause here. This isn't as “cut and dried” as it might appear. There is room here to ponder a few things without *dishonoring* Jesus or *minimizing* His full Deity. So, let's take it one step at a time.

Now, first of all, there is nothing I am about to say, that in anyway, is designed to teach or to make anyone think that Jesus was some “created Being”. He wasn't. The Scriptures are crystal clear here. Jesus is God. The Apostle John said:

John 1:1-4

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being

through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

... so, Jesus is God. He is Deity. He is Divine. So, that is settled. But notice closely what John said:

... the Word was with God, and the Word was God

... so, John is careful here to put us in an impossible situation- trying to explain how Jesus can be "*with God*"- He can be standing next to God as an *entirely separate Person*- and yet Jesus also "was God" at the same time.

And then John tells us Who he is talking about when he said,

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

... so, the Word that was "in the beginning", and the Word that "was God" was also the Word that was "with God". And that Word took on human flesh and became Man.

So, the Jehovah's Witnesses' are wrong about Jesus. Jesus was *not* a "created Being" that was "higher than Man but lower than God", sort of a "demi-god" or an angel. And the Mormons and Kenneth Copeland are both wrong about Jesus, and we humans are not now, and never will be, Deity. So, Jesus is God. Jesus is Yahweh with a human body.

But that's not all Jesus is. He is also fully Human. So, Jesus was born and He ate and got tired and wept and grew in wisdom and He bled and died. And for Jesus to be "made" spiritually alive, He would have had to experience some form of "spiritual death". But before you take up stones to throw at me, think for a moment what "spiritual death" really is.

Someone who is spiritually dead, is cursed by God, He is damned, He is not in Favor with God. He is sinful. And Jesus was all of that, in some sense, when Gods imputed all of the sins of all of God's elect on Him as He hung on the Cross.

And at that moment, the Bible says that Jesus "became sin". And when Jesus "became sin", God could no longer be in union with Sin, and so God *departed* from Jesus and could no longer be near and could no longer even look upon Him. And that had never happened before. From Eternity Past until the Moment Jesus became Sin, the Word was with God and the Word was God. But when Jesus became Sin, He felt the Absence of God and He cried out:

Matthew 27:46b

... *ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" ... MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?*

... so, Jesus was never afraid to die. The Cross did not scare Him. Jesus was absolutely fearless as He hung and died. What bothered Jesus was the fact that, in order to fulfill His Father's Plan, the eternal and infinitely perfect Fellowship and Union that God the Father and God the Son had enjoyed, always, was going to be interrupted.

But while there was a "separation" from God, there was not a "cessation of existence". So, Jesus didn't cease to exist because He was God and He was eternal.

Now when human beings die, we don't cease to exist either. And we, too, may experience a "spiritual death". And we might even experience a spiritual death in this life. And we are able to also experience an "Eternal Death" as well. But we don't cease to exist. You and I are going to live *forever*, somewhere. The notion that people, who die, just go to the ground, is a Jehovah Witness' fabrication, and is *not* taught anywhere in the Bible.

But, whoever enters into Eternity without being saved will experience not only a "spiritual death", but an "Eternal Death". But even at that, we won't cease to exist.

So, Jesus experienced some kind of "separation" from God which is how we can define "spiritual death", *not* a cessation of His Existence. So, Jesus didn't cease to exist any more than humans who are spiritually dead cease to exist. But we can say that Jesus did experience some form of a "spiritual death" because God had imputed all of our sins on Him.

So, even though we don't fully understand the Mystery of this, somehow, Jesus was in a moment of time, when all sin was poured out

on Him, and God had to turn His back on His Son, and Jesus was forsaken by God the Father. He did not cease to exist, but there was a kind of "spiritual death", a real "separation" from God, at the point in which He was made sin. But it's also very clear that whatever "spiritual separation" Jesus experienced at that moment was quickly gone, because it wasn't long after He was separated from God that Jesus called Him:

"Father"

... and so, at the moment God had forsaken His Son, Jesus said:

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

... but now, Jesus says:

Luke 23:46b

... Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.

... so *whatever* experience of "spiritual separation" Jesus had was only for a moment when He was made sin. But then His spirit was made alive and He committed His Spirit to God.

