

1 Peter 3:18-4:19

INTRODUCTION

We left off last week with v. 18 of chapter 3 and a passage of scripture that many argue is *the most difficult* in the entire NT to interpret and understand.

So let's pick it up at that point and start our study tonight with a bang!

CHAPTER 3

Whenever faced with a passage that's a challenge to interpret, remember first of all to check the context.

What's Peter's *main theme* here?

Well, we know from our previous studies that he's telling his readers *how to cope with suffering*.

They're already under a measure of persecution and he knows it's only going to get hotter.

So he's been urging them *not to resist* and become hostile and aggressive in the face of persecution but to remain humble and submissive to the Lord's guiding hand.

Though man may be the *agent* of persecution, they need to see that above and beyond man, is God turning what man means for evil to their good – because all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are the called according to His purpose.

As Christians, they're to follow Jesus' example, and Jesus shows the power of suffering for doing good.

So He says . . .

¹⁸For 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,

It was *through* the passion of Christ, through the deep hostility and hatred of men against the Son of God that our redemption was made possible.

Jesus is the perfect example of suffering for doing good.

He was the Just One who suffered for all of us, the *unjust* ones - and the purpose of it all was to *bring us to God*, to restore our

broken relationship with Him. ^[1]

If God could turn the most evil act of all time to good, how much more the lesser evil God's people endure?

But Peter makes several profound points here when he says that Christ suffered once for sins.

1) There is no longer any sacrifice, any atonement that can please God.

Even our own suffering won't pay for our sins because the

price has already been paid. ^[2]

2) The ancient Greek word translated "bring" was used "of admission to an audience with the Great King." ^[3]

It spoke of *privileged access* – of the honor of having a prolonged audience with someone of great worth, rank, and influence.

In Romans 5: 1-2 Paul says,

¹Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

In Ephesians 2:18 Paul writes -

Through [Jesus] both [Jews & Gentiles] have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Peter's point is that since Jesus has died to gain us access to the Father, it's unthinkable that we wouldn't take advantage of that access to enjoy fellowship with God.

One of the questions I like to ask when leading a small group is – If you could spend an hour with anyone, one hour to just hang with them, talk, ask questions, be their intimate for one hour – who would you choose?

Through Christ, we have access to unhindered, unlimited fellowship with no one less than God!

3) Finally, Peter says that Jesus was "put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit"

In Romans 6:4 we read that the Father raised Jesus from the

dead.

In John 2, Jesus says that He will raise Himself.

And here it's the Spirit who raised Jesus.

The conclusion? It was the Trinity that was involved in the work of the Resurrection.

We read on now about the work of the Spirit -

19by 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.*

Here is where we get into the difficulty in sorting out just what Peter is saying.

He's speaking of things that are only *hinted at* in shadowy form in other passages.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus lay in the tomb for *three days*?

What happened to Him between the time He expired on the cross and the resurrection on Sunday morning?

We know what happened to His body;

It was taken down from the cross, hurriedly and inadequately wrapped up by Joseph of Arimethea and Nicodemus and then placed in Joseph's family tomb not far from the site of the crucifixion.

There it lay until changed on Sunday morning.

But what happened to Jesus' Spirit? Where did it go?

Peter tells us – He went and preached to the spirits in prison.

Peter uses idioms here that would have been readily understood by the people of his day.

Hades, or the *afterlife*, was understood to be like a spiritual prison from which there was no escape.

Peter tells us that Jesus went and preached to the inmates of Hades.

This lays out an important truth we ought not miss: If Jesus

went to Hades, then His death was no sham. [\[4\]](#)

The theory that Jesus merely swooned on the cross and then

was taken down and revived cannot be true since Jesus went in the Spirit to the abode of the dead.

This means that Jesus identified totally and completely with humanity in that He died!

Also, if Jesus went to Hades, it means that his triumph is *universal* and there is not one place in *all creation* that has not been conquered by His victory.

This is why Paul writes in Philippians 2:10 -

At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

In Rev. 5:13 every creature in heaven, on earth and *under* the earth sings a song of praise to God.

