

1 Peter

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1 Peter 3:18-4:6

Vs. 18, 19, 20a, 4:5-6

- This passage speaks to both the unfathomable mystery of God and His equally amazing grace.
- That the risen Christ went to the underworld to preach to the dead has been a cornerstone of the faith since the beginning. The Apostle's Creed, one of the earliest statements of faith references Christ preaching to the dead.
- Many though have struggled with the idea of Jesus descending into Hell. If we understand Hell correctly as a place of punishment for the wicked, what we see here is something different. Here the gospel is preached to the *DEAD*, the just and the unjust, not to the condemned only.
- In Peter's sermon at Pentecost found in Acts 2, he quotes Ps. 16 in verses 2:25-28. He were see that Christ is not to be abandoned by God to Sheol, or Hades, the place of the dead. Before Christ, Heaven was not fully opened. Moses, Elijah, and Enoch, yes, but to those who were simply good Jews who believed in God, Sheol/Hades was your eternal destination, This was place of shadows where people moved like grey ghosts in a dim twilight, knowing neither hope, nor strength, nor joy (Is. 38:18).
- Vs. 19 calls it a prison and indeed Isaiah 24:21-22 refers to it as a prison. But it is not to be thought of as Hell as we understand Hell. This was a place of keeping until the final judgement was to come.
- In 3:19 and 4:6, Christ preaches to the dead, to those in Hades, the just and the unjust, all who have ever lived prior to Christ's coming. The Messiah they had long waited for in life, now comes to them in death. Here is the magnificent mercy of God. No one is forgotten. All have the opportunity to choose Christ or reject Him. "How could those in Hades possibly reject

Him?” you may ask. Yet was it not immediately after Jesus raised Lazarus, a man dead 4 days, that the Jewish leaders set in motion their final plot to kill Him? We might just as easily ask, “How could anyone deny that He is the Son of God, if he can raise a man dead 4 days?” Yet they did. If you want to pursue this further, I recommend CS Lewis’s “The Great Divorce” as to how people, even if they are dead, can choose against God.

- Peter points out in vs. 18 that though Christ was put to death in the flesh, he was made alive in the Spirit, which allowed Him to appear and disappear as He did with Thomas and His friends from Emmaus. This also allowed Him to accomplish His final task before sitting down at the right hand of the Father – descending into Hades to preach to the dead. We see this in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (4:9-10) and in the Revelation of John (5:13). That Christ descended into the place of the dead to preach Truth and offer salvation was given as fact by those who knew Him best.
- For us, the great Truth here is that now that the dead have seen Jesus, then there is no place in the universe the mercy of God has not reached. A sceptic once asked an evangelist what he would think if little green men ever landed on earth and the evangelist said he would preach Jesus to them!
- The early church father, Justin Martyr, (100-165 AD), said, “The Lord, the Holy God of Israel, remembered His dead, those sleeping in the earth, and came down to tell them the good news of salvation.” There is now no corner of the universe God’s grace has not reached.

Vss. 20b-22

- There are in scripture types and anti-types. For instance, in the Old Testament a lamb is a type of living sacrifice. In the New Testament we have Christ as the anti-type. HE is the lamb, the living and final and ultimate sacrifice. Here in 1 Peter is a reference to how water in the Old Testament was a type of punishment or even a godless evil. The Red Sea and the Jordan River were both barriers to the children of Israel trying to journey to the Promised Land, so God parted the waters so these non-seafaring

people could pass on dry land. And then in the story of Noah, water is the ultimate instrument of global death. In 1 Peter is the anti-type of water – baptism. Now, because of Christ, water is symbolic of the spiritual cleansing that comes with salvation through Christ.

- An appeal to God for a good conscience: the Catholic church uses the word “sacrament” for baptism. It is from the Latin word “sacramentum” which was the oath of loyalty a soldier would take upon entering the army. In baptism we are saying that we accept all the demands of picking up our cross and following Jesus.
- See Romans 6:1-14

Vss. 4:1-5

- “he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin”: Peter here returns to the land of the living and the persecution the churches are facing. He reminds them of their past life in vs. 3 and all that it entailed. He goes on in vs. 4 to say that he is well aware of how the church members former friends now malign them, laugh at them, for giving it all up for a God they cannot see. There is always a cost to discipleship. When we accept Christ we may lose our friends, our jobs, even our family.
- How does suffering cause us to cease to sin? Only in that given that we do have a choice between one life or the other, a life with Christ or a life without, if we actually suffer, really suffer for our belief in Christ, how then would we ever go back to living a life without Him? Once we have paid the price for our faith, would we waste all that just to go back to a life without Christ? No.
- One final thing to remember is that rather than being made to feel bad by our former friends, we are to pity them, pray for them, and witness to them, try to help them to see the God they cannot see, because they will indeed have to stand before the Judge of the living and the dead.