

“If You Should Suffer, Suffer for What Is Right, Part 2”
1 Peter 3:18-22

Introduction: This morning we were looking at the examples Peter gave us of patient suffering for what is right, to encourage us to the same activity. Peter told us that the precious Son of God suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us into fellowship with the Father. If Christ can suffer in this way, then He has sanctified this way for all of His children. We must remember that our Lord told us that the world would hate us. And if we are to live godly in this present evil age, we will be persecuted.

But then Peter moved on to a second illustration of this principle to give us further encouragement. I noted that this passage is highly debated as to its true meaning. There are so many variables that you must take into account. For instance, who are the spirits who are said to be in prison? Are they unbelievers who have died? Are they OT saints who have died? Are they fallen angels? What was it that Christ preached to them? Did He preach a second chance for repentance? Did He preach the completion of His redemptive work? Did He preach their final condemnation? And when exactly did He do this preaching? Did He preach before His death? after His death and before His resurrection? or after His resurrection? Tonight, I would like us to continue to learn what the Lord has to teach us from this passage, and to continue to see that,

If God should so ordain that you should suffer unjustly in this life, know that He has also promised to bring you through.

II. I Would Like to Pick Up Now Where We Left Off on Point Two, Which Is that Peter Points to Noah as a Second Example of One Who Suffered for Righteousness' Sake.

- A. The First Point Was that the Understandings of This Text Are Many.
 - 1. It is because there are so many variable in the passage, as we have already seen.
 - 2. But again, careful attention to the context will show us how to unravel its meaning.
 - a. Peter is showing us that it is better for us to suffer for doing what is right than for what is wrong.
 - b. He is not now taking a diversion to an entirely different topic, such as what Christ did after He died on the cross.
 - c. Rather, He is most likely giving us an example of suffering which flows out of his first illustration.
- B. I Believe that the Best Way to Understand What He Is Saying Is to See that He Is Speaking of What Christ Did Through Noah in the Days Before the Flood.
 - 1. Notice the first two words of verse 19, “in which.”
 - a. This clearly refers to the Spirit, whose work of resurrection is mentioned in verse 18, the Spirit of life.
 - b. I think here the translation “in which” could better be understood as “by which.” It means simply that it was by means of the Spirit of God that Christ did what He did.

2. Notice secondly, that Christ is said to have gone and made proclamation.
 - a. Christ went somewhere by means of the Spirit and He preached.
 - b. The word used here for “proclamation,” refers to the authoritative proclamation of an ambassador of God. It is the same word used of Gospel preachers today.
3. Thirdly, we are told who it was that Christ preached to: “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.”
 - a. Christ preached to spirits, which could refer to either angels or to the disembodied souls of men.
 - b. He preached to spirits who are presently in prison.
 - c. The reason they are in prison is because of their former disobedience.
 - d. This disobedience took place when God was patiently waiting in the days of Noah, while he was constructing the ark for the salvation of his household.
4. Having eliminated the idea that the angels somehow cohabited with man during the time of Noah, and from the simple fact that the angels who fell did not incur their judgment for any particular act at the time of Noah, but rather at the time of their rebellion against God, the only other option would be that these spirits are men. They are men who disobeyed at the time of Noah.
5. But are we to think from this passage that Christ went and preached to just those men who lived during the time of Noah? Why would He single them out here? Did these get a second chance to be saved? Did these alone need to have Christ’s victory announced to them, while the others did not?
6. Before this becomes too confusing to hang onto, I want to again remind you of the context. Peter is giving to us examples of suffering for what is right. How could Christ’s preaching to disembodied spirits give us an illustration of that?
7. I believe that the best way to understand this passage is this:
 - a. Christ did not preach to these spirits after His death, but before, a long time before.
 - b. These spirits are now in prison, but they weren’t when Christ preached to them. They living at the time of Noah.
 - c. What it tells us is that the Spirit who raised Christ is the same Spirit by which Christ preached to these men through Noah.
 - d. The passage would read like this, “By means of which Christ also had gone and preached to the spirits who are now in prison.”
 - e. Peter is telling us that Christ was not sitting around in heaven doing nothing before His incarnation. He was actively involved in calling men and women to repentance through His messengers, through His prophets. It is the Spirit of Christ, after all, who empowers and emboldens His people to witness of Him.
 - f. Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). He preached that men should repent for the judgment of God was coming. If they expected to be saved they must believe God and turn from their evil ways. God patiently waited for the one hundred years of the building of the ark for them to repent.

