

Persecuted for Righteousness; Hades and Baptism (1 Peter 3:13-22)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Background

- a. Peter's first letter focuses a great deal on suffering. He says we should not be surprised that we suffer in various trials. Throughout his letter, he touches on several different types of trials that Christians face.
 - i. We will be refined through trials; they can produce a positive end result.
 - ii. The life of Jesus consisted of suffering in His life, followed by glory. If we are following Him, we should expect to see the same.
- b. Peter has addressed the subject submission quite a bit in this letter.
 - i. Citizens need to honor the king and be subject to the governing authorities.
 - ii. Slaves need to be subject to their masters.
 - iii. Wives need to be submissive to their husbands.
- c. He also spoke about the fact that we need to be leading righteous lives if we want God to heed our prayers.
 - i. Husbands need to treat their wives in a considerate, understanding way, or their prayers will be hindered.
 - ii. Peter also quoted from **Psalm 34**, where David said, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."
- d. Peter now continues his discussion of our need to persevere in doing what is good toward all, even to the point of suffering.

II. Suffer for Doing Good

- a. Read **1 Peter 3:13-17**.
- b. Peter's logic here:
 - i. Peter starts by asking a question.
 - ii. **Peter's Rhetorical Question:** "Who will harm you for becoming a follower of what is good?"

1. **Implied Answer:** While plenty of people will harm you for doing bad things, there are also *some* who will harm you for doing *good things*!
- iii. Peter says we should do the following when we are badly treated by others:
1. *First*, make sure that we are suffering for doing what is good (not being persecuted for doing *bad things*!)
 - a. Make sure you have a clear conscience and that there really is nothing wrong that you are doing toward someone else.
 2. *Second*, *don't be afraid* of those who are threatening us or treating us unfairly.
 - a. We need to fear God only and not be afraid of any people.
 3. *Third*, remember that if we are suffering for righteousness sake, *we are blessed*. This recalls the words of Jesus:
 - a. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (**Matthew 5:10-12**, NKJV)
 - b. "Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets." (**Luke 6:22-23**, NKJV)
 4. *Fourth*, always be prepared to give a defense for the reason for the hope we have (why we are doing what we are doing).
 - a. Do this with meekness (toward people) and fear (toward God).
 - b. These can be opportunities to glorify God and get others to consider the faith.

- c. I would like to share with you some painful lessons I have learned over the years related to this topic (being persecuted for righteousness sake, versus suffering at the hands of others for acting unrighteously). This draws from mistakes I made in the past personally, as well as mistakes I have seen others make.
- i. When we are being criticized by others who do not share our beliefs, we need to listen in order to hear what they are saying.
 1. **Question:** Is there *anything* we are doing related to their criticisms of us that is *unrighteous*?
 - ii. For years I was in a church culture that strongly emphasized **Matthew 6:33**, heavily focusing on the first part (seeking His kingdom) but largely neglecting the second (His righteousness).
 1. “But seek first the kingdom of God *and His righteousness*, and all these things shall be added to you.” (**Matthew 6:33**, NKJV)
 2. Recall also, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus said, “...*unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*” (**Matthew 5:20**, NKJV)
 - iii. There are many bad examples I have seen where Christians who were *very involved in religious practices* (praying, reading their Bibles, sharing their faith with unbelievers, getting together often with other Christians, giving sacrificially to the church and to mission work) were nevertheless *being unrighteous in basic areas of their lives*. This includes:
 1. Financially irresponsible. Not paying rent or other bills on time, sinking in debt.
 2. Not taking care of obvious things that were broken down (house, car, basic maintenance), out of laziness or irresponsibility.
 3. Neglecting elderly parents.
 4. Neglecting one’s children or being harsh and domineering with them. Children being out of control, disorderly and disrespectful of other people and the property of others.
 5. Lacking integrity. Not keeping one’s word to others, including at work. On the job, speaking to friends or reading something when one should be working. Being chronically late. Falling asleep at work.