So, the point that Peter wants us to understand is that when Jesus was crucified on the Cross, His Body died, but His Spirit was alive. And the Question is, "*Where did Jesus go when He died?*" And **1 Peter 3:19&20** tell us:

In which 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.

Now the phrase "**in which also**" tells us that Jesus' living Spirit, *completely separate and apart from His Body*, which lay in the tomb, went someplace. And the verb here refers to a *personal* "going". And it's the same use as in verse 22, where it is translated as:

"having gone."

... but it's the same verb. And it means to *literally* "go somewhere else". So, Jesus' Spirit "went somewhere else" from where His Body went. Jesus' Spirit had been with His Body on the Cross. But when His Body died, Jesus' Spirit went "somewhere else". So, Jesus' Spirit enjoyed the benefit of being "made alive".

So, Jesus' Spirit was *not* consigned to Judgment. His Spirit was *not* consigned to Eternal Death. His Spirit did *not* experience the "Second Death", like all unbelievers will, who feel the Wrath of God. Jesus' Spirit was released into God's perfect Purpose.

So, where did Jesus' alive Spirit go? Well, it says He went and "preached". He went and "heralded". Peter says that Jesus' alive Spirit:

1 Peter 3:19b

... went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison,

.. and this tells us that when Jesus died, He went somewhere to preach. He went and gave a triumphant Sermon. So, even before His Resurrection, He was moving freely in the spiritual realm, triumphantly proclaiming.

Now, what is interesting is that, even though Jesus was freely and triumphantly preaching and proclaiming and heralding, He was *not* preaching the Gospel. This phrase in the Greek does **NOT** mean "to preach the Gospel". So, Jesus was *not* trying hard to get people, who had rejected Salvation their entire lives (and who had died), to repent and be saved. That is *not* what Peter says Jesus was doing.

This Greek phrase means "to make a triumphant proclamation" or "to announce a triumph". So, it is the word "to herald", but in a *military* sense. And back in the 1st Century, military generals and kings would have a man who went around and *loudly* and *triumphantly* proclaimed the Victories of the King! And *that* is what Jesus was doing.

So, Jesus was going all over the spirit-realm announcing His great Victory! Jesus was proclaiming or heralding His magnificent Triumph! But, *specifically*, what was Jesus proclaiming? What was Jesus, very loudly and very triumphantly proclaiming all through the spirit realm? His absolute Triumph over Sin, Death and Hell!

So, Jesus did it! Jesus obeyed His Father, perfectly! And every Sin that *any* of God's elect has ever, or will ever, commit was *fully* and

eternally "paid for"! Jesus absorbed *all* of God's Wrath against *all* of the Sins of *all* of God's chosen people! So, Jesus triumphed over *every* bad thought, and *every* evil deed, and *every* sinful inclination. He didn't leave a single one out! But that's not all. Jesus also utterly triumphed over every temptation, every demon, and every desire of satan! But He still wasn't finished. Jesus also completely triumphed over Death itself, and the *fear* of Death that we tremble before all our lives. But that's not all. Jesus also fully triumphed over Hell itself!

So, Jesus went *victoriously*, like a conquering King, all through the spirit realm, *loudly and proudly* heralding the inconceivable Good News that it no longer matters how bad we have been! It no longer matters how much sin we have engaged in! It no longer matters how much we have hurt other people! It no longer matters whether you are a Man or a Woman, or a slave or a slave owner! It no longer matters whether you are rich or poor, or whether you are educated or uneducated! It no longer matters if you have high political connections, or if you know the right people! It no longer matters whether you are a Jew or a Gentile! It doesn't matter if you have been schooled in the Old Covenant law! It doesn't matter what race you are, or what nationality you are, or what ethnicity you are, or what pedigree your blood line offers! Jesus triumphed! Jesus won! Jesus conquered Sin, all of it. Jesus conquered Death, every piece of it! And Jesus conquered Hell itself!

So, Peter is reminding these pitiful, beaten, scattered aliens, who have lost all of this world's goods, and who have been cast out of their land, and who have no money and no job and no food and no clothing, and no hope to ever get any of it back, that at the single weakest, most vulnerable moment in Jesus' Life, at the very point when God the Father had forsaken Him, at the very instant that Jesus was "made to be sin", was also the moment of His greatest Victory and His most astounding Triumph, and was the moment of His most important Accomplishment! So, *that's* what the Apostle's context here is all about. It's all about absolute Triumph in the midst of unjust Suffering.

