

1 Peter 3 (Part 2) :8-22 • Always Prepared to Make a Defense

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Here on Sunday morning, we're going through the New Testament, and we are right now in the book of 1 Peter chapter 3. So open your Bibles there please. 1 Peter chapter 3

For those of you who have been following our study in First Peter, this has been a good time, a good time in the word. So let's start today with prayer, shall we?

Father, we thank you that we can come together as the body of Christ and open our hearts to you and to your word that you would speak to us and bring wisdom and understanding to our hearts.

But Lord, even more so that we might take the word and apply it as we go from this place and walk it out. Live it out in our daily lives. And for that, Lord, we need your strength and courage. So Father, we look to you for the whole thing, to open our hearts, to speak to us, and then to enable us to walk this out and to live it on a daily basis. And we thank you, Lord, that you are faithful in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen.

We've been talking here the last couple of weeks about how to walk in harmony. And Peter started in the last chapter talking to us about how we can live harmoniously. He mentioned how we can live with the world, and particularly as it pertains to the governing authorities.

Then we covered harmony in the workplace, particularly when you have less-than-ideal working conditions. Or maybe a boss who's kind of a stinker and likes to make life hard. And that sort of thing.

And in the first seven verses of this chapter, you'll remember that Peter talked about harmony in marriage. And we looked in those verses and saw how God has established order in the home between the relationship of the husband and the wife. And when we walk according to that order, there is harmony. And you guys know what harmony is. We heard some harmony this morning during our worship time.

It's fun when I get to sit next to people who know how to harmonize, too. And I can hear harmonies going on all around me. It's very cool, because harmony is beautiful. It's notes that blend together in a very pleasing sort of a way. And that can actually be our lives when we are walking according to God's word, and particularly as it relates to marriage. There can be harmony. Yes, there can be harmony in marriage. Just in case you were wondering.

Yeah, it is possible, but only when we're, only when we're walking according to the word of God and applying it in our lives. And when there isn't harmony, then it's like people playing different chords on two instruments and they're not playing the same thing. And it's very discordant and it's like, “ugh.” And our marriages can be that way too, can't they?

So we discussed that whole issue last week. Now as we get into this section of 1 Peter, chapter 3, he's going to begin by talking about harmony in the church, or among the members of the body of Christ. If you look with me in verse 8, it starts off in your Bible saying,

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind,” and we talked how that word. This is a couple of weeks ago, we talked how the word “unity” is a Greek word that is actually translated by some Bibles, like the NIV as “harmony.” Live in “harmony.” And he's talking here about having harmony in our thinking. Notice he says, have *“unity of mind.”* He's not talking about thinking the same thoughts in the sense that, we finish each other's sentences or something like that. He's talking about harmony as it relates to our understanding of the revelation of God's word. It means being on the same page.

Have you ever wondered why Christians don't get on the same page? Why are there so many different expressions and why are we,..? Oh, we've had a couple of thousand years to mess things up. And we veer from the word of God and we start injecting things like personal opinion. And people will say, they'll read something of the Bible and say, “Well, to me that means...” Well, that's not what the Bible is about. It's not about what it means to you. It's about what it means. It's about what God intended it to mean and that's not something that's open to personal interpretation.

God interprets the word of God through his Holy Spirit to our hearts, and He brings the meaning. That's what He said when He told His disciples, *“the Holy Spirit when he comes will lead you into all truth.”* (John 16:13) It's His truth. It's not my truth. It's not your truth. It's not a particular denominational truth. It's just simply the truth of God's word. And the way we have unity of mind is when we just stick to the word of God and we don't veer from it.

Now, like I said, we've had a couple of thousand years to veer from the word of God. Right. But as we come back to the scriptures and as we begin to jettison our predeterminations and our preconceptions and our traditions.

Oh, if I could, I mean, traditions are great when they're fun and I mean, like our family has, like your family does, I'm sure, traditions around Christmas. How you go about doing things,

for they're fun. But when traditions begin to supplant the truth of God's word or add to, or tweak or alter or whatever God's word, when tradition begins to come into play, we no longer have unity of mind because we've gotten away from the word of God and we've begun to exalt our traditions rather than the simple text of God's word.

