

# Victory through Suffering

*Our Identity in Christ*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Peter 3:18-22  
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Please turn within your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3. The message this morning will focus on verses 18 to 22, third chapter of Peter's first epistle. The title of the message is "Victory through Suffering." Victory through suffering. This epistle, we've noted that Peter's letter to the churches in Asia Minor, to whom he writes, his burden is that they are experiencing suffering and they will experience more suffering in days to come. We've noted he writes in 63 AD, less than a year before major persecution breaks out. Of course, Peter in himself does not know the future, but God inspires these words to be written at a perfect time for his church to prepare them for an upcoming season of intense persecution. And so this letter is buttressing their faith, strengthening their resolve to honor Christ, and enabling them to stand in the midst of suffering. In fact, suffering is a key word in the book. Suffer, suffers, suffering occurs 16 times in the book. Peter is particularly concerned about the issue of our suffering in the middle of the book. From chapter 3 verse 8 all the way through chapter 4 verse 19, he's concerned about Christians bearing up and suffering well when we suffer for our faith. And so he's concerned to help us do that, as we live godly lives, as when you come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, he changes you. We heard earlier in the assurance of pardon, if any man is in Christ, he's a new creature. You have a new heart, a new calling now to live your life for his glory, to see transformation happen in every area. That's what Peter's been talking about in this letter, that we're called to be people who exhibit the power of the gospel in every area of our lives. Our family life, our work life, our relationship with the government, all of that is to be transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ. And as we live lives that are increasingly good in the way God defines good, the loveliness and beauty of life lived in accordance with his instruction, his design, empowered by his Spirit, when we live lives like that, the world is not going to appreciate it because light offends darkness and as Jesus himself told Peter and the apostles, men love darkness rather than light, and if they hated me, they will hate you. And so Peter, having received that instruction, is now passing it on to those to whom he writes. He's saying, listen, as you live for the glory of God, you try to live lives of increasing holiness and righteousness, you're going to find more opposition, antipathy, hostility from those around you. As they see your good deeds, they're going to think that your good deeds are evil. They're going to slander you as evildoers. We see this in our own world today, to speak truth is now defined as hate speech, to say what God has said is the design, just to articulate that, is viewed by our present society, at least a lot of people in our present society, as hate, when in reality, the

most loving thing you can do is tell people about Christ and his word. It's the kindest thing you can do and yet it's called hate.

So they misinterpret, they misunderstand. This is what it's going to be like and Jesus said it would be like this, and so Peter writes to prepare these Christians to bear up in a time of intense suffering. In this previous passage we looked at, verses 13 to 17, he was asked the question, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" The idea is, listen, as you prove zealous for what is good, when people do malign you and mistreat you, they can't ultimately harm you. And he says, understand that, understand that if you're doing good, you are only being blessed by God. Even though you may experience the antipathy and hostility of the world, you may experience financial repercussions for your faith, you may experience social ostracism for your faith, you may experience physical attack for your faith, even if all of those things happen, you are blessed. The fact is, you are under the blessing of God. Outwardly, things may be not so good, but inwardly, you are blessed and precious to God and God is working in you.

So he said, know this. In fact, we talked about the previous message on verses 13 to 17, and I said, he really kind of says in a way, he says, you know, set your mind, was the first thing, know that you are blessed, set your mind. When you're encountering persecution, suffering, set your mind. Don't judge by circumstances. Know what God says. You are blessed if you're suffering for righteousness' sake. The Lord is right there with you. Set your mind. Then we talked about also guard your heart. The next thing he talks about in that passage is don't let fear overwhelm you. Don't fear their intimidation, but rather persevere in hope. Be sanctified in Christ and in hope. So guard your heart. Don't let the fears of the world trouble you and stir you up, but stay focused on God's presence, Christ's presence in your life. So set your mind, guard your heart and then last week we talked about watch your mouth. That is, what do you say. Be ready to give an answer. As Ron was mentioning earlier, we've got to be ready to do it and watch the tone of how we say it. That's what we saw last week. I think what he does in verses 18 to 22, he said already now, set your mind, guard your heart, watch your tongue, the theme really of this next section is fix your eyes. Fix your eyes on Christ. That's what he's going to do in verses 18 to 22. He's going to say, the way that you persevere in trial, the way you persevere in persecution is you fix your eyes on Jesus. Just like the author of Hebrews says, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

Let's read these words together, chapter 3, 18 to 22.

