

1st Peter 3:18-4:2
Arming Ourselves with The Mind of Christ
...arm yourselves likewise with the same mind – 4:1

When you come to the end of chp. 3 in Peter's first epistle, you come to a section in the chapter that seems to present some perplexing difficulties and thus call for some explanations. What does it mean when we read in 3:19 that *he* (i.e. Christ) *went and preached unto the spirits in prison*? And apparently not just any spirits in prison but the spirits that were held there from the days of Noah. And what does it mean in v. 21 when Peter refers to baptism that saves us? – and that this baptism is the antitype (the “figure”) of the judgment of the flood that came upon the world in the days of Noah?

The Reformation Study Bible (R.C. Sproul) gives 5 different interpretations of vv. 19,20 that are the most common:

(1) The “spirits in prison” are the people to whom Christ preached during His earthly ministry. (Luke 4:16-21).

(2) Christ by the Holy Spirit preached through Noah (2 Pet. 2:5) to the people before the flood (Gen. 6-8). Noah called them to repentance, but they disobeyed and are now imprisoned.

(3) Christ preached in the short interval between His death and resurrection during a “descent into hell.” (I might mention here that this descent into hell idea has had some support in church history. The earliest of creeds known as “The Apostle’s Creed” states: I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; 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 hell; The third day He rose again from the dead etc.) It is said that Christ announced (during this descent into hell) His victory to the spirits of Noah’s wicked contemporaries confined in the realm of the dead.

(4) A similar idea is that during the same interval Christ proclaimed His victory to fallen angels, often identified with the “sons of God” of Gen. 6:2, 4 (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1), in their place of confinement.

(5) Christ proclaimed His victory to fallen angels after the resurrection, at the time of His ascension into heaven.

Of these 5 interpretations, I give the most credence to the idea behind the very first one – i.e. that “the spirits in prison” correspond to lost sinners in general. One could argue that there are spirits in prison all around us in our day. There were certainly spirits in prison during the days of Noah, as well as during the days of Christ’s earthly ministry. Listen to the verses cited in defense of this interpretation. This is from Lk. 4:16-21 *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. 17 And there was delivered unto*

him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 18 *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,* 19 *To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.* 20 *And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.* 21 *And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

Just as important as being able to explain the meaning of Peter's words in these verses is the matter of the use that Peter is making of these somewhat difficult statements. In that respect the context is very important and I think helpful for understanding Peter's purpose in this section of his epistle.

You will notice that in v. 18 he makes reference to the sufferings of Christ: *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.* Now keep this statement in mind and jump down to 4:1 bearing in mind that there were no chapter divisions in the original composition of the New Testament. Notice how 4:1 begins *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh,* there's what connects this statement to 3:18. Christ has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust (3:18); Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, and then we come to the admonition that Peter has been aiming for. Here it is: *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.*

It brings to mind Paul's words in Phil. 2:5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.* And then Paul goes on to describe Christ in his humiliation, just as Peter makes reference to Christ who has once suffered for sins. So we begin in 1Pet 3:18 with reference to Christ's suffering, there follows these puzzling verses that follow in vv. 19-21, and then the section concludes or aims for the admonition to *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.* What this indicates to us is that these verses that make reference to Christ preaching unto spirits in prison, and the longsuffering of God in the days of Noah, and the reference to baptism and its correspondence to the judgment in Noah's day – all of these statements are serving the purpose of reinforcing the argument that leads to the admonition in 4:1 to arm yourselves with the same mind.

And so that's what I want to focus on this morning – this theme of arming ourselves with the mind of Christ. And the way I'll bring this theme into sharper focus is to raise and answer the question:

How Do We Arm Ourselves with the Mind of Christ?

Consider with me first of all that we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ:

I. By Identifying Ourselves With Christ

Look again at the words of v. 21 *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

In his commentary on 1st Peter, John Brown, a 19th century Scottish preacher and theologian from the secessionist church of Scotland provides a very good and detailed analysis of Peter's meaning here.

“Baptism saves us” he notes, “as it is ‘the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’ In order to understand the precise meaning of Peter’s statement, he then elaborates a number of things from the New Testament that are said to save the believer in Christ.

“Before entering on the exposition of this statement, which is encumbered with some verbal difficulties, it will, I am persuaded, serve a good purpose to state in the fewest words, to whom, and to what, in the New Testament, salvation is attributed.”