So, Peter is reminding these persecuted saints that "Suffering for doing what is right" is "better"; it has great Value to it. Suffering "according to the Will of God" has an Eternal Purpose and Meaning behind it. Our Suffering isn't random or accidental, and Suffering like

this is never, never, never because God is mad at you and is trying to punish you.

So, Peter is *not* teaching here about how brave we can be or how much grit we can work up. He isn't trying to teach us how to be a Stoic or how to be philosophical about Suffering. Peter is not trying to get us to learn how to take Punishment like some animal. Peter is *not* teaching us how to be "Conscientious Objectors", and he certainly is not teaching us that God is basically mean and cruel, but because He is Omnipotent, we just need to learn to take it.

No, Peter is teaching that the single most perfect, most innocent, most pure Man, Who ever lived suffered unmercifully. And the conclusion of His Suffering was *not* that He simply died and went to the ground like some dog. But Jesus won! Jesus triumphed! Jesus was victorious! And His very alive Spirit went all over the spirit realm crying out that He had conquered all Sin and all Death and Hell itself! And that means that our Suffering is important, and even necessary, to become Holy, and to be molded and shaped into the very Image of Jesus, the One Who triumphed!

Now there are several side Issues here that are *not* the main Point of Peter's Teaching, but that need to be explained. And I can only give you some information about these Issues, because that is all the Bible gives.

For example, Peter says these "spirits" are in "prison". And there is no reference anywhere, in all the Bible, where the souls of people are imprisoned. And the Greek word that Peter used here has nothing to do with a "condition", like being in a condition of being "bound" or "imprisoned". No, this word has only to do with a particular "location". So, there is a particular location where these spirits, which are not human, are imprisoned. And that leads us to believe that Peter is talking about demons.

So, evidently, there are *some* fallen angels, or "demons", that are allowed to roam "free" on the earth, while *some* are locked up in prison. Now *why* are some "free" while others are "locked up"? We don't know. All demons are bad, none of them are good. And none of them will be saved. All demons will be judged. But, evidently, *some* demons are locked up awaiting their final Judgment, while *others* are allowed to do more damage on the earth before they are judged.

Now when Peter says that Jesus proclaimed to these “spirits” or these demons, he was *not* talking about *all* demons. He wasn’t even talking about all the demons who are locked up in prison. Peter is very specific here about which demons he was talking about. Peter said that Jesus...

... 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

Now, first of all, all demons were disobedient when they joined in with Lucifer’s Rebellion in Heaven. And *that* is why God cast them out of Heaven. But, evidently, *these* particular demons were *especially* disobedient during the time when Noah was building the Ark. Now there is no reason to assume that the demons, who were working during the time when Noah was building the Ark, are the *only* ones who are locked up. There may well be other demons who are locked up, too. But Peter is teaching here that Jesus made this Proclamation to *only* the demons who were active during the time of Noah and the Ark, and which were then locked up.

Now why was that? We don’t know. Peter and nobody else talked any more about it. So, we are left to guess that, *evidently*, there was tremendous demonic activity on the earth during the 120 years when Noah was building and as the Spirit of Jesus was preaching Righteousness through Noah. And the result is that God locked up these particular demons.

Now, does that also mean that since Jesus equated some aspects of His Second Coming with Noah and the Ark that there will also be tremendous demonic activity on the earth just before Jesus comes back? Maybe, but we simply can’t say that with any degree of certainty. But, if there is, then God will be faithful to provide enough Grace for us to persevere through that time as well.

So, Peter says that when Jesus died, He went to these particular locked up demons and proclaimed His Victory to them. Now, why *them* and why not *all* demons? Again, the Bible is silent. And we could spend the rest of our lives offering conjecture after conjecture. But that is why I told you last time that all of these strange examples that Peter is

using here *evidently* meant something very important to the believers of the 1st Century, but they are *not* the main Point Peter is making.

