

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Triumph of Christ's Sufferings

1 Peter 3:18-22

Part Three

All of us are faced with choices. And sometimes the choice we are facing is whether we are going to do what is right or to do what is wrong. In order for us to be fully prepared to make the righteous choice Peter has given to us a very basic, easy to understand principle in **V. 17**, **“it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”**

In order for us to stay on the path of righteousness we must be fully convinced of the truthfulness of this statement. Peter, in seeking to convince us of this statement's truthfulness shares with us the experience of Christ in **VV. 18-22**.

Let us read these verses, **“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; (19) in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, (20) 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. (21) And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”**

As we have examined this passage we have seen the triumph of Christ in the midst of suffering for righteousness sake. We first of all saw CHRIST'S TRIUMPHANT SIN BEARING in **V. 18**, and then we saw CHRIST'S TRIUMPHANT SERMON in **V. 19-20**. And now we are going on to examine our TRIUMPHANT SALVATION IN CHRIST.

TRIUMPHANT SALVATION

Let us read **V. 21** **“And corresponding to that baptism now saves you -- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** It is a wonderful thing when we are surrounded by all kinds of terrible things and yet be assured of a glorious and triumphant salvation. And that is exactly what Peter is attempting to impress on the minds of his readers. The world seems so black at times for Christians who truly are seeking to live lives of righteousness. In the midst of these things there is a wonderful reality that we can continue to hold on to and that is the reality of our salvation.

Let us look at **V. 21** and see if this is not so. How does it begin? **“And corresponding to that baptism now saves you.”** Obviously there is clearly a link between **V. 20** and **V. 21**.

We know this because of Peter's use of the word “ANTITUPON” from which we get the English word “antitype.” It is this word that the KJV translates “figure” and the NIV as “symbol” and the NAS as “corresponding.”

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The question we need therefore to answer is, “What is mentioned in **V. 20** that presents a picture of what is spoken of in **V. 21**? Or in other words, what is the “**that**” referring to in the phrase which we just read?

Grammatically it could be referring to the “water” which lifted the ark or it may be referring to the entire preceding picture of Noah and his family in the ark being saved through water. I believe that the better understanding would be that the “**that**” is the entire picture. The reason is quite simple. Was it the water that saved Noah and his family? Clearly the answer would be no! The water would have destroyed their family if it were not for the ark. Therefore it would seem best for us to understand **V. 21** as follows. “**And corresponding to that**” would mean corresponding to this story of Noah and his family in the ark being saved through water “**baptism now saves you.**”

What in the world does this mean? What does Peter mean when he says, “**baptism now saves you?**” Let us first of all try and answer the question, “What does Peter mean by “**baptism?**” What are the possibilities? It could be “spirit baptism” which is clearly defined in **1 Cor. 12:13** as the act of the Spirit of God when He joins or immerses us into Christ. Or it could be referring to water baptism? So which is it?

Looking at the immediate context it would be very difficult not to believe that the baptism that Peter is alluding to is in fact “water” baptism. You have water in the immediate context just prior to this phrase and you have water alluded to again in the immediate context just subsequent to this phrase. In order to be fair in our attempt to interpret this passage correctly we would be hard pressed not to see the baptism referred to here as “water baptism.”

Therefore let us summarize what we have discovered so far “**And corresponding to that** (the picture of Noah and his family in the ark being saved through water) **baptism** (that is water baptism) **now saves you.**” SO WE HAVE ESTABLISHED THE CLEAR LINK BETWEEN **V. 20** AND **V. 21.**

HOW DOES THE STORY OF NOAH AND THE ARK CORRESPOND TO WATER BAPTISM?

Noah by faith entered the ark which protected him and his family from God’s judgment against sin which ultimately resulted in Noah and His family being delivered from a corrupt and evil world. Water baptism **pictures** something very similar. Water baptism pictures Christians by faith entering into the safety of Christ, becoming identified with His death, burial and resurrection and also looking forward to a future deliverance from this present evil world. This is how water baptism corresponds to the story of Noah and the Ark.

THIS IS HOW WE ARE SAVED BY WATER BAPTISM. NOT BY THE WATER ITSELF BUT BY WHAT THE WATER PICTURES. THIS IS WHAT PETER IS REFERRING TO WHEN HE SAYS “And corresponding to that baptism now saves you.”

In order to avoid any confusion concerning the actual role of water baptism as a sacrament Peter goes on to clarify. He clarifies it with two oppositional phrases.

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What is the first phrase, “**not the removal of dirt from the flesh?**” Baptism is not a Jewish rite of purification; such activities were well-known in both Jewish and pagan religious practices and apparently form the background of Peter’s expression. What Peter is doing here is to guard against any ‘magical’ view of baptism which would attribute saving power to the physical ceremony itself.

