

“Our Triumphant Savior” (part 2)

1 Peter 3:18-22

Last week, we began looking at these verses which close out the third chapter of 1 Peter. I must confess that these verses have really gripped my soul and have brought me greater confidence in the Lord.

These are verses which should serve to encourage you no matter what your outward circumstances may presently be. Especially if you're suffering!

The Christians to whom Peter wrote were living under a set of extremely difficult circumstances. They knew what it meant to suffer for their faith. And though they didn't realize it at the time, their situation would become much worse. Peter knew that they needed to be encouraged by the truth of all that Jesus had secured for them through His suffering on their behalf. Though it felt like they were defeated and helpless victims at the hands of their persecutors, in reality, they were more than conquerors through Him who loved them and gave Himself up for them.

Peter's readers needed to know that in Jesus Christ they have a triumphant Savior. And it is the same thing that we need to know as we yield in trust to His sovereign control.

I have already pointed out to you what Peter mentions in verse 18, and the fact that Christ triumphed through His suffering on the cross. Peter says:

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...”

His suffering was once for all time, it was substitutional, and it was reconciling. It was also undeserved, something that should have given Peter's readers better

perspective into their own circumstances. Jesus wasn't conquered by suffering, but rather He conquered through His suffering.

Well, I want to show you another way in which Jesus is our triumphant Savior.

Not only did He triumph through death:

2. The triumph of Christ's PROCLAMATION (3:18b-20a)

"...being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah..."

We have a triumphant Savior who conquered sin and death through His own suffering and death on the cross. But I want you to notice next that Peter refers to a triumphant proclamation that was made by Christ immediately after He was put to death in the flesh.

At the end of verse 18, Peter mentions how Christ was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit."

Depending on what translation you have, some see this as a reference to the Holy Spirit, and so 'spirit' is capitalized in those translations. Yet the Greek text omits the definite article, which suggests that Peter isn't describing the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Instead, he is saying that Jesus was spiritually made alive, even though physically He had died.

Peter is expressing the truth of what happened after Jesus died upon the cross, and before His bodily resurrection.

He was literally put to death in the body. In His body, His life came to an abrupt halt. When the judgment of God reached its apex in the death of Jesus, the very

moment His sufferings were complete and He was put to death in the body, immediately in His spirit He was made alive.

And so Peter is giving us a clue into what happened between the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

He was not the victim of death, but the Victor over death. And in the death of Jesus, we have the death of death. It was the Puritan writer John Owen who most famously wrote a book which he entitled, “The Death of Death in the Death of Christ.” If what Peter says here is not true, then those who have died are gone for good. No hope!

You will remember that according to the gospel writers, with His dying breath, Jesus declared that His work of suffering for sinners was finished.

John 19:30—“It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Luke 23:46—“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.”

So when Jesus surrendered His spirit to the Father, Peter says in verse 19 that at some point between His death and resurrection, in His spirit He went and made a proclamation to the ‘spirits in prison.’

When Peter says that Christ went and ‘proclaimed’ to these spirits in prison, it brings up a couple of questions: who were these ‘spirits’ to whom Peter refers, and what was it exactly that Christ proclaimed to them? While not getting too deep, I want us to consider these two questions.

When you look at what Peter says here along with other passages that refer to this, I think that this proclamation involved three important announcements.

It was an announcement of victory

The word Peter uses is 'kerusso' which is the word used to describe the act of heralding. The idea is that after His death on the cross, Jesus went and proclaimed the victory over Satan and his demonic forces. It was the means by which God had:

Colossians 2:15—“...disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ].”

It was a triumphant proclamation, a celebration of victory over the enemy. In head to head combat, Jesus had single handedly defeated Satan and the forces of hell. Though the serpent had bruised the Messiah's heel, with that same heel the Messiah crushed the head of the serpent.

Jesus died in the body, and was made alive in the spirit after His suffering. And before His bodily resurrection, in the spiritual realms, He proclaimed victory over the devil.

Hebrews 2:14—“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

The divine Son took on flesh and blood and became a man because only then could He die and, through His own death, defeat the devil. That word 'destroy' used there by the writer of Hebrews does mean to annihilate, for the devil is still actively busy. Instead, the word means to render inoperative or to make of no effect. It means that he's been defeated and disarmed. And it was this victory cry that was made to these 'spirits who are in prison.'

Now to be sure, these are some of the most intriguing verses in the entire New Testament, and Bible scholars offer a wide range of theories as to whom exactly Peter is referring when he says ‘spirits in prison.’ Are they the spirits of human beings, such as those who died in the Old Testament, or are they fallen angels?

