

“Our Triumphant Savior” (part 3)

1 Peter 3:18-22

One of the worst disasters in history happened on November 1, 1755 when a massive earthquake struck the coastal town of Lisbon, Portugal. It is known as the Great Lisbon Earthquake, which lasted nearly 10 seconds, and was followed by other aftershocks that continued to destroy buildings and homes. Fires broke out across the city and made rescue efforts nearly impossible. To further complicate matters, tsunami waves pounded the seaport, drowning hundreds and ripping ships away from their anchors. The death toll was estimated at 100,000.

In his book, “Where Was God,” Erwin Lutzer tells the story:

Erwin Lutzer — *“That morning the sky was bright, calm, and beautiful, but in a moment everything was transformed into frightening chaos. Ironically, the earthquake hit on All Saints’ Day, when churches were crowded with worshipers. One would think that the people who sought shelter in the house of God might be spared. Indeed, some people even ran into the churches, seeking shelter by joining the priests who were conducting mass at 9:30am. Eyewitnesses say that the crowds had the terror of death on their faces, and when the second great shock came, both priests and parishioners alike began to shriek, calling out to God for mercy. But heaven was silent to their pleas. Almost all of the churches in Lisbon were reduced to rubble, and the people in them killed.”*

Some religious leaders began to say that the earthquake was a sign of God’s judgment against the city. And yet if so, why were churches full of worshipping people destroyed, and yet a street of brothels remained unaffected? In an attempt to explain the disaster, people began assigning blame to other groups of

people. If we would be honest, we do the same thing when something disastrous happens. We expect suffering for those who are wicked, but certainly not believers. Right?

Peter shows us how Christians aren't immune to suffering.

I want us to conclude our study of this passage from the third chapter of 1 Peter, a section of Scripture that has really encouraged me as I have studied it over these last couple of weeks. Within this text, Peter reminds us that in Jesus Christ we have a triumphant Savior. No matter what our circumstances may involve, we can have confidence in the Lord. Well, these Christians that Peter wrote to had been experiencing persecution for their faith. Though they were righteous, they knew what it meant to suffer for the gospel's sake. Their pain was very real.

We suffer in ways for which there are no easy answers. The loss of a baby. Cancer. Natural disasters. Random killings. When life is unfair, and you suffer because of it, how will you respond?

In response to life's hardships, sometimes a person will ask, "If God is good, if God is loving, then why is there so much evil and why do bad things happen to, at least from our perspective, good people?"

Whenever we suffer, there are at least four possibilities as to why:

- Suffering as the result of poor choices
- Suffering as the result of spiritual attack
- Suffering as the result of a fallen world
- Suffering as the result of doing good

Jesus also suffered, though He had done nothing wrong. And so the apostle encourages these believers by focusing their attention on Christ, who also suffered and yet He was triumphant through His suffering.

I have already pointed out a couple of ways in which Jesus is our triumphant Savior. To begin with, we considered the triumph of His crucifixion. Peter explains this in verse 18:

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

The second thing that we have seen from this passage is the triumphant proclamation that Jesus made over the spiritual forces of darkness. We dealt with verses 19-20 last Sunday, where we considered Peter’s words here of how Jesus formally announced His success over those Satanic forces that sought to subvert God’s redemptive plan. When Peter says that Jesus went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, he is referring to the heralding of an announcement. It was an announcement of His victory, His authority, as well as both the possibility and certainty of salvation. The forces of darkness are defeated, and Christ is triumphant over all.

Jesus suffered and died for our sins, through which He defeated sin and death. His victory over the enemy was announced. Notice how His triumph is further seen:

3. The triumph of Christ’s RESURRECTION (3:20b-21)

“...while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves

you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."

Thank God that Jesus didn't enter the grave and stay there! If so, then none of us would have any hope.

Through His death on the cross, He defeated the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil. And through His resurrection, Jesus even overcame the grave itself.

One of the most sobering things you can do is to walk through a cemetery and read the names and dates on the headstones. (illus. of Arlington Cemetery)

If we were to take a brief walk over to Floral Garden, we'd find hundreds of graves. Many of you have laid to rest a loved one over there—the grave of a mother, or a father, a sister, brother, or even a child.

The fact of our own mortality is something that we often try to ignore. We don't like to think about death, and yet it stares us in the face every day. Every waking moment of our lives, we seek to evade or escape death in some way. It shapes our laws and safety rules. Why do you think vehicles have seat belts? Or why do roller coasters have chest harnesses? Why do pools have lifeguards? Because there exists the possibility of death.

Death is the ultimate unknown. And depending on who you ask, some would tell you that it is the ultimate end. Enjoy life now, because when you die, that's all she wrote.