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having

gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we come now to Your word, Lord, eagerly we come in a sense of humility, knowing that we need Your grace. Lord, we cannot understand these things unless Your Spirit works in our hearts. So open the eyes of our hearts, open our spiritual ears to see, to hear, and to understand Your truth. And may the entrance of Your word give light and in Your light, may we see light, may we walk as children of light. For the glory of our Savior, we pray in His name, amen.*

So victory through suffering. He's saying, listen, suffering is a reality. You're going to suffer for doing good. And the theme that he's been talking about throughout this section is keep on doing good when you're suffering. When you're suffering, when people are persecuting you or maligning you, misunderstanding your faith, mistreating you because of your faith, do not return insult for insult. Don't return evil for evil. Don't harm those who harm you. Instead, bless them. Do good to them. By the power of the Holy Spirit, overcome evil with good. So Peter is basically calling us to that kind of a life and he said, so in doing that, fix your mind on the fact that you're, I mean, set your mind on the fact that you're blessed, guard your heart, knowing that you're not going to be overcome by fear, troubled, you're going to set your hope. Watch your mouth, be ready to give an answer, and now fix your eyes on Christ. What's going to help more than anything else for you to bear up in suffering is to keep looking at Jesus.

This is really what the Christian life is all about, keep looking at Jesus. In fact, Peter, he keeps calling us to this. Even back in chapter 2 when he was telling us the key theme of that section we talked about was in chapter 2 verse 12, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." Keep your behavior. That is your manner of life. Keep your behavior excellent. That is good and beautiful. Make your life beautiful by conforming it to God's will and word. Now, what they're going to do is they're going to slander you, but keep on keeping on in walking in obedience to God, and if you keep on keeping on, then that which they slander you, they will eventually, many of them will be won over. And he goes on to say, okay, so in verses 13 to 16 of chapter 2, from 13 to 17, in the way you deal with authority, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, verse 13. Then in verse 18, he says, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect." In your workplace, live differently. And then he's going to chapter 3, verse 1 to 7, he's going to talk about in the marriage relationship, in your home, let Christ's transforming power change the way you live as a wife or as a husband. And in the middle of that though, that middle of that section in chapter 2 verse 21, when he's saying, you may suffer for doing good, chapter 2 verse 20, "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God." And he says look at Jesus in chapter 2, "For you have been called for this very purpose, since Christ also suffered for you,

leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Christ is your example, follow him. That's what he says in chapter 2. So he's talking about how to live and he says, "Look at Jesus. Consider Him, look at His example. When He was reviled, He did not revile again, but kept entrusting Himself to the One who judges righteously. Be like Christ. Look at Jesus in the midst of your struggles."

And in chapter 3 now, when he's really talking most directly about the suffering, even more focus on the suffering itself, and he's telling us, you know, get your mind right, guard your heart, watch what you say. Now he says, look at Christ. That's what's happening in verse 18 of chapter 3. He said in verse 17, "For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all." Many translations say "suffered" because this is one place where there's a textual question whether or not the word "suffered" is original or the word "died." Both are pretty strongly attested to in the ancient manuscripts. Ultimately, this again shows how the text of the New Testament is 99.9% perfect and the places where you have any disagreement in textual evidence, there's never any major doctrine at stake, like here. The issue is Christ, his suffering for us or his dying for us is basically two ways of saying the same thing. Doesn't change the meaning of the passage. Peter's saying, "Look at Christ. As I'm calling you to suffer for doing what is good, how do you bear up in that?" Look at Jesus and what his argument is this, Jesus kept on doing good all the way from the moment of his birth all the way to the cross. He only did good. And you know what he experienced? Suffering after suffering after suffering for doing good. But what he's telling us here is not just follow his example of meekness, like he said in chapter 2, just be like him, don't revile. He's saying, look at Jesus, because not just the reality of suffering, but the result of his suffering for doing good. The result of his suffering for doing good is he has won total and complete victory. He has been victorious through his suffering so that he now is seated at the right hand of God reigning and ruling. He has won the ultimate victory.

And so as we wrestle with the difficulties, look at Christ and understand that when you suffer for righteousness, you will win. You will win. You're not losing. It feels like you're losing when you're being rejected, when you're being socially ostracized, marginalized, friends no longer want to be around you. You may experience the persecution economically. You may lose your business or your position. These things may well happen that the culture is moving in that direction for us as Christians. If that happens, it feels like you're losing. We experience physical persecution. If we actually suffer physically for our faith, people beat us or imprison us for our faith. It's happened before, it may happen again. If that happens, what are we to do? Keep doing good. That is keep loving our enemies. Keep speaking the truth. Keep standing for Christ. Keep conforming our lives to what Jesus has called us to by the power of the Holy Spirit. Not in our own strength, by his grace. Keep on keeping on doing good because you know that in doing so, you are winning, even though it doesn't look like it outwardly, because it did not look like Jesus was winning outwardly.

