

October 26, 2025

1 Peter 3:18-22

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

Scriptures for further study:

1 Peter 1:10-11

Colossians 2:15

“The implication of the connection between 3:17 and 3:18 is that even if a Christian were to suffer to the point of unjust martyrdom for the sake of Christ, such suffering is both purposeful and victorious because death is not the final word. Christians follow in Christ’s footsteps through death to victory.”

-Karen Jobes

“Peter does not mean that Christ descended to the souls of the dead to preach, but that he was in the time of Noah a proclaimer of the grace of God... For though Christ had not yet appeared in the flesh, yet he possessed the same power then as now, and he was always the one Mediator through whom God was reconciled to men.”

-John Calvin



Grace and Suffering, Part II

1 Peter 3:18-22

BIG IDEA: Since Jesus emerged from the waters of tribulation and death through His glorious resurrection, let us look to His victory as we patiently endure the sufferings of this life.

OUTLINE

1. Jesus’ Suffering
2. Jesus’ Preaching
3. Jesus’ Coronation
4. Our Response

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. In our modern era, why is suffering so often regarded as abnormal, unjust, and meaningless—something to be eradicated, medicated, or evaded—rather than embraced as a vital, formative force in life?

2. In verse 18, Peter grounds our winsome suffering in Christ’s unique work. What is it about Jesus’ work in this verse that motivates winsome suffering together? Why should this lead to blessing others instead of keeping score?

3. Verses 18–22 have puzzled commentators. How did Christ preach to “spirits in prison”? One popular view is that Jesus descended into hell, where some evildoers from Noah’s time were kept, and preached the gospel to them, giving them a second chance at salvation. However, the text refers to “spirits,” which, when used in the plural, is typically reserved for angels. Read Jude 6 to determine who the spirits in prison are.

4. Refer to verses 20-21. How does Peter illustrate the parallel between Noah’s flood—where the waters served as both divine judgment on the ungodly and the means of safe passage for Noah’s family in the ark—and Christian baptism today, where those waters symbolize God’s wrath against sin while offering believers refuge and salvation through union with Christ, the ultimate ark who bears the punishment on our behalf?

5. Read verse 22 and refer to the sermon point “Our Response”. How does the exaltation of Christ—at the right hand of God, where He reigns with fullness of joy, glory, and power to gather, defend, and intercede for His church—invite us to respond to our own suffering not merely as an intellectual truth from His life of suffering, preaching, baptism, and ascension, but as a transformative call to live boldly, equipped with His gifts and graces, even amid trials?

“Christ is exalted in His sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man He is advanced to the highest favor with God the Father, with all fullness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and does gather and defend His church, and subdue their enemies; furnishes His ministers and people with gifts and graces, and makes intercession for them.”

-WLC, 54

“The spirits in prison are best understood as evil angels, whom Christ, by his resurrection and exaltation, triumphed over and proclaimed his victory against.”

-Francis Turretin

“Peter ascribes saving power to baptism only in so far as it is the sacrament of regeneration and faith... He guards against all misunderstanding by pointing out that its efficacy is not physical, but spiritual, resting in union with the risen Christ.”

-Louis Berkhof

“The resurrection and ascension are not mere appendices to the work of Christ; they are its crowning acts. In them, the history of redemption attains its goal. Exaltation is the open declaration of Christ’s lordship and the guarantee that his people share in the heavenly life.”

-Geerhardus Vos

“Because Jesus is risen and exalted, everything sad will come untrue, and because he is seated at the right hand of God, there is no situation over which he is not sovereign. His exaltation means our future is utterly secure.”

-Tim Keller

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Peter’s Day, suffering was universal and inevitable, and was interpreted either as fate, divine punishment, or an opportunity for virtue. It was something to be mastered, endured, or philosophically neutralized. In our day and age, suffering is viewed largely as abnormal, unjust, and meaningless, something to be removed, medicated, or avoided rather than embraced as a formative part of life. - Pastor Bill

After addressing different types of people in the church, particularly in relation to authority, Peter discusses how we should behave as a corporate community. Calling us to unity, charity, and humility, he lays the groundwork for our collective witness amid a hostile society. - ESV Knowing the Bible

Praise to Jesus – We praise God for Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice and victorious resurrection. We praise God that in Jesus Christ and through His suffering, we have been brought back home. We praise God that just as Jesus’ suffering was purposeful, so too are our sufferings not random.

