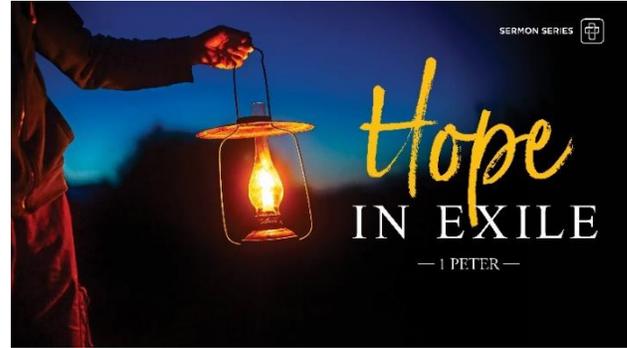


## Victory In Jesus

1 Peter 3:18-22

David Sunday July 19, 2020



Let's pray as we prepare our hearts for the preaching of God's Word in 1 Peter 3:18-22. We're going to hear the voice of our King and Shepherd addressing us through this great passage.

Almighty God, to You all hearts are open; to You all our desires are known and from You none of our secrets are hidden. We pray as we open Your Word that You would cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, so that we might more perfectly obey You and worthily magnify You through Christ our Lord. Open our eyes to see wonderful things in Your Word. Give us understanding. Transform and equip us to live for You in this world, a world that desperately needs Your light and love. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's bow in submission to the voice of our good Shepherd King, as He speaks to us from 1 Peter 3, beginning at verse 18:

*<sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup> who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water. <sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.*

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Praise Him for His Word.

Ever since I read Ron Chernow's fascinating biography of U.S. Grant, I've been intrigued by this man whose humble background was in Galena, Illinois, and who went on to save the

Union during the Civil War. He then became the President in the 1870s and did more to fight for the cause of civil rights for African-Americans than any other President in the next 100 years.

Lately, Kate and I have been watching the History Channel, which is doing a documentary on U.S. Grant. As I've watched, I'm impressed by how Grant remained so resolute while pressing through the Overland Campaign in Virginia's wilderness and losing thousands of men at the Battle of Cold Harbor. What was the source of his steely determination? How did he inspire his soldiers to persevere through the brutality of it all?

The answer was that Grant carried within him the assurance of victory. He was able to inspire those around him with his calm, steady assurance, "We shall prevail." What a difference it makes when you're forecasting victory instead of foreboding defeat. When you're studying for an exam and you're thinking, "I'm never going to pass this thing," it's much easier to give up than if you're thinking, "If I study hard enough, I can do well on this exam." When you're training for an athletic event, if you're thinking, "We will win" it's so much easier to keep pushing yourself. The confidence of victory enhances your stamina.

Sometimes when I'm running, I come to the final leg of my journey home, cross back over the Fox River and make it to that steep hill in Tekakwitha Woods. When I approach that hill, it makes all the difference in the world if I'm thinking, "I've got this," or if I'm thinking, "I could always just give up and walk"—like I was thinking yesterday in the humidity. And it makes all the difference in how you live for Jesus in this world whether you're forecasting victory or foreboding defeat. You've got to realize that being a follower of Jesus in this world is not always going to be popular.

In his book, A History of Christian Missions, Stephen Neill wrote that the first three centuries, when the gospel was spreading like wildfire, every Christian knew that sooner or later he might have to testify to his faith at the cost of his own life. Most of us probably aren't thinking about the cost of our lives these days, but we do have to acknowledge that the headwinds are getting stronger. Would it surprise you if being steadfast for Jesus brought social shaming, ostracism, economic loss or slander against you? If you've been listening to what the Holy Spirit has been saying through the Apostle Peter, this shouldn't surprise us. God calls us to live distinctive lives in this world, not blending in, but demonstrating the holiness of our Father. He also calls us to conduct ourselves honorably in this world, not withdrawing ourselves, but living in such a way that the Gentiles may see our good works and glorify God on the day He visits us. So we're not to accommodate ourselves to the culture, and we're not to withdraw ourselves from the culture. Rather, we are called to bring a blessing to the culture we live in.