And I say simple because we've made it more difficult than it needs to be, by adding things and so forth. So Peter is encouraging us to have harmony in the body of Christ by saying, "You know what, we're going to get back to the word. Let's just get back to the word." And I know, and some of these things I've learned in the past.

Do you remember when you were a brand-new Christian and you learned things and you just accepted them because somebody told you? And I was the same way. I just, somebody told me something and so I believed it. And then later on I got into the word of God and I went, "That's not true. Yeah, there's no, it is not in the Bible at all."

So there's, what we've added. So we got to get back to unity by getting back to the Word. Notice that Peter goes on to say we are also to have sympathy for one another. Harmony comes about through the expression of sympathy. And sympathy is a sense of concern, it's a sense of compassion for someone who is going through challenging times, misfortune.

And when we walk in an attitude of sympathy toward them, there's going to be harmony in the body of Christ. He also mentions brotherly love, and this is actually a Greek word from where we get our word, Philadelphia. The city of brotherly love, they call it. But it in the Greek it means just that, brotherly love.

And I don't know if you had a brother. I grew up with a brother. We didn't always show brotherly love for one another. He liked to kind of beat on me because he was older and more athletic and taller. And he would get me in this scissor pinch with his legs until I would just tell him anything he wanted to hear.

I don't know why I told you that, but he used to beat up on me a lot. But I actually think of him today as my little brother. I don't know why, but anyway, it's funny, isn't it? How, you can have that kind of a relationship with a brother or sister and then you grow up and you leave home and suddenly your relationship gets a lot better. And you start showing real true, brotherly or sisterly affection, after you're not living in the same home any longer.

Well, what this verse is talking about when it mentions brotherly love is talking about treating people like family members ought to treat people. Means caring about people who are in the family, and you're in the family of God. And there is harmony when we treat one another, like we really, truly are genuinely part of the same family.

Notice that Peter goes on to speak of a tender heart. We're to be tenderhearted toward one another. The Greek literally means goodhearted. And then he also says, we are to have a humble mind. And this is about thinking less of myself and more about others, putting others first, right? So these are the things that Peter says we need to be thinking about as it relates to being a harmonious body of Christ. To love, care, take care of one another in a very genuine and real ways.

He goes on then to address situations where you're confronted by someone who has no intention of living harmoniously with you. It'd be wonderful if everybody that you reached out to, or that reached out to you. It'd be wonderful if there was always a reciprocal sort of a response. But have you ever noticed, sometimes there isn't. You go and you go to talk to somebody and be nice to somebody and they just kind of look at you like, "What?" And they're not, and they're just kind of made up their mind. They don't, they're not going to be nice back to you. And that could be a believer or an unbeliever. So how are you going to deal with that?

Verse 9 says, "*Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling.*"

I don't know if you use the word "reviling" in your daily vocabulary. I don't. "Oh, he's reviling that guy." Actually, the word "reviling" means to criticize and to attack. So somebody who's on the attack. So in other words, he says, don't repay evil when somebody does evil to you, or don't attack back when someone attacks you. Rather, he says on the contrary, "*bless.*"

And then you'll notice that he makes this very important statement. He says "*to this, you were called.*" And this is the second time Peter has made that statement in the last chapter. He did it before, now he's doing it again. He's talking to us

about our calling. Your calling is not to respond out of anger when someone is angry at you, but you're called to respond differently.

You're to be different, right? And that's what he's telling us “*for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*” What are you called to? You're called to bless.

If somebody treats you badly, you're called to bless. “*That you may obtain a blessing.*” In other words, that's all about sowing seeds of blessing so that you reap a harvest of blessing. Those are challenging things though. I mean, when somebody's in your face and they're making life hard and they're saying things that are very hurtful and demeaning.

Had a young woman, write to me just this week, who was, she was beside herself.

“Pastor Paul. How do I respond to people who are verbally abusing my faith? Who are talking so negatively and so in such a derogatory way about my faith, how do I respond to those people?”

And I, since we were going through 1 Peter here, it was kind of an easy one to answer. I just shot her back some verses from the Bible and said, “well, here's what the Bible says. You're to respond with blessing.”

And that doesn't mean that you act all holy when they say nasty things, you go, “Bless you, my child.” or something like that. No, it just means that when you're given an opportunity to speak, you speak back kind, generous, and things that are filled with blessing and not derogatory and hurtful back. In other words, you don't hit that one back to them the same thing that they've brought to you.

