

XXIX. I Peter in Biblical Perspective  
*The Elect in the Exile*  
“Christian Suffering and the Suffering of Christ—Part 1”  
I Peter 3:18–22  
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I Peter 3:18–22 says [18] *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, [19] in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, [20] because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. [21] Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, [22] who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The Lord's Day every week reminds us that our Savior died for us, He has risen and that He is coming again. And we rejoice in that but every so often in the church we focus on some themes from the Bible and church history. Today is Reformation Sunday and I believe it is the most profound movement of the Spirit of God since Pentecost. I love to remember it for a number of reasons. One is that I long for God to do this again and I have some hope that He will yet do it maybe in my own nation. I make that a groaning prayer that He would visit us with a Gospel awakening yet I know it will not come without a revival. Revivals come when there's a reformation among leaders and in the pulpit. We are in desperate need of this.

This hope I have for this has reason from this negative analysis. I read the Bible and see that God came down in judgment because of the shedding of the blood of the innocent one Abel. God came down in judgment when a nation decided not to love a nation but began to worship that nation and believed that its salvation came through that nation as they raised up a tower of Babel. I see the judgment God brings in the sins of sexual anarchy in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. Then I look at my own nation. There is not one innocent blood but 1.5 million at least every year and now such acts of abortion have spread to infanticide, to active euthanasia and to countries that have preceded us with the Gospel which have now reverted to the death of those with special needs. It's so horrendous yet God has not judged us.

I see the rebellion that we embrace shamelessly that which God tells us to repent of and flee to Christ for forgiveness, Gospel transformation and Gospel redemption in terms of the sins of addiction which include sexual anarchy yet God forestalls the judgment. I see the arrogance of taking a nation and turning the worship of nation using God has a tribal god for a nation instead of the God of all the nations. Maybe that is the judgment of God but could that be the patience of God calling to repentance and that He would yet visit us with a Gospel awakening, and a revival that would begin in a reformation. Oh for another constellation of reformers like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer and one I will tell you about in this study, John Hopper. Oh that God would rend the heavens again and come down by His Spirit to do that even in our own midst. I long for, pray for and groan for that.

The reason I am staying in I Peter on this Reformation Sunday is because we are at a paragraph of verses that I think are foundational to the Reformation, the reason for the Reformation, the inspiration and motivation of the Reformation. When you recapture salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone you come back to the supremacy that it is Christ who saved us. These Reformers suffered for Christ.

Peter tells us how elect exiles live and these are those through God's sovereign grace through the foundation of the world have ordained to save. Exiles are who we are for Christ in a broken world on our way to a Promised Land. Peter gives us the Gospel blessings and Gospel commands which tell us how we are to live. Beginning in I Peter 3:13 going all the way to I Peter 5:11 is a how exiles will serve Him with a mission, a message, in ministry in some context of an environment of suffering. Peter calls this Christian suffering. That is suffering, not for evil or because the world is broken or because you have a broken body but suffering for Christ's sake, righteousness sake, for the sake of the truth if it be God's will.

God has called us to this suffering and every believer and every church that will be faithful to Christ to some degree at some time will suffer in this world for Christ. In a world in rebellion to the Lord can only get to the Lord by bringing adversity and suffering upon the body of Christ, the Lord's people and His people are to say 'no' to the fear and intimidation that such persecution would bring for He has called us to that suffering but that suffering will bring two things.

The first thing is that this suffering is a blessing from the Lord. In the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 there is only one thing that brings two blessings of Divine benediction. Matthew 5:11–12 says [11] *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* He says 'In that blessing from My hand I have provided for you an opportunity for you to verbally communicate Christ as Savior (the message) to the world and to visually validate Christ as Lord (the message).

We studied this in I Peter 3:15–16 which says [15] *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.* You do this in a way that they will only be able to bring glory to God for what you have done as well as what you have said. In other words, the day of suffering for Christ is the day of a platform and opportunity to verbally confess Christ as you confirm Him as Lord in your heart so that the way we live validates the message we bring. This is what the Reformers did.