Remember 1 Peter 3:9, *“Not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing.”*

What happens when we bring the blessing of Christ in word and deed? Some people will see our good works and glorify our Father on the day He visits us; other people will see Christ in us and will treat us just as they treated Him. They’ll disparage, slander and threaten us, so we shouldn’t expect better treatment than Christ received. We shouldn’t be surprised when these things happen.

Let’s go to the verse we ended with two weeks ago—1 Peter 3:17—and read it again: *“For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”* Everything Peter is saying in verses 18 through 22 is designed to strengthen us to do verse 17, to suffer for doing what is good.

We see this also in the verse that follows this passage that Brandon will be preaching on next week—1 Peter 4:1: *“Therefore,”* because of everything he’s just said, *“since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding.”* In other words, prepare yourself to suffer for the sake of Christ. Get ready. Don’t be caught off guard. That’s what 1 Peter 3:18-22 is designed to help us do. We’re going to focus on three words: journey, judgment and triumph.

## **Forecast victory, don’t fear defeat, because of the journey on which Christ is taking believers.**

These verses are here to help us in the battle to forecast victory and not fear defeat, first of all because of the journey on which Christ is leading believers. Maybe you noticed Peter is writing these verses kind of like a travelogue. He’s telling us about the journey Christ has taken and in verse 18, the start of the journey is a place called suffering.

*“For Christ also suffered,”* we read in verse 18. The One Who came into the world “to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found” suffered for doing this. The most loving, compassionate, truthful, kind and holy Man Who ever lived suffered—and He suffered to a degree no human being has ever matched.

Then as we follow Him on this journey, we cast our mind to Calvary, where Jesus bled and died for us. We see His wounds, His hands and feet as our Savior hangs on that cursed tree. Peter tells us in the middle of verse 18, *“He was put to death in the flesh...”* In the visible physical realm, Jesus was crucified. His body was bound and drenched in tears, then they laid

Him down in Joseph's tomb, dead and buried. We'll come back to this goldmine of a verse in a few minutes, but for now, let's keep moving along in the travelogue.

Peter tells us that after death, Christ was "*made alive by the Spirit.*" That's how the Christian Standard Version describes the resurrection. It was by the Holy Spirit of God, Who raised Jesus from the dead. The English Standard Version translates this, "*He was made alive in the spirit,*" with a small 's', referring to the invisible spiritual realm where Christ now lives. Both translations are speaking true theology and both are possible.

Then in verse 19 we read this interesting phrase: "*...he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.*" We're going to come back to that.

Then in verse 21, as we follow this travelogue, we see another reference to the resurrection. Then finally where it ends in verse 22, we see that Jesus "*has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.*" This is where His journey ends, with ascension, enthronement, triumph and dominion. Peter is telling us:

The head that once was crowned with thorns  
Is crowned with glory now;  
A royal diadem adorns  
The mighty victor's brow.

The highest place that Heav'n affords  
Belongs to Him by right;  
The King of kings and Lord of lords,  
And Heaven's eternal Light.

[From "The Head That Once Was Crowned" by Thomas Kelly]

Jesus has gone from suffering to glory. This is what Paul Miller calls the "J curve," descending downward into the depths of humiliation and shame, then rising upward to the heights of resurrection, ascension, universal dominion, power and glory. That's the pattern of Jesus' life—going down, then rising up.

Peter is telling us all of this because he wants us to understand that when God called us, chose us and caused us to be born again, He also enlisted us and enrolled us to join this same journey with Jesus. The journey Christ took is the journey we are also called to take. Remember 1 Peter 2:21, "*For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*"

That's the journey we are to be on right now. Jesus is our Pioneer and Guide, and we're following in His footsteps, through suffering, into glory. So for believers who suffer now for doing good, Peter is reminding them of this journey. He's telling them, "You're not alone. Jesus also suffered. He wants you to know your suffering is not the end. Jesus has gone ahead to glory. Jesus is not suffering anymore." Praise God for that! He's at the right hand of the Father, so your suffering will not last forever either.