6. Being rude, inconsiderate, noisy.
7. Being arrogant (attitude of looking down at others).
8. Being extremely judgmental toward others.
9. Not showing basic love and kindness toward others who are not Christians.
10. Persisting in telling others over and over again the same things that they clearly are not interested in hearing. In other words, “beating a dead horse”. Or telling others even more spiritual truth when they have already made it abundantly clear that they have rejected the truth that already has been shown to them.
 - a. Jesus said, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.” (**Matthew 7:6**, NKJV)
 - b. He also told his disciples, “Now whatever city or town you enter, *inquire who in it is worthy*, and stay there till you go out.” (**Matthew 10:11**, NKJV)
 - c. Jesus said regarding the good soil, in the Parable of the Sower: “But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a *noble and good heart*, keep it and bear fruit with patience.” (**Luke 8:15**, NKJV)
- iv. Being a Christian is not an excuse for a lack of righteousness in any area. It calls us to an even higher standard of righteousness and integrity than the world around us.
- v. Sometimes it is hard to know whether I am being opposed because of something I am doing is righteous, or if it is because of an unrighteous way I am doing it.
 1. When bringing up unpopular kingdom teachings, I have sometimes been accused of:
 - a. Being arrogant
 - b. Being unloving
 - c. Being legalistic
 - d. Not understanding the grace of God

- e. Bringing up things in the wrong way, or with the wrong attitude.
- 2. I need to consider what is being said and try to be objective in determining whether there is any truth in it.
 - a. Was the person who said it simply *offended by the truth* of the thing I said (and is just making an excuse to deflect)?
- vi. It is hard to be objective in the face of criticism from others.
 - 1. The '*readily accused*' personality types among us are easily manipulated by others and tend to think that the problem is always something they did wrong.
 - 2. The *more confident* among us tend to assume that they did nothing wrong, and they are being unjustly persecuted.
 - 3. Perhaps we need to help each other, to be able to see things more clearly than we can on our own.
- d. Actually there are three reasons you can face suffering and persecution:
 - i. For doing something wrong (unrighteousness);
 - ii. For doing something good (righteousness); or
 - iii. For doing nothing at all (neither good nor bad).
 - 1. Alison and I have been reading *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's classic on the repressive prison system in the old Soviet Union under communism. From that work:
 - a. Many people were arrested and sent to prison for years, some to die there, for doing nothing wrong at all. Someone turned them in on a false charge, or someone needed to meet a quota.
 - b. The author lamented that so few made any public protest when they were arrested. They almost always went off quietly, thinking, "I did *nothing wrong*; surely this is a mistake!"
- e. Peter calls us to do good and to be willing to suffer for that (and realize that we somehow will be *blessed by God* in the process).

III. Jesus in Hades

- a. Read **1 Peter 3:18-22**.
- b. Points made by Peter in this rich, complex passage:
 - i. Peter starts by addressing the fact that Jesus also suffered (just as the righteous Christians will suffer).
 1. This is one of the main themes of Peter's letter: as followers of Jesus, our life will follow His.
 - ii. Peter here summarizes Jesus' life as follows:
 1. Suffering, even though He was righteous;
 2. Death;
 3. Time in Hades;
 4. Made alive by the Spirit (resurrection); and then
 5. Ascending to heaven, seated at the right hand of God.
 - iii. Peter makes all the same points regarding the phases of Jesus' life in his speech to the Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, in **Acts 2**.
 1. Read **Acts 2:22-35**.
 2. The point Peter makes here is that the path of Jesus' life *fulfilled the prophecies*.
 - a. Jesus suffered and died (**Acts 2:23**).
 - b. Then His soul *went to Hades* but did not remain there, nor did His body see decay (**Acts 2:27, 2:30; Psalm 16:8-11**).
 - c. Jesus was *resurrected*, which also fulfilled the promise that God would "raise up" the king who would come from David (**Acts 2:30-32, 2 Samuel 7:12, 1 Chronicles 17:11** – compare LXX with Greek NT wording regarding "raise up").
 - d. Finally, Jesus was raised up to the heavens and is now seated at the right hand of God (**Acts 2:32-35, Psalm 110:1**).

