

Subject: Victory in Jesus

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:18-22

First Peter was written to Christians who were suffering for their faith. They needed encouragement. They needed to know that their suffering was part of God's plan and it was not in vain. They needed to understand that ultimately they were not losers, but winners. Like Jesus who suffered greatly, they were not victims, but victors. They would not be overcome by suffering and persecution, but they were overcomers. We will look at the text under four headings.

1. Christ's purpose in suffering (vs. 18)

If He had not suffered and died on the cross, there would be no salvation. Verse 18 is one of the greatest statements on the death of Christ in the whole Bible. It includes many wonderful truths about our Savior's death on the cross.

- A. Christ's suffering was redemptive – He suffered and died for sins. He died to redeem sinners and take away our sin. This is how John the Baptist introduced Jesus at the beginning of His earthly ministry: **John 1:29** *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* He died for a reason, to pay for our sins. He paid the price of our redemption. He said, "It is finished," or the debt is paid in full. We will never appreciate the cross until we understand the awfulness of sin.
- B. Christ's suffering was sufficient – Notice the word "once." It means once for all. His death was never to be repeated because it was sufficient for all people for all time. The Book of Hebrews states this many times to make a point (*Heb. 7:26-27; 9:11-12, 24-28; 10:11-14*). All the Old Testament sacrifices of the Jews were repeated again and again. Animal sacrifices were made every day, every week, and every year but none of them took care of the sin problem. These sacrifices only covered up the problem and extended the period of grace until Jesus came to provide the perfect sacrifice. Those animal sacrifices merely covered sin, but they could not take away sin.
- C. Christ's suffering was substitutionary – He died as our substitute, the righteous one for the unrighteous. **Romans 5:6** *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.* **Romans 5:8** *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* **Corinthians 5:21** *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.*
- D. Christ's suffering was reconciling – He died to reconcile us. The goal of His sacrifice was to bring sinners into union and communion with God. When Jesus died on the cross, the Bible says the veil of the temple was torn in two, showing that the barrier was taken away and now through Christ we can be right with God.
- E. Christ's suffering was justifying – The words "made alive by the Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit and speaks of His resurrection and the results of His death. **Romans 4:25** *Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.* The resurrection was proof that God the Father accepted His sacrifice to pay for our sins and satisfy God's justice. Jesus said "It is finished" on the cross, and when Christ rose from the dead, the Father said, "It is finished."

2. Christ's preaching to spirits (vs. 19 -20)

This is generally regarded as one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament to interpret. One commentary said: “Verses 19 and 20 constitute one of the most puzzling and intriguing texts in the New Testament.” I heard a well-known speaker at a national conference preach from this text and it took him at least 20 minutes to introduce the sermon. He must have said at least three or four times that it was one of the most difficult passages in the Bible.

Here is what I understand this to mean: Christ, by the Holy Spirit through Noah at the time before the flood preached to the lost people of that day. Noah was not only a builder of the ark, but a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). The people did not listen to his preaching and did not repent of their sins and so they were all killed in the flood, and their spirits are now in hell, which is called a prison in our text. Hell is a prison for all people who die in their sins and rebellion toward God. The waters of the flood were God’s judgment and only eight people were saved by (through) water from the evil world.

3. Christ’s preservation of saints

Verse 21 refers to the experience of Noah’s family and the ark of safety as “the like figure.” That means something that corresponds to something else. It means a physical thing that refers to a spiritual thing. Peter is saying that just as 8 people were saved on board that ark and went through the flood safe and sound is like our experience of being in Christ as our ark of safety. The reference to baptism doesn’t mean that water baptism saves us. There is too much scripture that says we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Water is not our savior; Christ is our Savior. Baptism here refers to our spiritual baptism in Christ. We are spiritually united with Christ in His death and resurrection. We identify ourselves with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We have a good conscience toward God because we trust in Christ and are saved. Just as the ark saved Noah and his family through the waters of judgment, so Christ is our ark of safety because of His death and resurrection.

4. Christ’s position of sovereignty

Christ is a victorious Lord, not a defeated victim. He has been exalted in heaven at the Father’s right hand, the place of prominence, power, honor, majesty, authority, and sovereignty. His sovereignty is absolute. Nothing is outside His control. Every creature, even Satan and his kingdom of demons are subject to His authority. Other scriptures speak of His supreme position and authority, for example:

***Ephesians 1:19-21** ¹⁹ And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ 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.*

When you are suffering as the believers in 1 Peter were suffering, it helps to know who’s in control. Everything in life now and forever hinges on Christ’s authority and sovereignty. We cannot be defeated no matter how much or how long we suffer. In Christ we have the victory, whether in life or in death. To live is Christ and to die is gain. Christ has all power and all authority and since we belong to Him and we are eternally united with Him, we are safe and secure. Paul writes about our security and victory in Christ in the 8th chapter of Romans.

Romans 8:16-18, 31-39

This was the lesson Peter was teaching believer then and now. We should not be upset if we suffer trials or persecution for Christ’s sake. We don’t need to worry because we have victory in Jesus and we are “more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” We don’t need friends in high places because we have a Savior and Lord in the highest place of all.