And in Ephesians 4 where Paul refers to the same thing Peter is speaking of here, we read

⁹(Now this, “*He ascended*”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

¹⁰He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

The location of Hades was seen as being “beneath” the earth while heaven was thought to be “above.”

Of course, ancient peoples didn’t really think of these as *physical* locations but as dimensions of reality.

So heaven was *above* because it was a *higher* reality while the abode of the dead was considered *beneath* the earth because it was a shadowy existence where personality was submerged under a continual state of sorrow.

Peter’s point is that Christ’s victory is universal and complete. Another thing this passage reveals is that there is *no corner* of the

universe into which the message of grace has not come. [\[5\]](#)

There is here a solution to one of the most haunting questions to confront the thinking Christian – What happens to those who lived before Jesus and those to whom the gospel never came?

Very simply, there can be no salvation without repentance, but how can there be repentance when the message of God’s

love and holiness has not been communicated?

There is NO OTHER NAME by which a person can be saved than the name of Jesus Christ – so what about those to whom that name is not preached?

A complete and detailed answer to that question is *not* given in scripture, but this passage hints at a larger truth that may comfort us.

Jesus went to Hades to declare the facts of His life, death, and coming resurrection to the spirits kept there.

If the plan and the purpose of God are so complete as to deal with this detail of the destiny of those who died *before Christ came* we can be confident that in His infinite justice, mercy, and grace, God will ensure that in some way, each person will come face to face with the issue of their sin and the redemption that is to be found only in Christ.

The *how* of that, we will have to leave in the capable hands of God.

But now we are faced with another question – just who is Peter referring to here when he speaks of the “spirits in prison.”

Are these demonic or human spirits?

He says that their disobedience was in *the days of Noah*.

The description of those days in Genesis 6 paints a harrowing picture of a demonic human alliance that had the potential of overthrowing God’s Plan of Redemption.

In fact so dangerous was this unholy alliance between the demonic and human that the only solution was the flood.

The question is - Why would Jesus *preach* to these imprisoned spirits?

This *preaching* wasn’t *evangelistic* so much as it was a declaration of *judgment* and *condemnation* upon those who had rejected the preaching of Noah.

It took Noah and his sons a hundred years to build the ark and the entire time they were announcing the doom of the human race unless there be repentance.

The first phase of that doom came in the form of the flood – the final phase of that doom came in their condemnation to remain in Hades and finally to be cast into the Lake of Fire because of their rejection of Noah’s message of

repentance and then Christ's message of repentance. Peter then makes a transition from those who are *condemned* to those relative few who will be *saved*.

The 8 souls refer to Noah and His wife, and his 3 sons & their wives.

They alone of the entire population of the earth were saved from the judgment of the flood.

And just as Noah's salvation from the judgment of God was connected with *water*, so the Christian's salvation is connected with the water, the water of *baptism*.

The water of the flood washed away sin and wickedness, and

brought a new world with a fresh start before God. [\[6\]](#)

In the same way, the water of baptism washes away the filth of a lost life and results in the impartation of a new life in the Spirit.

Peter elaborates on this . . .

2¹There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 2²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

Peter doesn't want anyone to think that it's the actual water of baptism that saves us.

The crucial issue is the spiritual reality *behind* the immersion in water.

What really saves us is the answer of a good conscience toward God, a conscience made good through the completed work of

Jesus. [\[7\]](#)

Then Peter completes the whole scenario of what happened after Jesus went to those spirits in Hades – He rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, in the position of both rest and favor.

In this final position – He is the pre-eminent power and authority in all heaven and earth!

Don't lose sight of Peter's main thrust in all of what he's said here – Jesus suffered for doing good, and God used it for our salvation and has vindicated Jesus before the eyes of the entire universe by establishing His throne over all.

As we faithfully follow in Jesus example, we can leave the issue of our vindication and final exaltation to the hands of God, who has promised us that as we overcome – He will grant that we will sit with Him on His throne, that throne that over-rules in all things. [Rev. 3:21]

CHAPTER 4

¹Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind,

Jesus suffered because He identified with righteousness and truth.