- e. *Therefore*, in view of Him fulfilling all these prophecies about the Christ, the Jews need to believe in Jesus and follow Him (**Acts 2:36-41**).
3. In **1 Peter**, instead of using these facts to bring unbelievers to faith, Peter is addressing Christians who already believe. Consequently, the main point Peter is making by recounting this pattern of Christ's life is:
 - a. Christ suffered before entering into His glory.
 - b. Therefore those who follow Him must follow the same pattern in our own lives (suffering now, with the promised glory to follow later).
 - c. Christians should not expect '*pleasant times*' in this life.
- c. Peter says that the dead body of Jesus was "made alive *by the Spirit*". He also says. "by whom (again referring to the Holy Spirit) He went and preached to the spirits in prison..."
- i. Recall the importance of the Holy Spirit, as explained by Jesus. He spoke quite a bit about the Spirit to His disciples the night before He was crucified, in **John 14-16**. He told them:
 1. "...It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." (**John 16:7**, NKJV)
 - ii. **Question:** What does this statement by Peter, that the dead body of Jesus was "made alive" by the Spirit, tell us about the Holy Spirit?
 1. **Answer:** Here again, and throughout the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is associated with *bringing life*!
 2. The Spirit of God was present in the beginning, in **Genesis 1:1-2**. The Lord *breathed life into* the first man, formed from the dust of the earth (**Genesis 2:7**), as Jesus *breathed on* his disciples when they received the Holy Spirit (**John 20:22**).
 - a. Note that in Greek (in the LXX and the Greek New Testament), the word for "spirit" and "breath" is the same word.
 3. Read **Ezekiel 37:1-14**, the story of the Valley of the Dry Bones.
 - a. The Holy Spirit, also described here as the "Spirit of life" (**Ezekiel 37:5**, LXX), breathes life into dead bones.

4. In **Luke 1:34-35**, Mary is told by the angel Gabriel that despite the fact that she is a virgin, she will conceive a son (who will be called the Son of God) *by the power of the Holy Spirit*.
5. In **John 3:3-5**, Jesus says we must be born again, a new birth by water and the Spirit.
6. Paul wrote, "...for the letter kills, but *the Spirit gives life*." (**2 Corinthians 3:6**, NKJV)
7. Paul also wrote, in **Romans**: "But if the *Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you*, He who raised Christ from the dead *will also give life to your mortal bodies* through His Spirit who dwells in you." (**Romans 8:11**, NKJV)
 - a. This is so encouraging. The *same Spirit* who raised the body of Jesus from the dead dwells within us, and in the future will raise our dead bodies to life as well!
- iii. The Holy Spirit is referred to in the later version of the Nicene Creed (a/k/a Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, 381 AD) as "*the Lord and giver of life*". We see that this statement is fully consistent with the Scriptures.
- d. While the word 'Hades' is not used in **1 Peter 3**, that is what Peter is referring to when he speaks of Jesus in the time after His death (and before His resurrection) when Jesus "preached to the spirits in prison".
 - i. We know from **Acts 2**, where Peter quotes from **Psalms 16** (designated **Psalms 15** in the LXX) that the spirit of Jesus was *in Hades* between the time of His death and His resurrection.
 - ii. Jesus spoke about this time (between His death and resurrection) in **Matthew 12**:
 1. "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights *in the heart of the earth*.'" (**Matthew 12:39-40**, NKJV)
 2. The expression "in the heart of the earth" did not refer to the tomb (cave) that held the body of Jesus. It referred to *Hades*, the intermediate place where souls of the dead go prior to Judgment Day.

- iii. This place Hades is also spoken about in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, in **Luke 16**.
 - 1. Read **Luke 16:22-26**.
 - 2. The angels escort the spirit of a dead person to *Hades*.
 - 3. This place has two regions, which are separated from each other by a gulf that cannot be crossed.

- iv. Paul also mentions the descent of Christ (into Hades) between the time of his death and resurrection, in **Ephesians 4**.
 - 1. “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore, He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” (**Ephesians 4:7-10**, NKJV)
 - 2. Here Paul quotes from **Psalms 68:18** (designated **Psalms 67:19** in the LXX), where it says “You ascended” and “You received gifts for mankind” (from the LXX).
 - 3. Paul makes the point that He had to descend before He ascended. In fact, He descended to “the lower parts of the earth” (referring to Hades).