Stephen Hawking — *"I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy tale story for people afraid of the dark."*

As Christians, we know that this is not the case. The Bible says that it is appointed unto man once to die, and after this, the judgment. There is a hereafter. There is an afterlife. The moment your heart stops beating in your chest, your spirit will leave your body and you will go to an appointed place.

As Christians, death is not the ultimate unknown because our confidence is in One who has already been there.

Hebrews 2:14-15—“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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

Through His own death on the cross, Jesus destroyed the works of the devil. And He delivers those who through the fear of death are held in bondage to Satan. Are you afraid to die? Jesus Christ has triumphed over the grave through His resurrection from the dead. And to illustrate the significance of Christ’s death and resurrection, Peter reminds his readers that we’ve been given the ordinance of baptism.

You’ll notice that Peter mentions baptism in verse 21 and connects it with the death and resurrection of Jesus. He says that baptism serves as:

A pattern

Don’t misinterpret what Peter is saying here. When he says ‘baptism now saves you,’ he is not making a case for baptismal regeneration. There is nothing inherent in the water of baptism that saves a person from their sins. That is something that only Christ can do, and it comes through faith alone.

When Peter refers to ‘baptism’ here, he is describing the believer’s figurative immersion into Jesus Christ. Notice the connection to the ark. Jesus is the ‘ark’ that carries us safely through the waters of judgment and into salvation.

Notice how Peter says that baptism ‘corresponds’ to the judgment of the world in Noah’s day through the flood.

“Corresponds” — *word is ‘antitupos’ in Greek and is the same word from where we get the term ‘antitype’*

There are patterns revealed in the Old Testament which serve to illustrate truths in the New Testament. We call these patterns ‘types.’ For example, the tabernacle is a type. The passover lamb is a type. The ‘antitype’ is the New Testament correspondence.

Peter says that ‘baptism’ in the New Testament is the antitype of the flood in Noah’s day. It is a pattern.

The flood was an act of judgment by which God purged the world of the wickedness of that Genesis 6 generation. While the world was swept away by the waters of God’s judgment, Noah and his family were lifted to safety by those same waters.

And so throughout redemptive history, we see this same pattern emerge—God saves the world through judgment.

And just as the ark signified judgment on the world of unbelief, it also signified salvation for those who were safe within. In Noah’s day, God saved His people through the flood, while at the same time punishing sin. In Israel’s history, God saved a remnant of His people through the exile, which also served as a judgment for their sin. It all serves to prefigure the work of Jesus on the cross.

In His death, Jesus endured the judgment of God in my place. While at the same time my sins were being judged in the death of Christ, my salvation was also being secured by the work of Christ. After the flood waters had receded from the earth, Noah and his family emerged from the ark and were given the freedom to fill the earth once more. And after the flood waters of God's judgment had passed over Christ, and His body was laid in the tomb, on the third day He emerged from the grave as the Victor. Those who are in Christ also share in His victory.

A picture

Baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It signifies our union with Him. That's why as 'baptists' we believe that the mode of baptism is very important. It comes from a word that means to fully immerse. The reason immersion in water is important is because of the symbolic picture that it conveys.

The water serves as an illustration of the grave. The flood waters in Noah's day were the means of God's judgment. With the exception of Noah and his family, every living thing on the earth died as it became buried under the water. In similar fashion, the water of baptism is symbolic of the grave. It signifies death and judgment of sin. As a follower of Jesus is immersed in the water, it is a picture of Christ's death as judgment passed over Him in my place.

This is Paul's argument:

Romans 6:3-4—“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was

raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

To be ‘baptized’ into Jesus Christ is what the Spirit of God did for you as a believer the very moment you were saved. This is referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit whereby you are immersed into both the death as well as the saving life of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13—“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit gives you a new life at salvation. And water baptism is a picture of this reality. It illustrates how the believer has passed from death into life. It is not merely some religious ritual. It is not an optional ‘add on’ the Christian life. Baptism is a beautiful picture of our union with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A profession

Peter says, “Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

It is not the water itself that saves, but faith in Christ.

1 Peter 3:21 (NLT)—“And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Baptism is a response to God from a clean conscience, or from the heart of a person that has experienced the grace of God in salvation. Baptism is the New Testament way that a person openly and publicly professes faith in Christ. We see this all throughout the NT. In response to his message, in the early chapters of Acts, Peter called upon men and women to repent and be baptized.

Acts 2:37-38—“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Baptism always follows faith and repentance in the New Testament. This is the consistent message of the church.

Acts 2:41 —“So those who received his word were baptized, and they were added that day about three thousand souls.”

The message is not ‘be baptized in order to be saved.’ No, the message is be saved in order to be baptized. Faith and repentance must come first, as evidenced elsewhere:

Acts 3:19—“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.”

Notice the order—repent...turn back...sins blotted out.

