

# Christ Suffered – And Was Exalted!

I Peter 3:18-22

**<sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.<sup>1</sup>**

We have come to what most scholars consider to be the most difficult verses in the New Testament. How should we understand Christ's spirit being made alive? Who are the spirits he preached to and what message does he announce? We will also have to discover how these answers connect to those who lived thousands of years prior when Noah lived.

These questions are difficult to work through, but not impossible. On the other end of what I pray to be a faithful interpretation of the text is a glorious principle to hold on to. Christ, though he suffered in the flesh, is exalted over every angel, authority, and power. His triumph over evil is our hope that suffering for good will not lead to gloom. The end is glory.

In the aforementioned verses Peter draws on the example of Christ as an encouragement to Christians who struggle with suffering for doing good.

## The Ministry of Jesus Christ (vv. 18-19; 22)

- A. Christ suffered for the unrighteous to bring us to God
  - a. Christ was the just one, but he was treated unjustly
  - b. Peter has already mentioned he died as a substitute
    - i. ***1 Peter 2:24*<sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.<sup>2</sup>**
  - c. He died once for sins
    - i. ***Hebrews 9:24-28***
    - ii. The suffering of Christ is unique in that his suffering is unique and definitive
- B. By the power of the Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead and proclaimed victory over the spirits
  - a. Various interpretations on this phrase, "being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit"
    - i. Some view the two nouns, flesh/spirit as referring to sphere so the text would read, Jesus was put to death in the flesh and made alive in the spirit.
      - 1. They would argue Jesus died in his body but lived in his spirit or a spiritual realm.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 3:18–22.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 2:24.

- ii. Others view the two nouns as agency, that is to read, Jesus was put to death by human means (flesh) and made alive by the Spirit.
    - iii. The better choice is to see the nouns as functioning differently (the first is reference and the other is agency)
  - b. To better understand, we should see Peter contrasting death and resurrection.
    - i. Being put to death refers to the death of Christ, while being made alive refers to the resurrection of Christ.
    - ii. The verb is used this way throughout the New Testament
      1. ***John 5:21, For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.***
      2. ***Romans 4:17, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.***
      3. ***Romans 8:11, If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.***
      4. ***Ephesians 2:5, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—***
    - iii. Peter is not imagining Jesus living in some space between death and life...instead he is picturing the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
      1. The message for the readers is clear. Even though Jesus suffered death in terms of his body, the Spirit raised him from the dead. Similarly, those who belong to Christ, even though they will face suffering, will ultimately share in Christ's resurrection.
- C. He is exalted and every angel, authority, and power are subjected to him.
  - a. Again, we need to wrestle with several interpretations on the phrase, "in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison"
    - i. Augustine – Christ is preaching through Noah in the Old Testament
      1. Christ preached through the Spirit in Noah's day and the spirits are those ensnared by sin who ultimately rebel and are drowned
    - ii. Christ liberates Old Testament saints who have died between the time of his death and resurrection.
    - iii. Christ descends to hell to preach the gospel to those who died during Noah's day to offer them the opportunity to repent.
    - iv. Christ proclaims victory and judgment over the evil angels.
      1. ***Genesis 6:1-4, When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.***
  - b. Most scholars lean toward the 4<sup>th</sup> view.

- i. spirits refer to angelic spirits and not human spirits
- ii. The word prison corresponds to Satan's imprisonment (Rev. 20:7).
- iii. Gen. 6:1-4 provides the reason for their punishment
- iv. Standard interpretation in Jewish literature.
- c. Christ's proclaims victory over the angels
  - i. ***Colossians 2:15, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."***
  - ii. Why some evil angels and not all?
    - 1. Some argue the evil spirits in Gen. 6 represent all evil spirits
    - 2. Ultimately, this remains an unanswered question.
  - iii. The reference calls to mind ***Psalm 110:1, "The Lord says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make all your enemies your footstool.'"***
    - 1. ***Jesus uses this verse to refer to himself...Matthew 26:64, "Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."***

### The Ministry of Noah (vv. 20-21)

- A. Lived during a time when people were extremely disobedient to God
  - a. Jesus describes the days of Noah and suggests the day of his return will be similar
    - i. ***Matthew 24:37-39, For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.***
- B. Had a ministry of proclamation
  - i. Noah is not measured by results; he is measured by faithfulness.
    - 1. ***Hebrews 11:7, 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.***
- C. Small remnant was saved
  - a. Here scholars find another interpretive problem.
    - i. Some see the number 8 as symbolic
      - 1. This can hardly be the case because Peter is literally thinking of Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives (8 total)
    - ii. What does it mean for them to be saved through water? (instrumental or locative?)
      - 1. Water is the means God used to rescue them from the evil world and, at the same time, punish those who refused to accept
  - b. Typology reference
    - i. The flood waters brought physical death and Baptism brings spiritual death
      - 1. ***Romans 6:3-5, Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ***

*was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

**2. Mark 10:38-39, Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,**

**ii.** God used the ark in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, God used the cross

### Our Present Predicament

- A. We should expect trouble to come as a result of living among the unrighteous
- B. Suffering does not exempt us from doing good
- C. Evil will not ultimately triumph over good