ALWAYS BEING PREPARED, PART 2

1 Peter 3:17-22

This morning we’re going to pick right up where we left off two weeks ago in 1 Peter Chapter 3. We didn’t cover a lot of ground last time, only 4 verses, but this material is very important and it is theologically deep and rich. We had good discussion two weeks ago and I think it’s important we talk about and understand what Peter is saying here in Chapter 3. “Always being prepared” is the title for this lesson and it comes from verse 15 of Chapter 3 which says, “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” “So, why are you a Christian?” We need to be able to answer that question should we are asked. The picture on this slide depicts God’s judgment on the earth in Noah’s day which we will make reference to later in this lesson.

Before we read verse 17 I need to do a quick recap of our study so far – covering the six previous lessons. Who is Peter’s target audience? Who is he writing this letter to? To the scattered, persecuted saints living in exile, specifically in the 5 Roman provinces mentioned at the beginning of his letter (1:1). The Christians Peter writes to were suffering unjustly because of their faith in Christ. Many had lost their homes, jobs and material possessions. And now they were forced to live as aliens away from their homes. It’s around the same time that Peter wrote this letter, around 64 A.D., that the Roman emperor, Nero, began to step up his persecution of Christianity. Some Christians will be martyred for their faith including Peter himself. Why does Peter write this letter? To encourage these suffering saints, to give them much needed words of hope and comfort during very troubling times. Keep this in mind as you study First Peter.

In Chapter 1 Peter reminds these believers of their great salvation in Christ, of the blessings of their inheritance, what he calls, “a living hope” (1:3). He reminds them of all that is theirs in Christ. He reminds them of their calling, that they’ve been set apart for holy living. He urges them to abstain from the passions of the flesh, to keep their conduct honorable among the Gentiles, in other words, those unbelievers whom live around. Their good deeds, their holy lives, as well as their words, will serve as a positive testimony for Jesus Christ. Peter lays out their responsibility (and our responsibility) as Christians in Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3. The key phrase Peter repeats is “be subject to.” And he talks about being subject in 3 main areas of life: civil, social and family. He says “be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution…to the emperor…to governors…” (2:13). Peter says to be subject to the government. Be good citizens where you now live. He says, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect…” (2:18). In other words be good servants, good employees even if your master, your boss, is not very nice and unfair. He says “wives, be subject to your own husbands…” (3:1) even if they are unbelievers. Why? Because by your “respectful and pure conduct” (3:2) you may win them to Christ. And Peter has a word for the husbands as well: “live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to her…” (3:7) again, whether she’s a Christian or not.

In all three of these areas the example that Peter points to is Jesus Himself. Peter gives five positive character traits that Christian brothers and sisters should possess: (1) unity of mind, have a common goal. What is our common goal as Christians living in an unchristian world? To advance the kingdom of heaven; (2) sympathy; (3) brotherly love; (4) a tender heart; and (5) a humble mind. Our motivation is not to please men, other people, but to please God. Peter reminds these persecuted believers and us that God is watching. He’s fully aware of what’s going on. God hears the prayers of the righteous and He judges those who do evil.

And then in our lesson two weeks ago Peter talked about being “zealous for what is good.” Living a life marked by goodness, generosity, kindness and so forth will not eliminate persecution but it might slow down to some degree the resentment and evil treatment done to Christians. Those who do not know Christ and might even be hostile toward Christianity will have more difficulty speaking against you even if they oppose your beliefs. It will be harder to criticize you if your behavior is above reproach. We see a parallel between Peter’s words in verse 3:14 “even if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed” with Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” God will honor those who suffer for doing what is right.

[flip slide] READ 1 Peter 3:17.

In this evil world it’s a given that we are going to suffer if we live out our Christian faith. We have two options – we can suffer for doing good or we can suffer for doing evil. If we suffer for doing good, for what is right, for doing God’s will for us, then 3:14 says we “will be blessed.” That Greek word for “blessed” is *makarios* and it means to experience all of the fullness of the indwelling Spirit of God. In 4:14 Peter says, “you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” On the other hand a Christian could also suffer for doing evil, for doing what is wrong, for not doing God’s will. There is a consequence for that also that will not be pleasant. Peter says, “it is better to suffer for doing good.” And the model for this, for how we believers are to live out our Christian faith and respond to the persecution that may come our way, is Jesus Christ. Are you really willing to commit to doing the will of God no matter the consequences? Jesus did and look where it took Him. He ended up being crucified on a Roman cross.

READ 1 Peter 3:18-22

Wow! There is a lot here that we need to try and unpack. Verse 18, when Jesus was killed unjustly, He triumphed over sin. “The righteous [Jesus who knew no sin] for the unrighteous [sinful mankind, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God]. Christ’s victory brought us to God. His death on the cross made a way for our salvation. As Peter said back in Chapter 1, we “were ransomed…with the precious blood of Christ.”

Verse 18 again: “Being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” Paul says it this way in Romans 6:4: “We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Jesus suffering, His death on the cross, brought us salvation. And this deep theological point is what Peter explains further in the next few verses. He uses the analogy of Noah and the ark.

