

Before reading

Last week we had in 1 Peter 3:18 the central point of Peter's letter: 'Christ died for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.' But the verses that follow are puzzling.

When preachers follow, as I do, the plan of working through a book of the Bible out of respect for the whole Word of God, it means they cannot escape the verses that are, to be honest, obscure. Verses that other systems might dodge. Verses that make retirement look quite attractive! Let me try to answer some questions, and better still, show how they apply to us today.

Reading -1 Peter 17 - 22

17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison

20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

21 and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also— not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand— with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Sermon

I wonder how Barry Ferguson feels today? Or Allan McGregor - that's Captain and first choice goalkeeper, respectively, if you don't follow Rangers news. They drank all night in the team hotel after losing to Holland 3-nil, and were given a warning. Then they gave great offence while on International duty, and Walter Smith used the ultimate sanction: sent home from Murray Park, suspended for two weeks; Ferguson demoted from Captain; The SFA saying they won't be selected for Scotland again. Judgement!

A consequence of their actions, and after due warning.

Today, we face up to that unpopular word: judgement. And even though it is only Palm Sunday, we need to fast forward a bit through the death of Christ to his resurrection.

17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil: *supreme example*: 18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

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|----|---|---------------------------------|
| 19 | through whom also he went and preached to <u>the spirits in prison</u> | 1 Who are they? |
| 20 | who disobeyed long ago
when God waited patiently in the days of Noah
while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, | 2 How disobey?
3 How preach? |
| 21 | and <u>this water symbolises baptism</u>
that now saves you also— not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, | 4 ? thro' water
5 How ? |
| 22 | who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—
with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. | |

1 Who are the Spirits in prison (v19)?

How did Christ preach to them?

The Gk word is pneumata. Spirits. And we might imagine that refers to people who have died. But the commentaries tell me that this word, used by itself, never means people, let alone dead people.

It means spiritual beings, what we might call angels, including good and bad ones. Heb 1:14, Luke 10:20

V22 reinforces this interpretation: ‘angels, authorities and powers in submission to Christ.’

These particular spirits in v 19 are ones who ‘did not obey’. Genesis 6 vv 1-4 gives the basic facts, and Jewish mythology elaborated on an angelic rebellion just before the time of the great flood when Noah was told to build an ark, that is, a huge wooden box that would float - 450 feet long, that’s a football pitch and a half.

Peter’s second letter, ch 2 v 4,5 spells it out in more detail:

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment, if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others, if he....

V9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials, and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment...”

In other words, Jesus, raised from the dead, went to these spiritual beings, who are held in some kind of prison, awaiting the judgement of the great day, and ‘preached’ to them.

Once again, the commentaries explain a word: this is not the usual word for preaching: ‘evangelizeing’, to proclaim good news. i.e. it is not the word for explaining the gospel to people to tell them of God’s love for them, and of how Christ died to save them, calling them to repentance, to faith in Christ and new birth by the Holy Spirit.

No, this word ‘kerussein’ means to be, or act as, a herald, to proclaim, announce. Make a statement.

So Christ was not telling these spirits the good news of how they could be saved; rather he was showing them he was alive! He let them see him in his glorious, resurrection state, to show them he was victim no more, but Victor. The shouts of acclaim on Palm Sunday as he entered Jerusalem suggested a king; but now he evidently *was* king. By his death for others, he had triumphed over sin and death and the grave. Evil was conquered, which, for evil spirits, was *bad* news.

All this seems to have happened, if we reckon by human time, in the space between the death of Jesus at 3pm on the Friday, and his bodily resurrection which was discovered after sunrise on the Sunday morning.

2,3 We need to come back to Noah.

At a time when humans were greatly wicked, God regretted creating them, all except Noah. The Bible is clear, it was a consequence of humanity doing wrong, and the judgment was deserved.

Even so, Peter remarks on God’s *patience*, his delay in sending the calamity, hoping that mankind would repent and turn from evil ways. God was also waiting until the ark had been built, so that some would be saved. I wonder if we can gasp this concept; that judgment is not what God wants to do. It is because he is too pure to ignore evil.

Within the human mess of evil, there was one man who was righteous, through faith in God. God decided to make a covenant with Noah, to preserve him and his immediate family,

commissioning him also to save samples of animals, one breeding pair of unclean animals, and seven pairs of domesticated animals and birds. (Gen 6)

That word 'covenant' is crucial.