- v. The ‘*Apostles Creed*’ is an early statement of the Christian faith that is still recited in many churches. It is based on earlier similar creeds. (This seems to be a pre-baptismal creed of faith, broken down into three parts, which begin: “I believe in the Father”, “And in... His Son”, and “I believe in the Holy Spirit”.)
 - 1. From the ‘received’ form of the text of that creed in the 8th century (translated from Greek):
 - a. “I believe in *God the Father* Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.
 - b. “And in *Jesus Christ his only begotten Son*, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into the lowest places [= Hades]; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sits at the right hand of God

the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

- c. "I believe in the *Holy Spirit*; the holy catholic [= *universal*] church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh; and everlasting life. Amen."
- vi. While the descent of Christ into Hades may seem like an extremely minor detail to many of us, Christians in the past considered it to be something important to believe. We see that from how it was included in this early summary of the Christian faith.
 - 1. Jesus became fully human and went through all the things that we are to go through, showing us the way.
 - 2. This included becoming flesh, suffering, dying and descending to Hades before being raised to glory.
 - 3. This also illustrates how He conquered death. Death was not able to hold Him. He showed that death can be defeated.
- e. For those who may be wondering, "What did Jesus do in Hades?", Peter gives us some insight we may not find elsewhere in Scripture.
 - i. He preached to "the spirits in prison".
 - ii. Here, Hades is referred to figuratively as "prison", in the sense that those inside it were (prior to that time) not able to get out.
 - 1. There may have been a few short-term 'jailbreaks' from this figurative 'prison', such as:
 - a. (Lazarus, the friend of Jesus) who was raised by Jesus after four days in the grave (**John 11**); and
 - b. the widow of Zarephath's son, whom Elijah raised (**1 Kings 17, Luke 4:26**),
 - 2. However, though they temporarily may have escaped from this 'prison', they ended up being captured later and being returned to Hades when they experienced natural death again.
 - 3. Jesus was the one who made the ultimate 'jailbreak', smashing the gates of Hades and escaping because death could not hold Him.
 - a. Peter says of Jesus, "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because *it was not possible that He should be held by it.*" (**Acts 2:24**, NKJV)

- b. In **Revelation 1** Jesus said about Himself, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And *I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*”
(**Revelation 1:18**, NKJV)
- iii. Therefore, Jesus “preached” to those who had died prior to the time of his crucifixion, including to people who lived back in the time of Noah and the Flood.
- iv. **Question:** *What did Jesus preach* to the spirits of people who had lived and died long before?
 - 1. I can’t say for sure; however, some early Christian writers who comment on this believed that He *preached the gospel* and gave the good-hearted an opportunity to believe in Him and be saved.
 - 2. The fact that the people at the time of Noah are mentioned would indicate that He was not preaching exclusively to the Jews (who did not yet even exist as a nation at the time of Noah). Gentiles had to be involved.
 - 3. Perhaps there is some insight to be gained from the story of Joseph in **Genesis 37-50**, who foreshadowed Christ in many ways.
 - a. Consider the treatment of Joseph in Stephen’s speech in **Acts 7**. Stephen portrayed the treatment of Jesus as mirroring that of Joseph (and Moses), who came before.
 - b. Early Christian writers also saw Christ foreshadowed by Joseph. For example, from Irenaeus:
 - i. “By these Christ was typified, and acknowledged, and brought into the world; for *He was prefigured in Joseph.*”
 - ii. (Source: Irenaeus, *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 571)
 - c. Parallels between Joseph and Jesus include:
 - i. Both were the beloved son of the Father, held above all the others.
 - ii. Both were hated by their brothers, who did not want him to rule over them.