At the end of the letter there's a beautiful verse that says, "*The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while*" (1 Peter 5:10). This journey you're on will involve a little bit of suffering, but it will end in glory. So when it's costing you something to be a Christian—when your friends despise and forsake you, when your opponents sometimes slander and abuse you, Peter is saying, "Don't lose heart. Don't resign yourself to defeat. Forecast victory, because you're following in the footsteps of Jesus. The journey He's taking you on leads to the same glorious destination where He now is."

So we are now "where Christ has led, following our exalted Head." We suffer with our Lord below; we'll reign with Him above. That's the first way Peter encourages us.

## **Forecast victory, don't fear defeat, because of the judgment from which Christ has rescued believers.**

We're going to take another look at verses 19-21, because there's a lot going on here. This is where we need to turn on our spiritual windshield wipers, because we're traveling into an area of low visibility.

Early on when I was learning to preach, I heard this maxim: "A mist in the pulpit will produce a fog in the pews." I'm sure I've produced a fair amount of fog in my days, so I've added to my preaching prayers a number of C's that I ask God to do in my preaching. The first is clarity. I pray for clarity, because if there is not clarity in the pulpit, there's going to be fog in the pews. If we listed all the interpretive options for verses 19-21, you wouldn't be able to keep up, your windshield wipers would be going crazy and we'd all be swamped in this deluge of information. So I want to focus on what's most clear, so we don't lose the clarity of what God is saying to us in these verses.

There are a number of things that are very clear that will encourage us. First, it is clear that Peter is pointing us back to the days of Noah in Genesis 6 through 9. You can see that in these verses. At the beginning of Genesis 6, we read of a sordid incident where the "sons of God"

came down and had perverted sexual relations with the daughters of men. As a result of this, human wickedness spread so greatly on the earth that God resolved to bring about the judgment of the flood on the whole world.

Now, if we flip over to 2 Peter 2:4, there are some verses that shed light on this text: *“For if God didn’t spare the angels who sinned but cast them into hell and delivered them in chains of utter darkness to be kept for judgment;”* there’s our key word, *“and if he didn’t spare the ancient world, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness...”* There’s another important phrase—Noah was a “herald” or a preacher of righteousness. *“...[A]nd seven others, when he brought the flood on the world of the ungodly.”* Skip down to verse nine: *“then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.”*

We can clearly see that in both 1 and 2 Peter, he wants us to understand there’s a relationship between the judgment God brought into the world in Noah’s day and the judgment God is going to bring into the world when Christ returns. The judgment of the flood is just a shadow of the judgment that is coming when Christ comes again. So that’s the first thing that’s really clear. Judgment is coming into the world, and Noah’s flood and judgment portrays that to us.

Here’s another thing that’s really clear: Christ has something to say to those who are disobedient. We see in verse 19 this intriguing statement: *“in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.”* Christ is proclaiming something. We know that when Noah was building the ark for 120 years, he was preaching. He was a preacher of righteousness to the people around him, calling them to repent and turn to God.

So one plausible interpretation throughout history of 1 Peter 3:19 is that when Noah was preaching, Christ was actually preaching through Noah by his spirit to those who were disobedient. If you look back to 1 Peter 1:12 about how the Holy Spirit sent from heaven was preaching through the prophets, you can see this is a plausible interpretation. Christ was preaching through Noah to those who were disobedient, now being held in a prison of eternal separation from God because of their disobedience to the word. That’s a plausible interpretation.

Another plausible interpretation, and the one I favor, is that this is speaking of something Christ did after His death in His risen state. When it says *“made alive by the Spirit”* in verse 18, it follows that Christ somehow went and made proclamation to these disobedient spirits—referring to the fallen angels who brought about so much wickedness on the earth—that

Christ proclaimed His victory over sin, death and Satan. This is the announcement of the victory of Christ the King.