Think about that. Think about Jesus' ministry. Born in obscurity, Bethlehem. Unknown, virtually completely unknown until he breaks on the scene after the preaching of John the

Baptist and John the Baptist says, "This is the One about whom I told you, the One who comes after me is greater than me." And Jesus begins his ministry and he preaches and people who hear him preach, many of them are just overwhelmed and say, "Never did a man preach like this man preaches." His healing ministry was phenomenal. I mean, he healed lepers. He healed the lame. He healed those who'd been born blind. He even raised the dead to testify to the reality of who he was. He is the Messiah. He's the King. And yet what happened? As his ministry goes on, more and more and more, his people reject him. He came to his own and his own received him not.

His disciples are a ragtag band of Galileans. I mean, the Galileans were so unimpressive, I mean, the Judeans, I mean, the Jews, the Galileans, kind of like, it was northern Israel originally and it's an area where Jesus is raised and the guys around him and remember when when they see like they're talking to Peter the night Jesus is crucified before he's crucified and they're like, "Hey, you sound like a Galilean like He does, as you have that southern accent apparently or that northern accent there." I guess it surely wasn't a Brooklyn sounding accent that they had. But anyway as they speak you could hear in their voice they're from the same area, and Jews in general look down on Galilean Jews. And so it's unimpressive. You have an unimpressive group. And look at the group that's with him. There's no scholars. There's no, you know, his disciples are fishermen, tax collectors, and they're Galileans. "That's what You've assembled in this three-year ministry? These 12 guys, really, that's what You've got?" Not much to show for it.

And then he ends up, though there are moments where it seems like he might be coming into acclaim and the people might follow him, in the end they reject him utterly and cry out to Pilate, who's willing to give away a prisoner in accordance with the normal Passover policy of releasing a Jewish prisoner. And they say, "No, we want Barabbas instead. Give us that rascal Barabbas. Don't let Jesus out." "What do you want me to do with Jesus?" "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" They totally reject him and it looks like abject failure, complete, dismal failure. And that's what the apostles must have been wrestling with. It must have led our author, part of what led him to deny Jesus three times. Can't understand what's happening. And this defeat, he is now nailed to a Roman cross, he hangs there in agony, abandoned by God. The sky goes dark. He cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It's even worse than we thought. Supernaturally, it looks like, to the Jews there, it looks like this man must be such a terrible sinner that God has abandoned him. We're seeing supernatural manifestations of his rejection. What must this man have done? What a final and ultimate defeat. In reality, of course, we know he was bearing the sins of all who would ever believe. He who knew no sin became sin for us.

And so this apparent ultimate defeat was in reality the ultimate victory, for in the moment he breathes his last, remember he says, "It is finished. Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." He breathes his last and what happened? At that moment, the earth quakes, Matthew tells us this in Matthew chapter 27, the earth quakes, the veil in the temple, this massive, thick veil in the temple that separates the holy place from the Holy of Holies, the place that only one time a year the high priest can enter into the Holy of Holies, the place of God's presence, the veil is torn from top to bottom in the instant Jesus dies. That

is access to God granted for mankind in his death. The victory is won. Not only that, Matthew tells us that at the moment Jesus died, the earthquake happens, the veil is torn, and there are people that are resurrected around Jerusalem. Jews get out of their graves now alive. This apparent defeat has been an ultimate victory and Peter is going to unpack even more of that reality for us in this passage, and what he's going to say is, "Listen, you must not judge by what your eyes see. You must not judge by what normal experience would tell you about your circumstances. You must judge by the word of God and the life of Christ. And when you do that, you'll understand that when you think you're being defeated, you are actually triumphing mightily." You are becoming, you're going to experience what Paul says, we are more than conquerors. We overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us.

This is what he's calling us to. This is the main point of the passage. Look at Jesus' suffering and know that suffering for doing good has incredible power to bring victory. That's the theme, the agenda of this passage. Now I wanted to hammer that home at the beginning because I've got to acknowledge that verses 19 to 21 here in the middle, as we read it, some of you may have been thinking, what's he talking about? Because this is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. In fact, Martin Luther, in his commentary, writes about it, "This passage is difficult and obscure. I don't even think I understand it." And Luther wasn't one to say things like that. He always had an opinion. You know, often wrong but never in doubt, right? But on this passage, he said, "I don't know exactly what it means."