Peter refers to the eight *people* who were saved - Noah, his three sons, and their wives. He says they were saved 'through water' And v21 this water symbolizes baptism

Explain:

Water was both the instrument of destruction and also the support that carried the ark and its occupants during the time of judgment. That is, the water meant both death and life.

4 Now, being 'kept safe through water' was a literal event.

But then Peter says the flood water symbolizes baptism, that *now* saves you.

Some see this as a phrase taken from the baptismal liturgy of Peter's day , almost as if Peter is addressing the candidates for profession of faith and baptism.

What does he mean baptism now saves you?

Well, first, he cannot mean that any person who goes through a ritual called baptism is automatically saved.

He immediately qualifies the statement: water can wash away dirt on the skin, but not the evil inside a person.

It cannot even produce a good conscience before God.

5 Baptism is a sign of a covenant of grace, a relationship set up by God, one effect of which is that our consciences are made clean toward God.

The key to the meaning of baptism is Jesus, his death v18 and his resurrection v21c. It, i.e. baptism, saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven.

Baptism is a sign of being joined to Christ, the Christ who died to sin and rose again. If we come to Christ as adults, it follows our coming to faith in Jesus as our saviour and Lord. If we are the children of such believers, we share in its blessings, just as Noah's three sons and their wives did (and they were not infants) It points us to the fact that we are to think of ourselves as dead to sin, and alive to righteousness.

If you have been baptized yourself, is that how your baptism works for you today?

a) Do you recognize that you can do nothing to earn God's forgiveness. Jesus, by dying in your place on the cross, once for all time, has paid the price of your sin. You cannot, and need not, earn yourself a place in God's favour. If the eternal Judge has declared your sin paid for in Christ, and declared you forgiven, you may have a clear conscience before him.

b) Do you recognize when you are being tempted to disobey God in some way? - To doubt one of his promises like, 'I will never leave you or forsake you', or ignore one of his commands like, 'love your enemy', or find your security lies in money in the bank rather than in God himself. Do you then say to yourself, 'Hold it!' I have been baptized into Christ. The sacrament symbolizes that I am one with him. He died to sin, so I have died to sin. I am living in Christ who has brought me to God the Father. This temptation is expecting me to be a rebel again, and it is inconceivable!

c) resurrection.

Christ is alive, Victor over sin and death and the grave.

Christ gives new life to all who trust in him.

Parallels?

Baptism	The Flood
Christ	Noah
Believers	Noah and family

Water involves judgment *and* rescue

Not rescued by the ritual of baptism, but by what it signifies: not rescued by an *it* but by a *him*: the person, Jesus Christ. His death, his resurrection

Made alive *by* the Spirit i.e. Holy Spirit, or *in* the spirit

Idea of condemnation analogy if Central Heating boiler is classed as ID = immediately dangerous.

Positive pressure, i.e. a pump blows the exhaust gases against the casing of the boiler, and they then escape through the vents provided, into the flue; but if the seal that holds the casing to the rest of the boiler is imperfect, the gases escape into the atmosphere, and could poison the occupants of the house.

Far better to have negative pressure, i.e. the fan sucks gases up into the flue.

Immediately dangerous = gas supply to boiler capped, and warning notice attached.

Or cf an Engineer inspecting a bridge. In Montrose, there was a cantilever bridge, rather similar to the Forth Rail bridge, but smaller and made of concrete. As pedestrians walked across the bridge, they could see some cracks on the superstructure, and the council prepared a report. They called public meeting, and the Provost got up to speak.

“For part of the inspection, we went by boat *under* the bridge. And I can assure the people of Montrose that the cracks on the superstructure of the Bridge are absolutely nothing to worry about - compared to the cracks *under* the bridge.

Not saved by flashing blue light, but it signifies that help is on the way, be it Fire and Rescue, Ambulance, Police, Coastguard

As we saw last week: Is Jesus just another human device to excuse our guilt? To pretend it's gone? The Bible says emphatically, NO! 1 Peter 3:18: Note 4 parts. '(1) Christ died for sins (3) once for all, (2) the righteous for the unrighteous, (4) to bring you to God.'

God equally reckons Christ's righteousness to our account.

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, *so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness*; by his wounds you have been healed

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Judgment, and the warning of it coming: meant to bring about change of life NOW. Jesus.