



1 Peter 3:18-20

That He Might Bring Us to God

18 For 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,

19 by 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.

Although Turkey is the most secular of the Muslim nations, it has long been one of the most difficult countries in the world to reach for Christ. After years of attempts at evangelization, the total Christian population is still truly tiny, all Christian denominations together number only around 0.1%. Despite their tiny numbers, the Christians of Turkey are coming under increasing persecution as the wave of the worldwide Islamic Jihad sweeps over that nation as well.

And yet, Christian missionaries have not given up, men and women are still struggling to bring the light of the gospel to the Turks. One such group of Christians is Zirve publishing, an Evangelical organization that prints bibles in Turkish that the Word of God might be read and heard by the Turks. Here you have Christians selflessly laboring for the gospel. Well last Wednesday, five Turkish Jihadis broke into the offices of Zirve and brutally murdered three of the men who worked there – two Turkish converts and a German Christian.

But why? I don't mean why did the Jihadis do what they did, that is obvious. I mean why did the Christians of Zirve publishing have to suffer for doing good? That is a legitimate question, something that countless Christians through the ages have wondered, and something that would have concerned the churches that Peter was writing to. *Peter, do we have to suffer?* Is God not in control? Did Jesus not finish the work of salvation? Do we finish it ourselves by our personal suffering? Why should we have to suffer?

Well Peter has already assured them that for Christians to suffer for righteousness sake is not a sign of God's curse, rather it is a blessing to be persecuted and even martyred for the sake of Jesus. And now Peter tells them, that as they suffer, what they are really doing is taking up the cross and following after Jesus. Do you suffer for righteousness? Well then, remember that Jesus suffered for righteousness sake before you. Not only that, Jesus suffered for righteousness sake ***for you***.

Because, Christians, when it says that Jesus suffered once for sins, the sins that he suffered for, were not his own, for he the Son of God had none. It was your sins he suffered for. You stood before God guilty of breaking all His righteous laws. There was not one of the Ten Commandments you had not broken in thought, word, and deed. On judgment day, the only just sentence would be GUILTY, and

the only just condemnation, eternal separation from God and punishment in hell. The wages of sin is death, and we have all worked hard to earn our pay. We often ask *What Would Jesus Do?* It's a good question, but that's not the question Peter answers, he answers the more vital question **WHAT DID JESUS DO?** And he answers, Christ stepped in and paid the debt you couldn't, he just took your sins upon his back, and paid for them, in his **atonement** death on the Cross.

Atonement is a wonderful word, it came into being because in translating the bible Matthew Tyndale realized that there was no English word that explained that Christ's sacrifice, which accomplished both the remission of sin and reconciliation of man to God. So he said what has Christ's propitiation and reconciliation done for us, it has brought us back to God and made us at one with Him again. It was an at-one-ment. Hence the word "atonement."

Now that should strike people as wonderful, to be forgiven, and reconciled to God by that once for all sacrifice of Jesus, but Peter wants them to have the right image of just how wonderful their salvation really is. And you know that's 90% of Gospel preaching. I mean I can explain the gospel in less than five minutes, (for instance here in verse 18 that's the gospel, or in 2 Cor. 5:21 "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.", or John 3:16) the other thirty minutes of preaching is a desperate attempt to apply that vital message to the people who need to hear it.

So beginning in verse 19, Peter gives them an image of the miracle of salvation from the Old Testament. Now admittedly verses 19 and 20 are some of the most difficult to exegete in the bible, and one which even the best of theologians have stumbled at. As Martin Luther said: "***A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty, just what Peter means.***"

I can confess the same thing as Luther, I'm pretty sure I know what he doesn't mean, but not quite certain what he does mean. So here is what I think he doesn't mean:

I don't think Peter means that after Jesus died in the flesh on the cross His divine Spirit went to hell and preached the gospel to the damned angels and unbelievers who died in the flood. That after all would contradict what Jesus himself declared on the Cross when he said to the thief "***Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise***" and "***Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.***" Jesus didn't go from the cross to preach to lost spirits in Hell, he went from the Cross to Heaven and entered there triumphantly.

So here is what I think Peter is saying. (And here I'm not alone, I'm following the interpretation of men like Matthew Poole, Wayne Grudem, Ed Clowney, and many, many others.) Peter points out that while Christ's body died on the Cross, prior to the resurrection of his body, Christ's Spirit which didn't die was living once again in that exalted state as the second member of the Godhead that he had had for all eternity prior to his incarnation.