The fact is, ALL who seek to live godly lives in this fallen world will likewise suffer.

In 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul says –

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

What's a bit disconcerting is to realize *where* this persecution of the godly often comes from; it often arises from religious people!

Who were Jesus' moist vociferous opponents? The scribes and Pharisees.

Who persecuted the first disciples? The Jewish religious leaders!

Who did Paul have the most problem with? The Judaizers – ultra-religious Jews!

Throughout church history, it's been the established church which has been most brutal in oppressing and persecuting those groups and sects which recognized abuse and sought to reform it.

Peter is saying here that if Jesus faced opposition, and He was perfect in holiness, we need to steel ourselves with the mindset that following Christ means facing opposition, and oftentimes from the very people we would expect would be supportive of us.

¹Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ²that he no

longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Peter is *not* saying that if a person has suffered persecution it's a sign they've arrived at a state of sinless perfection or that they're never tempted with the things of the flesh.

What he means is that a person who's incurred the world's hatred to the point where it would lash out in violence is likely to be the kind of person whose lifestyle is uncompromising in its posture toward the world.

It's this commitment to holiness that the world loathes and seeks to do away with.

Also, the person who suffers persecution for the sake of Christ is almost always profoundly *changed* in their outlook on sin and the lusts of the flesh.

For it's in the midst of suffering for Christ that one experiences the power and presence of God in a way like no other.

It's only the grace of God that allows one of His people to endure suffering and when one finds him/herself in the throes of it, God gives a double-portion of His strength and presence.

Those who are physically persecuted more often than not give the testimony that in the midst of their agony and pain, the presence of God was so sweet, so tangible, that it more than compensated for the discomfort they endured.

They come away from these times with a whole new perspective on life and on temptation.

³For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

What an apt picture of the wanton lifestyle of the world:

Lewdness refers to outrageous moral filth.

Lusts is an insatiable craving for that which in the acquiring only inflames MORE desire.

Drunkenness is more than the state of being inebriated; it's the Friday Night pursuit of getting snocked.

It's that mentality so prevalent in the world that the weekend is for partying and for getting as loose as possible through

wine or drugs.

A *Revelry* was a group of men & women who were drunk but not so far gone that they couldn't still walk.

As a group, they would go out with torches, dance through the streets and sing drinking songs together.

As they wandered along, they would get into all kinds of mischief, vandalizing property and engaging in all kinds of behavior that disturbed the peace.

Drinking parties is another word for revelries, but it carries the idea of the complete breakdown of morality so the people seek for an excuse to do things they would never do when they were sober.

Abominable idolatries is the final expression of this kind of drunken lifestyle in which a person violates the last restraints on the sense of morality and engages in all kinds of perversion. The reason Peter uses the word idolatries here is because many of these abominations were done as an act of worship of some deity.

They included bizarre sexual practices and even ritualistic murder.

4In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation [wastefulness], speaking evil of *you*.

As Christians, they had repented of all that – and now, the people they used to hang with who were into that stuff, are speaking EVIL of them!

They are into the very worst kinds of things imaginable, but they criticize the followers of Christ and refer to them as “evil.”

Woe to the culture that calls evil good and good evil!

And yet, this is precisely what we find today!

Pornographers condemn Christians for seeking to warn people against pornography and for exercising a measure of protection for young children.

Christians are given the evil label – censor!

Just this week I read an article how the LAUSD has approved outright pornographic material for junior and senior high schools to encourage the promotion of homosexuality in the

schools!

You may have heard the report about the mayor back east who made a formal resolution to reject and renounce the influence of Satan in the life of her city.

For this proclamation, she was attacked by several civil liberties legal groups and told she had to issue an apology and make a formal statement recognizing Satan.

In his book *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, Robert Bork chronicles how in our age, evil is called good and good is labeled as evil. So, what should we do in the face of such an upheaval of right and wrong?

5They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

We must go on doing what is right, regardless of what they do. They will have to answer to God, not us.