One possibility is the ancient book called "*The Book of Enoch*". And even though this book is *not* inspired and was *not* included in the Canon, the people of the 1st Century were all very familiar with this book. And the "*Book of Enoch*" dealt with angels that are referenced in **Genesis**. The half-brother of Jesus, **Jude**, refers to this ancient book in verses 14&15 of his Epistle, when he said:

Jude 14&15

It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

Now what is interesting is that in **2 Peter 2:4**, when Peter talked about angels being cast into Hell, he used a particular word for "Hell" that is *not* the common word used throughout the New Testament. Peter used a word for Hell that was used in the *Book of Enoch*.

Now does that mean that the *Book of Enoch* should have been included in our Canon? No. It simply means that both Jude and Peter were using a reference about a particular subject that many people in the 1st Century were familiar with to make a point. And we do this all the time in our day. We reference a quote or an action by somebody, who may not even be saved, to make a larger point. And Peter was doing the same thing.

But the main Point that Peter is talking about here is not demons or Noah or "spirits in prison", it is why "Suffering for doing what is Right" is "better" than "Suffering for doing what is Wrong". And *everything* else Peter says here serve to uphold that main Point.

Okay, we're doing pretty good, but then it seems that just about the time we understand one deep and profound Mystery, this "fisher of men" tries to get us into another one. Look again at verse 21:

1 Peter 3:21

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,

Now there is a lot to say about this, but let me begin by saying that to our shame, satan has been successful in taking the very sweet and wonderful and important and very simple Issue of Baptism and has somehow made it to be a very controversial Issue in our day. Because after 2,000 years of the Church being on the earth, the Issue of Baptism is one that many people disagree about.

For example, some religious groups baptize babies, while others "christen" infants, while still others baptize only believers. Some sprinkle, while others dip, and others fully immerse. Some teach that Baptism saves the human soul, while others teach that it is part of bringing us into Salvation, while others teach that it is simply the outward response of an inward Reality that has already taken place.

And this is so bad today that many groups now teach that it really doesn't matter "if" or "how" they baptize, because they conclude that *all* efforts and all the logic behind the efforts are all equally true and equally effective. It is very popular to simply say that, since nobody really knows, then it really doesn't matter. And since "unity" is the single most important Goal, we shouldn't continue to even try to find out what is right, because we might end up offended or alienating some who think differently than we do.

But the effort to "get the Gospel right" is always correct and always proper. And as genuine believers, we should want to understand, even if it is hard, and even if the correct conclusion offends and alienates. It is only in the emasculated minds of lukewarm or unsaved people where abandoning Truth so as to achieve "Unity" exists, because nobody ever taught it in the Bible. The pursuit of Truth matters and trumps everything else. Because without knowing and having and understanding Divine Truth, we are simply wandering around, doing what is right in our own eyes, and we will never attain true Unity. So, the whole purpose of having 66 Books of Divine Origin is so we would "know the Truth" and learn to "love the Truth" on our way to "obeying the Truth", and not have to guess or make stuff up.

So, what *should* we believe about Baptism? Well, several years ago, I developed a very thorough Study on the Issue of Baptism, and you may want to get a copy of that. But, in a nutshell, here is what you need to know:

- ✓ Baptism is commanded by the Lord Jesus
- ✓ Baptism is for "Believers" only
- ✓ Baptism is in water by full immersion
- ✓ Baptism is one of only two "Ordinances" or "Sacraments"
- ✓ Baptism is a "Means of Grace"

Now we live in a day when there is much false teaching all around. And it seems as though the Issue of Baptism has been *especially* hard hit by all the man-made and incorrect Teachings. For example, on the one side, we have seen the rise of many so-called "para-church" Ministries that do *some* of what the Church has been tasked with, but not all. So, there are "Ministries" out there that specialize in Miracles and Healing, or Bible Studies, or Family Matters, or Political Causes. And these groups all try to "come alongside the Church" to help God's people learn or do what the Church either won't do or doesn't know to do.

But aside from the fact that you can't find any so-called "para-church" Ministry in the Bible, I'm not aware of any of them that obey Jesus and baptize their followers. And as a result of so many people thinking that them being a part of these para-church Ministries is the same thing as being a part of a real Church, we literally have a sea of people out there that will lay claim to be saved, and yet have never been baptized. And this has gone on for so long now that many will even say that they don't think that being baptized is even important, and they don't plan on ever being baptized.