We're talking about verses 19 and 20 and verse 21. There's two incredibly difficult interpretive issues in this passage. The first in verses 19 and 20, it says that Jesus, after he's made alive in the spirit in verse 18, "in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark." So who, the question is, who are the spirits in prison, now in prison, who were once disobedient to whom Jesus preaches? Who are these spirits? That's the first question. That's a massive question. And then verse 21, a second incredibly difficult interpretive issue. He follows one after another. It's like, Peter, could you not help us out here? The second issue in verse 21 is he says, baptism now saves you and it looks like, is he saying water baptism saves us? Now, we're going to see as we look at this carefully, of course, he's not saying that. Scripture interprets Scripture and he's not saying that. But what is he saying? Why does he say it that way? Why does he bring up the spirits now in prison and Jesus preaching to them?

These are tough issues and let me just say, we're not going to spend time on these today. I'm laying them out because one of the key principles of making a decision hermeneutically about something like this, that is an interpretive issue, is you need to see the question in light of the larger point. If you try to answer these questions without really understanding the agenda of the passage, you are setting yourself up for failure, then you're just kind of going much more subject to whim and personal taste. So we've got to hammer home the agenda and not miss the point and then try to understand the mind of God in putting, inspiring Peter to write these words. Why did the Lord want these things said at this point? The question is, how do verses 19, 20, and 21 support what Peter's

saying in verses 18 and 22 because the thrust of the passage is really verse 18 and verse 22. Look with me at how this shows out. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." You see, Jesus also suffered like we suffer. He suffered for doing good and look what happened. He brought us to God. You see what good came out of his suffering. He suffered for good and look, it looked like he was losing, but in reality, he brought us to God. And verse 22 carries the thought forward even more, Jesus "who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." Jesus suffered, but look what happened. He's brought all of his people to God and he ascended to the right hand of God through his suffering. It was his suffering that enabled this to happen. Suffering for doing good has brought about this incredible victory.

So the message is when you are suffering for doing good, know that you know that you know that God is at work in this and he's doing great things through it because this is his way. Now, understanding that, now you can actually look at these difficult questions. What does he mean, spirits now in prison? What does he mean, baptism now saves you? So we're going to dig into that. I'll just mention, spirits now in prison, I'm going to sow this out for you to think about this week and prayerfully consider and read the text and you can read other passages and we're going to really dig into it next Sunday, Lord willing. But the spirits now in prison, there's two basic major possibilities. There are subsets of these possibilities that you could say four or five different possibilities, but we're just going to say the two big ones, who are the spirits now in prison? Some people believe the spirits now in prison in verse 19, "in which he went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison," are the spirits of people who were alive, that is human spirits of people who were alive at the time of Noah and who were disobedient and Jesus went to preach to them after his death. And exactly when is another issue, but it's after his death, possibly after his resurrection or before his resurrection, he went and preached to them. That's one possibility, the spirits of human beings who rejected the preaching of Noah. The other possibility is these are fallen angels who were involved in the rebellion related to Noah and is talked about in Genesis chapter 6, the sons of God and the daughters of men. My personal opinion is that's the right answer. I'm going to explain it next week. But you understand there's a lot of differences of opinion among godly people, okay?

So ultimately, let me just say this, it ultimately does not matter because the point that he's making is Jesus suffered for doing good and through what apparently was defeat, he won the ultimate victory, therefore, when you go through what appears to be defeat, know that you can win a victory like his through his power as you keep doing good. That's the point and these things are brought in to say, to strengthen that main point. Do you see? So that's how we actually look at it interpretively, say, okay, which one advances his argument the best? That's what we're going to look at next time.

Okay, so put those things out of your mind for a minute. I've wrestled with how to do this because it's like, you know, if I don't say anything, you're like, "Hey, why hasn't he even talked about it?" But to talk about it is, well, let's spend the next four hours. We're going to have a long sermon today so we can really work through all of this. Just hang in there

with me. We're bringing some food in, ordering pizza. No, we're not. We're not doing that today. But we want to get the main point of the passage and receive what God has for us, the main food that he has for our souls, and then I think as we look at it, next time with more focus on these issues, we're going to see how these things actually carry powerfully the message to our hearts. God doesn't speak, you know, and make a mistake. Even though we in our fallibility, our weakness, we find things, some things in Scripture are less clear than others. This is a passage that's less clear. And the reality is you read your Bible carefully, you come to passages that are more clear and less clear. And here's a key principle, the more clear helps you interpret the less clear. Okay, you look at the more clear passages and you know what you know that you know that you know this is true, and these others God intends you to let those shine light on the less clear. But what we want to keep focusing on the main point.

