

# POLISHING THE PULPIT

Polishing the Pulpit began with three friends getting together to brainstorm sermon ideas. We soon invited other friends, and someone said, "This is great! We should tell others."

We adopted this platform to help brethren in South Africa with best tools of Bible Interpretation, we welcome everyone's input, we scrutinize it, accept it, refine or reject it. We intend to hold the first Annual Conference in 2024 in order to teach and reach more people and brethren. Polishing The Pulpit (PTP) is not sponsored by any church and will not be at any point in time. We are individual brethren who wish to study the bible diligently with many others.

Now, with consideration of this passage, we must agree that we may not easily see eye to eye, but eventually we will do.

**We now that 1 Peter 3:18-22** is considered by many to be the most difficult passage to interpret. There are numbers of different interpretations that have been given about these verses. As we study the text, it is important that we **make sure we do not come out of the context**. These verses have been lifted from their context which brings about many of the different interpretations we encounter. Let us look at the verses surrounding this controversial text and see if it gives us some clarity about where Peter is going.

**For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:17; ESV)**

Remember that Peter has been talking about how we handle suffering to the brethren in regions of Asia and Surroundings see Chapter 1:1. Peter has been talking about suffering and how they should handle it. We know that Peter is still on this topic in verse 18 of chapter 3 because the verse begins with the word **"for."** We will come back to this in a moment. Let us look at chapter 4 and verse 1 and notice the topic of discussion. **Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking... (1 Peter 4:1; ESV).** The topic continues to be suffering. So we are couched between these two bookends concerning suffering. Unless Peter has taken a total detour and tangent from the topic, we can safely assume that 1 Peter 3:18-22 is also about suffering.

**18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. (NKJV)**

**18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, (NIV)**

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So the topic is suffering and that this seen as verse 18 begins, "For Christ also suffered once for sins..." When suffering, do not forget that Jesus suffered. Jesus suffered, but not because of anything he had done wrong. **He suffered to deal with our sins. He did not suffer because of his own sins. Jesus is the righteous. He suffered because we are unrighteous and needed our sins atoned.** It is worth pointing out again that this text does not explicitly teach substitution. The point is simply that Jesus died on our behalf. He did it for us. The purpose of Jesus' suffering us to bring us to God. Sin separates us from God. We cannot spend eternity with God with our wickedness attached to us. We are separated and Jesus died to deal with our sins so that we could be brought to God through his suffering. **The connection is that Jesus suffered for doing good and we will also suffer for doing going. First Peter 3:16 reminds us that we will be reviled for our good conduct.** Jesus endured the same thing. But before we can have a pity party for ourselves we must remember that Jesus did this for us. Before we think we are going through so much, let us never forget what Jesus has done for us. I think this is the purpose of Peter's instructions here. We will suffer for doing the will of God. But never forget that the One we follow also suffered for doing the will of God and that suffering was for us. In fact, he was put to death for us. He was put to death and raised from the dead so that we would be reconciled to God.

Now this is where interpretations veer all over the place. Some teach that between the time of Jesus' death and resurrection he went to the realm of the dead and preach to Noah's contemporaries. Jesus either preached the gospel to save their souls or proclaimed the good news that he had been victorious. But there are just volumes of problems with this viewpoint. Allow me to point out just a few of these problems.

- The scriptures do not teach anywhere that salvation can be obtained after death. Jesus himself in Luke 16 taught that there was no ability to change one's eternal destination after death.
- Why would Jesus preach only to Noah's contemporaries? Are there not billions more that would have needed to hear the gospel?
- If Jesus only made proclamation about his victory, why was this victory proclamation only made to Noah's contemporaries who are lost? So Jesus did not after his death but before his resurrection preach to the dead who lived at the time of Noah but drowned.

Another view is that Jesus preached to fallen angels. The "spirits in prison" are understood to be disobedient angels. But we again have the problem of the scriptures never teaching anything to this effect. **Further, the writer of Hebrews tells us that salvation is not extended to angels, but only to humans (Hebrews 2:16). Jude 6 tells us that disobedient angels are in everlasting chains awaiting judgment. There is no opportunity for salvation of disobedient angels.**

I previously understood this text to be saying that Jesus proclaimed victory to those who had died. The problem is: why? Such a concept takes Jesus and places him in the selfish act of saying, "I won," to those who have clearly lost. Again, we still have the problem why this declaration would only be made to those who were Noah's contemporaries. **But let us go back to the original theme: what do these teachings have to do with suffering? How does this information help the reader who is suffering for doing good? Even if these interpretations have merit, the problem is that these interpretations only work outside of the context but do not fit the flow of Peter's**

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instructions on how to deal with suffering for doing good. So what is Peter teaching?