There's a lot more that could be said about these verses. I listened to a great podcast this week that included a chart with all these different options I'd be happy to share with you by email if you'd like more information on it. But here's what we can say with great clarity and great confidence: to those who are disobedient to the Word of God, Christ has a message for you. You are fighting on the wrong side. Lay down your sword. Repent and turn to God, for Christ will have the victory over all God's enemies and you do not want to find yourself fighting a lost cause against Him.

We see here that sin is bondage that leads to a prison of eternal separation from God in hell. So repent and turn to Jesus, because there's another thing that's also very clear in these verses. In both Noah's day and in our own day, there is only one place of safety and rescue from the judgment that is coming into the world. God told Noah to build an ark. Now Noah was in a land-locked country, far from any body of water. God patiently waited for 120 years while Noah, that preacher of righteousness, proclaimed God's judgment and established a place of safety and refuge from that judgment. You can imagine the people taunting and mocking him as he was preaching. "You idiot. Fake news. This is all a big hoax." But no one knew that that ark was the only way anyone could be rescued from the wrath that was coming upon the world. It was the only safe place where God's judgment would not engulf you.

Isn't it exactly the same for us? There is only one ark of salvation. There is only one refuge from the judgment that is coming. Jesus is our ark of salvation. His is the only "*name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). He is the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). He is the only hope of escape from the wrath that is coming into the world.

He is a safe refuge because of what we read back in that goldmine of verse 18. Look at it once more: "*For Christ also suffered for sins once for all...*" He was a perfect, completed sacrifice that never needs to be repeated, sufficient for all who will put their trust in Him. Christ suffered for sins once for all—"*the righteous for the unrighteous*"—so sinners like us can look to Him and say, "In my place, condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood." He can now take my place at God's judgment, bearing my guilt and shame, as Martin Luther dramatically portrayed when he wrote this about when Jesus carried our identity to the cross:

Our most merciful Father...sent His only Son into the world and laid  
upon him the sins of all men, saying: Be thou Peter that denier;  
Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that

adulterer; that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief which hanged upon the cross; and briefly, be Thou the person which hath committed the sins of all men; see therefore that Thou pay and satisfy for them.

That's what He did. He suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous. Why did He do that? I love how Peter describes it: "...that he might bring you to God." The goal of Christ's suffering is to carry you safely into the presence of God Himself. Just like that ark carried Noah and his family through the flood of God's judgment, they landed on the other side and came out into a whole new pristine world that had been cleansed from sin, so when we come into Jesus and find refuge in the ark of salvation that is Him, we also will be carried through the waters of God's judgment. He will bring us home to God in a new creation, where God Himself will dwell among us, we will be His people and He will be our God. Jesus died to bring us home to God.

So how do we enter that ark of salvation? Through baptism. Look at verse 21: "*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you...*" Peter is saying there's a correspondence between the ark in Noah's time and baptism in our day. But he understands he could easily be misunderstood at this point. He doesn't want us to think he's saying we need to do something in addition to what Jesus has done in order to be saved, which he describes so beautifully in verse 18. Peter is not teaching that we need to get saved by the act of being baptized. That act does not save us. So he clarifies himself quickly. Look at what he says in verse 21 in the parentheses. "*not as the removal of dirt from the body...*" In other words, it's not the bath that saves you. It's not the act that saves you. "*[B]ut the pledge of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*"

When believers are baptized, we are declaring that we are placing our hope in the ark that is Jesus, Whose blood and righteousness cleanse us from our sins, giving us a clear conscience before God, knowing we've been solely forgiven through what He accomplished at the cross. Baptism is a physical, outward demonstration of repentance and faith in Christ. It's a graphic picture. When we were immersed under the water, it's a picture of how Jesus went under the waters of God's judgment on the cross. We are saying, "O Lord Jesus, as You go under the water, I trust in Your death for me and know that I am united to You by faith with Your death, so that the judgment You faced for my sins I no longer need to face."