Acts 5:42—“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”

The New Testament knows nothing about walking an aisle, signing a card, or raising a hand. Now I’m all for those kinds of helpful tools to help repentant

sinners follow Christ in obedience. But none of these are ever intended to be a substitute for baptism. According to Scripture, obedience to baptism is that way that you and I publicly declare our faith in Jesus.

Baptism is one of the ways that we often measure the evangelistic impact we are having as a church. In recent years, there has been a decrease in baptisms in the SBC, a trend that we pray reverses. Many of our churches are baptizing fewer and fewer people. One of the reasons may in fact be the difficult culture which we presently live in. Another reason could be the lack of intentional personal evangelism on our part. Another reason still is the lack of responsibility on the part of many to follow through with baptism. Perhaps we have wrongly viewed baptism as the end rather than the beginning of a life of obedience.

Just like there is no better picture to illustrate the death of Jesus than the Lord's Supper, there is no better picture to illustrate the resurrection of Jesus than baptism. Through His death, proclamation, and resurrection Jesus is our triumphant Savior. One final consideration that I want to make involves the triumph of Christ's ascension to glory.

4. The triumph of Christ's ASCENSION (3:22)

"...who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."

Peter shows us how Jesus suffered, was buried, was raised, and is now exalted. Through His own suffering and death on the cross, Jesus triumphed over sin and death. In His spirit, He then went to declare His victory over the devil. It was an announcement of His triumph over evil. Peter wants his readers to know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the triumphant One. He is not some mere teacher or revolutionary figure. He is not held captive by death. No, He is victorious! He

proved His triumph over death, hell, and the grave through His bodily resurrection, which baptism is a symbolic picture of.

All of this is true, and yet we are still left with this question—where is He now, and what is He up to? What happened after His resurrection, and how does it impact our lives now as believers?

Peter gives us a wonderful answer in verse 22:

“He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him.”

Where He presently is seated

Peter says, “He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God.” We read about the ascension of Jesus in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:9—“And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”

It was a supernatural phenomenon as Jesus was taken up into a cloud of radiant glory. The skies were opened up and Jesus was received into heaven where He is seated at the right hand of God. Jesus even said this would be so:

Luke 22:69—“But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”

That He is seated speaks of His authority. After His death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father because His mission was accomplished. The ‘right hand’ is a place of prominence and power. The right hand of God refers to a position of eternal authority. It is the supreme place of honor. There is no one who occupies a more prominent place than He does.

What He presently is doing

“...with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”

Jesus occupies the highest of thrones. There is no one greater, no one higher, no one like Him. He is seated in majesty, and He is actively ruling over all things.

- He is building up His church
- He is interceding for us as High Priest
- He is representing us as our Advocate
- He is preparing a place for us

Remember that submission and surrender has been a key theme in Peter's epistle. Through His finished work, Jesus has demonstrated that He is Lord, the One before whom all will one day bow the knee. To be saved now demands that you declare Jesus as Lord. All will declare Him as Lord, but those who do so now, who confess their faith in Him now, who surrender their lives to Him now, will be saved for all eternity. This is the message that we must declare.

The ascension of Jesus marked the passing of the work of evangelism to His disciples. Before He ascended, He gave His followers work to do, and that work continues until now. Yet the time will come when our work is over. The very same Jesus who passed through the clouds and into glory will also return in a similar way. The skies will open up, and the Lord will descend, and we will be with Him forever.

Let me give you a few principles for application as I close:

Whenever I'm suffering, I must remember that Christ also suffered.

The suffering of Jesus always puts my pain in perspective. It brings comfort to my soul when I focus on the cross and how there I find the answer I need. No matter what I have had to endure, it pales in comparison to what He endured for me. Those in Peter's day needed to be encouraged by this fact, and so do we.

Whenever I'm overwhelmed, I must remember that Christ overwhelmed both Satan and the grave.

Rather than being defeated by what we sometimes face in life, you and I must remember that in Jesus Christ we are more than conquerors. He is triumphant over the forces of darkness that oppose us, and in the end, we win.

Whenever I'm confused, I must remember that Christ is in heaven in the place of supreme authority.

Life has a way of taking our breath. Things happen out of the blue it seems. But even though it seems that way from our perspective, it never really is that way from God's perspective. Jesus Christ is in a place of supreme rule and authority. No matter what happens, He is Lord over all.

Ephesians 2:4-6—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

I am seated with Him in heavenly places! Through union my inseparable union with Him, I am now able to reign in life. That means that my circumstances do not determine my value, nor are they the source of my joy. Jesus alone does

that for me. To be seated with Him in heavenly places means that my salvation is secure, and nothing can ever change that—even the sufferings of this life.

If you have never been saved, I urge you now while you have time and opportunity, repent of your sins and trust in Jesus Christ. He loves you. He died to save you from your sins. He is a triumphant Savior, and you can share in His victory now through faith in Him.