So now what we're going to do is we're going to look at two points this morning. The first is the reality of his suffering for doing good, and the second is the result of his suffering for doing good. That's the main thrust of this passage. The reality of his suffering first. In verse 18, he reminds us, he says, look, it's better in verse 17, if you suffer, then suffer for doing what is right. And he says, for, it could be translated because, because Christ also died for sins once for all. You suffer for doing good because Christ suffered once for all. He died for sins. I said the word could be suffered, either way, the idea is the same. He suffered. His whole life was a life of suffering but the focus here in this passage is particularly on his death, the suffering of death.

The sufferings of Christ are something that this, let me just show you this, how Peter keeps telling us to look at the sufferings of Christ. Look at chapter 2, verse 21. I mentioned it earlier, but look at how he describes it. This is 1 Peter 2:21, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you." Christ suffered for you. Verse 23, "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats." The suffering of Christ. Then chapter 3, verse 18, we just read about Christ also died for sins once for all, that is he suffered for us. Look at chapter 4, verse 1. After our section we're in right now, when we finish it, chapter 4, verse 1 will be our next passage we look at, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose." Chapter 4, verse 13, "but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ," know that you're blessed. Then chapter 5, verse 1, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of," what, "the sufferings of Christ." Christ has suffered. He's made that point emphatically clear and we who belong to Christ, part of our calling is to share in his suffering, and what we find as we read the Bible more carefully is suffering produces wonderful things. It really does. it produces proven character. It produces hope. Just like suffering in life does. You know, you don't get stronger by sitting around watching TV. How do you get stronger? You tear down your muscles and they come back stronger. Suffering produces strength. Spiritually, how much more so?

The reality of his suffering. So he died for sins and he continues to unpack this by saying "once for all." His suffering, he died one time. His suffering was limited to his life and his death, his earthly life and his death. He suffered, but he suffered more than we can



ever even understand. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, rejected all throughout his life and then experienced the agony of the cross indescribable, spiritual, emotional, mental anguish Christ took upon himself. But it was once for all. It's not repeated. Jesus is not sacrificed again and again as Roman Catholics teach. He suffered once for all. They teach that in the Mass, it's a bloodless sacrifice that his death somehow is still being effected through the Mass as if he's still dying. No, the Bible says he died once for all.

So his suffering is there in his death for sins, once for all, and then in the emphasis on being put to death, "having been put to death in the flesh." Put to death. Now, there are other places where Jesus says, "I lay down My life," and certainly he did willingly, but in reality, his death was a violent act where other people acted upon him. In fact, Peter, in his own preaching, in Acts chapter 2, verse 23 says, as he's preaching to the Jews at Pentecost, he says, "This man attested to you by all these miracles, this man delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." And then he speaks of the agony of Jesus' death. It was a violent death. It was an agonizing death. The reality of his suffering cannot be missed and so Peter reminds us of that in this passage. Look at the reality of the suffering, but his emphasis is not to stay there and camp out too long there. He wants us to see the result of his suffering. The second point is the main point, the result of his suffering.

1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." He brings us to God. He brings sinners like you and me, as David said, conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, sinners from our mother's womb, defiled, rebels at heart, proud, arrogant, unloving, all the things that are true of us in who we are apart from Christ, and he washes that away and he brings us into the very throne room of a holy God so that we can come in unashamed. We can come boldly to the throne of grace. Think about that, to come boldly to the throne of Almighty God, you and me, if you're in Christ. Unbelievable, unimaginable. That's what he's done. He brings us to God.

