



KING'S CHAPEL

Daily Devotional - 1 Peter Study

Week 5 - Day 4

Approaching God

Take a moment to read back through yesterday's passage from 1 Peter 3:15-17 and to engage your heart over the truth of God's word. *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* Perhaps a family member, a colleague, or a friend has at some point asked about my Christian faith. What was my response at that time? Was I happy to answer? Or was I confused or embarrassed? How would I *like* to have responded?

- “. . . . *do this with gentleness and respect.*” The areas where faith touches our lives are always sensitive. And sometimes we bear scars or wounds from our pasts. In my own conversations with others, do I respect the sacred nature of this contact? Do I know how to touch with gentleness?
- “. . . *to suffer for doing good.*” Peter speaks of a reality I might like to avoid. Even if my own conduct is good, I may be misunderstood, even persecuted. Am I prepared to accept this as an imitation of Christ, who “suffered for sins”? Am I willing to leave the effectiveness of my witness in his hands, to trust him for the outcome of my efforts? Try to listen to Peter's counsel again, as one listens to the advice of a spiritual Father.

As you start your time with the Lord today, spend some time thanking him for what he has done in and through you already and ask him to inspire you with courage and readiness for the future.

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation - 1 Peter 3:18-22

Passage Introduction: Sometimes we come to a Bible passage that's very hard to understand. And when a Bible passage is hard to understand, we can make it say almost anything we want. 1 Peter 3:18-22 is one of those passages. But, if we approach this text in a spirit of prayerful humility, and establish what we know before tackling what we don't, we can make some headway toward an understanding of this passage that will encourage us to persevere faithfully in unjust suffering. That is Peter's aim in his letter, and so it's likely that these difficult verses are intended to leave us feeling further encouraged and more fully equipped to endure suffering.

1 Peter 3:17-22 - 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. **18** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, **19** in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, **20** because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. **21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Daily Study Questions

You may find it helpful to read through the commentary in “Resources for Further Study” at the end of today’s study to answer these questions.

Questions for Study

- How does the thought in 3:18 flow logically from the thought in 3:17? Does 3:18-22 continue the themes of suffering and submission that we’ve studied recently or do you think it moves onto other themes? How does the text support your answer?
- Why did Christ die on the cross? Why does Peter say “Christ also suffered *once* for sins?” Read Hebrews 10:5-14 to help you with your answer.
- In vs. 3:19, what does “in which” refer back to? Who went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison?
- Commentators offer three primary explanations for “who these spirits in prison” are in vs. 19.
 1. *The spirits are disobedient humans who lived in the time of Noah, now in hell, whom Jesus proclaimed the gospel to in between his death and resurrection.*
 2. *The spirits are disobedient humans of Noah’s day, whom Christ preached to through Noah before the flood.*
 3. *The spirits are fallen angels who stirred up the wickedness in Noah’s day, to whom Christ proclaimed His victory over sin.*

Based on your study of 1 Peter so far, which of these views seem like the best fit to you?

Questions for Meditation & Application

- How does what you understand of this passage encourage you to follow in Jesus’ footsteps?
- If Jesus has defeated the devil and announced his victory over the demonic realm, how might knowing this help Christians (including you) practically to face unjust suffering?

Close in Prayer:

Father, thank you today for this powerful reminder of Christ’s work on my behalf. And that this victory shows the power you have over all “angels, authorities, and powers” everywhere. May your ultimate authority, and Jesus’ presence with me today give me strength to share the gospel.

Resources for Further Study

1 Peter chapter 3 notes

Commentary & Notes on 1 Peter 3:18-22

A quick glance at this passage reveals that verses 18-22 are one unit that begins with Jesus' death in verse 18 and climaxes in his exaltation in verse 22. Further, "for" at the beginning of verse 18 shows us that in Peter's thinking, verses 18-22 connect to and flow from verse 17. "For" indicates a reason or ground—so verses 18-22 provide the answer to the implied question, Why is it better to suffer for doing good, than for doing evil? (v 17). Here is my suggestion for what Peter wants us to take from these verses, which is worth bearing in mind as we work through the complexities for the next few pages... Why is it better to suffer for doing good, rather than evil? Because Jesus has already walked the road marked with righteous suffering—and it was the pathway to his vindication and glory. So let's unpack these verses with this overarching truth in mind.

Peter encourages the suffering Christians in Asia Minor by reminding them that they are not alone in their suffering: "For Christ also suffered" to the point of "being put to death." Yes, we may suffer, and we may even die for our faith, but Jesus, "the righteous" one has already walked the road marked with righteous suffering and faced death himself.

