

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**September 15, 2019**

**Back to School**

**1 Peter 3:18**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again, we thank you for who you are, we thank you for the fact that when the role is called, we will be there not on the basis of what we've done but on the basis of what you've done in our lives. Lord, that's going to be the theme that we're looking at this morning, and so, again, I just I pray as we open up your book, as we learn from it, that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit here with us, that you be guiding us and directing us and, again, my prayer is that this is not just something that we hear, goes in one ear and out the other but that it would be of permanent value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is the start of a new school year, it's back to school, and if you remember the first few weeks of school, it was always the time that was used to kind of review the basics from the year before. And so this morning I want to kind of do the same. I want to look at an amazing verse in 1 Peter and I want to use this verse as a means for us to review exactly what our understanding of the

gospel is as we start a brand new school year.

Now our text this morning is *1 Peter 3:18*. It says: *For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm.*

Now it's quite typical of scripture that God manages to say a great deal through very, very few words. And in fact this one scripture answers in capsule form six different questions we have about our faith. It tells us first who Jesus is, that he is the Christ; secondly, what he did, that he suffered for sins; how effective it was, once for all; what he exchanged, his righteousness for our unrighteousness; why he did it, that he might bring us to God; and what his efforts finally accomplished, being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm. And this one verse in 1 Peter is the entire gospel in capsule form. So let's review it.

Well, the first thing that Peter tells us in this verse is who Jesus is and that is the Christ. You know, when I was a youngster I actually believed that Jesus Christ was Jesus's full name. His first name was Jesus, his last name was Christ. And even today there's lots of folks who still think that but that's not the case at all. Christ is not a name, it is a title. It means "anointed

One" or "Messiah," the holy one of God. Well, you can see the problem that comes with thinking of Jesus Christ as simply a proper name for a proper person. It stems from thinking of Jesus simply as a person, you know, someone like us, someone who had a birthday 2,000 years ago. Well, the Gospel of John almost immediately gives the lie to that kind of thinking. *John 1:1* says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* So John's gospel starts out by saying that everything in creation was made by this entity known as "the Word." In the original language, the "word" is translated "logos." Well, how do we know that that's Jesus? Well, if we read further you get to verse 14 of the same passage John tells us this Word, this logos who created the universe also took on flesh 2,000 years ago and became one of us. *John 1:14* says: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John tells us that for all eternity this word coexisted with the Father and the Holy Spirit and that he was in fact the creative force that spoke the universe into being. It tells us that 2,000 years ago the Word entered into space and time by entering into the human race through a virgin named Mary. He was the Christ, the anointed one. The Word itself was made flesh and was now dwelling among us. John tells us that the Christ

existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit for all time. So in essence we really have four different words or titles referring to the very same person. I mean the Christ was the logos, was the Son, was the Word. And that's the answer to the first question: Who is the Christ.

Question two is: Okay, what did he do? Well, John tells us that it was the Word who did the actual work of creating the universe at the dawn of time and that this Word became flesh and dwelt among us. So we ask, okay, why did he do that? Did he come to be a great teacher or an example or a leader? And actually the answer is he came for one purpose and one purpose only. And as our text tells us this morning, he came to glorify his Father by ransoming and rescuing his people. He came to suffer and die for us. Again, *1 Peter 3:18: For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm.* Again that raises the question, okay, why would Christ have to "suffer for sins"? Well, the short answer to that question is *Romans 3:23* which says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* What God is telling us there is that he views every single son or daughter of Adam as lawbreakers, as fallen, as sinful, as unworthy of heaven, and here is why: God is perfect and we are not. And here's why Jesus had to come to suffer

for sins. We are, all of us, imprisoned by what God calls the law. In *Romans 3:19* he says: *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.* We know this law is understood by the ten commandments but even those ten rules are wildly misunderstood. You know, folks think the ten commandments are requirements for getting into heaven. But that's not their purpose. In fact it's never been their purpose. God gave us the law not as a means to work ourselves into his favor but as a standard to show us that no man was capable of doing what God himself commands. The law is just God's measuring rod. It measures all of us and tells us we are hopelessly unable to meet God's standard, but that's all the law can do.

