

I love doing puzzles. My wife got me a puzzle board so I could work on them without taking up a table space for weeks. Rica got me that is an impressionist painting and it is one of the hardest puzzles I have ever done. The way I like to do puzzles is to do the easy stuff first. You start with the edges, maybe a big obvious brightly colored piece. When I come to something difficult in a puzzle I leave that space alone and work on what is more attainable. Then I periodically come back to the hard part. My hope is that as I fill in the other parts I start to eliminate things and slowly will be able to piece together what I had no chance at understanding before.

That is what we are going to need to do this morning. The end of chapter 3 is the most difficult passage to understand in all of 1 Peter and is one of the more difficult texts in the entire Bible. One commentator counted 180 different valid interpretations. Martin Luther, who always had opinions and was never afraid to share his ideas even though he should have been said, "I am still not certain what the apostle meant." What makes the passage so difficult is Jesus preaches while in the place of the dead and verse 21 says, "Baptism saves you." What do we do with that? Well before we tackle the hard stuff, which I promise we will look at. We are going to start with what we can understand and work our way up to what is confusing.

Because this entire passage is not about theology. The entire picture is not trying to teach us the intricacies about Christ's descent to the earth and baptism. Those elements are there, but this passage is about obedience. It is calling us to live a particular way in the world. And so as we work on piecing this together, keep your mind of the picture Peter is calling us to. We are being called to be like Jesus and to behave a particular way.

Turn with me to 1 Peter 3:8-22. Let's take a look and try to make some sense of it.

I. Bless others even when cursed because we have been blessed (v. 8-12).

This is what Peter calls us to.

We are to be a blessing in the world.

And we are to bless other people around us even when we suffer.
Or even when other people are the ones causing our suffering.

Verse 8, **“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”**

Look at what we are called to be.

First, this is not an individual thing.

This is not just a list for us to work on by ourselves.

This is who we are to be as a church body.

As the corporate body of Christ, we need to work on this together.

That it would be a description of us as a church as well.

We are to have unity of mind.

We are to be united.

Not a unity that pretends we agree about everything.

Not a unity that keeps quiet about some stuff so we can pretend to like each other.

But a unity that cannot be shaken or destroyed by disagreement.

A unity that endures because we have the mind of Christ.

Likemindedness means “a common heritage of faith and ethical tradition.”

They are to be likeminded in a different way than the Romans around them or the other cultures and peoples.

They are to be united by the Christian tradition and Christian values.

We are united in Christ in a way political parties cannot be united.

We are united in Christ in a way fans of sports teams cannot be united.

We share Jesus.

We are united in Christ.

And we are to have the same mind in Christ.

We also are to be sympathetic to one another.

This is important since the entire book has been about suffering.

We are to care about the sufferings of others.

We are to carry them ourselves.

We are to have a familial love.

We call our church not members but a church family.

Because we are to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

And we should love each other like family.

In Christ's family you love one another even when you don't like each other very much.

In Christ's family, you love one another even when we can't stand one another.

Our love for each other is not dependent on what we do, but on who Jesus says that we are.

We also need to keep a tender heart towards others.

Being a Christian calls for having thick skin, but a tender heart.

We cannot allow our hearts to become hard.

Our hearts must remain soft.

We have to continue to love others.

Even when they curse or harm us, We must love in return.

And we are to be humble.

Now humility was not a Roman virtue.

They did not value or like humble people.

Humility was looked down upon as something the weak do.

But we are to be humble.

We are to consider others before ourselves.

All of these are not just about ourselves but others.

When we live out these virtues.

When we act like Jesus in these ways, then we can bless the people around us.

Verse 9, **"Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless,"**

We are to not repay evil for evil.

We are not to try and get even with those who wrong us.

Instead, we are to be a people who bless.
we turn the other cheek.
We bless those who curse us.

When people curse you out.
When people scream at you in anger.
We should respond with a benediction.
Pick any of the blessings we use on Sunday morning.

This would have been hard in the time period.
Because this is largely an honor and shame culture.
Being insulted and having your honor questioned was a serious offense.
It was not just about having self-control.
If someone reviled you or did evil to you, then you were expected to respond.
To allow it to happen would be shameful.

But God calls us to something different.
He calls for us to at times endure shame, that He may be glorified.
As Christ was shamed on the cross, and rose in glory.