Now in just a few verses, Peter is going to address the issue of how we're to respond to someone who genuinely wants us to know why we hope in Jesus Christ, and he's going to talk to us about how to do that, but that's not what he's dealing with right here.

He's not talking about people who genuinely want to know about your faith. He's talking about people who are criticizing your faith and who are talking down to you about your faith, and they're belittling it. And this is another thing, I mean, People run into this all the time in the workplace, even at home in some cases.

I've had women who've written to me just distressed because they have an unbelieving husband who is constantly putting them down for believing what they believe about the Bible or whatever. And people will write and say, "How do I respond?" And here's the thing about that.

I tell him in all honesty that the Bible really doesn't give us snappy comebacks for people when they say snarky things. That's really not what in fact, what the Bible does give us an example of. And even in the person of Jesus is not saying anything. And I know that's hard when somebody has said something snarky to, to just kind of hold your tongue. But do you understand that's what Jesus actually did. You guys remember after he was arrested and they hauled him in before Pilate, who was the governor? Pilate questioned him and he really didn't know what to do, but he heard that Herod was in town. So he thought, "Oh, okay. I'll pass him off on Herod!" and kind of passed the buck. Well, Herod was delighted. Let me show you this passage from Luke 23. On the screen it says:

(slide)

Luke 23:8 (ESV)

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign (or miracle) done by him.

"I want to see a miracle done by Jesus." "So (it says), *he questioned him at some length.*" But I want you to notice here what Jesus said in response. Nada. Says Jesus didn't answer. Why didn't Jesus answer Herod? Because Herod wasn't looking for answers. Do you understand that not everybody who questions you is looking for answers?

Sometimes they're questioning you in such a way to as, to make your faith look ridiculous. And there's certain ways you can ask questions to make things look bad according to the question, so that there's really no way that you can answer without looking dumb. And that's what they want to do. Some people do that. They try to actually lead you into a conversation to make you look foolish.

And they're just, they're not interested. They're not interested in having a genuine conversation about Jesus. Who He is, what He is to you, and so on and so forth. They don't care. They're going to just bring up all these other peripheral issues and try to blow a lot of smoke, so that they can win their argument or something like that.

What does Jesus give us as an example? He didn't say anything. He didn't, He didn't respond at all. And I think that's an important example for us to see. There are times when you want to talk to somebody about your faith, but you know, the Bible also talks about not casting your pearls before swine.

And that sounds like a very derogatory sort of a thing. But do you understand the swine don't appreciate pearls? They can't. They look at a pearl and they're like, "can I eat it?" That's all they care about you. And I would look at a pearl and go, whoa, that's beautiful. They can't do that. You look at your faith, you go, "that's amazing." They can't see it, so be careful.

We need to have discernment, Christians, about who we're sharing the gospel with. Jesus told us in the parable of the sower that some people go out and scatter seed on the sidewalk and it doesn't do any good. The birds just come and pick it up and fly away (Matthew 13:4). So you see it's possible to sow your seed where it's not going to do any good.

You sit there and you're doing your best to try to, defend the faith to somebody who doesn't want to hear what you have to say. So this is kind of a challenging thing. But this is why we're called to sometimes hold our tongue and when people are cursing, we are to bless and so forth.

He goes on to quotes Psalm 34, or at least a couple of verses in Psalm 34. If you look in your Bible beginning in verse 10. This is where the quotation comes in. He says,

*"For whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it."*

And here's the point of why he's quoting this passage from Psalms.

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."*

And the whole point of this quotation is to remind you and me that God is listening. He is responding to his children according to their response, and he's looking for people who are going to be peacemakers and seek peace and respond appropriately following the example that Jesus gave us in terms of how we respond. Right? And we are to respond in peace. We're to seek peace.

And I know there are some people that don't want peace. That's not your responsibility. Your responsibility is to seek peace nonetheless. And if they throw just more junk back at you, it's like, well, whatever. And that's hard. I know that's hard because man, the flesh.