What we have done is missed the focus of the text. We have become so consumed with the meaning of the spirits in prison and Jesus' proclamation that we have missed how suffering fits into Peter's point. Do you think Noah had a life of suffering? The scriptures declare him to be a preacher of righteousness. He lived in a day when the thoughts of humanity were continually wicked. Only eight people were saved from God's judgment. Noah went around preaching to people to repent of their sins and warned them that it was going to rain so much that the earth would be flooded. It had never rained that much on the earth before. How much ridicule did Noah endure? How much mockery came his way year after year as he built an enormous boat to keep animals and people? Day after day, month after month, and year after year for 120 years, Noah and his family are building a large boat to save the world from a flood. Christ was preached through Noah to those who chose to be disobedient. I submit to you that this is the simplest way to understand the text. Jesus went and preached to those disobedient in the days of Noah through Noah himself and only eight believed. Peter used this language earlier in 1:10-12 where Christ spoke through the prophets about suffering and the subsequent glories.

Now, in 1 Peter 3, how did Christ preach to the spirits in prison? "By the Spirit" (note: "...by the Spirit; by whom also He went and preached..." – verses 18,19). So, Christ preached to the people in Noah's day by the Spirit. But the Spirit of Christ was in the Old Testament prophets (see 1:10,11). And one of those prophets was Noah, a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). So, when Noah preached to people, the Spirit of Christ was in him, and was preaching to people through him. So, Christ, by the Spirit, went and

preached to the people through the preaching of Noah. It's just that simple! If you note Ephesians 2:17-18 which says Christ preached peace to Jews and Gentiles who were in Ephesus. But Christ Himself was never personally in Ephesus during His lifetime. Yet He preached to them through the Holy Spirit who guided the apostles and prophets who preached to them (see Nehemiah 9:30). Note also Genesis 6:3 in which, shortly before the flood, God said His Spirit had been striving with those evil men. So, in this way and at this time, Christ was preaching to these people by the Spirit. **Now when did this preaching in these verses occur? "When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared" – verse 20.** So, when Noah preached to these people while the ark was being prepared, **that is when and how Christ, by the spirit, preached to them. The preaching referred to here was done, not after these people died, but while they and Noah were alive before the flood actually occurred.** In what sense were these people "spirits in prison"? Every person who is guilty of sin, is spiritually a bondservant of Satan, even while he is alive on earth see John 8:34; Romans 6:16; 2 Peter 2:19; 2 Timothy 2:26. So the people, who were disobedient in Noah's day, were at that time spiritually in prison to Satan. **When Noah preached to them, Christ, by the spirit, was preaching to spirits who were at that time prisoners of Satan. Nothing here says the people were taught the gospel after they died.** And to hold such a view contradicts many other clear Scriptures. (Note that it could be that Peter is saying these spirits had been preached to past tense referring to Noah's day. But that they were in prison in Peter's Day, present tense. Either this explanation or the one given above would fit the truth.)

When Jesus died, He did not go to the place of torment but instead went to paradise Luke

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24:43 (same as Abraham's bosom in Luke 16:19-31). And since there was a great gulf between the two, He was not in the place where the wicked were. The passage could not mean that Christ personally taught wicked people after He and they had died, simply because He was never in the place where they were. **So, as the passage says, Jesus taught them by the Spirit (through Noah),** and He taught them in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared.

The passage also does not say that anyone will now or in the future preach to dead men to give them a chance to be forgiven. If these spirits of people who have died could hear and believe the gospel, and repent of sins, why could they not also be baptized.

So notice the picture: Jesus suffered for our sins unjustly because he was innocent. Though killed in the flesh he was delivered by God when he was raised in the Spirit. Noah suffered as a preacher of righteousness. Though he suffered, he was delivered from the destruction of the earth by flood through the ark. Peter's focus is on the fact that Noah preached but they disobeyed and only a few were delivered. But they were delivered despite the suffering endured.