“God is said to save us. ‘All things are of him’ in the new creation. He is ‘the Savior of all men, specially of them who believe’ (1Tim. 4:10). We are said to be saved ‘by grace,’ by God’s grace’ (Eph. 2:4,5). Christ is said to save us. ‘All things’ in the new creation ‘are by him.’ One of his most common names is ‘our Savior.’ The blood of Christ is said to save us. ‘Redemption is through his blood.’ The resurrection of Christ is said to save us. ‘We are saved by his life’ (Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:10). The Holy Spirit is said to save us. ‘We are saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost.’ (Titus 3:5). The gospel is said to save men. The words which Peter was to speak to Cornelius, were words which were to ‘save him and his family.’ We are said to be saved by faith. ‘By grace are ye saved, through faith.’ ‘Thy faith,’ said our Lord, on a number of occasions, ‘has saved thee.’ ‘He that believeth shall be saved.’ Men are said to be saved by confession of the truth in connection with faith. ‘With the heart man believes to righteousness,’ that is, justification; ‘and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.’ And men are said to be saved by baptism in connection with faith. ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.’ (Mk. 16:16); and here ‘baptism saves us.’

John Brown then makes this observation about all these statements: “Now, these statements are all perfectly consistent with each other; and he only understands how sinful men are saved, who sees the meaning and apprehends the consistency of these statements. Here they are in one sentence, - God, in the exercise of sovereign grace, saves men through the mediation of his Son, who died as an atoning victim, and rose again to the possession of all power in heaven and earth, that he might save all coming to the Father by him, who, being led by the operation of the Holy Spirit to believe the gospel of salvation, become personally interested in the blessings procured through the mediation of the Son; and, wherever men are made really to believe the gospel, they, as the natural result of that faith, and in obedience to the Divine command, make a profession of that faith; and in the case of those who in mature life are brought from a false religion to the knowledge and belief of

the gospel, the commencement of this profession is baptism, of ‘the being washed with pure water.’”

“If this statement is understood, there is little difficulty in answering the question, How does baptism save? It is an emblematical representation of what saves us, - the expiatory, justifying blood of Christ; the regenerating, sanctifying influence of the Spirit; and a corresponding confession of the truth thus represented.”

So I’ve let John Brown pretty much preach my first point for me but what I would add to this very good explanation of v. 21 is simply this: Baptism is a mode of identification. It’s the mode of identification that Christ Himself has ordained. In the days of ancient Rome it was baptism that really gained government recognition of a man being a Christian. If you were to profess faith in Christ and argue to others, especially to government officials, I suppose, that you were a Christian, but you could not say that you were baptized, they wouldn’t recognize you as being a Christian, all your protests and arguments, notwithstanding.

This was and is, you see, the official way that a person identifies with Christ. To argue that a man was saved without baptism could be likened to a man who drives a car without a driver’s license, and upon being pulled over he tries to persuade the policeman that pulled him over that he really is a skilled driver who ought to have every right to drive his car. Without that license the policeman won’t be impressed with your arguments or your driving skill. No license – you’re not an official driver. And in the case before us now – no baptism, you’re not an official Christian.

Now I should point out as Peter does here that it’s not the official rite of baptism that has saving power in it. There is no saving power to the mere symbolic application of water to a physical body – or to use Peter’s words *not the putting away of the filth of the flesh* but rather the answer of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. John Brown again: “What the Apostle’s words bring before the mind is this: A man has a good conscience; he has obtained this good conscience by the resurrection of Christ.” His hope, in other words, is in Christ. Christ came and Christ died and Christ rose and in Christ’s death my sins are washed away. My conscience can be good insofar as I identify with Christ’s atoning death and appropriate it to myself by faith. And the believer makes a declaration of this good conscience in his baptism; and it is in this way that the Apostle declares that baptism saves.

All of this makes for a good explanation pertaining to baptism, but still the question remains – how does this statement on baptism and this reference to the days of Noah equip believers to arm themselves with the mind of Christ? It does so this way:

At the time of Christ’s crucifixion all the world was against Him. The Jews were against Him; the Gentiles were against Him. His closest followers had forsaken Him. He was on His own you could say. In the days of Noah the same thing could be said for Noah and his family. *When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water* (3:20). Yet in both

cases, in the case of Noah and in the case of Christ Himself both were vindicated. Noah's warning of judgment proved to be real. The flood did come. The world was judged. That's something, you know, that Christians do well to keep in mind and sinners do well to heed. Here is the proof that judgment is real and that the warnings of judgment ought to be heeded. God has demonstrated the truth that judgment is not an idle threat. It's real. God has proven it to be real and though the whole world mock the message of the gospel as well as the warnings of judgment, in the end, it was Noah that was vindicated and proven to be right even though the whole world stood against him.