The flesh comes to life, doesn't it? Especially when somebody's saying things that are mean and just flat out, you can just tell they're just being dumb. It's possible they don't even mean what they're saying, but they're just saying things to just, rile you. And it's real easy to get riled, especially when people are saying things about Jesus that riles me. But I've got to be careful that Paul (me) doesn't rise up and say something because Paul doesn't have anything to say to them. And that's happened a few times where Jesus didn't speak through me, but Paul spoke and it didn't help a thing. So that's what we've got to be careful about that. In verse 13, Peter asks a question and he says,

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?”

Or “desirous” in a very great way for what is good? And he's making a general statement here. “Who's going to harm you if your desire is to do good?” And it's something akin to saying, “Who's afraid of getting stopped for speeding if you're always driving the speed limit?” It's a kind of a dumb example, but it's close.

Because you see, Peter knew full well that it is possible to live a good life and to do nothing wrong and still be persecuted. He knew that. What he's saying is don't invite trouble. Don't live your life in such a way or do things in such a way that you bring trouble upon yourself. And that's why he goes on in the next, very next verse to say, if you do, if you should suffer “*for righteousness' sake,*” and that means for doing right. If you do right, and then you suffer for it, he says, don't worry about that because you're going to be blessed.

So don't have any fear of the people who are giving you a hard time. Don't be troubled by it, he says. And these were really important words for Peter to pass along to people. And you know that Peter was writing to people who were suffering.

Do you know that Peter uses that word “suffering” 17 times in this book? So this is obviously a major theme of this letter. You're suffering, I know it. So how are you going to respond to people? Well, listen, if you are in the right, you're doing good, and you suffer anyway. Don't worry about it. You'll be blessed. God will bless you.

And so don't have any fear. Oh, I, man that's such a good word. Don't live in fear. Jesus told us that kind of suffering would be inevitable for believers, right? But now here as we get to verse 15, this is where he begins to speak to us about how we respond to people who ask us about our hope.

They're not just asking questions to make you look dumb or ridiculous. They're asking questions because they want to know about your hope. Look what he says here in verse 15, starts off by saying, “*in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.*” In other words, set Him apart as the holy One, and that implies you too living a holy life. But then he goes on to say, “*always being prepared to make a defense.*”

And I want you to circle that word (defense), if you do that sort of thing in your Bible. That word “defense,” that's an important word. Be prepared to make a defense, because the Greek word that is translated defense here is “apologia.” And this is where we get our word apologetics. And it is the defense of the faith, the defense of the gospel.

And Peter exhorts us here to give an answer. He says, “*to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*” I want you to stop there, and I want you to think for just a moment. Why would somebody do that? Why would somebody walk up to you and say, “Would you please give me a reason for the hope that you have in Christ?”

Listen, the only reason somebody would do that is if they saw hope in you, right? If you're kind of a hopeless Eeyore going around, always talking about doom and gloom and, “Oh, we're all dead. It's just a matter of time.” Nobody's going to come up to you and say, “Wow, where's your hope? I want to know where. Tell me. Tell me about your hope.”

Oh, that's ridiculous. They have to see it in you. And so that's a really important question that we need to ask ourselves this morning. With everything going on in the world and with everything going on in your life or the lives of those who are close to you, where is your hope? I want you to think about that for a minute.

I want you to ask yourself the question, “Am I hopeful?” and, “Do I exude hope to the people around me?” Because if you don't, then nobody's ever going to ask you about it and you're never going to have an opportunity.

Do you convey a hopeful outlook to others? And I'm not talking about pie in the sky hope either. What I mean by that is, “Well, I sure hope things get better.” That's not real hope. That's wishful thinking. “I hope our next President's better than this one.”

No, that's not hope. That's not biblical hope. We are talking about hope in the Lord, in the Lord Himself, in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is a hope that expresses itself through the peace that you have in your life. That comes with the understanding that God is in control and God is working all things together for the good of those that love Him and are called according to His purpose. I love the fact that we sang that this morning.

That's where our hope is. It's not in this. It's not in circumstances. It's not in that person you're sitting next to. They will let you down, count on it. Isn't that a fun message? That's reality. Our hope is in the Lord. We look at what's going on in the world. Our hope is in the Lord. Aaron was praying about that here just as we were closing out the worship time. Where is our hope?

Our hope is in the coming of the Lord the work that He has done on the cross and the work that He will yet do in the future to make all things new. That is our hope and that is what we should be conveying. And so we need to ask ourselves the question: Do you, when you're hanging around unbelievers, do you think that they could detect that from you? Could they detect from you an outlook of hope, an attitude of hopefulness, to the point even where they might even ask the question, “Why have you put your hope in Jesus?”