**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, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:21-22; ESV)**

Baptism corresponds to this deliverance. Baptism is not just external washing. **This is an important statement. Baptism is not a mindless act. Baptism has no value as an**

**action without the heart. This is not a ritualistic or ceremonial act.** I believe we have made a grave mistake over the last 60 years or more. In our effort to teaching the importance of baptism since it is neglected by most of the denominational world, we have overemphasized baptism. Our effort is not to get people wet. Our purpose is not only baptism. Too often baptism is seen as the end result. **But just as much as faith alone does not save, neither does baptism alone save.** God has asked us to be changed people living in the holiness of God, exercising the fruit of the Spirit. If baptism was all that there was for us to do, then the scriptures did not need to be so lengthy. **So let us be clear that baptism is not ritualistic. Just because you are immersed in water does not mean that you are saved. There is nothing special in the water, the preacher, the words, or the church. So what is important? What is the point of baptism? What are we doing when we are baptism and how does baptism save us if it is not through some ritualistic sacrament?**

Carefully examine Peter's words: **Baptism is the appeal to God for a clean conscience. In baptism we are appealing to God, pleading with God, and begging God to cleanse us and erase our sins. We are asking him to cleanse our consciences and give us a new life in him. This is our heart appealing to God as we are submitting ourselves to his will. We are asking for deliverance. We are asking for salvation.** Baptism is how we make that appeal to God's grace for forgiveness. Baptism is how we call on the name of the Lord. Baptism alone does not save. Ritualistic, ceremonial baptism is not in view. Once I am convicted of my sin and I realize that I need salvation from my sins, I then need to appeal to God for mercy, pleading for forgiveness. Baptism is how that appeal to God's grace is made. All of this is based on the resurrection of Jesus (v. 21-22). **We have deliverance because Jesus died and was raised from the dead. This salvation is not**

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based on our righteousness or our deeds, but because of Jesus' righteousness and Jesus' deeds. Baptism is how we ask God for his grace.

**Conclusion:**

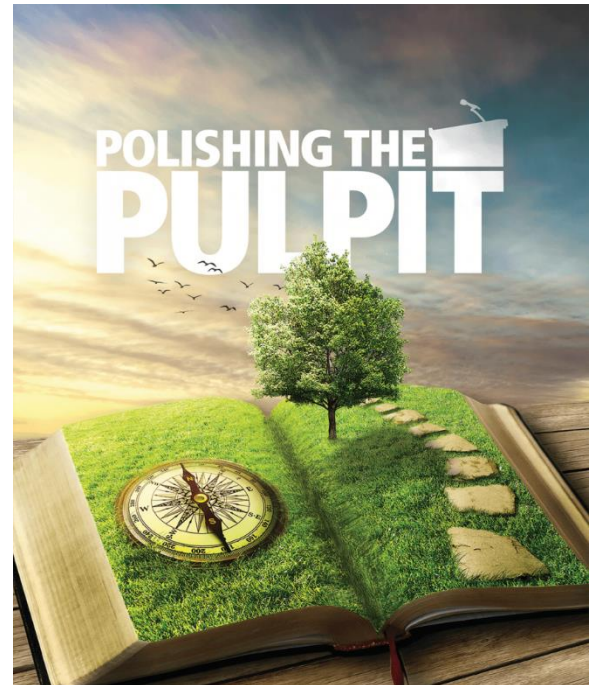
Notice how it all fits together. **These Christians are suffering for doing good. Peter has told them to continue to do good even in the face of such adversity.**

In verse 22, we see that Christ has gone into heaven at the right hand of God, angels and the powers being made subject to Him. Having died and been raised to make salvation possible, Jesus then was raised to God's right hand (Hebrews 1:3). There angels, are subject to Him (see Ephesians 1:19-23; Matthew 28:18).

What is the connection between verses 18-22 and the context? Peter had said we must be willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. He said that Jesus suffered for us to make our salvation possible, so we should be willing to suffer for Him. This means we must stand up for Him in times when people oppose God's will. In Noah's day, people were wicked, yet Jesus through Noah defended the truth to them (verse 15 to verses 19). In the end, God spared Noah, and so will spare us if we have obeyed the gospel in baptism. After suffering, Jesus became victorious despite the opposition and so will we.

**Work Cited**

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Thank you