If it wasn't for the Reformers you would not have even heard a hymn in your own language but they died that you might worship the Lord. I couldn't have even offered a Bible to anyone before the Reformation. Many of the Reformers died so that you could have a Bible that tells you of the majesty of the God of the Word who created you, sent His Son to die on a cross for you, who now will sustain you by the strength of His might as your Hope and Refuge in the day of trouble and all those things you know from His Word that is now available to you in your own language. Before the Reformation you wouldn't have had the opportunity to have the Lord's Supper. You could have assembled and watched the elements, maybe lifted on the other side as somebody else had the Lord's Supper on your behalf but you wouldn't have had it. Yet by God's grace these Reformers captured the simplicity and profundity of the Gospel and its implications for the life, worship and sacraments of the church. Many suffered and died so we could have all this.

If you want to know some of the gruesome deaths these Reformers went through then go read Fox's Book of Martyrs or J.C Ryle's book The Five English Reformers. These Reformers suffering gloriously, powerfully, grievously yet triumphantly and the key to why they did it, how they did it and what they did it for is right here in this I Peter 3:18–22 text. I Peter 3:18 gives us the reason which says *[18] For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.* I believe this was the foundation as to why there was a Reformation and the inspiration as to why they suffered unto death in Christ, for Christ and for this message to get to us. This is the key to any suffering that we do for Christ on the way to glory as well.

This is found in a paragraph that is highly challenging. We will take a couple of studies to look further into this paragraph. I'm sure you have questions about this paragraph like 'what are these spirits who are now in prison' or 'what does it mean it is like in the days of Noah' or 'what is this baptism saves you stuff.' When I read a commentary on this paragraph I couldn't help but think of Peter as he is ending his second epistle, II Peter 3:15–16 which says *[15] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, [16] as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*

If Paul read this I bet he would say "Peter, what do you mean I write things that are hard to understand, what do you think I Peter 3:18–22 is?" I won't be answering those questions of spirits in prison, days of Noah and saved by baptism in this study because there's a principle in understanding the hard things in the Bible but because the Bible is the Word of God it cannot contradict itself. So when you study the hard things you first go to the context of the clearer things because the hard things cannot contradict the clearer things. This text is abundantly clear in the opening verse and closing verse so in this study that is where we'll start.

We see the essence of the Gospel in I Peter 3:18 where we're saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and I Peter 3:22 says *[22] who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.* Here we see clearly that Jesus has risen, is ascended and is in glory who now intercedes for us as He rules and reigns with full authority over all authorities. These are very clear so whatever is in the middle of these two verses can't undo these two bookends.

There is a man I'd love to meet named Lord Sandwich and he invented something that has been the delight of my life. He was responsible for inventing the sandwich. I wish I had invented the sandwich. Whenever I would come home from baseball, basketball or football practice the very first thing I would do is make a sandwich and it was a work of art. Right now I can see my mother standing behind me waiting for me to make a mistake. I can still hear her say "Son, you utterly have ruined two pieces of bread! What is all that mess in-between?"

That is the way I feel with this I Peter 3:18–22 passage initially. I have two good solid pieces of bread, verse 18 and verse 22 and then there is this stuff in-between. I will get to that because it is beneficial to us but first let's understand how it's sandwiched. So I'm going to give you some thoughts on how this is sandwiched and how it deals with Christian suffering. These two verses should not surprise you because these two verses are abundantly clear here.

God sent His Son from glory/heaven to the earth to become a Man who humbled Himself by His humanity to go to a cross as this Messiah would suffer, be rejected, die for our sins and His suffering would not merely be that of rejection by His own but it would be the rejection and suffering of all of hell from the Father on Him for us. He came in order to go back to glory and

there are 17 verses from Isaiah to the New Testament that lay out the Messiah's work from glory to suffering to glory. They were amazed that Jesus suffered on the cross and He had to correct them so they would understand this very flow in I Peter 3:18 and 22 – suffering to glory. Actually I will show you two of these 17 passages. First let's look at Luke 24.