And that's the next thing we need to think about, in light of what Peter is exhorting us, is to be prepared to give an answer. Can you give an answer? In other words, can you communicate your hope to someone?

I know you're hopeful, but can you communicate it? Do you know enough about the word of God? And do you understand enough to be able to articulate why you believe, what you believe and why it gives you hope? You see the whole point about this because I think we're very hard on ourselves when I say things like this or when I tell you or talk to you about Peter's exhortation to be prepared to share your hope with somebody.

Most Christians think, “Well, I probably couldn't do that.” But what we think is it ought to come automatically. It doesn't come automatically. That's why Peter says, “*be prepared.*” That whole idea of that word “prepared” means to make something ready for consideration. I've prepared this, and that means thinking about it, talking about it.

How am I going to respond? What kind of things would I say to somebody if they said, “There's something about you. There's a hope. There's a peace, even in the midst of everything going on in the world, and I want to know what it is.” What would you say? How would you articulate it? Peter says, “*be prepared.*”

To know what you're going to say so that you can give them a reason. And I like that word a lot because reason tells you and me that our faith is reasonable. Okay? Unbelievers think that we have blind faith. It's not blind at all. It's a reasonable faith. We come before the Lord and we reason.

Now, that doesn't mean that reason is the only thing because faith does have a very important part or place in our lives, but our faith is reasonable. You believe the Bible is the word of God. You know what? There's good reason to believe the Bible is the word of God. When you look into it and you understand. What the Bible says and how God has kept it all these years and all of the things in life and in the world and all of the things that testify to the reality and the validity of the word of God. It's reasonable to believe it's reasonable. You're not an irrational person for believing that there's a creator God, although the world would like to, perhaps, paint you that way.

Be prepared to give them a hope when they ask you for the reason, when they ask for the reason. So work on your answer. But when you share it, Peter goes on to say, “*yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶having a good conscience*”

So make sure that when you talk, when you share, you're not saying things in such a way that you're going to come off sounding purposely judgmental and condemning. Because that's just, and I know we live in a world that's primed and cocked to think that everything is judgmental, that doesn't agree with their particular position. I know that I get it, and sometimes it's very difficult, but you have to just, you have to be gentle.

He says, do it with gentleness. Hold it gently. Hold that person gently as you're talking to them. Don't be harsh. Don't be rough. Be gentle and be respectful. Be respectful and have a good conscience about the way you do that as well.

Now regardless of how you share, there are always going to be some people who are not going to accept, even when you are gentle, even when you are respectful, even when you have thought it out and reasoned, shared your reasoning with them.

Some people are going to, and that's why Peter goes on to say "*so that when you are slandered,*" and that's going to happen sometimes. The word "slander" is all about people making false statements about what you have said. "*so that, when you are slandered,* (he says), *those who revile your good behavior,* (again, that word means to criticize and to attack your good behavior), *in Christ may be put to shame.*" And they're going to be put to shame because your response is not to revile back, but it's to bless, but is to bless in return.

So Peter says in verse 17, "*For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*" Is it possible, according to verse 17, to suffer according to God's will? Yes it is. That's exactly what Peter says for it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will.

You might say, "Well, that sounds kind of cruel of God to actually have a will that we might suffer for doing good. Shouldn't we be rewarded for doing good?" Oh, the reward comes later. The suffering comes now. That's the example Jesus gave us.

Okay, now we're going to read these last five verses all together, and we're going to take just a little bit of time to talk about them and unpack them because there's some difficult stuff in here. I'll just tell you ahead of time. Here we go. Verse 18, down to the end of the chapter, it says:

¹⁸For 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, ¹⁹ in (or "by" your Bible may say) the spirit which he went and proclaimed, (Circle that word in your Bible), 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."

All right. Now you can tell just as we read through these verses that there's some challenging stuff going on here. But essentially Peter is discussing that

time period between the death of Christ on the cross and when he rose again. And we know that there was essentially what made up a portion of three days. It wasn't three 24-hour periods, but it made up a portion of three days.

