

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

Introduction: If you will remember, a couple of weeks ago we were looking at the apostle Peter’s commandment to be zealous for what is good. The main purpose that the Lord saved us is that we might be a people who would show forth His works. Paul writes, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Keeping away from sin is only one part of our responsibility. Our main responsibility is to do good works. Jesus said, “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8). “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:22). Good works are why the Lord recreated us. They are what bring glory and honor to the Father as men see us doing them. And they are what testify to the fact that we are truly disciples of the Lord.

Peter then gave us two additional reasons why we should be zealous for good works. First, it is the safest way to live. He writes, “And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?” (1 Pet. 3:13). God certainly will not. Nor will He allow the devil or his demons to harm you, except ultimately for some good purpose. Nor will men generally harm you, if you are only doing good to them. And the second reason he gave was because, “Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed” (v. 14). You are blessed because God promises to reward you in heaven for your suffering. Jesus says that such a reward is great. It also helps assure you that you are truly living as lights in the world when wicked men cannot bear to see that light, and try to put it out. And so he said, do not fear, but submit to the Lordship of Christ, and be prepared to give a reason for the hope you have, with gentleness and reverence. But, he reminds us, to make sure that you always maintain a good conscience, so that when you are attacked and slandered by men, they will be put to shame because they cannot make any of their accusations stick. Peter says, “For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong” (v. 17).

And this brings us to the next section of Peter’s letter, which really ties in to what he just said. It is better, -- if such should be God’s will, if this is what He has ordained for you, -- it is better that you suffer for doing what is right, rather than for doing what is wrong. This principle he wants to further impress on our hearts by the examples that follow. First he points to Christ’s suffering in bringing us to God. He then points to Noah to show that he also suffered unjustly. And then from this, he assures us that if we in God’s providence should suffer the same, we too shall be brought safely through. And so what the Lord says to us this morning is this passage is,

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

Our text contains some of the most difficult passages in the Bible. So I would like to develop its ideas carefully, both this morning and this evening, and to refute the false ideas which are commonly held concerning it.

I. First, Peter Points to Christ to Show Us that He Suffered for Doing What Was Right. He Writes, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.”

A. Notice First that Christ Did Suffer.

1. The word in the NASB, “died”, is better translated “suffered.”
 - a. It is true that in the suffering of Christ that He died. But I want to stress that Peter is pointing to Christ as an example of suffering.
 - b. This is what Christ came into the world to do. His suffering did not start after He was arrested and subsequently crucified. Rather, it started as soon as the incarnation began. The One who was infinitely perfect and blessed, united Himself with our weak and feeble nature, and in that nature experienced everything that we experience.
 - c. But not only so, being around the sinfulness of man brought about suffering.
 - d. Just imagine having lived in the relatively sheltered neighborhoods that you live and then suddenly having to move into the inner city. You would be like righteous Lot, whom Peter said was daily tormented by the wickedness of the city. It is a very real suffering.
 - e. But, of course, His greatest suffering was on the cross, not only the excruciating pain of the nails, as the weight of His body pulled down on them, but especially the pain of separation Christ felt, as His Father laid upon Him the sins of His elect, and then turned away in divine wrath.
 - f. Christ did suffer.
2. Christ suffered once for all time.
 - a. As our high priest, Christ offered Himself up as a sin offering to once and for all remove our guilt.
 - b. He does not have to offer up daily sacrifices for sin, as the Aaronic priesthood did for the sins of the people.
 - c. He is not offered up daily in the sacrament of the Mass, as the Roman Church teaches.
 - d. But He was offered up once for all, in that which He suffered.
3. And the reason He did so was to satisfy divine justice for sin.
 - a. Christ died for sins, that is, He died to remove the guilt of our sins.
 - b. Our sins made us debtors to the justice of God. But Christ has removed that debt and made payment for them in full. And that forgiveness is yours this morning, if you are trusting in Christ for your security before God.

B. But Notice what Peter Is Saying Here. Christ, Who Was Just, Suffered for Those Who Were Unjust.

1. Notice what a perfect illustration this is of what Peter is trying to teach us.
 - a. His principle, remember, is this, “For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong” (v. 17).
 - b. Did Christ ever do what was wrong? Did He ever vary even in the slightest from

the perfect will of His Father? Of course not!