Repentance through Jesus – We repent for those moments when we’ve looked more intently at the victories of the world or even our own miniscule victories instead of the victory of Jesus. For those moments when we have allowed the sacraments to become rituals instead of grace-infused reminders of our union with Christ, our identity in Him, and the spiritual nourishment to endure the hardship of life in Him and for Him.

Consecration for Jesus – Let us renew our baptismal identity—and live as those already raised with Christ as those who are more than victorious through the truly victorious One.

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. What does verse 18 teach us about the result of Christ's death for our sin and unrighteousness?

(We read that His death for our unrighteousness brings us to God. The holy God cannot be in the presence of sin and unholiness. Therefore, we needed a Savior to take our punishment for our sins and give us His righteousness.)

2. Peter uses the example of Noah and the ark in this week's passage. What does Peter want us to understand with this use of the example of Noah?

(We are meant to see that the ark protected Noah and his family from God's judgment through the floodwaters. Therefore, the salvation we have through Christ's grace alone by faith in Christ alone protects us from the righteous judgment of God on sin. To say it more simply, the punishment for our sin will be paid by us or by Christ.)

3. What is used in a Christian baptism? What is the symbolism in baptism?

(We use water in baptism. The water is a sign of our need for cleansing. In other words, because of our sinfulness, we need Jesus to wash us clean or to forgive our sins. This means that in baptism, we acknowledge God's righteous judgment on sin as well as acknowledge the salvation we have in Christ. Point out to your children that in verse 21, Peter wrote that it is not about the "removal of dirt from the body" with water. Baptism points us to and reminds us of our need for forgiveness found only in Jesus.)

4. Pastor Bill talked about "Our Response" in his last sermon point. This is a great opportunity to talk to your child about what it means to profess faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This profession is best summarized by Jesus when He proclaimed, "Repent and believe the gospel" in Mark 1:15. To repent means to confess our sin and to ask the Holy Spirit to turn us away from our sinful ways and turn us towards Jesus. To believe the gospel means that we trust in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to save us. If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Ken (kenc@fpcrome.org).

Scriptures for further study:

2 Corinthians 5:21

Matthew 28:18-20

Titus 3:4-7

FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Isaiah 53:3-6

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Romans 6:3-5

Titus 3:4-7

Hebrews 12:2-3

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

1. What does verse 18 teach us about what Jesus accomplished through His suffering? How does Jesus' suffering impact our suffering?

2. Why do you think people today often treat suffering as something to avoid at all costs? What are some ways you've seen people (even Christians) try to avoid or numb hardship? Think about how people react to discomfort, criticism, or failure. How does the gospel give us a different view of hardship?

3. Peter compares the floodwaters in Noah's day to Christian baptism (vv. 20–21). What does this teach us about what baptism represents? How is Jesus like the ark that carried Noah's family to safety? The flood was judgment, but the ark saved them. In baptism, we see that Jesus saves us from God's judgment—not by washing dirt off but by uniting us to Him

4. According to verse 22, Jesus is now reigning at the right hand of God—with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to Him. How does this help you trust Him even when life feels chaotic or unfair? He's not just a Savior who suffered—He's a King who reigns. That means He has the power to use even our pain for His purposes.

5. How does this passage remind you of your union with Christ — that His death and resurrection are now your death and resurrection? How does that change the way you think about suffering, identity, and victory? When we're united to Jesus, His victory becomes ours. That doesn't mean life is easy, but it means we suffer with Him and in Him—and we will rise with Him too.

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. This passage provides a powerful description of the gospel: that Jesus died once for all, that he paid the penalty for our sins, that he became our substitute, dying in our place and bearing the punishment we deserved, and that he was raised from the dead. (This is exactly the same as what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:1ff—that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised to life on the third day.)

Question: This is the gospel. Do you understand the gospel?

2. This passage not only proclaims the gospel but also calls upon people to believe the gospel and so be saved. When Peter refers to the water of baptism that saves us (v.21), he is not referring to the water itself but rather to the inward cleansing and forgiveness of our sins. Moreover, he is picturing us as passing through the waters of judgment, being given new hearts, and raised to new life in Christ.

