

Alive in the Spirit

1 Peter 3:18-22

Do you ever feel that life is unfair? Do you ever think that believing in Jesus is a waste of time because you see other people that don't care about God, the church or others that seem to be doing just fine, without a care in the world? Do you ask yourself is it worth it to be careful in your behavior, in your prayer-life, in your stewardship of time, resources and talents. Do you think sometime that it is the good that suffer and those that do evil are the ones that have an easy time of it. In the scripture that we just read Peter presented Jesus Christ as the perfect example of one who suffered unjustly, and yet obeyed God. In the previous verse Peter wrote about suffering for doing good rather than for evil-doing; and then he gave the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the "just One" (Acts 3:14), who was treated unjustly, so that He could die for the unjust ones and bring them (bring us) to God! He died as a substitute (1 Peter 2:24), and He died only once (Heb. 9:24–28). This was a contrast with the Old Testament yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. Jesus' death was completely sufficient to reconcile people to God.

Although Jesus' sinless life provoked the unjust hostilities of evil men, He did not fear men but trusted Himself to God. Christ clearly stated His purpose and committed Himself to a course of action. He died in humankind's place (2:23). In other words, Jesus suffered for doing good; He did not die because of His own sins, because He had no sin (1 Peter 2:22). Because of His work of dying for our sins on the cross, we now have forgiveness of our sins and we have an open access to God (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). We may come boldly to God's throne! (Heb. 10:19ff) We also have access to His marvelous grace to meet our daily needs (Rom. 5:2).

Although Jesus was put to death on the cross, he was made alive in the spirit and because of him we are made alive in the spirit. Jesus had a real body (Matt.

26:26), soul (John 12:27), and spirit (Luke 23:46). He was the true God-Man. So on the cross, he suffered and died. His body was put to death. But His spirit was made alive and He yielded it to the Father. Because of his sacrifice, we too are made alive in the spirit as we yield ourselves to God.

In the midst of Peter's explanation of Jesus dying for us when we were unrighteous he tells us about Noah and how his family was saved through the waters of the flood. Peter compares their experience to our baptism which represents a complete break with our past life. As the Flood wiped away the old sinful world, so baptism pictures our break from our old sinful life and our entrance into new life in Christ. Peter pleased with his readers and us to have the courage to commit themselves and ourselves to a course of action by taking a public stand for Christ through baptism. This was because early in Christian history many waited and were baptized on their deathbed. But Peter taught the act of public baptism would "save" them from the temptation to sacrifice their good consciences in order to avoid persecution. For a first-century Christian, baptism meant one was following through on their commitment to Christ, regardless of the consequences. Peter knew what it was like to be persecuted for the sake of the Christ. He endured prison, beating and ultimately death.

Baptism is not merely a ceremonial act of physical purification, but (*alla*, making a strong contrast) the pledge (*eperōtēma*, also translated "appeal") of a good conscience (*syneidēseōs*; compare v. 16) toward God. Baptism is the symbol of what has occurred in the heart and life of one who has trusted Christ as Savior (cf. Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12), and trusted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (compare 1 Peter 1:3).

Jesus yielded His spirit to the Father, died, and the Father raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 6:4; 8:11). It was a miracle! It is because of His resurrection that we Christians have the “living hope” (1 Peter 1:3–4), and are alive in the spirit. And it is through our baptism we are made alive in the spirit.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ declares that He is God (Rom. 1:4), that the work of salvation is completed and accepted by the Father (Rom. 4:25), and that death has been conquered (1 Thes. 4:13–18; Rev. 1:17–18). The Gospel message includes the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1–4), because a dead Savior can save nobody. It is the risen Christ who gives us the power we need on a daily basis for life and service (Gal. 2:20), to be alive in the spirit.

In this scripture Peter gave us more good news. Peter had spoken about the wicked men, who were disobedient and corrupt in the days of Noah; who were ultimately destroyed. But in the destruction by the flood eight people—Noah and his wife, his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their wives—were brought to safety in the ark. Not only were Noah and his family saved, but we are saved and baptized by trusting in Jesus and his sacrifice, bringing us safety through the water. In this passage Peter has three great things to say about baptism. First baptism is not merely a physical cleansing; it is a spiritual cleansing of the whole heart and soul and life. Its effect is on a person’s very soul and whole life.

