

1 Peter 3:18-20 ¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.

Up to this point we have discussed that Christ's redemptive plan, including His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, are pointed out in verse 18 as Peter tells us that our Lord died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

And in the previous studies on this verse we also saw how this passage is not talking about a universalism as if Christ died for all, without exception, only that He died for sins, one time and one time only as His atoning sacrifice was sufficient as He exclaimed on the cross, it is finished.

If Christ had died for all, paying the debt of sin for all, then all come under the protection of that sacrifice. But the truth is all do not believe and therefore all are not saved. If, as a result of their unbelief, these unbelievers pay their own debt, then logically the debt has been paid twice, thus making God unfair.

The argument has always been that the debt was paid but people must believe to receive the gift. And that is certainly true, but it does not address the obvious problem, either Christ really paid the debt once and for all without any participation of the people being purchased or He didn't.

If the purchase price must include a work on man's part, (faith), to seal the deal then these words of Peter ring hollow. There is only one conclusion and that is that Jesus Christ really purchased the full price for all whom He came to die for, that is His elect.

I'm not going to go into any depth at this juncture on this particular point because I have taught this truth in many other portions of God's word, including my study on the book of Ephesians, Romans and John, but suffice it to say that Jesus made it clear that

there was a plan to redeem and pay the debt in full for a specific people before the foundations of the world and they are all the one's the Father gave to His Son..

John 6:37-39 ³⁷ "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

But as we come to our text this morning we must understand that not even the elect,(the one's for whom Christ came to purchase and bring home to glory on the last day), are exempt from the curse and the sin in which they were born into this world.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All men in all generations were and are disobedient to their God and Creator, thus making all people worthy of condemnation and death.

Ephesians 2:1-3 ^{NAU} And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

The difference between the sons of disobedience, of which Paul speaks in Ephesians, and those who are described as once being dead in their sins and trespasses, formerly living in the lusts of their flesh, is that these believers were brought from death to life by the Spirit of God as the gospel was declared to them.

This is the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit that Paul speaks of in his letter to Titus.

Titus 3:5-7 ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

Only the Spirit of God can cause us to be born from above, or born again, to a life that must be manifest from the life giver Himself. This process is described by the prophet Ezekiel who demonstrates

that a new heart must first be planted in a human being as the old one is taken out.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 ²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

With this quick background we can now move to the passage that describes Jesus going to make proclamation to the spirits in prison.

As is the case with any portion of God's word if we are to exegete a passage like this we must come to the passage with the context in mind and also other portions of God's word that deal with the same subject matter.

The first thing to consider is the phrase, proclamation to the spirits in prison. Where else in the word of God do we see similar language? The second thing to consider is the fact that these spirits are further explained in our text as being those who once were disobedient and that some of these disobedient one's had God's patience extended to them during the days of Noah as God was about to judge the world with a flood.

To the first issue, "the proclamation to the spirits in prison", the word of God is replete with language that shows clearly what this means.

We need only go back to the Garden of Eden to get the flavor of the impending prison to which mankind would be subject when the Lord judged both Satan and the first man and woman God created.

We are told that as a result of their disobedience they died as God promised. And yet, their physical death did not take place for hundreds of years. And yet their spiritual death, which cut off their former relationship with the living God, came to an end the moment they partook of the forbidden fruit.

From that moment on they became prisoners of the sin and the curse that God thrust upon all mankind and all of His creation. In our text Peter alludes to the judgment on the entire world by God through a flood because of the sinful hearts of all men.

This same judgment will take place at the end as those who are slaves of sin will be punished as well. The prophet Isaiah points this out as he speaks of this judgment on the entire world.

Isaiah 24:3-6 ³ The earth will be completely laid waste and completely despoiled, for the LORD has spoken this word. ⁴ The earth mourns *and* withers, the world fades *and* withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. ⁵ The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

Isaiah 24:22-23 ²² They will be gathered together *Like* prisoners in the dungeon, And will be confined in prison; And after many days they *will be* punished. ²³ Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And *His* glory will be before His elders.