How can we be these kinds of people?
Well we get there by doing what Peter calls us to in verse 8.
When we act like Jesus in those ways, then it gets easier to act like Jesus in others.

"for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing."

This is our calling as followers of Christ.
We have been called to be like Jesus not just as in His life, but to be like Christ in His sufferings.
To bless and we are cursed.
To love in return as we are hated.
And we do this in order to receive the blessing.

I don't think this blessing refers to salvation.
It is not saying we can earn salvation.
But refers to the blessing that come from following God.
The blessings of God always come after suffering.
Abraham's son was born after years of barrenness.
Joseph became a ruler after years of slavery and prison.
The promised land came after 400 years of slavery and the wilderness.
The resurrection was after the crucifixion.

If you want to obtain the blessings of God, we willingly endure suffering.
And we do it while blessing those who cause us suffering.
Just like Jesus did.

Peter then goes on to give a long quote from Psalms 34.

Verse 10, **For "Whoever desires to long life
and see good days,**

**let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;"**

In the psalms, long life and good days come from the blessing of God.
If we want to be a people who receive this blessing, then we need to obey.
Our tongues do not speak evil.
We keep our tongues from sinning or lies.

Verse 11, **"let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it."**

This again is who we are to be as followers of Christ.
We repent of evil and sin.
We turn away from it.
Instead, we turn ourselves towards God.
We live holy lives following in Jesus' footsteps.

And we are to seek and pursue peace.
Not the peace of the world.
Not just peace and quiet.

We are to pursue the peace of the kingdom of God.
The kind of peace that can only come from Christ.

Verse 12, **"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."**

This is the reason.

Why do we bless those who bless?

Why do we work so hard to follow Christ even in difficult seasons and days?

We do so because God looks at and listens to the righteous.

If we have faith, and if we are actively following Christ, then He hears our prayers.

This is just like last week where God said he does not hear the prayers of ungodly husbands.

He does not listen to the prayers of those who are not following Christ.

In fact, His face is against evil doers.

It means that He opposes them.

This is both a warning and a comfort.

We should be warned to not be evil.

To not sin because we do not want God to oppose us.

But this also should comfort us.

It should remind us that God opposes the evil.

We do not have to retaliate because God will.

WE do not have to have the last word in an argument, because God will.

We can submit to suffering and persecution, because one days they will have to submit to God.

II. Do good even when suffering because it is God's will (v. 13-17).

We need to follow Jesus and be holy even when we suffer.

Even when it is hard are we are being opposed.

Verse 13, **"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?"**

Peter does say we should be zealous for good.

We should be eager to do good.

And if we all following what Jesus asks, if we are acting and living like Jesus calls us to,

If we are like Christ, opposition will not be that likely.

Verse 14, **"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,"**

Suffering for righteousness sake means persecution.

It is not just the regular suffering that comes along with life in general.

This is if you are hated for Christ's name.

This is if you find yourself suffering because you are willing to follow Jesus even when it is costly.

Even in those times, God's word says that we are blessed.

And because of that blessing we have no need to be afraid.

No Christian should ever talk about coming persecution with fear.

We should never read a story anywhere in the world about how Christians are treated and be afraid of it happening to us.

Because there is no need to fear.

To be chosen to suffer for Jesus is a blessing.

We also should not be troubled by it.

This doesn't mean we should not find it sad.

Reading stories of churches in India being burned and pastors thrown in prison makes me sad.

That is okay.

But it should not shake our hearts.

It should not dislodge the hope that we have in Jesus.

Our hearts should not be overcome with worry and anxiety.

Verse 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,"**

First, we are to always be honoring Christ as Lord as holy.

Many people always call themselves Christians, but they do not act like Christ is Lord of their life.

They treat Christ more like a therapist or counselor.

They treat Christ like an advisor or a friend that helps but does not have to be obeyed.

They do not always acknowledge Him as someone who must be submitted to.

We have to always acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

Even when we suffer.

Even when we are persecuted.

We also have a famous verse here.

We talked about this some on Wednesday night.

We are to be prepared to give a defense of our faith.

To explain what our hope is.

This verse typically is spent talking about apologetics and how we can most effectively do that.

That is a valid and good application.

But, the context here is not a nice normal setting.

It is not a philosophical debate in a classroom.

This is a defense given in the midst of suffering.

This seems to be a defense given to someone who hates and is mistreating you.

We are to be prepared even then.