- c. But did Christ suffer? Was He afflicted by the unrighteous of the world? Yes. He suffered as much as any man ever suffered at the hands of men. He even suffered at the hands of His Father.
- d. Christ did not suffer as an evil doer. If He had, He would have only been receiving what He had deserved.
- e. But here is where the merit of His sufferings come in. His suffering was not for Himself, but for us.

2. But what kind of justice is this? The just suffering in the place of the unjust?

- a. How can we say that God is just in making Christ suffer for the unjust.
- b. Christ was just. Before the righteous and perfect judgment of God, He was absolutely blameless. No one could have brought a charge against Christ and made it stick. Christ said to the Pharisees, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46). He knew that no one could bring anything out of the past, or in the present to convict Him.
- c. But how different it is with us. Now it may not be that the Pharisees could have found something against you. Perhaps you are one of those rare individuals who was so restrained in your sin that you didn't commit any gross outward sins.
- d. But it certainly is the case that God knows your unrighteousness. You might be able to pass the justice bar of man, but not that of God's. God knows all of your sins, the sins of the past, as well as the sins of the present. He even knows the sins of your future. And if you were to stand before Him to answer for even one of your sins, even that which was imputed to you from Adam, even the least sin would cause you to be forever swept away in His judgment, as we saw last week.
- e. You who are riddled with sin; you who are not just in the sight of God. It would be just of God to make you pay. But not the just.
- f. Where then is the justice of God in Christ's death?
- g. It is because of the principle of substitution and imputation. God's justice will allow a substitute. He will not allow that sin should go unpunished. But He will allow that another might pay the penalty.
- h. And that is what Christ voluntarily submitted to the Father to undergo for His elect. The OT sacrifices foreshadowed that work of Christ. This was a gracious provision of God, a provision of substitution. A man who committed sin would bring the animal to the priest, lay his hands on the beast and confess his sins over it, and then the animal would be slain in his place.
- i. And this is exactly what Christ did. The Father laid our sins on Him, and then He took our place in the judgment of God as the just was caused to suffer in the place of the unjust in bringing us to God, in reconciling us with the Father, after sin had separated us.
- j. Peter says that the just suffered for the unjust, that "He might bring us to God."

C. And Yet, Was Christ Forever Swept Away in God's Judgment? No. In the End, He Was Vindicated by God.

- 1. He was put to death in the flesh, that is, in His human nature He died.
- 2. But He was made alive in the Spirit.

- a. He did not remain dead. On the third day, He rose again from the dead, as the Spirit of life came upon Him and raised Him up. He was made alive “by” the Spirit. This is the way the KJV renders the verse, and this, I believe, is more accurate.
 - b. This, remember, was His vindication, His justification from God, that the Father had accepted His sacrifice and that His justice was now satisfied, and His people, saved from wrath.
3. This is Peter’s first illustration, the suffering of Christ.
- a. Is it better for you to suffer for doing what is right than for doing what is wrong? You better believe it. Christ suffered for doing what is right. The Righteous One suffered in bringing us to God. And in the end, He was vindicated by God, because He was suffering according to the will of God.
 - b. When you suffer for doing what is right, Peter says that you too are blessed, for you too will be vindicated by God on that final day and receive the reward of your suffering.
 - c. What does it mean to suffer for righteousness, except that you are suffering in Christ’s place, taking the punishment which is meant for Him? And when you are suffering for Christ, do you think that He will be far from you?
 - d. The quote on the back of your bulletin really sums it up well. “The face of Jesus must be very near our own when the thorns from His crown of suffering are pressing our brow and hurting us” (Blanchard 306).
 - e. And so don’t worry when you do what is just and good in the sight of God and suffer for it. Christ did the same and was vindicated. You will be as well.
 - f. But if you suffer for doing what is wrong, you had better fear.
 - (i) If you are a Christian, the Lord is disciplining you. He will sometimes even take away the life of His child to purify you of sin.
 - (ii) But if you are not His child, it is a foretaste of His wrath. You had better fear lest you do not heed His warning and end up in hell.
 - (iii) Instead, learn what it is that He wants to teach you. Repent of your sins and run to Christ. Come to the One who stands ready to forgive and give to you an inheritance in God’s eternal kingdom, merely of His free grace through Christ Jesus.