If water baptism is therefore not the means to cleanse us then what is the purpose of water baptism? Water baptism is the God ordained response that disciples are to give in light of their salvation which is by grace through faith. What does the NAS say? “**But an appeal to God for a good conscience.**” The KJV I believe is really the more clear translation. In the KJV it says, “**but the answer of a good conscience toward God.**”

Why do I believe this? The word “appeal” or “answer” in this clause is extremely important. It is the word *EPEROTEMA* and it occurs only here in the entire NT. Its basic meaning is “a question, an inquiry.”

Though etymologically the term might be expected to denote only the asking of a question, usage included the response as well.

In view of that question and answer usage of the noun, the translation in the KJV, “**the answer of a good conscience toward God,**” is quite acceptable. That translation makes it clear that the believer’s acceptance of baptism is his answer to the Spirit’s questions that stirs his conscience and results in his conversion. *His answer is given out of a good conscience, a conscience purified by the blood of Christ and assured of personal acceptance with God. Water baptism is the proper answer that a disciple of Christ is expected to give to the Lord after he has become a disciple of Christ.*

Let us put this altogether now. How does one become a disciple of Christ or in other words how is one saved? He is saved by faith in Jesus alone.

What does **Eph. 2:8-9** tell us? “**For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast.**”

What does **John 1:12** tell us? “**But as many as believe on Him to them gave he power to become the sons of God even to them that believe on His name.**”

What does **John 3:16** tell us? “**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**”

How is one saved? How is one who desires to be set free from their sins delivered? We are saved or delivered by transferring our trust from ourselves to Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. It is a matter of belief and belief alone.

Was Peter clear about this? Of course Peter was clear about this. In **1 Pet. 2:6-8** Peter writes these words, “**For this is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and He who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.’ (7) This precious value, then is for you who believe.**”

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But for those who disbelieve, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone,’ (8) and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the Word, and to this doom they were also appointed.” Peter understood as clearly as all the other writers of scripture that salvation was by grace through faith alone.

If Baptism is not necessary for salvation is it important at all? Let me ask you another question. What are those who have believed in Jesus to do as an expression of their faith? They are to be what? Baptized. What does **Matt. 28:19** tell us **“Go therefore and make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”** They were not baptized in order to become disciples but all disciples were to be baptized. Do we see this actually taking place in the early church? Yes. Time after time after time we see those who had believed were baptized. In fact baptism became what? Baptism became the outward visible manifestation to the world of that person’s union with Christ. This was no accident this was designed by the Lord to be exactly that.

In **Acts 2:37** after the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost it says the people were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, **“Brethren, what shall we do?”** And what did Peter say, **“Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** Did baptism save them? No! But obviously it was unthinkable to Peter that those who by faith had just become disciples of Christ would not be willing to declare it publicly through baptism.

If there is an unwillingness to be baptized as an outward testimony to what has taken place inwardly it raises the question of whether or not there has been a genuine profession of faith.

“And corresponding to that (The picture of Noah and his family in the ark being saved through water) **baptism”** (water baptism, the visible expression of the inward reality of our union with Christ) **now saves you.** (Not the sacrament itself but what the sacrament symbolizes) **“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** **“Not the removal of dirt from the flesh** (it is not a magical bath). **“But the answer of a God conscience toward God”** (but rather baptism is a proper outward response to the inward work of the Spirit in our hearts).

VV. 18-22 are filled with triumph. We first of all examined triumphant sin-bearing, then we examined Christ’s triumphant sermon, and now we have seen Peter alluding to our triumphant salvation which is dramatically manifested in a very tangible and visible manner in water baptism. And now he comes to **CHRIST’S TRIUMPHANT SUPREMACY.**

TRIUMPHANT SUPREMACY

Let us read **V. 22**, **“who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”** This glorious final note of triumph. Who is at the right of God? Jesus. All throughout the OT and on into the NT the seat at the right hand of God is the seat of highest preeminence. The right hand of God is a place of strength. The right hand of God is the place of authority.

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And He took this place of authority only after what had been done? “**After angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.**” When Jesus came into this world and took on a human form He came under the onslaught of the spiritual forces of darkness and this is the group I believe that is specifically in view in this passage. But after His resurrection He ascended again to His rightful place and there is no one there that has power over Him. He sits on the throne of power.

1 John 4:4, “Greater is He who is in you than he that is in the world”

CONCLUSION

Do we have anything to fear from this world or the forces of this world? And the answer of course, is of course not!

Just as Noah and his family were brought safely through the waters of judgment in their wooden ark. We also will be brought safely through the waters of judgment whether that judgment comes from the heavens above or from the earth below because we are safely joined to our ark who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we are going to live righteous lives we must be convinced of this that “**It is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.**” Hopefully as we have been examining the experience of Jesus and seeing His triumphant SIN BEARING, HIS TRIUMPHANT SERMON, HIS TRIUMPHANT SALVATION, and HIS TRIUMPHANT SUPREMACY we will purpose ourselves to follow in His footsteps fully convinced in our minds that we are doing what is best.