- g. But they didn't listen to him. They were all swept away in the Flood, everyone of them, except for Noah and his family, eight persons in all.
 - h. Now these rebels are disembodied spirits being held in the prison of hell, waiting for the day of the final judgment. They are now dead and in prison.
 - i.. Peter is saying the same thing in 4:6, where he writes, "For the Gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God."
 - j. And Paul, in essence, may be referring to the same thing with regard to baptism, where he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:29, "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?"
 - k. Is Peter saying that the Gospel was preached, or should be preached, to those who are dead at the time of preaching? Is Paul saying that there are those who are being baptized for persons who are already dead? Paul may be saying this. But you should also note that he distances himself from these people, whoever they are, by referring to them as "they," and not "we."
 - l. I think it is clear that Peter is saying that the Gospel is only preached to those who are alive. The fact that they are now dead does not mean that they were when the Gospel was preached to them. And such is the case in our passage.
8. Peter, then, is pointing to the situation of Noah, a situation which was very similar to his readers, to show them that they must patiently endure their suffering for doing what is right.
- a. There were a lot of things which Noah and Peter's readers had in common, many of which are true of us as well today.
 - b. Noah and his family were clearly a minority surrounded by a majority of hostile believers.
 - (i) This was also the case with Peter's audience, as we saw two weeks ago.
 - (ii) He writes, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials" (1:6).
 - (iii) They were being tried by the fire. They lived in a world which was hostile to the God that they loved and served.
 - (iv) We are in a situation in these days where we live in a world which has far lower standards than our own, at least, that is the way that it should be.
 - (v) Because of this, we will probably be confronted by those who are hostile to us. But we must be ready and armed with the purpose to suffer if need be.
 - c. Noah was a righteous man in the midst of a wicked world.
 - (i) Peter exhorts his readers that they are to be the same. He told them, "Keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (3:16).
 - (ii) You too are called to be shining lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation of people.
 - (iii) You are to let your light shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- (iv) Do not hide your light under the bushel in fear. But fear God, and dare to live and act what you in fact are in Christ.
- d. Noah witnessed boldly to those who were around him.
 - (i) Peter also encouraged his readers to do the same.
 - (ii) In 3:15, he wrote, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”
 - (iii) He told them that they must be willing to suffer, if need be, to bring others to Christ, just as Christ was willing to suffer to bring us to God.
 - (iv) If this was required of these saints of old, can we think that it would be otherwise with us? Paul prayed that he might know the power of Christ’s resurrection, as well as the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Everyone who will follow after Christ must pick up his cross and follow Him. There will always be crosses to bear, situations of suffering where we must die to ourselves to live for Christ.
- e. Noah realized that God’s judgment would soon come upon the world.
 - (i) Peter reminds his readers that the judgment of God was soon.
 - (ii) In 4:7, he writes, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”
 - (iii) If the Lord’s coming, and the wrath of God which follows, was near at hand for Peter’s audience, just think of how much closer it is for us. Nearly two thousand years have elapsed since Peter wrote this. Now we don’t know exactly how far off it is. It may happen in our life-time, it may not. But one thing is certain from the Scripture, we must be ready at all times, and we must do all that we can to get others ready for it.
- f. Christ, by the Spirit, preached through Noah to the unbelievers around him.
 - (i) The same is true of Peter’s readers, as well as of all Christians.
 - (ii) Christ is in you, if the Spirit of Christ dwells in you. And if He dwells in you, He is also at work in you.
 - (iii) Every time you do a good work, every time you share your food, every time you bear witness in the name of Christ, it is Christ working in you that produces the work.
 - (iv) The work of Christ in the Spirit to Noah is the same work that He carries on in the lives of His children today.
- g. God was patiently waiting in the time of Noah for men to repent of their sins before He brought judgment.
 - (i) In Peter’s day, it was the same. God was being patient, giving a space of time for repentance, before He brought final judgment, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its

works will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:9-10).

- (ii) God’s patience is still waiting today before bringing final judgment. He is waiting to bring in all of His elect. The only reason He has not called an end to time is for this very reason. Not one of Christ’s sheep shall perish. Everyone of those for whom He died will come in. And God will hold His full wrath back until then. There are times when it spills over and some of it is let go, as Paul tells us in Romans 1:18, but the full outpouring waits until that last Jew or Gentile is brought into the fold, and then men will cry for the rocks and hills to fall on them to hide them from the presence of the Father and of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16).

- h. Lastly, Noah was finally saved, along with his family, from God’s judgment.
 - (i) Peter reminds us here that God vindicated Noah, as He did His Son. God vindicated Christ by raising Him from the dead. God vindicated Noah by bringing the flood and by keeping him and his family safe in the ark, while the rest of mankind was destroyed. What Noah said was true. He believed it himself, and because he did, he was brought safely through the water.
 - (ii) Peter tells his readers that if they continue to suffer faithfully for the Lord, that they too will be finally saved. “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (5:10). They are, after all, “Protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:5).
 - (iii) And the same is true for you. If you persevere in the faith of the Son of God, if you pick up your cross to follow Him and do not desert Him no matter how rough things get, if you continue to fight the good fight of faith against sin and continue in season and out of season in producing the fruits of righteousness, you too will be delivered from the wrath of God.
 - (iv) The point is, you should not be afraid to do what is right, even if it means you must suffer for it. Christ suffered and was finally delivered. Noah suffered and was finally delivered. You too will suffer for doing what is good, but if you are faithful, the Lord will finally deliver you.
 - (v) The author to the Hebrews writes, “FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (10:37-39). May God give us all the grace to persevere in the faith of Christ. Amen.