The news is out that He has risen and here He meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus trying to wrap their mind around what has just happened with Jesus. Luke 24:25–26 says [25] *And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should **suffer** these things and enter into his **glory**?"* He suffered not only for the glory of the Father but to bring us to glory through Him and with Him. Now I'd like to look at a second passage.

Hebrews 2:10 says [10] *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, **should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering**.* Here is the One by whom all things are made, for all things are made and the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. Through the perfecting work of His suffering He atones for the sins of His people so that when He returns to glory we have title right to glory in Him and with Him. Through His suffering He brings many sons (men and women) to glory. The Reformers suffered with an eye to glory as well.

Every Christian (son of glory) will suffer to some degree on the way to glory but there was One Son who suffered who was sinless. We have the privilege to suffer for righteousness sake and we have that privilege because His Son suffered for our unrighteousness sake. So what kind of suffering did He do to bring us to glory? We see five things about Christ's suffering from this text. According to the text Christ suffered once for sins, the Righteous for the unrighteous that He might bring His people (us) to God by being put to death in the flesh and made alive in the Spirit.

So, number one, Christ's suffering to bring many sons to glory was personal. This isn't a concept, a theory or something up for discussion or debate. It is the actual fact that the Son of God by whom all things were made, in whom all things exist and continue to exist, took upon Himself a true body, went to a cross and God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). The One who abhors sins and had this glorious, unbroken, intimate, pure relationship with the Father which became utterly broken at the cross, became sin on our behalf. He cries out from the cross "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?!" Jesus knows the angst of this and that's why He cried out in the garden in Luke 22:42, [42] *saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."* We aren't the first to ask why salvation has to come this way for Jesus even did it in the garden. There He personally committed to becoming what He hated – sin – in order to experience and have poured out upon Him the unendurable cup of suffering so that we would not have to suffer the death of hell. He drank it until He could say "It is finished!" He paid it all, personally for you as your Redeemer.

He took a stand at the cross personally. In the Old Testament you get types of Christ like Moses who grab a hold of a staff to teach us of deliverance. Then you get One greater than Moses, Jesus, who takes hold not of a staff, but a cross and was nailed to it to make us new, personally. That's your Savior. Do you know Him personally today? Where would you go without Him and to who would you go if not Him? This is the Son of God who loves you and died on the cross for you personally.

Secondly, He died vicariously for our sins. It was the Righteous for the unrighteous. Here was a worthy Sacrifice brought by a worthy Priest. Jesus was the One to bring the

Sacrifice. He was the Sacrifice, the Righteous One. Vicarious means substitution. Here is my best illustration on this. We were blessed with three children and the first child we had the way God intended for people to have children. My wife came to me and said 'My suitcase is packed and I'm ready to go to the hospital.' Apparently the Lord has been stirring and she packed it that morning. I don't remember the ride to the hospital that day but when we got there I helped her out and got the suitcase and the nurse met me with that knowing little look saying 'Ok sir thank you, you may go to this room' as she sent me to the father's waiting room which is what God intended all along. Our firstborn arrived and went to see the baby through the nursery window because back then you were not allowed to hold them then. I went in and saw my wife, kissed her and she said 'I'm going to sleep' so I went home and came back the next day.

A couple of years later we had another child. By this time everyone is talking about how the father ought to participate in the birth of the child as if we are of some use in there. I never was able to attend the classes so when the time came for the delivery the nurse said to me 'you have to leave because you're not certified' because I had not been to the classes. So when our third one came along I was a student pastor and there were a lot of young couples in the church at that time so the pressure was on to go to Lamaze classes.

So for our third child I went to all six of the Lamaze classes and learned to focus and breathe which was what I was supposed to help my wife with. So I then stayed in at the birth of our third child. So there I was telling my wife during the delivery to focus and breathe and she finally said to me 'will you just shut up' so I had to go to a class for my wife to tell me that? I remember this belt like device that was around her that was attached to this graph. Every time a contraction came that needle on the graph would start moving like crazy but before it did that there was always this 'blip' and as soon as the 'blip' came the needle would start moving. After about 30 minutes, I started to notice that every time the blip came I noticed these pains in my stomach and the doctor told me those were vicarious because that is what you are doing to try and take the pain from your wife as I would try and take her place. I guess that's what it was for I loved her and wanted to take it from her but I couldn't.

