

## Standing Fast in the Grace of God

### “The Just for the Unjust”

#### *From the Cross to the Throne*

#### 1 Peter 3:18-22

In the previous section, Peter prepared believers for the possibility of suffering for righteousness' sake. He reminded us that even when we do what is right, opposition may come. He told us not to fear, but to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts. He instructed us to maintain a good conscience and to trust that if the will of God be so, it is better to suffer for well doing than for evil doing.

The question, then, arises: *Why is it better to suffer for doing good? What makes righteous suffering preferable to compromise?*

Peter does not answer that question with philosophy or sentiment. He answers it with Christ.

Verse 18 begins with the word “*For.*” That small word ties this entire paragraph to what came before it. It is better to suffer for well doing — “*for Christ also hath once suffered for sins.*” Peter now draws our thoughts from our suffering to the suffering of Christ, and he shows us that what appeared to be defeat was in fact the pathway to victory.

In these verses, we will see that Christ's suffering was redemptive, His death was not final, His resurrection was triumphant, and His authority is absolute. The pattern of righteous suffering does not end in loss; it ends in victory.

#### I. THE SUFFERING SUBSTITUTE — (VS. 18)

##### A. The sufficiency of His sacrifice

*“Christ also hath once suffered for sins”*

The word "once" (ἄπαξ) is critical here. As we saw in our study of Hebrews, this term means once for all; final and complete.

Hebrews 9:28

<sup>28</sup> So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Romans 6:10

<sup>10</sup> For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

## B. The substitution of His suffering

*"The just for the unjust"*

1. The preposition "for" (ὐπέρ) points to the substitutionary aspect.
2. Not just suffering alongside us, or suffering because of us, but suffering in our place.

2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>21</sup> For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Isaiah 53:5–6

<sup>5</sup> But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

## C. The purpose of His passion

*"That he might bring us to God"*

1. The verb phrase, "might bring" (προσαγάγη),

suggests access, introduction, presentation.

2. Salvation is not only rescue from wrath (“a fire escape from hell”); it is reconciliation to God (Heb. 10:19-22).

Ephesians 2:13

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:18

<sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

#### D. The reality of his death

*“Put to death in the flesh”*

This shows he was truly human, points to physical death, and the historical crucifixion.

#### E. The power of His resurrection

*“But quickened by the Spirit”*

Acts 2:24

<sup>24</sup> Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Romans 1:4

<sup>4</sup> And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

## II. THE SOVEREIGN PROCLAMATION — (VS. 19-20A)

*“By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah...”*

## A. The timing of the proclamation

*"By which also he went..."*

1. *"By which"* — the most immediate antecedent to the relative pronoun *"which"* is *"the Spirit."*
2. The verb *"went"* (πορευθεις) is significant. The same verb is used in verse 22 — *"who is gone..."*
  - a) The most natural reading in the context of Peter's language is that this proclamation ("preached") occurred in connection with the Spirit's work, during the time God's longsuffering waited in Noah's day.
  - b) This journey was one of confrontation. He did not just wait for men to notice Him; the Spirit went out to strive with them while the *"longsuffering of God waited."*
  - c) *"He went and preached"* — that is, Christ preached through Noah, as a *"preacher of righteousness."*

### Hebrews 11:7

<sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

### 2 Peter 1:21

<sup>21</sup> For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.

### 2 Peter 2:5

<sup>5</sup> And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

## B. The audience of the proclamation

*"And preached unto the spirits in prison"*

1. Within the context of this passage, this should be understood as "the spirits which were then, in Peter's day, in prison" — the emphasis is confinement under judgment.
2. The term "*preached*" (ἐκήρυξεν) is not to be understood as evangelical (this wasn't a second chance for salvation); it was declarative.

## C. The longsuffering of God in Noah's day (vs. 20a)

*"When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing..."*

God waited; they refused; judgment followed.