So what was Jesus doing during that time? Just kind of cooling his heels. Where was he? What was he doing? Was he asleep? Was he unconscious? Was he just playing cards with the angels? What was going on during that time? That's what Peter's talking about, and there are other portions of the word that actually talk about it as well, but you have to understand that when this physical body expires, dies, the spirit is released and there have been all kinds of questions.

Where does the spirit of man go? And particularly before Jesus' death, burial and resurrection? How about in the Old Testament? I get this all the time. "Where did people go before Christ? Did people go to heaven before Christ?" The answer is no, they did not. Heaven was opened at a specific time when Jesus paid the price and made the way open for heaven to be open through his sacrifice on the cross when he paid the penalty of our sin.

Well, it's interesting here, isn't it, that we're talking here about Jesus going, Peter tells us, and proclaiming to the spirits in prison. Now you have to understand this is not talking about a literal prison. It literally means the spirits in captivity, and it was kind of a holding area and we wouldn't really know much about this holding area where people's spirits went before Jesus' death on the cross, if Jesus hadn't told a story. Not a parable, but a story.

It's in parabolic form, but it's a story. It's a true story that is recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke, which tells us about this holding place. And by the way, it's not purgatory. There's no such place. All right. Here it is. Let's put it on the screen. Jesus telling this story says:

(slide)

Luke 16:19 (ESV)

"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. (Had everything he wanted in terms of food) And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.

This is when the spirit is released. Okay? The angels carried this poor man's spirit, right to what he refers to now as Abraham's side. Now this is going to be

called other things. It's also going to be called Paradise. But it goes on here to say, *The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.*

Now, before we move on, let's go back before we move on here. You'll notice here that it says, *"The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades being in torment."*

Now Hades is the Greek rendering or translation of the Hebrew word, Sheol, and Sheol, which is used in the Hebrew, speaks of the grave, all right? It doesn't necessarily refer to hell at all.

Hades is often referenced as hell, but Hades is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, Sheol, which is the grave. All right? Now it refers, in this case, to this part of this holding space where this rich man who died apart from embracing and accepting the mercy of God and where he was held. And it says that he was buried *"and in Hades being in torment,"* so he's already experiencing torment. And he's awaiting judgment. All right, now we'll read the next part.

²⁴And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' (Luke 16:19-26 ESV)

This is a fascinating passage that is very insightful. And as I said, had Jesus not told the story, we wouldn't have really known about this.

And by the way we know this is not a parable is because Jesus is using proper names, Lazarus and Abraham. Never, ever in parables are proper names used. You only use those in a story that is true. All right. A parable talks about something, it shares a truth in story form. This is an actual happening.

So it's interesting here that we find out that those who died trusting in the mercy of God, even in the Old Testament times, were taken to this place, which Jesus referred to as Abraham's side. But he referred to it to the other thief on the cross as "paradise." Remember he said to that thief, *"this day, you'll be with me in paradise."* (Luke 24:43)

Right? But the other man who rejected God's mercy was put into this place of torment where he awaited judgment. So where did the spirit of Jesus go after he dismissed his spirit from his physical body dying on the cross? He went to Sheol and there proclaimed himself to be the savior and the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption.

And this proclamation was made to both sides, to those who died trusting in the mercy of God and to those who died, rejecting. The mercy of God, including those he says, who disobeyed during the time of Noah while the arc was being constructed. And the reason that I had you circling the word "proclaimed" in your Bible is because it's a very important word.

It might be translated preached in your Bible, but proclaimed is better because the word that we typically use that we translate preached speaks more of speaking evangelistically. This is not that. This is not an evangelistic proclamation. This is simply a message Jesus went and proclaimed in the sense of giving a message that He is Messiah, He is Savior, and He passed that message along. But he did more than that. And for that we, we go to the Apostle Paul's writings in Ephesians. This is fascinating from Ephesians four, he says:

(slide)

Ephesians 4:7-10 (ESV)

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? (Sheol, if you will) He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

I want you to notice in this passage in Ephesians that Paul tells us Jesus descended into the lower earthly regions, which is a euphemism for Sheol, and it says he led a host of captives.

Remember I told you before when Peter talked about people who were in prison, it wasn't really a literal prison, it was just a place of captivity. That was where they were kept. Well, Jesus went down and proclaimed to those who were being comforted, who had embraced the mercy of God that he is Messiah. And then he led those captives out of paradise and into heaven itself.