The same applies to Christ. The world was against Him but in the end He was the one who prevailed. Judgment came upon Him and He bore that judgment and He triumphed over that judgment. So in the case of Peter's readers and in the case of you and I here this morning – we do well to arm ourselves with the same mind as Christ by identifying with Him in the way He calls on us to identify with Him through baptism and though the world be against us you're to keep in mind that the world was against Noah and the world was against Christ and just as Noah was saved through the waters and Christ came forth from the grave, so will the believer in the end be vindicated though the whole world be against him.

How, then, do we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ? We do so by identifying ourselves with Christ in His sufferings and death and resurrection. But would you consider with me next that we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ:

II. By Adopting the Same Mission as Christ

What did Christ do during the days of His ministry on this earth? Following His own baptism and His 40 day trial in the wilderness we read of how Christ, in a sense, took up the exact same mission that John the Baptist had begun. So in Mt. 3:1,2 we read *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* And in Mt. 4:17 we read *From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

There's a remarkable unity in the New Testament in this respect. From John the Baptist to Christ Himself to the Apostles of Christ in the book of Acts this message was the same. Following Christ's post-resurrection ministry to His disciples during which time He spoke to them for 40 days of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3) we read how Peter, on the Day of Pentecost preached to the multitude gathered in Jerusalem that they should *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:38).

And in the very last scene of historical narrative where we find the Apostle Paul in custody in the city of Rome the very last thing we read of him at the end of that book is how he *dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him* (Acts 28:30,31).

So we find this remarkable consistency within the New Testament when it comes to the message that John the Baptist, and Christ Himself, and the Apostles of Christ proclaimed. But what Peter is demonstrating to us in 1Pet. 3:19,20 is that this consistency of the message can be taken back into history way beyond the days of John the Baptist. This message can be taken back to the history of the nation of Israel and back further still before Israel even came into existence. This message can be taken all the way back to the days of Noah where Christ did something there that He did during His own earthly ministry and that He did through His disciples following His earthly ministry and that He continues to do right up to this present hour.

Look again at the words of 1Pet. 3:18ff *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 19 By which (i.e. by which Spirit) Christ also went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing.*

Don't these verses make it plain that Christ preaches through His servants in the power of His Spirit throughout the ages? This has been His mission since the very day He told the Serpent in the garden of Eden *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* (Gen. 3:15).

This is a mission that you and I must align ourselves with. This is the mission of the gospel. And we must be faithful to this mission. Isn't it interesting to note the contrast between what might be called the "successful results" of the preaching of the gospel in the days of Noah and in the days of the Apostles. Oh we love to read the accounts, don't we, of how thousands were saved on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out and men and women were convicted of their sins and cried out *Men and brethren what shall we do?* To which Peter replies *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

We love the accounts of revival. We love to read of the days of the Reformation and the Great Awakening and the 2nd Great Awakening. We love to see the gospel have such an impact on the souls of many. But in contrast to such movements that bring such visible and tangible results we also have such accounts in the Bible as the ministry of Jeremiah the prophet, where basically nobody responded to the prophet's message but instead took him to be a traitor, or the account that Peter references which is to Noah, who is called in 2Pet. 2:5 a preacher of righteousness.

Noah's ministry never made it beyond his own family in terms of what we call "tangible results." I can still see in my mind's eye the display in the Creation Museum in which a robotic mannequin is on display in a room that contained a cross section of the Ark. Noah's sons are seen working on the ark while this mannequin is set off at a little distance. He has a scowling look on his face and he's heard to mock and express contempt by saying words based on 2Pet. 3:4 *Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

The thing to note from our text here in 1Pet. 3:19 is that Noah was no less filled with the Spirit of Christ, then, than Peter was filled on the Day of Pentecost. You might not think it to be so by applying our contemporary “results standard” to the preaching of Noah. This is why every preacher of the gospel and indeed every Christian that endeavors to share the gospel should take note of the closeness of Christ to those who seek to give out the gospel. That closeness is so tight that Peter could say that there was a definite sense in which it was Christ Himself by the power of His Spirit that preached to the captive spirits in the days of Noah in which few, no more than 8 souls were saved.