The most commonly held understanding is that Peter is referring to a certain group of fallen angels who rebelled against God before the days of Noah. In fact, he mentions as much in verse 20. These were angels who did not obey.

Jude 6—“And the angels who who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

A clue to support this understanding is found in Genesis 6.

Within that passage, we are told that the sinful depravity of humanity was so severe that it grieved the heart of God that He had made man.

Genesis 6:5-6—“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”

The Bible says that the way that humanity had so corrupted itself grieved God’s heart. The effects of sin had become widespread. Man had made a serious departure from God’s original design which was outlined at creation and described in Genesis 1-2.

However, if you go back up and read the first four verses of Genesis 6, you will discover a strange and sinister series of events that led to such corruption. Now, I am not going to weigh into all that those verses could possibly suggest. Let’s

suffice it to say that there was a wicked, supernatural influence that led to the corruption of mankind.

It is easy for us to approach life strictly on the basis of the natural, what we can see with our eyes, what we can hear with our ears, or what we can taste and touch. And yet the Word of God says that the natural world around us is influenced by a supernatural world above us that we cannot see. (Prayer is essential; Eph. 6:10-18)

Demonic influence led to the unraveling and destruction of the world in Noah's day. It began with a demonic assault on the institution of marriage.

Since the fall of Satan and his demons, there has been an ongoing conflict between good and evil. He shows up as a serpent in God's garden who seduces humanity into sin against God. As part of the curse, God said to the serpent:

Genesis 3:15—“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The serpent's long war on the seed of the woman begins in Genesis 3, and it led to the events of Genesis 6. It was a time of spiritual deception, a time when wrong was right and right was wrong. It was a time when immorality and the pride of man reached its zenith, a time when humanity had become deceived and had bought into the lies of the serpent who sought to subvert God's redemptive plan.

The Bible says that the Genesis 6 generation was a perverted and morally depraved generation, a generation that had become dominated by demons. And so the flood was the course of action that God took to both rescue humanity and

judge humanity's sin at the same time. (I will come back to this in just a minute...)

And so this word 'kerusso' that Peter uses here, it is a word that described the actions of one who proclaims that the king has made a decision. It is the declaration of a certain edict. In this case, it is the proclamation by Jesus that He had successfully carried out His mission, the very mission these demonic forces had opposed. He had died for the sins of the world, and the work of salvation was complete.

It was an announcement of authority

Through His own death, Jesus destroyed the power of the devil and secured the victory. He announced His victory over Satan and fallen angels who had tried to subvert the redemptive plan of God in the days of Noah. His preaching also involved the announcement of His authority over them.

Romans 14:9—“For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”

As One who has authority, it also means that He Himself now possesses the keys of death and hell.

Revelation 1:18—“I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

In this text, Peter says Jesus died on the cross for sins. In His spirit, He went and proclaimed His victory and authority over the enemy. On the third day, He experienced a bodily resurrection and was given a glorified body. He appeared to His disciples over a period of forty days, and then He visibly ascended to sit at the Father's right hand.

Ephesians 4:8-10—“Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)”

All of this speaks of His power and His authority. As the victorious and authoritative God-Man, He has been resurrected and glorified and is now in heaven.

This is Peter’s conclusion in verse 22—Christ is the One “...who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him.”

Where is Jesus now, and what is He doing? He is sitting at the Father’s right hand. He is presently seated over all angels and all powers and all authorities who are all in submission to Him. He is in absolute sovereign control.

This has some wonderful implications for our lives!

For one, whenever we read this, it ought to put in proper balance for us all the political aspirations of man. No matter what men and governments decree, Christ is King. Consider how important this would have been for the readers in Peter’s day. When they were being persecuted and mistreated by those who were in positions of political authority over their lives, they needed to remember that there is One who is sovereign and authoritative over all!

Paul writes in Ephesians that Christ has been raised from the dead and is presently seated in the heavenly places:

Ephesians 1:21—“...far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

Another implication of this is that it ought to shatter all of our pride and ego.

When a man is given a title, he likes to wear it proudly on his chest. Like the disciples did, we jockey over position and accolade. For those of you have the title of chief executive officer, or chairman of the board, let me remind you that Jesus Christ is the ultimate Title bearer. He is victorious and authoritative. Regardless of the title that you may possess, it pales in comparison to the One that is His! Seeking titles for ourselves and name dropping ought to be of no importance to us now.