I have a Savior who loves me and knew. He desired to take our sins from us by taking the hell that stood in front of us because I knew where I came from and where I was headed. I praise God that He sent someone who told me about Jesus and where He came from and now I'm headed to a different place. He took my place and substituted Himself. He didn't need me but wanted me. I didn't want Him but needed Him. Then He came and brought me to Himself.

Thirdly, His suffering is foundational. The foundation of the Gospel is that Christ died for us and now has entered into glory triumphant.

Fourthly, it is doxological. He did it once and for all. He has won the victory over our sins. He had defeated all of His enemies and all of ours. Therefore we have eternal life. This is to the praise of God.

Number five, it is victorious. He was faithful, persistent and He said 'I delight to do Your will O My Father' to bring many sons to glory.

Paul said in Romans 8:18, *[18] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* So here is my takeaway for this study. All God's sons will suffer for righteousness sake at some time to some degree on the way to glory, but there is only One sinless Son who came from glory to suffer for the unrighteous and bring us to glory. Do you know Him? If you do, then you are willing to suffer for Him on the way to glory and you count it as joy to make Him known even on the platform of suffering.

His name was John Hooper and he was the bishop of Gloucester. John had to flee England for his life. He came to Christ under the ministry of Zwingli and was also discipled by Zwingli. When King Edward VI came to the throne and announced the establishment of the reformed church in England then Hooper said he was going home. Zwingli said to him that he would be famous because he was a great preacher and told him to let him know of the fame that God grants him. Hooper said to Zwingli is 'I think the only thing you will know of me will be my ashes. I think I will die for Him.' It was almost prophetic.

King Edward VI died an early death and Mary ascended the throne. John Hooper was one of her first targets. I won't describe for you the torture he went through for 18 months while he was in prison nor will I describe the gruesomeness of his death at the stake but I will share with you one of the things that happened before he went to the stake to die for Christ. A man of authority, Sir Anthony Kingston, who he had led to Christ had come to plead with him. He wanted him to make the statement required to recant and sign it. "Consider," Kingston said, "that life is sweet, and death (you are about to face) is bitter. Life hereafter may do good." To that, Hooper memorably replied, "The life to come is more sweet, and the death to come is more bitter. It is that hereafter that will be my life. I suffer for Him gladly, my eye is on Him all the way to glory."

Because of the wind and other factors, they had to light the fire three times while Hooper was at the stake and it took 45 minutes for him to endure the stake. Each time they had to start the fire they brought an iron with them to fasten him to the stake but he said 'I need not the irons to hold me here for I have a Savior who will keep me here and I go to Him.' It is that suffering for Christ with the eye to glory that is ours because of our Savior who suffered for us to bring us to glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You so much for the grace of the Lord Jesus. Thank You for those many Reformers who died simply for that one word we have repeated today – alone. We are saved by grace alone though faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone, a glory that we will enjoy with Him, our Savior forever. Father, fill us with the joy of our Lord so that even in the day of suffering for Christ's sake we might validate the message – Jesus saves – and we might communicate the message that even those who would cause us to suffer would be brought to that same Savior. May we have the heart of Stephen (in the Bible) and John Hooper who both cried out for the salvation of those who had brought them to their death, even as we give thanks to the One who came freely to die for us, Jesus, the One who will bring us to glory by His amazing grace, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

### Power Point

Christian suffering is a Divine Blessing designed to provide an opportunity for a Christian to both verbally communicate Christ as Savior and visually affirm Christ as Lord.

### THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

- Personal
- Vicarious/substitutionary
- Foundational
- Doxological
- Victorious

## LIFE TAKEAWAYS

All of God's sons will suffer for righteousness sake at some time to some degree on the way to glory, but there is only one sinless Son who came from glory to suffer for the unrighteous and bring us to glory.