This is our mission. We’ve been commissioned by Christ to carry it out. John the Baptist carried it out, Christ Himself carried it out, the followers of Christ have been carrying it out ever since. So if you would arm yourself with the mind of Christ, you must align yourself with the mission of Christ and you must do so without any concern over what may be considered a lack of results. The important thing is that the message of the gospel will be vindicated in the end. It was vindicated through Noah; it was vindicated through Jeremiah when Jerusalem eventually was destroyed. The gospel message will be vindicated in the end when Christ returns.

How, then do we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ? We do so by identifying with Christ in the way He’s ordained which is through baptism; and we do so by aligning ourselves with the same mission of Christ which is the mission of spreading the gospel. It remains for us to consider that we arm ourselves with the same mind as Christ:

III. By Adopting the Same Outlook as Christ

Look at the words of v. 22 where Peter speaks of Christ *Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.* This is the vision of Christ that we must catch and keep. He is in heaven. He does rule and reign. It might not seem so to those Christians that Peter addressed who were undergoing such fiery trials but in fact it was and is true.

I referenced John Brown earlier in our study. Let me quote from him again. He asks the question “What is the Apostle’s object in this reference? His primary object is, if we mistake not, ...to illustrate by contrast the blessed effects of our Lord’s going and preaching to the spirits in prison, after being quickened in spirit.”

When in the days of Noah he went and preached to them, ‘they were disobedient,’ all but universally disobedient, and ‘few, that is, eight souls,’ out of probably many millions, ‘were saved;’ but now, though many are unbelieving and impenitent, still multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles have become obedient to the faith; and, before he finishes his preaching to the spirits in prison, much greater multitudes will yet become obedient, ‘All the ends of the earth shall remember, and turn to the Lord; and all the kindreds of the people shall worship before him. For the kingdom is the Lord’s; and he is the governor among the nations.’ ‘The kingdom of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.’ And, though many shall perish in the deluge of fire, yet still the saved shall not be counted by human numbers. There will be

nations of the saved;’ and those set free from among the spirits in prison by the word of God, the truth which makes free indeed, shall be ‘ a multitude which no man can number out of every kindred and people, tribe and nation.’”

This is the outlook we need. This is the vision we must catch. And as we keep our focus on Christ and set our affections on things above, not on the things of this earth, we will arm ourselves with the same mind as Christ. Perhaps this is expressed best by the author of Hebrews in Heb 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

I’m sure I don’t need to tell you that we’ve just come through a Presidential election. I had promised myself that I wouldn’t stay up late to watch the results come in but I couldn’t escape the suspense of the whole thing especially when it appeared that Donald Trump just might win the whole thing. At this stage of the game I’m glad he won. I may not be as glad in the coming weeks and months but for the moment I feel I certain sense of relief, if not nothing else, that his opponent didn’t win.

But what if she had? And what if President-elect Trump proves to be as much a betrayer of Christians as any Democrat? As I followed the back and forth whining as well as the staged protests that have spread across the nation I said to my daughter that I thought my cell phone was going to explode in my hand from the heat of all the vitriol and venom that was being posted on Facebook by some people that I even know.

And then I came across this post from a dear old friend of mine who use to and still does make frequent trips to the nations of the former Soviet Union. This friend became a part of a ministry team that was headed up by an unregistered Baptist Pastor from the Soviet Union who had spent some 13 years in prison during the cold-war era and had somehow become part of a spy-swap during the days of the Carter Administration.

His Facebook post was simple and profound. Here’s what it said: “I feel almost guilty being joyful when so many others are miserable. But my state of mind isn’t dependent on politics. When you know the Lord, He gives love, joy, and peace that passes understanding when you keep your eyes on Him.” I truly believe this friend would have posted this even had the election results gone in a different direction.

That’s what Peter is advocating – the kind of outlook that sees Christ risen and ascended to heaven. This is what his persecuted audience needed and it’s what we need still today, election results notwithstanding. So how do we arm ourselves with the same mind as Christ? We do arm ourselves with that mind by identifying with Him the same way He identified with us. He identified with us through His baptism. We identify with him the same way. And we embrace the same mission, the mission of preaching the gospel to spirits in prison. And we adopt the same outlook, looking to Him who is risen and ascended and whose kingdom is destined to prevail in the end.