

The Redeeming Work of Christ

1 Peter 3:18-22

Warning: High Water Ahead! All Scripture is inspired by God, but not all Scripture is easily understood. In our passage this morning, we find some of the most difficult texts in Peter's Epistle, perhaps in all of the New Testament. Many are the differing interpretations concerning Peter's intended meaning.

Verses 19-21 are most perplexing to even the greatest scholars (you can imagine how perplexing it might be to your simple pastor). It seems that several questions need to be considered:

- **Who are the spirits in prison?**
- **What did Jesus preach to them?**
- **Where did He preach to them?**
- **When did this preaching take place?**
- **Did Peter teach baptismal regeneration?**

These questions could consume all of our time and energy this morning. After all, "inquiring minds want to know!" But even inquiring minds will not know and understand everything.

"The task of the faithful expositor is clear. If we cannot plumb the mysteries of the passage, we can (1) state the main, clear points, and (2) avoid major error by refusing to base novel doctrines upon obscure passages." Daniel Doriani

The main points of the passage concern themselves with Christ, His suffering and triumph! We must not become distracted by any fanciful notions that would diminish the glory of Christ's work or create a false gospel that leads to universalism.

- **Christ suffered for sin, died in the flesh, to bring us to God. (18)** Here again we find a Christological gem, a nugget worth more than gold.

Without the suffering and death of Christ, we would have no way to come to God. Our access was provided by the shed blood of the Lamb of God!

- **Christ was quickened, made alive, by the Spirit. (18b)** At the time of His death, only the flesh of Jesus died. He said, "Father, Into Your hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

The body of the Lord was laid in the tomb, but the spirit of Christ descended into Sheol, the abode of the dead, where He preached to the spirits in prison. But what did He preach?

Note: To draw from this verse any notion of a postmortem opportunity for salvation, is most unwarranted and would undermine much of the clear teaching of Scripture. We must hold to the clear teaching of Scripture, not to the traditions of the church. Tradition must always give way to the Scripture.

Note: Therefore, we cannot look at verse 21 and conclude that baptism has saving merit! That would undermine a host of Scriptures that declare salvation by grace through faith alone!

- Christ ascended into heaven and is reigning triumphantly over all powers and authorities. (22)

This is consistent with the message of Peter at Pentecost. (*Acts 2:32-36*)

Application points: Never allow the “fog and the mist” to hide Christ from your view!

Glory in Christ, even when we may not fully comprehend His mysterious ways.

Make certain you are fully resting in Christ’s atoning work!