6For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

Peter has already told us that Jesus preached a message of *judgment* to the spirits in prison.

Here he tells us that Jesus also preached a message of *salvation* to the faithful dead in Hades who looked forward by faith to the coming Messiah.

In Luke 16 Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

Lazarus was a poor beggar who sat at the gate of a rich man begging crumbs from those who passed by.

While Lazarus was poor, he was righteous; while the rich man was godless.

They both died at the same time and were ushered into the afterlife – Hades.

But they found themselves in different compartments in Hades.

The rich man was in a place of unbearable torment while Lazarus went to a place called Abraham's Bosom.

Abraham's Bosom was a place of rest and peace, a place where the spirits of the faithful dead went to await the work of the Messiah paying the sin debt of the human race.

You see, no one could enter heaven till the cross – so those who looked in faith to the promise God had made to send His Son to atone for the sins of the world and had lived a life of hope and expectation for that atonement went to Abraham’s Bosom.

After Jesus’ death and before His resurrection, He went into Hades and preached to both compartments; a message of judgment to Hades and a message giving body and substance to the hope of those in Abraham’s Bosom.

Once they heard the truth of the Cross and the work of Christ on their behalf, their formerly shadowy faith was given real content, and they were liberated from Hades into Heaven.

This is why in Ephesians 4:8 we read that when Jesus ascended, He led captivity captive.

He took the righteous dead in Abraham’s Bosom to heaven, fulfilling what He said He would do in the synagogue of Nazareth as He began his public ministry when he read from the scroll of Isaiah – that He would *proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*.^[8]

7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

We often speak of the “last days” and many people get excited in studying Bible prophecy as it relates to the last days.

But we need to understand that in the Bible, the Last Days began with the ascension of Christ.

When we speak of the last days, we mean that final few years before Jesus comes again, but the Bible means the entire time from His ascension to His return because it is the *last epoch* of human history.

Peter is reminding us here that the wrap up, the conclusion, could come at any moment – no one knows the day or the hour of Jesus return, so we need to live as though it could be today!

If you knew Jesus was coming tonight at _____, what would make sure you were doing when that moment came?

Whatever else you might say – if you’re a genuine believer, you’d

say you want to be in intimate and sincere communion with God!

8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

Love is the chief fruit of the Holy Spirit and without love, as Paul says in 1 Cor., 13, everything else is an empty sham.

If we maintain an attitude of serious and attentive prayer toward God and fervent love and devotion to one another, we have all the bases covered.

When Peter quotes Proverbs 10:12 and says that “*love will cover a multitude of sins*” he doesn’t mean that love will “excuse” sin or that if you have a lot of love it will compensate for shortcomings in other areas.

He means that fervent love will choose to let a lot of petty stuff go and not be an irritation.

None of us are perfect and we do lots of things that annoy others.

If we lack love, these annoyances can build to the point where we end up really disliking others.

Love chooses to believe the best about people – it hopes all things, endures all things, and refuses to keep a record of wrongs.

Friend, if you’re easily annoyed – it’s a sign you lack in love.

9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

One of the most obvious and necessary out-workings of genuine love is hospitality – of opening one’s life & home to others.

Real relationships require an *investment* and hospitality simply means that you open yourself to make yourself vulnerable to others by letting them see beyond the surface into how and where you live.

Being hospitable without grumbling means that when people take what you offer, you don’t resent it or murmur about it.

I’m reminded of the story of the man who invited someone over for dinner, and when they took seconds, complained that the roast usually lasted a week and was used for sandwiches.

If you’re going to open your home and offer others comfort, don’t be upset when they take it.

10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one

another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

This is an important word and one all of us needs to hear and heed.

Peter reminds us that every Christian, every born again follower of

Jesus Christ has been given a gift to use in service of others!

Those gifts aren't given to sit on – they must be used!

In His grace, God has dealt to each and every one of us some special calling and the gifts needed to fulfill it.

We must discover those gifts, cultivate them, and then put them to work.