How does he bring us to God? He wants us to unpack that for us. How is it that he brings us to God? The result is he brings us to God, but how does he do it? It's through suffering. His suffering made three things possible that he unpacks in the rest of this, three subpoints under the result of his suffering. The theme of it is, the result of his suffering is it brings us to God by doing three things, making three things possible. The first is a perfect atonement. His suffering made possible a perfect atonement. That's the emphasis, particularly in verse 18, that he might bring us to God having been put to death in the flesh. He died for sins is the first thing he says in verse 18. Christ also died for sins. That's the language of the Old Testament. The animal is put to death for sins as an offering for sins. Jesus' death was a substitutionary atonement. We prayed that in our prayer earlier, our prayer of confession. In the same way the Old Testament sacrifices, the reason God gave the law of the sacrifices, all those animals dying, so much blood being spilled, was to say this is, sin is a massive problem. Human sin is a massive problem to a holy God. How can he be just and the justifier of the ungodly and remain just? He can't just pardon sin. Sin must be punished or he's not just. And so how can God

justify the ungodly and remain just? Only by sending his Son as an offering for sins. That's what he's saying here.

He's put to death in the flesh. Again, the language of the sacrifice. The sacrifice doesn't willingly offer itself. I mean, Jesus, there's this parallel or this balancing reality, Jesus does offer himself freely, but in reality, there's also the sense in which God puts him to death. There's a reality in which, as we read earlier from Peter, you nailed him to the cross. He says to the Jews, "You put Him to death." You could say to Pilate, "You put Him to death." The reality is you and I, you know what, we put him to death. Our sins have nailed into that cross. But it's the language of sacrifice. It's a perfect atonement. It's through the blood that he sheds in our place that he makes us able to have our sins taken away and he gives us his righteousness. It's a perfect atonement, even the just for the unjust. The only one who could offer himself in our place had to be himself just. If he had sinned one time, his offering would have not been of any value. But he's perfect, tempted in every way, yet without sin. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, spotless, without blemish. And so Peter reminds us of that. He offers a perfect atonement. That's how he brings us to God.

Secondly, 2B, it's not just that his suffering made possible a perfect atonement, his suffering made possible a powerful resurrection. If he did not suffer, he could not rise. If he did not die, he could not be raised. And so his death makes possible his powerful resurrection that he begins to talk about at the end of verse 18, "that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." This is speaking of resurrection life, power made alive in the Spirit. This is speaking of, and he's going to say a little bit later here in verse 21, he says, when he talks about "baptism now saves you not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's so important for us to know the tomb was empty. That's the glory of Christianity. We worship a risen Savior. And so the tomb is empty, his body has been raised from the dead, but his body is raised now with a spiritual character about it. It's physical and spiritual. This is part of what he's intimating when he says in verse 18, "made alive in the spirit." The glory of the resurrection body of Jesus and the glory of what our bodies will be like.

In fact, to understand this, we really need to look at 1 Corinthians 15. So hold your place in 1 Peter 3, turn back to 1 Corinthians, right after Romans. The resurrection body is physical and spiritual at the same time. Scripture doesn't make this abundantly clear because we're talking about things that remain to be seen, but Christ's body was physical and at the same time, spiritual. What does that mean? I don't know fully. I know the tomb is empty and at the same time, I know Jesus could walk through walls. He could appear and disappear and he could eat fish and he could say, "Touch Me, I'm not a ghost." He was real. He's resurrected and yet his body somehow, and I think we were talking about this in men's Bible study the other day on Friday morning, there's some sense in which maybe there's like the fourth dimension or something spiritually and he's able to move in and out of that. I don't know. Peter doesn't talk about that, so sorry I even mentioned that.

But look with me what Paul says, 1 Corinthians 15:42. Well, actually, look back at verse 35 of 1 Corinthians 15, "But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?'" Look how Paul answers that. "You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else." He says, "Listen, the nature of the resurrection body to the body that we have now is on the order of a seed to a full grown plant." You think about that. A seed to a plant. It's something, now everything in the seed is present in the plant. Nothing in the plant that wasn't in the seed, right? But there is a transformation.

Verse 42. Skip on down to verse 42. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living soul.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." The last Adam is Christ. In his resurrection, he becomes a life-giving spirit, and he now raises those who follow him to resurrection bodies of glory. They will not age, there's no weakness, there's no flaws, everything is glorious and in conformity to his glorious body.

I've mentioned Luke 24, John 20, you can read Luke 24, remember after he encounters the two men on the road to Emmaus, two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they don't recognize Jesus right away, partly maybe because the glorified body is different, though he's not, maybe not fully glorified as it will be when he ascends. We don't know all of that, but they, for whatever reason, they're hindered from recognizing him. Certainly they weren't expecting to see him. They talk to him, then he, remember, he eats bread with him and he disappears and they know it's the Lord. "Did not our hearts burn within us while we were talking with Him?" The Lord has risen so they go back and tell the disciples what's happening. They're reporting to them and can you imagine the disciples are hearing from these guys, they've already heard from Mary Magdalene earlier. They're hearing from these guys what happened, and Jesus shows up in their midst and this is where he says, "Touch Me. I'm not a spirit. Feel, I have a real body."