## D. The vindication of righteousness over rebellion

Noah would have appeared isolated and mocked, yet he was preserved and the rebellious were judged.

- Peter now moves from proclamation to preservation. The days of Noah were not only an illustration of judgment, but of salvation — and that salvation becomes a pattern for understanding our own deliverance.

## III. THE SAVING PATTERN (VS. 20B-21)

*"...wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

## A. The preservation of the few

*"Wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water"*

1. The word "*few*" is important here. It shows that righteousness was not popular then, and is not today. The majority perished in judgment, as they seemingly always will.

Matthew 7:13–14

<sup>13</sup> Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: <sup>14</sup> Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

2. This reinforces what I said in our last study that absence of suffering is not proof of compromise, nor is a small number proof of failure. If success was based on numbers, Noah was a failure.
3. "*Saved by water*" — they were not saved *from* water; they were saved *through* water. The flood judged the world, but it lifted the ark.

The same waters that judged the disobedient lifted the ark and carried the righteous to safety.

## **B. The pattern through judgment (vs. 21a)**

*"The like figure..."*

1. This phrase means corresponding type; antitype; pattern fulfilled.
2. Peter is not saying the flood saved Noah. He is saying the flood illustrated something about salvation.
3. The water of the Flood was the instrument of judgment for the "spirits in prison," but it was the

Ark that bore judgement for Noah.

- a) Noah's Ark, along with the Ark of Bulrushes and the Ark of the Covenant, is a type of Christ and His bearing our judgment (vs. 18).
- b) Baptism, then, is the believer identifying not with the water itself, but with the resurrection of Jesus Christ which the water symbolizes (Rom. 6:3-6).

### C. The public appeal of a good conscience

*"Whereunto baptism doth also save us..."*

- 1. Negatively: *"Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh..."*
  - a) This is a qualifying statement for the previous phrase.
  - b) This eliminates physical washing, ritual cleansing, or mechanical sacramentalism.
- 2. Positively: *"But the answer of a good conscience toward God."*
  - a) He is not describing water's physical effect.
  - b) This is the internal response of faith.
  - c) The word for "answer" (ἔπερώτημα) is a legal term (only used this once in the Greek). In ancient contract law, it referred to the formal question and subsequent "pledge" or "stipulation" that bound a party to an agreement. In other words:
    - (1) The question: "Do you believe and submit to Christ?"
    - (2) The answer/pledge: The act of baptism, which is the "answer" of a conscience made good by

the blood of Christ.

#### D. The power of the resurrection

*“By the resurrection of Jesus Christ”*

Baptism does not save because of water or with water; it saves because it unites us publicly with Christ.

- The Christ who suffered, rose, proclaimed victory, and secured salvation is now enthroned with all powers subject to Him.

### IV. THE SUPREMACY OF THE EXALTED CHRIST (VS. 22)

#### A. The ascended Christ

*“Who is gone into heaven...”*

Acts 1:9

<sup>9</sup> And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

Ephesians 1:20–21

<sup>20</sup> Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, <sup>21</sup> Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

#### B. The enthroned Christ

*“And is on the right hand of God...”*

Psalms 110:1

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Hebrews 1:3 [1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2]

<sup>3</sup> Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

### C. The subdued powers

*"Angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him"*

Peter ends here because believers facing persecution need to know their Savior reigns, that their suffering is not pointless, that their enemies are not ultimate, and that their victory is certain.

### D. The assurance of the believers

This answers the anxiety of verse 14: *"Be not afraid"* — Why? Because Christ is on the throne.

Conclusion:

This section (beginning in verse 13) began with the intent to answer a question: Why is it better to suffer for well doing? And the question is answered by pointing us to Christ.

The Christ who once hung upon the cross now sits upon the throne.

Righteous suffering is never wasted. It follows the path Christ has already walked — from the cross to the throne.

And the One who reigns now guarantees that those who suffer with Him will one day reign with Him.