Second Peter calls baptism the pledge of a good conscience to God (verse 21). In every business contract there was a definite question and answer which made the contract binding. The question was: “Do you accept the terms of this contract, and bind yourself to observe them?” And the answer, before witnesses was: “Yes.” Without that question and answer the contract was not: valid.

Peter is, in effect, saying that in baptism God said to the person: “Do you accept the terms of my service? Do you accept its privileges and promises, and do you

undertake its responsibilities and its demands?” And in the act of being baptized the person answered: “Yes.”

Third, the whole idea and effectiveness of baptism is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the grace of the Risen Lord which cleanses us; it is to the Risen, Living Lord that we pledge ourselves; it is to the Risen, Living Lord that we look for strength to keep the pledge that we have given.¹

It was the understanding of Peter that Jesus also descended to the underworld and preached to the spirits of persons that lived before Jesus came to earth and completed the work of our salvation. Some scholars believe that Jesus only preached to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah; meaning that no one is outside the mercy of God. They were the worst of all sinners, but they were given another chance of repentance; therefore, the worst of persons still have a chance in Christ. Other scholars argue that Christ preached only to those who had been righteous and that he led them out of Hades into the paradise of God. They believe that Christ's sacrifice opened the gates of heaven to humankind; so when he went to Hades and told the glad news to all the righteous people of all past generations he led them out to God. Therefore because of Christ, there is now no time spent in the shadows of Hades and the way to paradise is open as soon as this world closes on a Christian.

Because Christ descended into Hades, it means that his triumph is universal. This, in fact, is a truth which is ingrained into the New Testament. It is Paul's dream that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth (Philippians 2:10). It is at the name of Jesus that we are made alive in the spirit.

¹ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters of James and Peter*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 236

Because Christ descended into Hades and preached there, there is no corner of the universe into which the message of grace has not come. There is in this passage the solution of one of the most haunting questions raised by the Christian faith—what is to happen to those who lived before Jesus Christ and to those to whom the gospel never came? There can be no salvation without repentance but how can repentance come to those who have never been confronted with the love and holiness of God? If there is no other name by which men may be saved, what is to happen to those who never heard it? This is the point that Justin Martyr gave long ago: “The Lord, the Holy God of Israel, remembered his dead, those sleeping in the earth, and came down to them to tell them the good news of salvation.” The doctrine of the descent into Hades conserves the precious truth that no person who ever lived is left without a sight of Christ and without the offer of the salvation of God.

Peter then reminds his readers that forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, the place of joy and honor (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:34–36; Phil. 2:5–11; Heb. 12:1–3). We as believers are seated with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:4–6), and through Him we are able to “reign in life” (Rom. 5:17) and be alive in the spirit. Jesus is now ministering to the church as our High Priest (Heb. 4:14–16; 7:25) and our Advocate (1 John 1:9; 2:2). He is preparing a place for us, His people (John 14:1–6), and will one day come to receive us to Himself.

But the main point Peter wanted to emphasize was Christ’s complete victory over all “angels and authorities and powers” (1 Peter 3:22) (Eph. 6:10–12; Col. 2:15). As Christians, we do not fight for victory, but from a position of victory—

the mighty victory that our Lord Jesus Christ won for us in His death, resurrection, and ascension.² Therefore we are alive in the spirit.

Peter concludes by reminding us that Christ was rewarded and blessed because of his sacrificial death. Peter had witnessed Christ's physical Ascension (cf. Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:6-11), and wrote that Christ has gone into heaven. The reward for Christ's faithfulness was His exaltation over all things. He is enthroned at God's right hand (cf. Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2), the seat of supreme honor, to rule and reign over all creation (cf. Col. 1:15-16; 2:14-15).³

This includes us, for as we trust in him we are made alive in the spirit and empowered to live life to its fullest. Amen.

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 3:18

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:850