And then John chapter 20, the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples where Thomas wasn't there. So apparently that thing we were just talking about, Thomas wasn't there. I don't know where he was, but he wasn't there. The rest of the 11, 10 of the 11 were there. Thomas wasn't and Thomas, when he hears the testimony, his nickname, Doubting Thomas, comes from what? He says, "Unless I see with my own eyes and I touch Him with my hands, I put my hand in the wound in His side and I touch His hands where the nail prints are, I will not believe." And a week later, Jesus shows up again and each time those passages talk about the doors are locked because they're scared. They don't know what's going to happen. The doors are locked and what happens? Jesus is in their midst immediately in his physical body, which is also somehow now a spiritual physical body. And he comes to Thomas and he says, "Thomas, reach here your hand into My side, put your fingers in the prints of My hands and be not unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas falls down and says, "My Lord and my God."

So his resurrection body is a glorious body and as Peter is telling us these things, he says he's now a life-giving, he's made alive in the spirit. Like Paul said, he's now raised a life-giving spirit, made alive in the spirit. This is how he's able to bring us to God, by the way. The fact that he's resurrected is what results in our justification. It's what proves we've been given his righteousness. It's what proves he can bring us to God. In fact, it's his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God that validates that he can take you and me into the throne room of God because he himself is now in the throne room of God as a man. I mentioned earlier that passage where Peter says, "You put Him to death, you nailed Him to the cross by the hands of godless men," and he says, "and He experienced the agony of death," but it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. He rose again because it was impossible for Jesus to be held in the power of death. Why? Because the soul that sins dies. He's not sinned.

It was impossible for him to be held in its power and I love this, the author of Hebrews is talking about the high priest, the ministry of the high priest and he says, Jesus is a high priest, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek, the king of righteousness. That's what Melchizedek's name means. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Melchizedekian line. And what's the high priest do? I mentioned earlier, once a year you go behind that veil into the Holy of Holies. The high priest goes behind the veil, and what he's doing is he's bringing the people and their prayers directly into the throne room of God once a year, that is, he is now, in doing that, bringing blood behind the veil, he's bringing the people to God. He's restoring their fellowship with God. The high priest brings the people before God to God. You see that? That's his role. The author of Hebrews says, in Hebrews 7:16, he says, Jesus is not in the line of Aaron, he's in line of Melchizedek, and his qualification for being the high priest, the one who brings us to God, is not based on a requirement of the law, that's not his qualification, his qualification is he's qualified to be our high priest by virtue of an indestructible life. His life is not killable. His life is not destroyable. In fact, when he died, he lived. He was immediately, he wasn't, his body lay in the grave for a couple of days because the Lord wanted it to lay there for a couple of days so that we could see the reality of the resurrection. Didn't need to lay there at all because, I mean, the fact that he died makes us right with God, he could have immediately resurrected. But spiritually, he was with God. He said, "Into Your hands, I commit My spirit, Father," when he died. And he is a life-giving spirit. He's able to bring us to God and he shows that.

And now the third point, so not just a perfect atonement, a powerful resurrection, but then a triumphant ascension back to 1 Peter 3 and verse 22 now. This is showing what good came from his suffering. The reason that he suffered was so that he could then make a perfect atonement. The reason that he suffered was so that he could then demonstrate a powerful resurrection. And the reason he suffered is so that he could now offer to God a triumphant ascension. And what happens here, he says in verse 22, "who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." Listen, the reality is that God the Son was in heaven at the right hand of the Father before the world began. Listen to me. So what's happened now? Now a man is at the right hand of the Majesty on high. A man is seated at the right hand of God, the

man Christ Jesus. Fully God, fully man, but mankind has now entered the very throne room of God and is seated at the right hand of God. So the breach that had happened, the separation that sin had brought, that had separated us from God forever, that makes the wages of sin to be death, that we deserve hell to be cast away from his presence forever, the bridge has been gulfed by the man Christ Jesus. He's brought humanity to the right hand of God. I love what one of the Puritans said, "The dust of the earth." Remember how Adam, God took the dust of the earth, formed it into a man? He said, "The dust of the earth sits enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high today." Dust of the earth. Physical flesh, yes, spiritual flesh, glorious flesh, but flesh of my flesh, bone of my bones, flesh of your flesh, bone of your bones.