So, Jesus is our example in suffering (2:21). But he is so much more than that. Jesus' suffering and death were an example for all of us to follow—but at the same time, they were also unique and unrepeatable. His suffering was "once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (3:18). Jesus is our Savior because his death was a once-for-all sin offering in which he, who never sinned ("the righteous"), satisfied the wrath of God by standing in the place of sinners ("the unrighteous") and received their punishment (he "suffered"), in order to bring rebels to God. Jesus walked the path marked with righteous suffering all the way to his death on the cross, and in doing so, he blazed the trail for us to follow. His cross opened the way to relationship with God eternally.

But Jesus' path was not merely to the cross (he "suffered"), but through the cross. Suffering and death are not the last word. Jesus was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (v 18). The key to understanding what Peter is saying is his use of "flesh" and "spirit." He uses the flesh/spirit distinction in parallel fashion in chapter 4:6. "Made alive" in 1 Corinthians 15:22 is the same as in 1 Peter 3:18. The flesh we inherit from Adam is corruptible and perishable—when we die in the flesh, our natural body is buried in the ground. But, at the resurrection it will be raised as a spiritual, incorruptible body.

All Peter is saying in 1 Peter 3:18 is that Jesus, who was born in the flesh as we are, though without sin, died in the flesh, the natural body. He was buried, as we all will be... "but" then Jesus was raised in the spirit, that is, made alive in the realm of the Spirit with an incorruptible, spiritual body.

J. Ramsey Michaels summarizes the idea well: *"If 'flesh' is the sphere of human limitations, of suffering, and of death (cf. 4:1), 'Spirit' is the sphere of power, vindication, and a new life."* The Christian hope is not that when we die we merely continue as spirit beings. No! We await the resurrection of the dead when we will receive a body that will never decay, feel pain or die. This "spiritual" body is part of our "imperishable, undefiled ... unfading" inheritance (1:4). Yes, we will

suffer, and yes, we will die. But we will also live again, for as Jesus was raised from the dead, so shall we be. Death is not the last word.

So in 3:18, Peter has traced the path Jesus blazed for us. It took him to suffering and death, and then to resurrection. Next, Peter says, Jesus “went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison” (v 19). Some see this verse as teaching that this happened between his death and resurrection. But this requires a view that Jesus’ “spirit” had died and needed to be “made alive,” which would be a strange reading, since though our bodies die, our spirits do not. The text and the context make more sense of the view that “made alive in the spirit” (v 18) refers to being raised in a spiritual body (see 1 Corinthians 15:44), so that whatever preaching Jesus did in 1 Peter 3:19 took place after his resurrection.

This still leaves us with the question: Who are “the spirits in prison,” and what did Jesus proclaim to them? Verse 20 gives us the reason for these spirits’ imprisonment: “because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah.” In the New Testament, “prison” is never used of the place of the human dead. Additionally, as Peter Davids observes: *“‘Spirits’ in the New Testament always refers to nonhuman spiritual beings unless qualified (as, e.g., in Hebrews 12:23).”* So it is likely that Peter is not speaking about humans here, because he does not qualify these “spirits” as ‘human spirits’ or as the “spirits of men” in 1 Peter 3:19. That is why I understand Peter to be speaking of fallen angels—in which case, he is referring to Genesis 6:1-4, which is likely speaking of angels (“the sons of God”) disobeying God by overstepping their boundaries, leaving heaven, taking women as their wives and having children, and which comes immediately before the account of Noah and the flood from verse 5 onwards. The Jewish tradition of Peter’s day spoke of such an event. More importantly, it is an event that appears to be referred to elsewhere in the New Testament:

- *“The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 6)*
- *“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.” (2 Peter 2:4)*

All of which means that in 1 Peter 3:19, the imprisoned spirits are fallen angels who disobeyed God in the days of Noah and, as a result, are now part of the demonic realm. In his resurrected, glorified state, Jesus “proclaimed” (v 19) his victory over these fallen angels, over that demonic realm (v 20). We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus has already defeated the prowling lion who seeks to devour us (5:8)! But Jesus was not only raised; he was exalted. He “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God,” and he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. “Angels, authorities, and powers”—again, likely to be referring to the demonic realm (as in Ephesians 3:10; 6:12)—are “subjected to him” (1 Peter 3:22). So, while this text is difficult to decipher, Peter’s message is not. It is better to suffer for doing good rather than do evil, because God will vindicate those who endure righteous suffering, just as he vindicated his beloved Son through suffering. If God is for us, who can be against us? No one—because even the demonic realm is under Jesus’ authority. In the midst of suffering, we can take heart that God is at work to sustain us in our suffering, and to bring us through that suffering to himself,