11 **If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

If your gift is to teach, preach, prophecy, or exhort – then make sure you are faithful to speak out what the Lord tells you to say, and no more or less.

If your gift and calling is to acts of service, which is what the word “ministry” means, then serve through the enabling grace and strength of the Spirit, that others might be blessed and God would be glorified.

There is implicit in Peter's instructions here the urgent call to God's people to not turn their gifts into that which would elevate their own name at the expense of God's glory.

It's sad when the gifts of God are perverted into a platform for someone to promote themselves.

I am always a bit leery when I see someone gain success in teaching or preaching or some ministry in the Body of Christ and they form an organization and attach their name to it.

The John Smith Evangelistic Society – the Bob Summers Ministries, or whatever.

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may give glory to your Father in heaven” – not glory to you!

12 **Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you**

partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

As we've already mentioned, Peter addressed this letter to Christians who were already enduring a measure of persecution, but now he tells them it is going to heat up and become really fierce.

When it comes it must not shake them or cause them to doubt God's love and providence.

Rather, they need to see that it marks and identifies them as Jesus's followers.

And for this – they can rejoice.

There's a subtle piece of irony here that we might miss –

Remember when Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die?

It had *once seemed strange* to Peter that the Messiah should suffer such a fate.

But now, here's Peter telling them not to think it strange that they should suffer for Jesus's name's sake!

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

Peter repeats what he's been saying all along – to be a follower of Christ means to face what Christ faced – the hatred and hostility of the world.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

There are lots of things a person can suffer for and here Peter reminds them that if they're going to suffer let it be for something *positive* and not something that deserves punishment, like murder, theft, being a lawbreaker, or even someone who meddles and seeks to stir up trouble.

16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Physical persecution can actually be an easier thing to endure than humiliation and shame, which is the form of persecution that is

much more common.

Peter says, when you're persecuted for being a Christian, don't be ashamed and back-pedal – instead, turn the temptation to feel shame into rejoicing and giving God glory that He is at work in and through you!

We don't glorify God *for* suffering.

But we do glorify Him *in* suffering, and we glorify Him for what He will accomplish in us and through us *with* the suffering.

17 For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

18 Now

Here Peter quotes Proverbs 11:31 -

“If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

The judgment of God has two ends, two results:

- 1) For the Christian, God's judgment leads to *purifying* and *reward*.
- 2) But for those who reject Christ, God's judgment results in *condemnation* and *loss*.

The fiery trial that comes on God's people purifies them and burns away the dross, leaving only the pure and precious metal of God's love and truth.

But the lost will face an *eternal fire* that does nothing but bring torment!

The same fire that consumes straw purifies gold.

The fire is the same, but its *purpose* in application is different, and its *effect* is different upon the straw and the gold.

Even so, Christians do suffer some of the same things the ungodly do, yet the *purpose* of God is different, and the *effect* is different. [\[9\]](#)

Right now, God's attention is focused on the Church and He bends all of history to prepare it as the spotless bride for His Son.

His judgment has begun with us – to *perfect* us.

But soon He will take the Church out of the world and will then wrap up history and bring about the day of final judgment.

If the way of salvation is narrow, only as wide as the Cross of

Christ, then what hope do those who reject the cross have?
Absolutely none!

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to *Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

The word “commit” is a technical word used for leaving money on deposit with a trusted friend.

Such a trust was regarded as one of the most sacred things in life, and the friend was bound by honor to return the money intact.

It’s the same word Jesus used when He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”^[10]

When Christians “commit their souls to God,” they leave their souls in a *safe* place.

God is a “faithful Creator,” and we can give ourselves to Him as pliable clay in His hands trusting that He controls the spin of the table, and the tools He brings to bear to shape us into the image of Christ.

^[1] Guzik, David

^[2] ibid

^[3] Blum

^[4] Barclay, William, pg. 242

^[5] ibid, pg. 242

^[6] Guzik, David

^[7] ibid.

^[8] Isaiah 61:1 & Luke 4:18

^[9] Guzik, David

^[10] Luke 23:46