- iii. Both were sold for silver.
 - iv. Both ended up “in prison” for a period of time, even though they did nothing wrong (of course, Jesus was in the figurative ‘prison’ of Hades).
 - v. After being released from prison, both were elevated to second-highest position in the kingdom and were the *only ones with access to the food* during a time of famine (Joseph physically, Jesus spiritually).
- d. He (Joseph) spoke to two men while he was in the prison: the butler and the baker (**Genesis 40**).
- i. One of those in the prison (the butler) would be raised up.
 - ii. However, the other one (the baker) was told that he would be destroyed.
4. For more on the historic (early Christian) understanding of Hades and Christ’s descent into Hades, see:
- a. Relevant articles in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot.
 - b. Audio lessons by David Bercot:
 - i. *What the Early Christians Believed about Life After Death*, and
 - ii. *What the Early Christians Believed about Christ’s Descent into Hades*;
 - iii. Both are available online (Scroll Publishing YouTube channel) or in CD format through Scroll Publishing Company.

IV. The Flood of Noah Foreshadowed Baptism

- a. Baptism is a topic that certainly receives a lot of attention in the churches of Christ. Those from our background are often criticized by Protestants for teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation (which is consistent with what the early Christians believed and taught).
- b. Over the years, I have been challenged by others with something along the lines of: “Show me *one verse* in the Bible where it says that *baptism saves you!*”

- i. Well, here it is:
 - ii. “There 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.” (1 Peter 3:21, NKJV)
- c. A few words about *types* and *antitypes*:
- i. The type is the original pattern, and the antitype is what follows from that.
 - 1. The Latin prefix ‘anti-’ means *against*.
 - a. One should not confuse this with the similar-sounding Greek prefix ‘ante-’, which means before (as in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, referring to those who wrote *prior to* the Council of Nicaea).
 - 2. From Noah Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, regarding the word ‘*antitype*’:
 - a. “The antitype is formed according to the model or pattern, bearing strong features of resemblance to it.”
 - b. Webster gives the example of the Passover Lamb being a *type*, with Jesus Christ being the corresponding *antitype*.
 - 3. For another example: on an old-fashioned typewriter (or printing press), the *type* that is set strikes the inked ribbon or pad, after which creates an image on the paper (the resulting *antitype*).
- d. Peter is saying here that the water of the Flood of Noah was the type, and Christian *baptism is the antitype that now saves us*.
- i. The similarities with the original pattern include:
 - 1. Both involve water.
 - 2. A few righteous people are “saved through the water”.
 - a. This is yet one more indication (of many throughout the Scriptures) that while God does not want anyone to perish, *only a few will be saved*.
 - 3. God was patient before bringing final destruction.
 - a. He wanted as many as possible to be saved.

- b. All of the preparations had to be completed before the day of judgement could arrive.
 - 4. There were warnings beforehand. However, the judgment came suddenly, and those who were unprepared were caught by surprise.
- e. Peter says our *baptism saves us through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*, and that it is the pledge of a good conscience toward God.
 - i. Baptism is not merely a mechanical thing. Through baptism, as Paul explained in **Romans 6:1-14**, we are participating in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We are *not* earning our salvation through some mechanical effort on our part.
 - ii. We must have faith (**Mark 16:15-16, Colossians 2:11-12**); a repentant heart (**Acts 2:38**); and as Peter mentions here, a good conscience toward God (**1 Peter 3:21**).
 - iii. Never forget that baptism is just the beginning of our journey as Christians. As Paul pointed out, drawing from the example of the Israelites in the Wilderness for 40 years, we must avoid sin and persevere to the end faithfully if we want to arrive at heaven, our Promised Land (**1 Corinthians 10:1-13**).
- f. If this brief discussion on Christian baptism has raised some questions in your mind, I encourage you to explore this subject further.
 - i. Always start by reading the relevant New Testament passages on Christian baptism, including **Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, John 3:3-5, Acts 2:36-41, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:1-14, 1 Corinthians 10:1-2, Galatians 3:26-27, Ephesians 4:4-5, Colossians 2:11-12** and **1 Peter 3:19-21**.
 - ii. For information on the historic (early Christian) understanding of baptism in light of the above passages, consider:
 - 1. *What the Early Christians Believed about Baptism*, an audio lesson by David Bercot, available online or in CD format from Scroll Publishing.
 - 2. Articles on 'Baptism' in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot.
 - iii. Another resource that many have found helpful is *Baptism, A Biblical Study*, a book by Jack Cottrell (published 1990).