A third implication is that the truth of Christ's victory and authority over the enemy ought to alleviate our fears of death and dying. These Christians to whom Peter wrote faced the prospect of death every day. The time would come when many of them would be marched into the coliseums and arenas and be publicly humiliated and cruelly executed. Yet what Peter is writing here would serve to provide them with confidence and hope.

Through His own death, Jesus destroyed the one who had the power of death and now leads us in victory procession.

2 Corinthians 2:14—“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Jesus Christ.”

No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ is me! From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand. 'Till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

The proclamation that Peter refers to in this passage was an announcement of victory and authority. Notice last:

It was an announcement of possibility and certainty

By virtue of what He has done, we are able to see both the possibility and certainty of the saving benefits that Christ gives and how they become ours personally. In other words, you and I are now able to experience the benefits of this victory which Christ has wrought.

Let's return for just a moment to the example that Peter gives of Noah. In the midst of a wicked generation, the Bible says that:

Genesis 6:8—“Noah found grace in the eyes of God.”

God determined to judge the pre-flood world in Noah's day and the flood would be His means of judgment. And yet at the same time, it would also be His means of salvation.

Notice in verse 20 how Peter shows this to be the case:

“...when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.”

While sinful and rebellious humanity had abandoned the truth and bought into the doctrines of demons, God's patience waited. While man was becoming increasingly corrupt, God's patience waited. While man was in league with Satan to mount a rebellion against God's design, God's patience waited.

Just how long was God's patience?

Genesis 6:3—“And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’”

The time would come when God’s patience would be over, and His judgment would be meted out. He was going to destroy the world through a global, catastrophic flood. Yet the world would not be without a sufficient witness. Noah is described in verse 9 as being a righteous, blameless man. He walked with God against the cultural grain. He swam upstream in the midst of a generation that was plunging headlong into judgment. His righteous life was an indictment on his generation, just like Peter’s readers.

The point that Peter is making here is this—the Lord knows how to save His own, while at the same time, judging sin.

2 Peter 2:4-5, 9—“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.”

The ark was both a symbol of judgment to the world, as well as a symbol of salvation for God’s people. It pointed to the cross. Through His suffering and death, Jesus both endured the judgment of God on sin while at the same time securing the salvation of those who are safely in Him.

Notice that Peter mentions only eight people who were personally brought safely through the flood, but not before God's patience waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. (Men, Noah got his family in the ark!)

Paul refers to the patience of God in the same way:

Romans 2:4—“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God is meant to lead you to repentance?”

Peter's point in verse 20 is that God was patient with Noah's generation and provided them with a sufficient testimony of His grace. And this was all the way up until the rain drops began to fall. The possibility for salvation is seen as the ark was being built, all due to God's patience. The door that led to salvation was wide open!

All people had to do to be saved was walk through it.

In a similar way today, God continues to wait patiently. He's waiting for lost husbands who have believing wives, for children who have praying parents, and for cities who are being interceded for by believers. But the situation is urgent, because the time is coming when God's patience will come to an end. The door will one day be closed.

Noah preached, “Run into the ark and be saved!” But no one paid him any mind. Jesus said that this will be the same attitude of the generation that witnesses His return.

Matthew 24:37-39—“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered

the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

My task, as well as the task of every gospel preacher and teacher, is this—to urge you while there is time to run into Christ and be saved! By virtue of what the triumphant Christ has done, it is possible for sinners to be saved and find refuge. And it is also certain that those who flee to Christ for refuge will be saved.

The Bible says in Genesis 7:16 that the Lord Himself shut Noah and his family safely within the ark.

The same waters that drowned the world in judgment were also the same waters that lifted the ark to safety. And in a much more severe way, the flood of God’s judgment was poured out upon Christ in the place of sinners. Yet for those who are in Christ, there is no longer fear of judgment. For the same cross that was an instrument of judgment on my sin is also the same cross that has now become the instrument of my salvation. Cross meant to kill—*my victory!*

And so when the Bible says that Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison, it was the message of His success over Satan, over schemes, and over systems that are in opposition to our triumphant Savior. It no doubt was the announcement of His victory over sin and death, His authority over Satan, and the reality of redemption that is now made possible for those Satan held captive.

Do you know Christ personally? Have you surrendered your life to Him? Now is the time to repent of your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Along the way of life are many foes,
and they daily war against my soul;
But constant victory*

My Savior gives to me

As I press on to the goal.

On the winning side, I'm on the winning side,

I'm on the winning side with Jesus;

Though hot may be the fray,

My soul can boldly say,

I'm on the winning side with Jesus.