But, on the other hand, because the Roman religious system *over-emphasized* Baptism, many Protestants have responded to that by *under-emphasizing* it. And so, in many minds today, Baptism is nothing more than an emblem, and has no urgency or importance to it.

But we must understand that the Lord of the Church *commanded* all truly saved people to "be baptized", and we are also "to baptize". And so, those who say they are saved and yet have *not* obeyed Jesus' Command to be baptized are either rebels, or they are uninformed, or they are deceived. And none of those are good. It is the official and formal position of the Covenant of Peace Church to say that all members not only have to be truly born again, but they have to obey Jesus by being baptized. You should not partake of the Lord's Table here unless you have been justified by Grace through Faith and have

been baptized. But why wouldn't a genuinely saved person *not* want to obey Jesus and be baptized?

And so, if you were baptized as an infant, or you "got wet" at some point in the past, and yet you weren't truly saved, then come and talk with one of the Elders and we will be happy to help you go through this amazing Sacrament.

So, Baptism is one of the many "Means of Grace" that God has graciously given to the Church, whereby He encourages and strengthens and helps to "make holy" those who are already saved. And because we take the Issue of Baptism seriously, it is not merely incorrect, it is evil to teach or believe that being baptized is what transforms the human nature and causes us to be saved.

But, isn't that *exactly* what Peter says here? He begins verse 21 by saying:

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you ...

.. and if that was all Peter said, then we would have to teach that Baptism saves the souls of people. And most of the groups that teach this use **1 Peter 3:21** as their "prooftext". But, that *isn't* all Peter said. Peter goes on to clarify what he was talking about by saying:

— not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Now many people point to the fact that various religious groups who go by the name of "Christian" have baptized babies by sprinkling them for many, many centuries. And the reason they point to the *longevity* of Teachings like this is to say that the *length* of a particular Teaching justifies its existence. But those of us, who at least try to utilize the concept of "Sola Scriptura", understand that the length of a particular Teaching has nothing to do with its truthfulness. For example, all of the Teachings of the Gnostics are all false. All of them are false. None of them are true. And yet, all Gnostic Teachings are ancient. Some even pre-date Jesus' Birth. All of the Teachings of the ancient Mystery Religions of Babylon are false, and yet some of them go all the way back to Nimrod in **Genesis 10**. So, the age of a Teaching has no bearing on its Truthfulness.

Others will point to how many people adhere to a particular Teaching, as though “popularity” has something to do with its veracity. We must understand that all of those who ascribe to the Teachings of Islam are deceived. They aren’t saved. They aren’t going to Heaven. And yet, the followers of Islam are in the hundreds of millions.

No, what makes something to be true is if it is, in fact, true. And what God has said, is *always* true. Jesus said:

John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

... so, we don’t have to wonder or guess. We can simply go to the Bible and then agree with what God says there, *infallibly*.

So, we can trust the Bible. Because it isn’t that God *does not* lie, but that He *cannot* lie. The one, true, and living God, Who is revealed in Creation and on the pages of the 66 Books of the Holy Bible, does not have the *ability* to say something that isn’t absolutely true.

So, what makes a particular Teaching true is *not* how long it has been taught or the popularity of it, but that it is what God has spoken in sacred Scripture. And there is not a single example in all of the Bible of a single baby being baptized. There is no Command anywhere in the Bible where God has told anyone to baptize babies. And every single example of a Baptism found anywhere in the Bible shows that it was in water and by complete immersion. And we have example after example of all baptisms carried out on the pages of the New Testament with people who had already believed and who had been converted.

And that means that Peter is *not* teaching here that Baptism “saves us”, even though that is *exactly* what it looks like. But, in reality, all the Peter is doing here is using a natural example to explain a spiritual Truth. And that means that Peter is not talking about “water Baptism” *at all* here, neither *literally* nor *symbolically*.

Now we could think that it is tragic that Peter used the word “Baptism” in the first place, because by using it so many people have become confused. But that is how God the Spirit moved him along. But, it is very possible that Peter was not referring to water Baptism here, in *any* sense. And the hint is given in what he says:

— not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience —

... so, whatever else we might think about this Passage, from what he says here, we know for sure that Peter was *not* talking about a *literal* Baptism into water. But it *could* also mean that he wasn't talking about a *symbolic* Baptism either.