Christ has ascended and when he did that he ascended over all the spiritual powers. All the demons of hell would have wanted to hold him back. They thought they had won the victory when they crucified him and he triumphs over them and what he's picturing here, he's gone into heaven after angels and authorities and powers have been subjected to him. The conquest is complete. The victory is total. Yes, the serpent bruised the heel of the seed. He did in a massive way, the serpent bruised his heel, but in the bruising of his heel, the seed of the woman has crushed the serpent's head. The victory is won. And the New Testament glories in this reality. Just walk with me for a minute through a couple of the epistles. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened," I pray that you'd be able to see this, "so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." I want you to know how incredible God's power is toward us who believe. And we live in a world that looks like the whole world is all filled with power and we've got no power as Christians. Looks like it. Less and less influence politically, less and less influence socially. Looks like that, right? But he said, "I want you to know what the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might." When was the strength of his might displayed, "which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet." Christ is reigning.

Turn over to the next epistle, Philippians chapter 2. Have this attitude in yourselves, chapter 2, verse 5. Philippians 2:5, the next epistle over past Ephesians is Philippians. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Look at the defeat. Look at the victory. "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Turn over to Colossians chapter 2. The apostles want us to glory in the triumph of Christ. Chapter 2, verse 11, here you have the cross and resurrection and the triumph of Christ. Verse 11, "in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," that's the cross, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Sins taken out of the way, nailed to the cross. Whatever your sins are, if you're in Christ, nailed to the cross. God doesn't remember them anymore. As far as the east is from the west, he will not remember them against you ever again. This is what the forgiveness that he has accomplished. Look what he says next. Verse 15, he nailed him to the cross, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, having triumphed over them through Him." He has taken our sins out of the way. He's brought humanity into the presence of God and he has triumphed over Satan and all of his minions, finally and eternally.

This is the glory of what Christ has done and all of that came through his suffering for doing what is good. What if he hadn't suffered for doing good? Where would we be? And he says, arm yourselves with the same mind. If Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves to suffer also. And when you suffer for doing good, it's an exciting time, isn't it? I mean, if this is the kind of stuff that happens when you suffer for doing good, think what that means about relationships and people in bondage around you, people in darkness. If we suffer for doing good and we bear up and we keep doing good and God is working in us, what's going to happen? They're going to be people who are liberated from their darkness. Jesus is going to become real to them in the moment. Not everybody, of course, no. Many will continue to reject and continue to hate, but there will be some whose eyes begin to see, ears begin to hear, lame begin to leap with joy. "Christ is King! I want your Savior for myself!" As we keep on doing good. Just keep on living for Jesus, keep on loving Jesus, keep on loving others for Jesus no matter what happens, and know that this is the way of God. He triumphs through this kind of apparent defeat at the glory of God that he does that.

Let's set our hearts to do that. I mean, as I said before, I hate pain. I hate to think about any unpleasantness in my life. I hope that every light is green as I'm driving. I mean, it disappoints me to get one out of, you know... So we all understand that. We have our desires but we're to lay them all down because our ultimate desire should be to make much of Jesus and to love him and know him better. And you know, the most wonderful thing about all this is that when you suffer with Jesus, you get to know him so much more deeply and wonderfully. He becomes so much more real to you, so much more precious and dear to you. May God help us to be faithful.

Let's go to him in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the glorious salvation that You've made known to us in Jesus Christ. Lord, we marvel that You were able to find a way to save sinners, to justify the ungodly and remain just. We marvel that what Jesus was willing to do for us, we can't understand it. We were so unworthy of being tolerated. We were objects of wrath, we deserved Your justice. And yet You did not only just not merely tolerate us, You loved us and gave everything for us. If You loved us like that, Lord, we ought not to live for ourselves, but for Him who loved us and died for us. Help us. For those that have not yet prayed to receive Christ truly from their hearts, surrendered to Jesus, Lord, open their eyes, help them right now. Help them understand that there's nothing keeping them back except their own unwillingness just to trust You, to lay aside everything and run to Jesus. He will receive You. And Father, help us who know You to be more faithful to You, to love Christ with an unshakable, undying love, and to want to be with Him so much that we are actually able to turn moments of difficulty and trial and even persecution into moments of triumph, not by our strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit and the glory of Christ. Lord, make Your name great in Your people all across the world. We pray for all our brothers and sisters who are suffering persecution. Make us strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. Make us faithful. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*