Now when Christ is truly preached by his ambassadors it is the Spirit of Christ who is preaching through them, you see this in Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 5:20– "***we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf***" And Peter tells them that Christ had inspired Noah to preach the gospel to the men of his generation, so that even as He was building the Ark for over 100 years, he was telling those unbelieving men to flee from the wrath to come. Noah's generation did not listen to that preaching, they did not obey the command of God given

through Noah, and when the flood came they all perished in their sins, and now they are indeed the spirits in prison, awaiting God's final judgment. And so in the end

Now we know that because this preaching of Noah to the wicked men who lived in the world prior to the flood is a theme Peter again picks up in his second epistle:

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;

5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;

Christ was longsuffering towards the men of Noah's day, he didn't judge them immediately. The compassion of Christ can be seen in the fact that via his Spirit He himself preached the gospel for 100 years, but they did not listen. They did not flee to the Ark, and so when the waters of God's just judgment came the only ones who were saved were eight souls, Noah and his family.

Now Peter points that out becomes the Ark was a picture of Christ, and the flood was a picture of the judgment that is to come. If we by faith enter into Christ, then we will pass safely through the floodwaters of Judgment. Because while the rain fell on the Noah and the unbelievers, he was safe inside the Ark. The water fell on the ark, and raised it up, from the ground, even as God's judgment in the crucifixion fell on Jesus and raised Him up on the Cross.

Now there is no doubt that Noah was ridiculed for his preaching of the gospel, and suffered for it. *Who is this fool telling us to flee into his Ark. We see no water. The skies are clear. We are in no Danger!* Christ went to them through Noah to do them good, and He suffered rejection and ridicule.

Well Jesus later went to the men of His own generation in the flesh, and preached to them directly, telling them that they were slaves to sin and in danger of judgment and that therefore they must take refuge in Him, from the judgment that was to come. And they said to Him: *"We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone."*

And so Jesus himself said of them in Luke 17:26 *"And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27 "They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."*

The majority of men in Christ's day as in Noah's did not believe the Gospel, in Noah's day it was just eight who believed and were saved. To them because of their hard hearts that preaching and the example of Noah was not unto salvation, but unto condemnation. As the author of Hebrews put it:

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Let me then make two final applications – to those of you who to those who haven't sought refuge in Jesus Christ, and to those of you who have:

In every age there have been many who would not listen to the preaching of the spirit of Christ, they persecute his Ambassadors, they ridicule "preachers of righteousness." The greater part of men and women will not flee to the Jesus before the deluge. Instead they misinterpret the longsuffering and patience and God. They figure just because the Sun is shining on them today, it will never, ever rain. A

hundred years of Sunshine, and then 40 days and 40 nights of torrential rain. It hasn't rained yet for you perhaps, and so you don't see the big deal about getting into the Ark. If I see some clouds, then I might consider running to Jesus. But let me ask, how do you know, as you sit there that this isn't the last day of year 99 for you? It just rained – no warning.

Brothers and Sisters, It was through the Greatest Suffering in All of Time that Christ Saved You. Christ had to suffer, that He Might Bring you to God – Therefore He has forever set an example for you and you should learn this now that it is only by being willing to suffer for Him that will save others. And that might even involve laying down your life.

***John 15:12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.***

Let me briefly comment, because I think that in light of current events, that there is a minor but much needed in this day and age, physical application of that principle of being willing to suffer even death for others.

Brothers we are living in a time of sinful passivity in the face of evil; in December of 1989 a lone gunman named Gharbi walked into a classroom of the École Polytechnique in Montreal he ordered the **50 men** and professors to leave the classroom and they did so, leaving the women to their fate. Mark Steyn rightly called that ***“an act of abdication that would have been unthinkable in almost any other culture throughout human history.”*** He went on to write ***“The “men” stood outside in the corridor and, even as they heard the first shots, they did nothing. And, when it was over and Gharbi walked out of the room and past them, they still did nothing.”***

At VA Tech, a 70 year old man was the only one whose response to a similar situation was to try to save others. Men, what is wrong with us? Have we forgotten ***A68: The Sixth Commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life,[1] and the life of others.[2]*** As Christians your first response to a lone gunman who is doing harm to women should not be merely to hope that you can run or hide better than everyone us.

Now by the grace of God, most of you won't ever be in that situation. But there is an even more important one where many of you have been running and hiding, and where there must be an end of Passivity. And that is regards to the gospel,

Death is stalking your friends, your loved ones, and will you do nothing to free them from the curse of it. Jesus laid down his life **THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD**. Brothers and Sisters, you cannot reconcile men to God yourselves, but by sharing the Gospel you can bring them to Christ that **HE MIGHT BRING THEM TO GOD**. Missionaries and ordinary Christians are literally laying down their lives that a lost and dying world might be brought to God. But we, who are surrounded by men and women one heartbeat away from damnation, don't because we are scared silly of being *embarrassed*. *What would I say to them?* Come now, you've been going to church for how long? How many times have you heard the gospel? ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*** Grab a tract, hand it to them, and say you need this. Still I wouldn't feel adequate: Well then come to the Evangelism Training class this Friday evening at 6:00