

A New People for an Old Message: A Study in 1 Peter, 3:18-4:6, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on April 7th, 2009

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Intro

Most commentators and theologians have argued that this passage we are going to look at today, may be the hardest one to interpret in the entire NT, and possibly in the bible. There are definitely some hard passages to figure out, but I do not want to miss the forest for the trees. Since there are a few decent options, and they have been argued by good men, it may be prudent not to dogmatically create our theology around any of these concepts, but accept them for what they are and stick to what Peter has been driving home all along; that the gospel of Jesus Christ is larger than any trial we are going through. A lot of this book has dealt with persecution and trials that would be the result of following Jesus. Last week we saw that suffering for righteousness sake is a reality, yet we are still called to do good, turn from evil and not repay evil deeds with evil deeds.

Paul begins our passage today reminding us that we shouldn't be surprised at suffering since our savior suffered unjustly, but he suffered unjustly on our behalf, and it is because of this that we have the ability and the hope (**1 Peter 3:15**) to persevere through trials and persecution.

From the Head...

Our passage is connected to the verses immediately preceding it. Our passage is an encouragement for those being unjustly persecuted. It's a passage that displays the victory and vindication of Jesus.

Christ's Victory (Christus Victor) (3:18–22)

A. His death (3:18)

Jesus unjustly faced death in order to save us for our sins. Peter writes this in the midst of verses talking about being unjustly persecuted by those that hate the Christian message. It is imperative to understand the significance of the cross here. Many want to emphasize Jesus' victory (Christus Victor) on the cross as a triumphant act of love of God over death, at the expense of His vicarious atonement. It is believed here that the atonement, as understood by orthodox interpretation is a product of 15th century rhetoric, and is a cruel unloving picture of the cross as God's demand for human sacrifice to satisfy his "Blood Lust;" however the two concepts cannot be separated, and it hurts the gospel, and our encouragement when it is separated. If you emphasize the vicarious atonement apart from God's victorious love, you do have a bloodthirsty pagan god who needs to appease his wrath and thirst for blood. However, when we emphasize the victorious love of God without balancing with God's just holiness, we denigrate the need of the cross and the holiness of God. The cross demonstrates both God's love (**John 3:16; Romans 5:8**) and His divine call to a holy justice (**Romans 3:25; 2 Corinthians 5:21**). The encouragement to these persecuted Christians is that Christ did die for the purposes of God (**Acts 4:28; Isaiah 53:10**), even though His death was unjust and a bloody disaster. This cross doesn't make God an "Unloving Tyrant" as one person called Him, it is truly a demonstration of His love and justice in that His holiness does require just payment, but in His perfect love, He personally paid the penalty for that justice, so that we could be made whole and righteous (**2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18**).

B. His journey to the spirit world (3:19–20)

These verses are very difficult to fully understand. What is going on in these verses? There are 3 main answers that have put forth by theologians over the years:

- 1) Descent into Hell in between death and resurrection (Popular with early creeds)
- 2) Pre-Existent Christ Preached during time of Noah
- 3) Triumphant Proclamation to fallen Angels after the resurrection of Jesus

I believe the text point us to the 3rd view for the following reasons:

1) The best understanding of the word “Spirits” is angelic or “Supernatural beings” (**Matthew 8:16; 10:1; Mark 1:27; 3:11; 5:13; 6:7; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 10:20; Acts 5:16, etc.**). There is precedent for the word to refer to human spirits, but it is used once (**Hebrews 12:23**), and it is qualified by the words “*just people*.” Most often scripture refers to humans as those who have a spirit, but is not normal to say that one is a spirit.

2) If #1 is true then it would be normative to see the “Spirits” as those angelic beings who intermarried at the time of Noah, and who had children that are referred to as “giants”/Nephilim. The “Spirits” here seem to refer to the “Evil Spirits” associated with the children of the Angel/Human consummation (See **Jude 6-7; 2 Peter 2:4-5**).

3) The clause “*In which*” (“in Whom,” NIV) appears to be connected to the antecedent “*Made alive in the Spirit*,” which makes the proclamation of victory over death after the resurrection; destroying the effect of the fall and death on humanity, and Satan’s greatest weapon (See **Romans 8:34-39; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58**).

4) There is no supportive evidence for either a “Second Chance” doctrine for those that have died, or for fallen angels to be saved.