II. And This Brings Us to Peter’s Second Illustration, of Which I Only Have Time to Break Ground on Before This Evening. He Points to Noah to Show Us that He Also Suffered for Doing What Was Right.

A. Now Here Is Where We First Move Into One of the More Difficult Passages of the Bible.

- 1. The understandings of this text are myriad. It reads, “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.”
 - a. Many interpretations of this passage have been put forth in the history of the church.
 - b. Some believe that it means that after Christ died, He went and preached to the people who were in hell, offering them a second chance for salvation. But this can’t be true since Christ never died for anyone in hell; He died to save His people from hell. Nowhere in Scripture is anyone ever offered a second chance for salvation. The author to the Hebrews writes, “It is appointed for men to die once and after this

comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). After death, your condition is final.

- c. Some believe that this passage teaches that after Christ died, He went and preached to the people in hell that He had triumphed over them and that their condemnation was final. Perhaps this is more plausible, but the Bible nowhere explicitly says that Christ ever went to hell for any purpose.
- d. Some believe that it teaches that after Christ died, He went and proclaimed release to those people who had repented just before they died in the Flood, and led them out of their imprisonment in Purgatory into heaven. We know that this is not true for the Bible nowhere speaks of any who repented during the flood, nor do we anywhere read of a Purgatory (Grudem 204).
- e. Some believe that it teaches that after Christ died, He went down into the depths of the earth to the Limbus Patrum, or Paradise, the place where the souls of men went until the death and resurrection of Christ. It was here that Christ came when He descended into the depths of the earth and led captivity captive (Eph. 4:8). Again, this is more plausible, but I believe the Bible does not teach such a compartment in hell that ever held the souls of the redeemed. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is simply showing the relationship between heaven and hell, that each of them can view the other. This increases the blessing of heaven, for the saints see what they have been delivered from and how God is glorified in the damnation of those who rebel against Him, and it increases the suffering in hell, as the damned see the saints comforted while they themselves suffer in the fire. I should also point out that Revelation 2:7 and 22:2 show that Paradise is in heaven.
- f. Still others believe that this passage teaches that after Christ died, or after He rose, but before He ascended into heaven, he traveled to hell and proclaimed His triumph over those fallen angels who had sinned by marrying human women before the flood (Grudem 204). They believe this on the basis of Genesis 6, which speaks of the sons of God going into the daughters of men, who had a mighty offspring (6:4), and on the basis of Jude 6, which speaks of the angels who did not keep their first domain, but abandoned their proper abode, being kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Though it is true that there are angels who have fallen, and that they are in eternal bonds, yet it is not true that angels can cohabit with women and have children by them. Even if they possess a man, there is nothing to say that their children will still turn out unusual, so as to make them better than normal. It is better to see the incident in Genesis 6 as the line of the godly through Seth, marrying the line of the ungodly through Cain. The children that such marriages produced were the warlords of old.
- g. There is still one more variation of this last interpretation which is held. It is that after Christ died and rose again, He ascended into heaven, and while ascending, He proclaimed His victory over the powers and authorities which are the fallen angels. He led captive His host of captives in triumphal procession in heaven. This is far more plausible than the other views we have seen so far. It is true that His work on the cross crushed the head of the serpent and defeated once and for all His enemies. It is also true that hell is not now in one locality, so that spirits who are said to be reserved in bonds are yet active in this world, even as Satan is who is now bound according to Matthew 12:29 and Revelation 20:2, and yet is still the Prince of the power of the air. It is to be understood of a partial binding. Satan is now bound so

that his house is being plundered by Christ as the Gospel goes forth. He is not allowed by God to bring about the final persecution which will lead to the final battle between the two kingdoms, immediately before Christ comes again. This is a good view, and I believe that it is very plausible.

- h. But I believe that there is still a better view, one which takes into account how this idea fits into the rest of the context. And that view we will look at this evening.