

**1 Peter 3:18-22**  
**(John 10:11-18)**  
**“That He Might Bring Us to God”**

**Introduction**

We come this morning to the most difficult passage in this letter, and one of the most difficult in the entire New Testament. By difficult, I mean difficult to understand. Other passages are far more difficult for us because we understand them all too clearly but do not want to believe and obey them. But here the problem is one of understanding just exactly what Peter is talking about, and I must confess at the outset that the finest commentators down through history have disagreed with one another, so on the debatable parts of this passage, we should certainly state our own conclusions humbly and acknowledge that they are provisional.

But why even take the time to address the text if it is so confusing? For at least two reasons: First, it is part of the Scriptures, which we believe to be God’s Word to us, and so it deserves to be heard and studied. Secondly, there are clear and important lessons that can be drawn from the text regardless of one’s specific interpretation of its more confusing parts. So perhaps it would be helpful to begin by pointing out what are its more difficult and confusing aspects.

The primary problems are as follows: First, who are the “spirits in prison”? Second, who proclaimed a message to them? And, third, what exactly was that message? Views range from believing that “spirits in prison” refers to those who rejected the invitation of Noah to repent and so perished in the Flood, to the view that it refers to the fallen angels who rebelled against God. Others hold that it refers to all those who had died prior to Christ’s death and resurrection, and still others that it refers to those who heard the apostles’ testimony beginning at Pentecost. Some believe that the one doing the proclaiming was the Spirit of God speaking through Noah, others that it was Jesus “alive in the spirit” between the time of his death and resurrection preaching the gospel to the dead, others that it was Jesus in his glorified body after the resurrection declaring what he had accomplished, and still others that it was the spirit of Jesus speaking through his apostles. On a minor note, there is also the question of what exactly Peter meant by saying, “Baptism ... now saves you” (3:21). This verse has been used as a proof text by those who believe that water baptism washes away our sins and makes us right with God.

Rather than trying to take each view and explain what I take to be its strengths and weaknesses, which would be necessary if this were a seminary classroom, let me rather draw five important lessons that clearly emerge from this text whichever view one holds about the debatable portions. Remember that Peter is writing to those who are facing persecution, encouraging them to stand fast in the face of whatever comes and to realize that nothing can finally harm them if they continue pursuing life in Christ. In these particular verses, Peter’s main objective is to show

them that it was through the same kind of suffering they are facing that Christ saved them and set them free, and that therefore it is by sharing in Christ's sufferings that they have hope of sharing in his glory.

## **Body**

- 1. Through Christ's sufferings, we are reconciled to God (3:18).**
- 2. Through Christ's death, we are freed from bondage (3:19).**
- 3. Through Christ's victory, we are saved from judgment (3:20).**
- 4. Through Christ's resurrection, we are cleansed from guilt (3:21).**
- 5. Through Christ's ascension, our salvation is secured (3:22).**

## **Conclusion**

Whenever the church of Jesus Christ has sought to advance God's Kingdom through political, economic or military power, it has soon become a reflection of the brokenness of a world in rebellion against God and has become infected with the very disease it was meant to cure. Whenever the church has chosen the way of Christ, who laid aside his glory, who used his power to heal and help his enemies rather than to destroy them, whenever it has chosen the so-called weakness and foolishness of the gospel of Christ over the much vaunted wisdom and power of this world, then it has begun again to turn the world upside down, to heal the broken and restore families, communities and nations.

When will we learn? When will we believe that there is really nothing that can finally harm us if our hope is in Christ, that no weapon forged against us can prevail if we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that it is through sharing in Christ's sufferings that we truly overcome the world?

Hear the good news of the gospel: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (3:18). Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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