And our defense needs to be given with gentleness and respect.

I rarely hear that part quoted when I hear this verse.

People like to forget that we are to defend the faith.
But we defend the faith gently.
We defend the faith with respect even to our enemies.
Even to those who persecute us.

Verse 16, **"having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."**

The emphasis is less on having a good philosophical answer for the existence of God.

It is the idea that your life needs to back up what you say that you believe.
Our conscience should be good and clear.

You cannot explain to someone why you believe the Bible teaches about same sex sexuality while you are engaging in sexual immorality yourself.

You cannot explain the belief in Christ creating the church while never attending or submitting to a church yourself.

Our consciences need to be clean because we ourselves are attempting to follow Jesus.

We cannot just be like everyone else around us and we just happen to call ourselves Christians.

We must actually be Christians who live like Christians should.

So we can stand for truth without wondering if someone will point out all the ways we are failing.

We must live holy lives.

People will say all sorts of things about how hypocritical Christians are.

They may say things about how we only do things for money and power.

Our lives should be so holy.

We should have a good conscience about our own lives.

So that when they mock our faith and then look at our lives, then they are put to shame.

Then they have to realize those things are not true about us.

Verse 17, **"For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."**

It is a blessing to suffer for following Christ.

We should not suffer because we have sinned and made terrible decisions. Here he even says that there will be times God wills for us to suffer for good.

There will be times God chooses to bestow the honor of participating in the sufferings of Christ.

May we steward it well.

III. The suffering of Jesus brings us salvation (v. 18-22).

Now we are finally coming to the most difficult part of our passage.

Hopefully you already have a better picture of what the chapter means.

But the big idea I want you to keep in mind here, is that the big picture is that the suffering Jesus Christ Himself endured brings salvation.

When you do a puzzle you usually have the picture or the box.

And you pull up pieces and look back at the box to try and see how it all fits.

This point is our picture and box.

Continually look back and remind yourself that Christ suffered for us.

Verse 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,"**

Christ suffered for sins.

But He did not suffer because of His own sins, He suffered because of our sins.

He took the consequences we deserved on His own body.

And He did this for all of us.

He suffered for those who called themselves righteous and are put together.

And He suffered for the unrighteous and the wicked.

He did this so that we could be reconciled to God.

He died, but was resurrected.
His death was not the end.
His death on the cross was actually our victory.

Okay, you are with me so far.
But now it gets strange.

Verse 19, **"in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah,**

What does this mean?

It appears to refer to something Christ did while He was dead.
His body was dead, but His soul and spirit were alive.
And Jesus was doing something for those three days He was in the ground before His resurrection.

Part of what He did was proclaim or preach to spirits in prison.
He descends into hell, or into hades the place of the dead.
But this does not mean that Christ went to hell to be tortured and suffer further for us.
There are plenty of different valid interpretations of this passage, but that is not one of them.
Christ paid the full penalty for our sins on the cross.
When He died, it was finished.
He did not need to suffer more.
So, whatever it is Christ does here in the place of the dead, He does as a Victor.
He descends in victory.

Now remember I said there are close to 180 different valid interpretations of this passage.

I am not going to give you all 180 options.
Maybe if we had a whole sermon on this section I could.
I am just going to give you some major ones.

Some take this to mean simply Christ was preaching through Noah. When Noah warned people to get on the ark, Christ was preaching through Him.

That sounds nice and neat, but it doesn't make sense to me in this context. There seems to be a more simple way to say that. And that does not connect with the cross and resurrection enough for me.

Some take this to be Christ proclaiming his victory over demons. The spirits in prison are the fallen angels from Genesis 6 who were imprisoned forever.

A lot of this comes from 1 Enoch, which was a well known and respected book in Peter's day that Enoch supposedly wrote.

So here Christ would be descend in victory to let all of hell and demons know they have failed and lost.

The proclamation is not an offer to repent, but a mocking.

That makes sense of who would be imprisoned, but that does not fit Jesus for me.

It does not sound like how Jesus acted throughout all of His ministry. And I am uncomfortable with how much this interpretation relies on a source outside of the Bible that I don't think Enoch wrote.

Another interpretation is that Christ gave some of humanity a second chance.

That those who were alive in the days of Noah and the flood and did not get on the ark, they get another chance to respond to the gospel.

Even though they are imprisoned in hell.

And then it seems like some do and they come and get to go with Christ to heaven.