When we come back out of the water, it's a picture of how Jesus was raised from the dead. We're saying to Him, "Jesus, I trust in Your resurrection as my victory over sin, death and

hell. You are giving me eternal life through Your resurrection life.” When we believe in Jesus, the first step after believing in Him should be baptism, when we pledge our allegiance to Christ and appeal to God for a good conscience through the blood of Christ. We sang about this in this favorite hymn:

When He shall come with trumpet sound  
O may I then in Him be found  
Dressed in His righteousness alone  
Faultless to stand before the throne

[From “My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less” by Edward Mote]

Have you done that? Have you gone into the ark of salvation that is Jesus? Then have you publicly declared your faith in Him through baptism? If you haven’t done that, don’t delay.

Don’t delay, because we see one more thing that’s clear from this passage. In Noah’s day, only a small minority believed—eight people in all, we read in verse 20. Only eight people were saved through the ark. Likewise in our day, it’s often true that when you look at the world around you, you feel like a very small minority. Maybe you’re the only one in your family, the only one in your school or workplace who is following Jesus. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14, *“Enter through the narrow gate”*—the gate of trusting in Jesus Christ alone. *“For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.”*

When you’re in the minority and you’re isolated, you can feel like prey for the enemy. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5 that our enemy, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Peter says, “Resist him, standing firm in your faith.”

## **Forecast victory, don’t fear defeat, because of the triumph Christ will share with believers.**

How do you do that? Well, you do that by looking at the last verse of this passage in 1 Peter 3. He closes this wonderful passage by encouraging us to forecast victory and not fear defeat by lifting our eyes to Christ on His throne, to the glory of His ascension and to His universal dominion. He’s reminding of us the fact that the triumph Christ now has will be shared with us who believe in Him. Look at verse 22: Jesus *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.”*

Peter is saying, “I want you to hear this very clearly. Your Savior has defeated your enemy. He is victorious.” That word “subject” has been an important word in chapters two and

three. We've been called to be subject to the ruling authorities, subject in the workplace, subject in the home. We're called to lives of submission. But now here at the end of chapter three, Peter is exalting the One Who sits on the throne, reminding us that all angels, authorities and powers are subject to Him. That's how you resist the devil. You look to Jesus in His power and glory. You put your faith in Him. You stand firm in the fact that Jesus is now ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father with all authority in heaven and on earth. There is no power of hell nor scheme of man that can thwart His perfect plan to complete your salvation. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever and ever.

So Satan is a roaring lion to us, but he's just a little cat on a chain to Jesus. Jesus holds the chain and we are subject to King Jesus. Satan can do nothing without His permission. Satan cannot touch you and me unless Jesus lets him, and Jesus will only let him touch us in ways that will finally sabotage Satan's designs and turn for our good, resulting in His everlasting glory. Jesus has gone into heaven, verse 22 says, and He's done that for us, because He died to bring us home to God. He's gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:104) and it is His great delight to share His triumph with us forever.

So what should we do after reading these verses? In a world where we will often suffer for doing what is good, he wants us to remember victory belongs to us, the people of God.

- Forecast victory; don't fear defeat 1 Peter 3:6, 14).
- Keep your eyes on Jesus (Hebrew 12:1-2).
- Rejoice that your Lord is King (Psalm 10:16-18).
- Adore your Lord and King (Psalm 99).
- Lift up your hearts and rejoice in Him (Psalm 64:10).
- Why? He sits at God's right hand, until all His foes submit, bowing to His command and falling beneath His feet (Psalm 18:38 Ephesians 1:20-23).
- So lift up your hearts; lift up your voices (Psalm 93).
- Again I say, rejoice (Philippians 4:4).

That's what God's Word is calling us to do today.

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