Let me at this point briefly explain the meaning of verse 19. It is very complicated and theologians and scholars are not in agreement.

“In which He [Jesus] went. Jesus was made alive and went in the spirit (v 18). When? (1) After His death on the cross and before His resurrection? (2) After His resurrection from the dead? (3) Preincarnate Jesus? (4) Some other time? We don’t really know. But we know He went and He went in the spirit. Where did Jesus go? “He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.”

The Greek word translated as “spirits” can refer to human spirits, angels or demons.

#1 Between Christ’s death and resurrection His living spirit went down to the abyss (hell, Hades) and preached, He “proclaimed” to the demon spirits bound there (these “angels who have sinned” are mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4). What did Jesus proclaim? If He is talking to the demons in hell then more than likely He is proclaiming His final victory over sin, death, hell and the grave by His death on the cross and upcoming resurrection. I lean strongly to this interpretation based on Colossians 2:15: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.”

#2 Christ spirit went down to Hades and preached to the spirits of human beings who had perished in the flood of Noah’s day because they had rejected Noah’s message. Again His message would be a proclamation of His victory over sin and the grave.

#3 Christ’s spirit went down to Hades and preached to all the lost souls who were there at that time.

#4 Jesus did not just proclaim victory but He preached a message of salvation and offered these lost souls a second chance. Most theologians reject this “second chance” interpretation because it is a doctrine found nowhere else in scripture. The Bible is clear that after death comes judgment for all those who reject God and His plan for salvation (Hebrews 9:27).

#5 A pre-incarnate Jesus back in Noah’s day proclaims a message through Noah. In 2 Peter 2:5 Noah is called a “herald of righteousness.” In this interpretation the message being preached is one of God’s impending judgment on the earth. It is the rejection of this message by the people of Noah’s day that resulted in them being wiped off the face of the earth and their spirits being placed “in prison,” that is, in hell.

#6 Jesus went to preach His upcoming victory and lordship to the righteous saints who have died. Most theologians reject this because of the term “spirits in prison” which means the spirits were not with the Lord in heaven but in some other place waiting to be released. Paul says, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

I’m not going to be dogmatic but to me the most viable interpretations are #1 and #5.

So the picture of salvation in Christ that Peter uses here is the ark that Noah built. Verse 20 talks about this. The ark carried only 8 people (out of probably millions) to safety during God’s judgment on the earth. The ark was God’s one and only means of deliverance from His judgment. It carried those who voluntarily went into it to a brand new life. And so it is for those who are in Christ. Millions of people perished in the great flood, God’s judgment. And why? For one reason only. Because they rejected Noah’s message (God’s message through His spokesman Noah). For 120 years while the ark was being built, Noah preached a message that God’s judgment was coming. It was in preparation for this judgment that Noah was building the ark. Peter conveys this same thought thru the rest of Chapter 3.

Verse 21, how does God save US? He saves us by the one and only means of salvation from divine judgment. He saves us thru the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, there is a lot of disagreement about what the baptism is that Peter mentions in verse 21. I’m going to tell you what I think. If you look the context of the verses before this, Peter is not talking about water baptism as we normally think about baptism. He says, “not as a removal of dirt from the body,” not water baptism. He’s talking about the baptism of God’s judgment upon the earth in Noah’s day. Think about it. The ark represents Jesus Christ. We are saved from the wrath of God’s judgment if we are IN CHRIST. There is judgment for those outside of Christ. It’s a great picture. Just a thought here. In Noah’s day who was it that got wet? Those who drowned, the masses of people who rejected God’s message and were outside the ark. Who is it that gets wet in our traditional baptismal waters? Those who have accepted God’s message of salvation.

Well Jesus suffered terribly. He was obedient to death on a cross. Jesus died as a result of being crucified. But He didn’t stay dead, did He? Where is Jesus now? Verse 22 says that He “has gone into heaven.” He is seated at the right hand of God – that’s the place of honor and power. After His resurrection Jesus ascended back to the Father (Acts 1:9) and took His rightful seat. Hebrews 1:3 says, “After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews 10:12 says, “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.” And what’s Jesus doing there today? He is interceding for us, His saints. Hebrews 9:24 says, “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” And Peter tells us that all created beings are subject to Jesus. Paul in Ephesians 1:20-21 says, “He [God the Father] raised Him [Jesus, the Son] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

Peter actually continues this same thought into Chapter 4 and verse 6. This is why the gospel was preached to you, so that you might escape judgment. And this is why we preach the same gospel to a lost world, to people characterized by all those things in 4:3-4, so that they too will have an opportunity to escape God’s judgment to come. That’s why we’re here. That’s the reason why when we got saved God didn’t just take us on home. It isn’t about us and our comfortable life and accumulating wealth. It’s about reaching people with the gospel message… while there is yet time!

So, then, this is why we must always be prepared to make a defense, to explain to anyone who asks us, for a reason for the hope in us. We need to tell others why we are a Christian. We must tell them the good news. Our lives are important. But our message, our words are crucial.