

1 Peter 3: 18-22 Christ, Noah and Baptism

Peter's writing to first century Christians who are beginning to face opposition for being Christians. So far it is mostly verbal. Sometimes, when we suffer, we deserve it. But when you do what's right and people turn on you, that's undeserved suffering. And that is the context of what Peter writes here.

Christ Also Suffered: v18 says: 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.' Before Christ's death Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about His death. Twenty years later, Christ's death isn't something Peter's ashamed of. It's something he glories in. And in one verse (v18) Peter summarises the gospel:

1. He says 'For Christ *also* suffered'. That means you have got a saviour who is able to sympathise with you. He has been where you are.
2. Then Peter says 'For Christ also suffered *once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous.*' That's the substitutionary atonement. Christ has paid the full price for your sins. When you go through hard times you are tempted to ask whether God is punishing you. No, He's not. Christ has paid your debt in full.
3. 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God.*' Once you were a million miles from God, but in the cross, Christ takes away everything that stood between you and God and brings you near to him. When you go through suffering you can feel like God is a million miles away again. He's not: Christ has brought you near.
4. The fourth thing Peter says of Christ is that he was *put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.* Death wasn't the end. Christ has been vindicated. When you go through hard times, you may not see victory this side of glory. Things may not work out the way you hope. But just as Christ was vindicated so will those be who put their trust in Him.

Noah Endured: There are, broadly, 3 interpretations for v19-20. **Version 1:** The spirits are dead people in Hades and Christ preaches to them between His death and resurrection. **Version 2:** The spirits are fallen angels in Hell and Christ preaches to them between His death and resurrection. **Version 3:** Christ preaches through Noah to the people alive in Noah's time, but who are now dead and whose spirits are in Hades.

If it is Noah Peter means that would encourage these Christians (and us) because 1. it doesn't matter that you are in a minority (like Noah). 2. Because when in the midst of difficulties you begin to wonder whether God will ever fulfill His promises, it's not God being indifferent, He's just patient. 3. Christ was with Noah and speaking through him, even when people weren't listening, as He is with you.

Baptism: an appeal to God: v21 baptism 'saves' us by being the outward expression of what Christ has done in our lives. We are saved by Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism symbolizes that. But it is also an appeal and a pledge to God. When we face suffering we can look back to our baptism and say 'that is physical evidence of what God has done in my life'. It's the marker in the ground that says nothing can be done to me that will separate me from Him.