Question: Do you believe the gospel? Would you like to receive these amazing gifts? Would you now seek out a Christian believer to help you take this life-changing step of faith?

3. God, through Noah, preached a message of repentance before the coming judgment (flood). So also do we believe that there is another coming judgment, and that people must repent before that day, while God is still patient (see 2 Peter 3:9).

Ponder: If you are not yet a believer, the Bible urgently warns you to get right with God (repent and believe in him) while you still have time.

Question: If you are a believer, how might God use you (like Noah) to boldly and lovingly urge people in our generation to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, even if some people are hostile, and even if it sometimes feels like so many people are indifferent?

4. Peter says, “Jesus was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit” (v.18). His temporary suffering here gave way to the enjoyment of his eternal inheritance in heaven.

Question: Given the difficult circumstances faced by Peter’s original audience, and by many Christians today, how might such a message be of encouragement?

5. If Jesus died, was raised, then ascended, and now “sits at God’s right hand” (v.22), it suggests that he has completed his work, he has been given all authority, and that he is worthy of all praise.

Question: Do you understand Jesus to be your Savior and your supreme Lord? Are you giving him all praise as your Savior? Are you giving him all honor as your Lord? Are you willing to allow Christians to explain things better to you and listen to their defense?

Living Hope: How God's Glorious Grace in Jesus Shapes and Empowers Us by the Spirit to Live with Gospel Grit in a Foreign Land.



Daniel in the Lion's Den by Briton Riviere, 1872

About the Artist: Briton Rivière, a British painter known for his animal paintings, particularly those featuring dogs and wild animals with deep emotion and dramatic flair, came from an artistic family. His father, William Rivière, was a drawing master and art teacher. Rivière initially studied at the University of Oxford, drawn to literary and historical themes, but later developed a fascination with animals and became renowned for his ability to imbue them with emotional depth and narrative presence.

About the Artwork

"Daniel in the Lion's Den" (1872) depicts the biblical story with lifelike lions, a popular and symbolic theme in Victorian England. It explores faith under trial, divine protection, and moral strength against tyranny, themes that resonated with Victorian audiences during a time when Christian values and moral courage were emphasized.

In Riviere's painting, Daniel's calm, unarmed demeanor symbolizes absolute trust in God. His gaze suggests prayer, hope, or spiritual communion, not fear. He represents the righteous man steady in the face of evil. The lions, though fierce, are subdued, a miracle of restraint. Riviere doesn't show angels or supernatural intervention; the restraint is invisible, spiritual. Some lions are relaxed, others alert, suggesting the tension between nature and divine command. Each lion has a distinct personality, reflecting the mystery of creation. The focused light on Daniel recalls God's presence in darkness. The murky den symbolizes the unknown, death, or temptation, yet Daniel remains untouched. Unlike dramatic biblical scenes, there's no movement or violence. The silence emphasizes Daniel's victory through trust, countering 19th-century action-heavy storytelling with a meditation on spiritual endurance.

1 Peter and Daniel in the Lion's Den

This painting, based on a biblical scene, helps us understand the overall theme of the New Testament letter. 1 Peter teaches Christians that as God's elect, they are called to live holy lives of faithful witness, enduring suffering with hope rooted in God's grace, while embracing their Gospel identity as a holy, royal priesthood in a hostile world. Like Daniel in the Old Testament, we are strangers in a distant place. Jesus told his disciples and us in the Gospel of John that we are "not of this world." Hebrews reminds the church that "this world is not their permanent home." Even within 1 Peter, God's people are called "sojourners and exiles."

Like Daniel, the darkness of this broken, sinful, and fallen world is always present. While we may never face a physical lion, Peter's first letter tells us that our enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, and the spiritual forces of evil are ever present. Yet, like Daniel, we must face the opposition with a Gospel poise, knowing that which is unseen is more powerful than what is seen and against us. Peter uses the language of "standing firm" in God's grace as we encounter all forms of darkness.

Church, may we see the beauty of 1 Peter in its overall message: God's glorious grace leading us to Gospel grit as sojourners in a dark world. But may we not just perceive its beauty but also embrace God's unique calling in these words: stand firm!