I really do not like this one.

It fits if we are trying to relate verse 20 to here and understand the context. But no where else in Scripture do we have the idea of a second chance for salvation after death.

And I don't know why this generation above anyone else would get that.

This is part of the catholic understanding and why they preach purgatory.

The last major view and what mine is this could mean Jesus came to preach to those who were waiting for resurrection.

This was Christ descending to set free the Old Testament saints like Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and those who looked forward in faith to salvation.

They are imprisoned not in hell being punished, but in the place of the dead waiting for redemption and resurrection.

I think this view makes the most sense to me.

I think it makes the most sense of other passages, like the description of Lazarus and Abraham being in Abraham's blossom.

He is somewhere not quite heaven but not in hell either.

Because Jesus had not paid the penalty for sin yet, so they could not be forgiven and in God's presence until Christ's victory.

That means that this descent and preaching is one of declaring that victory has finally come and God is delivering His people.

This view might sound weird, but honestly all of them do.

I think this one makes the most sense of all of the options and the texts. It helps explain why Matthew mentions other saints being resurrection when Christ died.

It comes down to two major options.

Either Christ descended to mock the enemy.

Or Christ descends to proclaim some kind of victory to the faithful.

Either way Christ is victorious.

Now if you want to study this more.

I would recommend the book "He Descended to the Dead" by Matthew Emerson.

It is a great popular level book going deep into this issue and has heavily influenced my thinking.

But I recognize this is a hard one.

And it does not get any easier because of what comes next.

Verse 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."**

The image is shifting to the time of Noah and the flood.

I do not think this refers to the spirits being preached too as much as this time of salvation.

Judgment was coming for the world, but some were saved through the ark.

Verse 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,"**

How could Peter say, **"baptism now saves you"**?

One thing that may help us is to place ourselves in the context of Peter's day.

Because now a days we see becoming a Christian and baptism as separate events.

We think about the moment someone places their faith in Jesus as the moment someone becomes a Christian and then baptism is a ceremony we do later.

But the Bible does not separate those.

The early church viewed baptism as the moment you become a Christian.

It is the moment you declare your faith.

The only exception being when you are dying.

So this would not have been that difficult for the early church and early believers to understand.

Because to them baptism is the moment you are a believer.

But notice what Peter says as well.

Baptism does not save us because it removes dirt from us.

"but as an appeal to God for good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

He is saying that the physical act of baptism is not what saves us.

The water does not have saving power.

The baptismal cannot wash away our sins.

Peter is not claiming the act of baptism itself is what saves.

It still is our faith.

It is the appeal to God for salvation.

And this appeal has to come by faith.

You could come and get baptized.

You could get baptized yourself.

You could go through the motions of baptism and it would do nothing.

It would not save you.

Because salvation only comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If you back up and remember the beginning of verse 21, **"baptism which corresponds to this,"**

Baptism corresponds to the Noah's ark.

It is the ark that brings us safely through the water.

Noah was not saved because he built a big boat.

He was save and sustained because of God's grace and mercy.

And he and his family were saved because of their faith and trust in God.

This is how baptism works.

It saves not because of the water or the physical nature of it.

But it saves us because of our faith and appeal to God for mercy.

Baptism is the ark that takes us to salvation.

It saves when accompanied by faith and belief in Christ.

Otherwise it is just water.

The same way Pharaoh and his armies were unable to pass through the waters.

But Israel went over on dry ground.

Now if all of this stuff is confusing or leaves you with more questions than answers I am happy to try and answer questions after the service.

Please feel free to schedule some time to come in and talk.

Or email or text me more questions you have and I would be happy to respond.

Verse 22, **"who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."**

At the end of it, all this passage is trying to do is show us the wonder of the salvation that comes from Christ.

His salvation comes through His suffering.

He descended to death as a conqueror.

And He ascended to glory with everything subject to him.

Even the talk about baptism saving us is less about the act itself and about following Jesus in faith.

And we have a chance to respond to it.

And we can receive it if we come to Him in faith.

We can follow the suffering victorious Savior.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] (Bless) others even when (cursed) because we have been (blessed) (v. 8-12). Do (good) even when (suffering) because it is God's (will) (v. 13-17). The (suffering) of Jesus brings us (salvation) (v. 18-22).
2. Jesus has brought us salvation through His suffering. And now suffering is nothing we have to fear. Because Jesus has already conquered.