5) It appears that the demons themselves understood that Jesus would finally condemn them (**Mark 3:23; 5:10-13; Matthew 8:29; 12:25; Luke 11:17-22**). This was Christ’s proclamation of victory over death, and their stronghold on earth. This would later be completely put to rest at their final judgment (**Revelation 20:7-15**).

6) The “Prison” may refer either to the “Pit of Darkness” that is reserved for Satan and his angels (**2 Peter 2:4**), or to the idea that the word means “Refuge” and has the idea that Jesus went into the spiritual realm to declare to them their weakened position and pending judgment.

7) This is in concert with the idea that “*At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, whether in heaven or earth*” (See **Philippians 2: 9-10; Colossians 2:14-15**).

These verses are here to exhort and encourage believers who are persecuted. They show us the victory of Christ over death and His enemies, just like we will triumph over our enemies (Including death) in due time. No manner of persecution can separate us from the hope and love we have in Jesus (**Romans 8:37-39**).

C. His resurrection (**3:21**)

This verse is demonstrating the “Anti-Type” (The word in the Greek for “Corresponds” is the word *antitupos*, which is where we get our word “Antitype.” The word means the corresponding partner to the original. The antitupos was the image that a signet ring left in the wax. In this passage, Peter uses the symbolic image of the ark of Noah as a saving device, and now relates this idea of baptism to that saving mechanism. He is clear that he isn’t referring to water in this passage, but the salvation of our souls from death “*Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*.” Our baptism in Christ saves us, because Jesus not only died to pay the penalty for our sins, but He has risen from the dead, crushing Satan’s hold on us as believers.

D. His ascension and exaltation (**3:22**)

Verse 22 picks up after the parenthesis of verses 19-20 and completes the salvific work of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and the final ascension into heaven. This completes Peter’s encouragement to persecuted believers. Christ was unjustly treated, but it is that trial (The cross) that gave Him victory over death (Resurrection) so that He could ascend to the right hand of the Father, as we also do in Christ.

Our Victory (1 Peter 4:1-6)

Here Peter presents the summary of our victory in Christ Jesus. He announces that we have victory because of what Christ has done on our behalf. We are now free from having to live within the desires of the flesh that drive all of our emotions and affections leading to debauchery and sinful living. The preaching to the dead in this context has nothing to do with a second chance doctrine, but the reality that the gospel is preached to those dead and alive and that those that find themselves in Christ can live in Christ in a different manner than the rest of the world. This is the message of Romans 6. We are now free in Christ to live for Him as a result of what he has done on our behalf. We are now motivated by a heart's desire to show love to our Lord, because He first loved us. I do not believe that this is a second chance doctrine for the following reasons:

- 1) It contradicts clearer scripture on the subject (**Luke 16:26; Hebrews 9:27**).
- 2) It mitigates the importance of perseverance of the believer (**1 Peter 4:1-6**)
- 3) It destroys the need for judgment (**1 Peter 4:5**)

While we should never judge our justification on our sanctification, the evidence of our justification through faith is the works that God has prepared before time (**Ephesians 2:10**). We are able in Christ to live a life that is pleasing to Him as we live that life by faith in His Spirit, and not in the self-indulgence of our desires as the ultimate motivating factor in our lives.

...to the Heart

Many of us are inflicted with the pain of stress and trials of this world. There are many in this world with direct persecution for their faith. 1 Peter 4:4 reminds us that people will "Malign" you for living differently, but we are called to be in the world as a different kind of person. This is only possible in Jesus. We will always fall short of this ideal, but we are made alive in Christ Jesus and His victory on the cross for our sake, and His righteousness. The cross ought to give us hope and encouragement that persecution and trials are inevitable on this earth, but like Jesus, we will be raised to the right hand of the Father in Him. Our persecution is momentary in light of eternity. In spite of our trials God loves us and is sovereignly watching over us. When we live our lives for our own gain, we will do "Good Works" out of the desire that God will bless our endeavors. In these past few weeks, we have seen that our good works should be motivated by our new identity in Christ, and that when we do good for our own benefit, we will be crushed by trials and either reject God in bitter anger, or judge ourselves as unworthy, and see our trials as a punishment from God. But when we see our trials through the gospel's lens, we see that like our own savior, it is a necessary evil that purifies our lives and is done for God's purposes and our own good. We can begin to trust in His sovereignty and goodness in the midst of them knowing that they are momentary and light in relation to the glory we will have with Him in His presence for eternity.