Peter is talking about an "Appeal to God for a good conscience through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ". That's all he is talking about. And then he is tying in how this "Appeal for a good conscience" helps us to suffer for doing what is right. Now if you put the words that come *before and after* the dashes of verse 21 together, you'll have this:

And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The other words that are *inside* the dashes are there to simply help the reader keep what Peter is saying in its proper context. So, Peter says, "Baptism now saves you". But, *what* Baptism? *Not* the kind that includes water that can wash away dirt. So, what Baptism is he talking about? The Baptism into the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ! And that's the real Issue here.

So, as the Great Flood was a furious Judgment of God upon the earth in **Genesis**, it literally killed everybody on the face of the earth, except the eight people who lived. So, even though they were immersed in the Flood just like everybody else, they were saved, *not* because they were *excluded* from the Flood, but because they were also "entombed" in an Ark of Safety. So, in that sense, these eight people "died" and were "buried" in the original Ark.

The difference for us is that on the Cross, the Judgment of God came upon Jesus Christ. And all those who are saved go through that Judgment "in Him". We are not *excluded* from the Judgment, we are "saved" from the Judgment. And so, the only reason we survive is because we are protected in Jesus- Who is the Ark of Safety. But to be saved, we have to die. We have to die to sin and die to self. But it isn't *our* death, it is Jesus' Death. So, by Faith, all of us, we go with Jesus into His Death, and into His Burial. But the big difference between us and the eight souls on Noah's Ark is that once we go with Jesus into His

Death and His Burial, we also come out on the other side in His Resurrection!

So, in reality, Peter is *not* talking about water Baptism at all. neither *literally* nor *symbolically*. What he is talking about here is us coming into a perfect Union with Jesus Christ by Faith. And how having this perfect Union helps us to suffer to God's Glory.

So, Peter is talking about us passing through the Judgment of God that fell on Jesus in His Death and Burial, and then of us coming out the other side in the Glory of His Resurrection. And, in that sense, we have been carried through the Judgment of God, because we have been "entombed" in Jesus Who is Ark of our eternal Safety.

Another hint that this is correct is found in the word "Appeal". And it comes from a Greek word that has to do with a Covenant. So, what allows us into the Ark of Safety, Jesus Christ, is a Covenant. So, what is the "Covenant" part of the New Covenant? Is it anything that we do? No. It is Faith. So, under the infinitely superior New Covenant, we are saved because we *believe*, because we *confess*, and because we *trust*. So, the "Appeal" here for a good conscience (through the Resurrection of Jesus) is the Gift of Saving Faith. And so, faith in Jesus saves us and rescues us from God's Wrath, and then purifies our conscience.

And water Baptism does not allow any of this to happen. Trusting in Jesus and repenting from sin, *that* is what allows us to be safe in Jesus, and to die to sin and to live for Christ. So, what saves us? Not water, but a heart longing to be delivered from the crushing burden of sin that plagues our evil conscience and wants to covenant with God to live an obedient life. And *that* is what will lead us all the way through the Judgment of God, and into the Resurrection of Jesus Christ!

And the pathway to begin to realize all this, and to appreciate all this, and to value what God is doing in our lives, the way that God uses to change us and to help us put all the pieces together in this life and on this earth, is Suffering. And so, Peter finishes this deep and amazing Passage by saying:

... who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

Here Peter ties everything in together by reminding them, and us, that Jesus has not forgotten us and He has not forsaken us, even though we may be hurting real bad. But Peter says that Jesus is very busy, right now, acting as the High Priest of our Profession, and He is interceding at the "Right Hand" of God for us.

Peter says here that all Angels, both fallen and elect, both bound and free, and all Authorities, both human and demonic, and all Powers, both earthly and heavenly, everything has been subjected to Him! So, our Suffering is not in vain. Our pain and the injustice that we go through, the agony of Suffering for doing what is right, all of that is working together for the greater "good" of the Glory of God, and, ultimately, for the fullness of our own Joy, precisely because everything, in all of Creation, has been placed at Jesus' Feet and He is Lord of all!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.