

Part 10: Understanding What's Misunderstood

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I watched a video this week which in a way helped me understand a bit more about the tension our country is wading into, but it also helped me understand the emotions our text today seeks to address. There was a news station filming some looting which was going on in Southern California and one of the shops that was being targeted was a convenience store which was owned by (or at least managed by) a black man.

The news station was filming the man trying to defend his store, verbally wondering when the police were going to show up. Finally a number of police officers show up and began to chase after the looters, some of whom were black, but when the camera panned back to the store you also saw officers handcuffing the store owner because in the chaos of people it was assumed that he too was a looter.

The news team began to explain to the officers that this was the store owner, that he was the good guy, and what I remember seeing the eyes of the store owner was a distinct look of sorrow. Because in light of all the suffering he was personally experiencing in the destruction of his store, he himself was being misunderstood in the midst of it.

This video helped me understand a bit more about things which I am insulated from. But it also helped me understand a broader principle. Suffering is hard enough on its own, but few things make us feel more alone and more trapped than when we are misunderstood in our suffering.

We are working through the book of 1 Peter and the apostle Peter is writing to people who are going to be misunderstood in their suffering. Contrary to what is going on in our nation right now, the suffering isn't due to skin color, political preference, or disease. Instead it is due to conversion to Jesus Christ. Peter is writing to people who belong to a third race. They are neither Jew nor Gentile, they are Christian.

And as Peter begins to walk them through the suffering they might encounter on account of their faith he expresses to them the reality that they will probably be misunderstood by culture even in their suffering. But instead of feeling trapped and alone in these moments, Peter wants to help them understand their suffering through the lens of what Jesus means to the suffering Christian.

We live in a world which on its own cannot explain suffering to us in a way which comforts us. This world will not be able to provide any comfort to suffering Christians, but Jesus can.

Here's what we are going to see today for the Christian, victorious living is only possible when we understand the victory of Jesus. Peter is going to help us understand this by pressing in two realities in this text, one is the cause the other is the effect. He is first going to help us with **Understanding Jesus' Victory** and secondly we he's going to help us with **Understanding the Christian's Battle**.

Peter is writing the Christians and churches whom he refers to as elect exiles. That is the status of anyone who follows Jesus. Putting our faith in Jesus means we belong

and not to the world. But this results in a tension. Of the five chapters in Peter's letter, three of them primarily discuss the way in which Christians should act when they suffer for being Christian.

If you remember this was the verse we ended with last week: **1 Peter 3:17**. And now look at how Peter opens up our text today: **1 Peter 3:18**.

For Peter the only way Christians can make sense of suffering, the only way Christians can endure in suffering, the only way Christians can continue to act Christianly in their suffering is to understand Christ's once and for all suffering on the cross.

The church of Jesus Christ has endured suffering in various ways from cultural to comprehensive, but this one act of suffering is what makes sense of the lifetime of suffering for the church. Why? Because it was in this one event of Jesus on the cross where a righteous man, a perfect and sinless God-man, suffered for the sins of the unrighteous.

Jesus died as the sinless substitute for those who have sinned. He suffered not because he needed to suffer but because we deserved to suffer. Our sin demanded death, but Jesus willingly subjected himself to it. Why? That he might bring us back to God.

The greatest problem we have in our world, the source of all the problems that social media memorializes on our feeds, is that we are separated from God. God as king created us and our sin is a rejection of his rule which demands judgment. Not knowing you're breaking the law does not mean you didn't break the law. That's us.

But Jesus, the eternal son of God, came and never sinned so that he might be the sacrifice for those who have. And for those who put their faith in Jesus Christ we have received not only the removal of punishment, but we have been won back to God himself.

How did Jesus accomplish all of this? By suffering according to God's will. Jesus' suffering lead to a stunning victory. This is Peter's first point today: **Understanding Jesus' Victory**.

There's a lot going on in the last part of chapter three, but Peter's big theme is that even though Jesus suffered, Jesus was the victor. Read with me: **1 Peter 3:18-22**.

So the big theme of this passage is the victory which Jesus secured in his resurrection from the dead. We see it explicitly mentioned in verse 21, but that's the implicit allusion Peter makes when he says in verse 18 that Jesus was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

Peter isn't saying that Jesus didn't have the Holy Spirit when he lived on the earth. That's out of line with everything we read about Jesus in the gospels. He's also not saying that after Jesus died he was freed from his physical body and lived only as a spirit. For after Jesus was raised from the dead we see him doing things which only physical people can do, he ate and drank, he was touched.

So what does Peter mean when he says this, well I think he means to show that even though Jesus suffered and died with all that anatomical and physiological pain which accompany that, he was raised renewed in spirit despite that.

Peter had a first-hand experience with this. If you remember it was Peter, James and John who went up the mountain with Jesus when he was transfigured before them. You can read the story in Matthew 17, but basically these three men saw Jesus in all his glory, for a moment Jesus didn't look like any other human, he was radiant, glowing like the sun, and then in a moment he looked like normal Jesus again.

There was a real sense where part of Jesus' glory was veiled while he was in the flesh. But after Jesus' resurrection, the veil was removed. Paul even speaks of our believer's own resurrection of the dead in this way: **1 Corinthians 15:42-45**.

For Peter this transformation is meant to encourage believers in two ways. First it stresses the supremacy of Jesus and secondly it stresses the assurance of the Christian.

In showing *the supremacy of Jesus*, Peter does this by showing Jesus' victory lap over the forces of darkness.

We see this in two ways, first it says that in his resurrected state Jesus went and proclaimed to the spirits who were imprisoned and who were around during Noah's day. For Peter the events of Noah and the flood play significant roles in both of his letters in scripture. But it forces us to wrestle some with what and whom Peter is talking about here.