And so, he emptied paradise that day. Because you do know that nobody went to Heaven before, before Jesus, before his death on the cross. Do you recall

that? If you read carefully through John chapter three, you will hear a statement where our Lord said nobody has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the son of man. (John 3:13)

Well, that was pre-cross that he spoke that. Post-cross we now, believers in Jesus who have put our hope and faith in him, when we are absent from the body, we are immediately present with the Lord. And now people are in heaven because the way to heaven has been opened because the price has been paid. The purification for sins has been given.

In the Old Testament sins were atoned for, they were covered. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for all of the sins that had ever been committed and ever would be committed, all in one fell swoop. And now the way to heaven could be open and it is open. Praise the Lord.

Now the last thing we're going to look at here is just those last couple of verses. Well, verses 21 and 22, particularly where it speaks of baptism. And I want to talk about these because it's important that we have clarity here. In verse 21, it says,

²¹ *“Baptism, which corresponds to this, (and the “this” was the waters of the great global flood. Okay, now he's relating it to baptism and he says 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.” (And so forth and so on)*

And the reason I'm emphasizing the wording of that verse very carefully is because there are some who have read that verse and they've come away with the idea that water baptism is what saves you. In other words, it is required to be saved but Peter is talking about the spiritual reality behind the physical act of water baptism. And that's why he's very careful to include the words, “, *not as a removal of dirt from the body.*”

In other words, it's not the literal immersion of the body into water that saves you. Can I just tell you this? There is nothing that can be done to your physical body that will save you. Okay? Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus? He said, flesh gives birth to flesh. That's all it can do. And the flesh is dying. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit, right? (John 3:6)

And you'll remember elsewhere, even Jesus said in, I believe it's John, chapter six, he says, *“the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit,”* (John 6:63 NIV) and we need to understand the spiritual dynamic

behind it. Peter is making a connection with the global flood and water baptism, but he's careful to say it's not the removal of dirt from the body. If that's what saved people, we'd go around tying people up with duct tape and throwing them in the river and just telling them you'll thank me later. Right? I mean, if that's all it took.

There is the spiritual dynamic behind it whereby we must be born again by putting our faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross.

And Peter knew that. He understood that, and he's not telling us otherwise. Peter understood that it's a spiritual rebirth and that this physical body is something that we're going to set aside. It is always and always will be the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that saves you. And that's such good news.

And you know when people ask me about that, and they do from time to time, I always point to the thief on the cross, and Lord, *“remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* (Luke 23:42 ESV) And Jesus said to him, “sorry bud. You got to, you're not going to be able to get down and get dunked, so you're not going to be able to go, tough luck, huh?” Anyway, that's not what he said. Is it? *“today you will be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:43).

Yeah. That's an important thing to remember. So here's the deal though. And you've got to understand this. We've had 2000 years to muck up the idea of what baptism is and isn't. And now whenever we talk about water baptism or we see water baptism, or I do a water baptism class, before we have a water baptism here, I always have to explain what water baptism isn't.

I love talking about what it is, but I also have to talk about what it isn't. And the reason I have to do that is because there's been all this teaching swirling around where people have gotten away from a simple faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and they've put it on their own actions. And they now, they came to the place of believing because somebody told them that if you get dunked you'll be saved. And that's what their hope is in.

“How do you know you're saved?”

“Well, I got baptized.”

And then we've got to go back to school. We've got to go back to the word of God. We've got to go back to Ephesians 2:8-9.

⁸”For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

It's not about you. It's about what He did that saves you. Amen. Amen.

Let's stand together. If you need prayer, you're invited to come up as we're closing. Father, we thank you so much for your word. Your word is true. Your word is a living hope, and that living hope has been conveyed to us in such a powerful and wonderful way, and I thank you for that, my Father.

And I thank you, Lord that that hope is something that people can see and recognize in our hearts. And I pray also that we would take seriously the exhortation of Peter to be prepared to share that hope with others, to tell them about the hope that we have and what words are we going to use and how we are going to say it, and how are we going to express that with kindness and respect.

Help us to do that, Lord, so that we can share that life with those who have yet to come. We praise you and thank you for the time that we've spent together and we pray a blessing, Lord, on our week as we think about these things and put them into action. In Jesus' name we pray, and all God's people said, amen.

God bless you.