This is the exact imagery we have of the last judgement found in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 6:12 - 7:1 ¹² I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴ The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

It is the sin of mankind that brings the wrath of God in judgment and it is this sin which has plagued man since the fall which leads to disobedience toward the one true God and Savior and making man a prisoner of his own sin.

Psalms 107:10-11 ¹⁰ There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery and chains, ¹¹ Because they had rebelled against the words of God And spurned the counsel of the Most High.

These prisoners of sin who revel in their disobedience are doomed to live in the dungeon of wrath forever, the lake of fire. And yet, the promise is held out to man that a redeemer would be born of

the seed of the woman, and through Him there would be hope of deliverance.

Psalm 102:18-22 ¹⁸ This will be written for the generation to come, That a people yet to be created may praise the LORD. ¹⁹ For He looked down from His holy height; From heaven the LORD gazed upon the earth, ²⁰ To hear the groaning of the prisoner, To set free those who were doomed to death, ²¹ That *men* may tell of the name of the LORD in Zion And His praise in Jerusalem, ²² When the peoples are gathered together, And the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.

That very redeemer was declared through the prophets of old.

Isaiah 61:1-3 ^{NAU} The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; ² To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, ³ To grant those who mourn *in Zion*, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

The Spirit of God was upon the Messiah as He was anointed to do what? To declare liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

This sounds very much like what Peter is describing in our text that the crucified Lord Jesus has risen in the Spirit to make proclamation to the spirits in prison as He has defeated sin and death and now, through His atoning work, He proclaims liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners.

In fact, Jesus Himself uses the prophet Isaiah's prophecy to confirm that this was precisely why He came into the world.

Luke 4:16-21 ¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM

RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." ²⁰ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Our Lord makes clear that His objective was to fulfill the Father's will which was to come into this world and preach the gospel to the poor which would result in releasing the captives from prison.

Well, did Jesus go throughout Israel releasing prisoners from all of the jails? Of course, not. Not even John the Baptist was exempt from such incarceration. But Jesus did release prisoners of a spiritual kind who were held in the bondage of sin.

Paul himself fully understood this bondage.

Romans 7:13-14 ¹³ Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. ¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

Being sold into bondage to sin was accomplished when Adam decided to exchange his future of life with God for the condemnation and judgment which he purchased for all mankind through his act of disobedience. You and I in Adam are prisoners of this condemnation and only one person can set us free from this bondage and that is Christ the Lord.

But praise God that our Lord Jesus came to pay that price in full for all of His people and that through His act of love for us we are no longer slaves or prisoners of sin but we are now slaves of the One who has given us life.

Romans 6:17-19 ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

But how can Peter say that, in His resurrected state, Jesus went to preach to the spirits in prison and then reference those who were disobedient during the days of Noah? Doesn't this sound like Jesus, in His resurrected state, went to a particular place and spoke to spirits, not flesh and blood human beings?

Again, this is where not taking the context into account and not using existing biblical language can get us into exegetical trouble. I hope, as we've pointed out so far, that we begin to see how Jesus is the fulfillment of passages like those in Isaiah where it is plain that bondage and slavery and prisoners of sin are all expressions of how human beings are in need of salvation.

It is Christ coming into this world preaching, declaring and proclaiming, both before and after His resurrection, that He is the one who can set us free from the prison of wrath from God. When Peter says that Christ is preaching to the spirits in prison it is not speaking about some strange doctrine where the risen Christ travels to the nether world, be it hell or heaven or something in between.

Peter is simply declaring the obvious from the passage and that is that Christ has redeemed a people for Himself through the agency of His atoning work on the cross, resurrection and ascension to the Father, as the Spirit of God awakens this truth in the hearts of sinful, though chosen people, who were once formerly children of wrath.

But the question then comes up why the reference to Noah? Doesn't it seem obvious that the risen Jesus is visiting these people who are obviously dead but whose spirits need preached to?

Again, as we pointed out in the last study, there is no room for any sort of redemption after one dies physically. One either goes to be with Lord through faith in the Messiah, or one goes to hell or hades, until the final day when both groups will be bodily resurrected from the grave, either unto eternal life with Christ or eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire.