Martin Luther says of these: "A wonderful text this is and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for certain what Peter means."

I'm going to spare us from the debate by sharing what I think Peter means most clearly in this text. I think he's speaking about Jesus proclaiming a victory over fallen angels, specifically those who sinned during the days of Noah.

In Genesis 6, we see another confusing text which seems to insinuate that some of God's angels rebelled and became sinfully involved with human women. Peter's second letter seems to tell us a bit more about what happened to those angels during Noah's day: **2 Peter 2:4-5**.

So Peter clearly understands these imprisoned spirits to be fallen angels. Why is he singling out these spirits when talking about Jesus' resurrection? Well because during the time of the flood, there was a pinnacle of wickedness.

Humanity was increasingly and pervasively wicked. And the story of fallen angels in Genesis 6 shows that it wasn't just humans who were wicked, but even members of the spiritual realm were wicked. God was going to vindicate his wrath on sinful humans by sending the flood, but it is here in Jesus' resurrection that God vindicates his wrath on the spiritual world.

It is here in the resurrection that Jesus proclaims his victory over those fallen angels. This is emphasized all the more in **1 Peter 3:22**.

So again, what is Peter's point here? Well Peter has already quoted from Isaiah 53 in this book which spoke of Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's suffering servant. And look at how Isaiah 53 describes Jesus in his death on the cross: **Isaiah 53:3-4**.

You see when the suffering servant of Isaiah, Jesus Christ, was on the cross, he was misunderstood. He appeared to be the defeated one. He appeared to be the one afflicted by God. Both the men who physically killed him, and Satan and his spirits who worked in the hearts of those men saw the cross as their own victory. Jesus was an utter failure, they had won. But here Peter shows that appearances can be deceiving.

This Jesus, though suffering in the flesh, conquered all things. He rose from the grave and now stands over all things. Why is this of hope to believers? Because in following Jesus you are not following a dead God. You are not following an eternally crushed savior, you are following the risen, ruling and reigning King Jesus. We don't need to fear the world when we are saved by the king who conquers it.

In our social media world, we know today more than ever, the power of the court of public opinion. Here Peter comes to believers who might feel small and opposed by such a powerful and vocal court and says, "You're behind the king. You're on the right side of history."

How do you know that? This is the second comfort of the supremacy of Jesus, ***the assurance of the believer***. Not only is he the ruling and reigning king, but he by grace can be our king. Look again at **1 Peter 3:20-21**.

So here Peter's theme of Noah shapes our understanding of our own salvation. God was going to send a flood to judge the whole world because their sin was so bad. But God chose to save Noah and his family because Noah was not like the world. Now we know that even though Noah was more righteous than his neighbors we know he wasn't perfectly righteous. After the flood Noah gets drunk and does some stupid stuff.

Ultimately Noah's righteousness was shown when he obeyed God and built the arc. Why was Noah saved? Because he trusted in God and his arc even when the world laughed at Noah's labor.

Peter says this is akin to your baptism. Just as the arc brought Noah safely through the waters of judgment, baptism corresponds to your safe passage through judgement as well.

Baptism is when a professing believer identifies themselves with the true arc, Jesus Christ. Baptism is when we acknowledge that our sin buries us under the deluge of judgment, we go down into the water and this is bad news.

What does he mean when he says that? He means that you might have a clear hope. He used the same word last week: **1 Peter 3:16**. Dear believer, when times are hard, when Christ's victory seems so far away, when his love for you feels distant, look to your baptism and be reminded of all that Jesus has done for you.

Know that when you feel that the world wishes to only disqualify you, Jesus has qualified you. When the world wishes to isolate you, Jesus has drawn near to you. There will be times where you might feel like you are the sole member of a losing team, but Jesus' resurrection reminds you that in him you stand before God as accepted. Why? Because Jesus has returned you to God.

Baptism reminds us of our comfort, but secondly, baptism reminds us of our conduct.

Baptism not only signifies Jesus' past performance and your future reward, it also shapes our present conduct. Paul makes this same point in **Romans 6:1-4**.

Because Jesus suffering secured for us new life we now get to live out his victory as Christians. Because Jesus has freed us from sin, we get to obey. But that obedience doesn't look like victorious living by worldly standards. Just as Jesus' obedience led him to suffering, so too might our obedience lead us there too. But even in this, we have a hope.

What I love about Peter's message here is that he assumes the wonderful nature of conversion. He assumes that Christians will have these issues in their past. There will be believers who struggle with lust, sexual sin, drunkenness and idolatry.

But when the gospel of Jesus washes over us and cleanses us we should be able to look back at those things and say, "I don't need to get any closer anymore. I can smell it from here." That's what he means when he says your time in these sins are sufficient. Sin is about what you find to be sufficient.

If Jesus is insufficient to satisfy you by bringing you to God and suffering in your place, then we will turn to sin as sufficient to bring us that belonging. But if we see Jesus as wonderfully sufficient, then we can look at those things which had real desires attached to them, and we can hear their calls for sufficiency, but we can choose to trust in the risen and ruling Jesus instead.

The persecution they were facing was the malalignment which came when you stopped mocking your boss with your fellow employees and they felt you were trying to make yourself better than them. It was the tension which came when you left the brewery early instead of staying too late or taking that extra drink. It was the pain that came when you stop having sex with your boyfriend when that was the standard. It's the awkwardness in this political age when we don't make coarse jokes or spew hate towards those who are on the opposite side of the spectrum.

It is to feel as out of place and as foolish as Noah felt when he built an arc to the derision of his neighbors, but he obeyed because he trusted God.

I want to be clear here. Some of us wear cultural opposition as a badge of honor.