This has been the arrangement from day one. When Abel was murdered he didn't go to Abraham's bosom, as if there was a place called Abraham's bosom as we discussed in the last study, since Abraham would not come on to the scene for many years.

No. Just as N.T. believers who die in Christ are absent from the body but present with the Lord, so too, O.T. believers who died in

Christ are absent from the body but present with the Lord, as we saw in the passage found in 2 Kings with Elijah.

2 Kings 2:1,11 ^{NAU} And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. ¹¹ As they were going along and talking, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.

By the way, when it is said that Christ preached to the spirits in prison this does not discount real flesh and blood people on this earth who received the witness of the Spirit coupled with the finished work of Christ on the cross and His subsequent resurrection which secured salvation for all who believe.

In fact, it was not uncommon for the apostles to speak to real flesh and blood believers living on this earth during the time of the apostolic ministry and address these saints as spirits.

We see it in a number of benedictions at the end of certain letters to the church.

Philemon 1:25 ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Galatians 6:18 ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

Philippians 4:23 ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

2 Timothy 4:22 ²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

So, what part of the believer is Paul speaking to in these believers? Is he only addressing their spirits? Is it only their spirits who need a blessing? Is it only their spirits that need the grace of Christ? Of course not. Paul is addressing the entire person who just happens to be made alive in the Spirit and who now has a real spiritual life that will live in that life with Christ forever.

In fact, Paul sums up the entire spiritual person for whom Christ died when writing to the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 ²³ Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be

preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? The entire person in Christ is spiritual. In fact, what Paul is telling the Thessalonians is that the entire person for whom Christ died, body, soul and spirit will be complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, Paul is addressing the resurrection of all believers where their physical bodies along with their spirits will find their completion on the last day just as Jesus promised that all that the Father gives Me will come to Me and I will raise them up on the last day.

And by the way, this is precisely what Peter is addressing when he brings the days of Noah into the picture. Remember that even during those days the disobedient were having the gospel preached to them as well.

They were spirits in prison and held in bondage to their sin which they reveled in and were not willing to give up. In fact, they rejoiced in their rebellion to the degree that God said enough is enough.

Genesis 6:5-7 ⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."

And yet, the Spirit of Christ worked in the hearts of 8 people who would be saved from the destruction and delivered from the prison of death.

Genesis 6:8 ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Noah didn't find favor because he was better than the rest. He found favor because he placed his faith in the promise of deliverance and the hope of the coming one who would take the curse and sin and blot it from the face of the earth and the flood was just a reminder of His cleansing grace.

And this is what Peter addresses in our text.

1 Peter 3:20 ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.

These disobedient spirits, these rebellious people during the days of Noah were extended the grace of God in both word and deed as the patience of God allowed them to hear the words of Noah who testified on the impending judgment but also deliverance through the ark which Noah was building.

Noah trusted that what God told him about the judgment and the deliverance from the flood through the ark was true. And by faith he proceeded to build the great ark according to the plans the Lord gave him.

Hebrews 11:7 ⁷ By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

He and his family would be saved and though sin was judged as all flesh was destroyed by the flood sin was not eradicated and thus there would be a need for the Messiah to fulfill the word of God to come into this world and become that sacrifice for our sin and thus cleanse us once and for all.

1 Peter 3:21-22 ²¹ Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you...”

Corresponding to what?

Corresponding to the image of Noah and the flood which foreshadowed salvation from the impending judgment of God. All of this pointed to the promises of God regarding the Messiah who found their fulfillment in Christ Jesus who was born into this world of a virgin, lived perfectly according to the law of God, suffered and died for our sin on the cross taking the wrath of God for us, and then victoriously raising from the dead three days later.

This is the gospel that Peter is referencing throughout this portion of God's word and it is the Spirit of God who has opened the eyes

of people in all generations, including Noah's, to see this as they are set free from the prison of darkness and sin as their punishment is taken by the Lord of glory.

So, corresponding to this, (that is, God's salvation which cleanses us from our sin), baptism now saves us. Here we go. There are groups out there that take this passage and others like it and conclude that baptism is the means by which we are saved together with Christ's work on the cross.

I can tell you from personal experience, growing up a Roman Catholic, that the teaching of that group makes it clear that baptism does in fact save. This is termed baptismal regeneration and is usually associated with infants who are cleansed from original sin as the waters of the baptismal font symbolize an actual taking away of that sin, thus placing that infant in a state of grace whereby if he were to die in infancy he would immediately be taken to be with the Lord.

In fact, the entire sacramental system of Rome is designed to assist in accomplishing this salvation and is also seen in the last sacrament of Extreme Unction whereby the person is anointed with oil in the "last rites" and is thus cleansed and made ready to leave this world prepared either for entrance to heaven or purgatory.

From the Roman Catholic website, New Advent, they make this claim regarding the administration of extreme unction.

"To perform this rite fully takes an appreciable time, but in cases of urgent necessity, when death is likely to occur before it can be completed, it is sufficient to employ a single unction (on the forehead, for instance) with the general form: "Through this holy unction may the Lord pardon thee whatever [sins](#) or faults thou hast committed." By the [decree](#) of 25 April, 1906, the Holy Office has expressly approved of this form for cases of urgent necessity."

But back to our text. When Peter says, that baptism now saves you, is he actually talking about water baptism? Well, the text itself answers that.

1 Peter 3:21 ²¹ Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

The water used in water baptism symbolizes the removal of sin from a person as we are cleansed from the filth and pollution of sin.

Speaking of external rites established by God to point to the Messiah who brings salvation the writer of Hebrews makes clear that there is no established rite or good work that can attain unto righteousness, rather they point to the One who cleanses and this is Christ Himself.

Hebrews 9:13-14 ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The writer of Hebrews goes on to explain the good conscience that Peter addresses in our text by explaining that there is a pure water that washes our bodies but it is not of the H₂O type. It is a cleansing that results from drawing near to Christ by faith as we hold fast the confession of our hope found in Him alone.

Hebrews 10:22-23 ²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

Back to our text.

1 Peter 3:21 ²¹ Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Our good conscience is a good conscience toward God. We no longer have to fear that we will come under His wrath because the sin that separated us from God has been eliminated as our status has been changed by God Himself from guilty to not guilty, from enemy to friend, from an alien to a beloved adopted child.

But this status does not come from anything we could accomplish but rather by what Christ accomplished on our behalf as He imputed His righteousness to our account. This is why we have a good conscience toward God and Paul drives home this point when writing to the Romans.

Romans 8:1-4 ^{NAU 1} Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh,

God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

But again, notice where Peter goes with our text as he tells us how baptism now saves us and equates that, not with a cleansing of the outward flesh, but a cleansing of the heart giving us a good conscience toward God as he places the accomplishment of this act of cleansing in the final victory of Christ over sin and death; that is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is through the resurrection that you and I have access to the Father because it was through the resurrection that Christ gained access to the Father on our behalf and accomplished the will of the Father as He has really and truly secured the salvation of all that the Father gave Him and these He will most certainly raise up on the last day as we too will rise from the dead and receive resurrected glorified bodies like our Lord's.

1 Peter 3:22 ²² who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

This risen Jesus is at the right hand of God and makes intercession for us continually. He has risen and we have been seated with Him in the heavenly places in the sense that our position before the Father is also at His side as our Lord Jesus brings us to God through the atoning work on the cross and then secures that through His resurrection.

Ephesians 2:4-8 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

This is the God we serve and love and the God we long to be with as we anticipate the hope of glory that is found in Christ on that last day as He comes for us and raises us up on that last day as He then turns this entire universe upside down, cleansing the curse through His fiery glory and establishing His kingdom in this world as He dwells with us forever on the new earth and heavens.

This is a glorious thing we look forward to and in Peter's second letter he holds out this hope and how we should respond to it in this life as we wait for the next. We'll end with this today.

2 Peter 3:13-14 ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,