Back in my cabinetmaking days I frequently had to cut identical parts for some kind of project that I was making. So let's say I have a project, and I have to cut fifty pieces exactly twelve inches long and I wind up cutting all of them an inch short. It's happened, trust me. So I'm staring at this box of parts and I take up my measuring tape and I measure them and instead of measuring twelve, they're all measuring eleven. Now what role does my measuring tape have here? Well, it can only do two things: It can tell me what twelve inches is and it can also tell me that all fifty of those parts that I've just cut have failed the twelve-inch

standard. See, my measuring tape can't do anything but measure. It's simply a standard that tells me that something isn't right. It has no power, though, to make eleven-inch pieces into twelve-inch pieces. Well, the same is true for the law. It shows us over and over again God's standard and our inability to measure up to it. And we commonly called that standard today the ten commandments, and it's really a statement by God saying if you think you can work your way to heaven, here is the standard. The measuring tape, if you will, is ten laws and they start out saying: One, have no other gods but me; two, have no graven images of anything relating to me; three, no taking my name in vain; four, no profaning my Sabbath; five, honor your father and mother; six, never murder anyone; seven, never commit adultery; eight, never steal; nine, never lie; ten, never covet. That's the ten commandments, I mean, you're all familiar with them. But understand what God is not saying here. He's not saying, "Here's my standard, now try your best." He's not even suggesting if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. He's telling us in no uncertain terms that we are required to observe these commandments perfectly. *James 2:10* says: *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.* There's a reason why Old Testament sacrifices were repeated over and over again, and it's because God's standard loomed over all of us and it constantly proved our inability to meet it, but that's

all it could do. We needed a champion who could actually meet God's standard of perfection and free us from the demands of this law.

And that leads us to question three, and that is: How effective was Christ's suffering? And again, to go back to our text. It says: *For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm.* So how effective was Christ's sacrifice? Well, our scripture says it was once for all. And again, the one thing you had to notice about in all the Old Testament sacrifices for sin is that they are constantly being repeated. For thousands of years before Jesus arrived, God had demonstrated over and over again that the only way for sins to be forgiven was for blood to be shed. In Leviticus 17, he said: *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.* And those thousands of years before Jesus arrived on earth, there were literally millions of innocent bulls and lambs and goats who were slaughtered as animal sacrifices, not for any sins that they had committed, but for the sins of the people. Once again, we ask why, I mean, why were these oceans of animals blood shed especially when God says in *Isaiah 1:11: I do not delight in the blood of bulls or*

*of lambs or of goats.* Well, these animals existed as pointers, if you will. I mean, all these innocent animals and all of them shed blood of sacrifice pointed to one person who would become the ultimate once-for-all sacrifice. John the Baptist at Jesus' baptism uttered one of the most profound statements ever made in all of scripture when he saw Jesus approaching from a distance. He looked and said: *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* What John was doing was he was pointing to and identifying the Christ, the Anointed One, the creator of the universe who had entered into his own creation as the Lamb of God who had was born to be slaughtered. But that's not the whole story. Each of the millions of slaughtered animals shared a common role that Jesus never had. See, these animals were innocent victims of man's sin, and Jesus was innocent but he was never a victim. It's a grotesque lie to suggest that Jesus was a victim of jealous religious leaders and a brutal civil government when God unequivocally states that the cross was his plan from the start. You know, Peter makes that clear in Acts 2:23. Speaking of Jesus and he's speaking to the crowd, he says: *Though He was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill Him.* Peter says it very clearly, *this was God's determined plan.* Still many accounts of Jesus's once and for all sacrifice depict Jesus as some kind of deer-in-the-headlights victim of a kangaroo court. The opposite is



true. I mean, every detail of Jesus's arrest, humiliation and crucifixion was planned beforehand by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I mean, we have proof of that when Jesus clearly tells his disciples exactly what was going to happen before the fact. When they arrived in Jerusalem he said this in *Matthew 20*, he said: *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."* I mean even the timing of the sacrifice was choreographed and it was choreographed with pinpoint accuracy. Of all the animal sacrifices that pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, none were more pointed than the Passover lambs.

Most of you know the story of the Passover. The Jews had become slaves in Egypt and Pharaoh had refused to let them go and God sends plague after plague after plague and Pharaoh simply hardens his heart. And finally God curses Egypt by sending the angel of death to slay all the firstborn of Egypt. And God tells Israel there's only one way to escape the death that what coming and each family had to take a lamb and sacrifice it, smear its blood over their doorposts. And God says that his angel of death would pass over each household that was under the blood of an innocent lamb.

And so God thousands of years later is going to demonstrate how exquisitely he had choreographed his Son's sacrifice and that at the very moment that Jesus, the Lamb of God, was hanging from a cross being sacrificed for us, at that same moment Jews all over Jerusalem were sacrificing innocent lambs because God had timed Jesus' crucifixion to coincide perfectly with that moment of Israel's celebrated Passover. I mean, it was no mere coincidence that Jews sought protection from death under the blood of a lamb. The actual Lamb of God was shedding his blood once for all at the same time to rescue us from death. I mean instead of repeatedly offering sacrifices, we now by faith take part in Jesus Christ's sacrifice. One great offering of the Lamb of God that once for all paid our debt to God. This is how *Hebrews 10* describes it. It says: *Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the actual form of those realities, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year. Otherwise, wouldn't they have stopped being offered, since the worshipers, once purified, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. See, it was God's will that Christ would die for sins once for all. It's the one great sacrifice that forever did away with all the other sacrifices. And again, Hebrews 10 says: Every priest stands day after day ministering and*

*offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. He is now waiting until his enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified. I mean Jesus orchestrated this. Jesus orchestrated his own one-time sacrifice. He was the high priest who offered himself up as the ultimate sacrifice, and only Jesus was capable of being the priest and the sacrifice by offering himself up for our sins. It cost Jesus his life. But unlike some popular understandings, Jesus didn't die of a broken heart or loss of blood or asphyxia, because Jesus was incapable of being killed by mere mortals. I mean, we're talking about the author of life itself. I mean, he gave us a hint of the vastness of the power he possessed when he shouted out to Lazarus to rise from the dead. Here's a young man who has died days before and is clearly in the advanced stages of decay. John 11 says: Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus calls out to Lazarus, and his decayed flesh begins to pulse with life once again. On the authority of Jesus Christ, Lazarus rises from the dead. Do you think the same Jesus, this author of life itself, was going to become the victim of crucifixion? I mean again, in John's gospel Jesus says: "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down my*

*life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."*

You see, nobody and no thing could ever, ever kill Jesus. Jesus claims he's the good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. And *1 Peter* tells us exactly why Jesus came to earth. He says: *For Christ who suffered for sins once for all.* Well, that's what he did and that's why he did it.

Well, the next thing that *1 Peter* asks us is question four: What did Christ exchange with us at the cross? So just to review, we have Christ, first of all, who died for sins; who thirdly, once for all; and now fourthly, the righteous for the unrighteous. This is the heart of the gospel. This is the heart of the gospel and therefore it is probably the hardest concept to grasp concerning the gospel, and that's God's standard of righteousness. I mean Jesus Christ is righteous and we are not. Not some of us but all of us. And any righteousness we have before God is an alien righteousness that's been given to us by God through faith. You see, before God we have no righteousness whatsoever and God made that crystally clear in *Romans 3:10* which says: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one."* Jesus dying for us was truly a case of the righteous dying for the unrighteous. But you know, for many folks even the thought of that is offensive, I mean, and it's

clear to truly understand what is being said here, we have to correctly define terms. We need to line up our understanding of righteousness with God's. God has a definition of righteousness which is very simple but it's very different from ours. It's this: If something is transcendentally flawless and absolutely perfect, God then calls it good or righteous. If anything is less than flawless, anything less than perfect, we humans might still call it good but God no longer does. In fact by God's standard, it is now not good. And God's standard is no different today than it was in the Garden of Eden. There God demanded of Adam righteousness on God's scale, not ours, and that was flawless transcendent perfection. I mean God told Adam whom he had created perfectly, if you eat that fruit, you're going to die. I mean it was a relatively small infraction, a simple act of disobedience but that act of simple disobedience was committed by a flawlessly perfect individual. And the second his teeth hit that fruit, Adam's perfection disappeared. It didn't matter whether the flaw was tiny or gigantic. All that matters is that where Adam once stood perfectly before God, he now stood imperfect, flawed, naked and now fearing his creator. God demanded absolute perfection from Adam. And when Adam refused, he died spiritually immediately and physically eventually. And here's the hard part. God's standard for us is no different than it was for Adam. He still demands of us absolute perfection because he must. It's his very nature.

There's no such thing as relative goodness in God. Everything about him is absolute perfection. And we're so used to our own sense of relative goodness that we think that God is required to grade us on some kind of sliding scale that's going to adapt itself to our ability to live up to it, but that's simply not true. Adam successfully passed on his flaw to the entire human race. He cursed us to be born flawed, to have a nature that now gravitates towards sin when his nature never did. I mean Adam chose to sin from a totally free will. We are driven to it by our fallen natures. And what's worse, God still holds us responsible to our original mandate as the creatures he made to bear his image. We are to be transcendentally flawless as God is transcendentally flawless. We can't do that. That is our curse. And the law was given not to show us how to be good but to demonstrate the impossibility of us ever being good enough for God.

Listen to what God says in *Galatians 3:10*, he says: *For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."* What God's saying is you want to get to heaven by following the ten commandments, you better observe them flawlessly and continuously or you are cursed. Our only hope, our only hope is *Galatians 3:13*, which says: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us -- for it is*

written: *"Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."* See, Jesus hung on a tree because he knew there was no other way but for him to take our curse and make it his own. His standard is impossible for us to meet but it's also impossible for him to change his nature because his standard is absolute perfection. Again, *Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* I mean think about what God is saying in that simple sentence here. I mean do you realize the depth of what that means? What he's saying is that anything that you do that falls short of God's own glory is sinful. I mean it may make sense since God is flawless perfection and anything less than flawless perfection has got to be imperfection, and that by God's definition is sinful. It just doesn't settle in our brains. It's a very hard concept to grasp, and so I want to give you a practical understanding of this. This is just a story. This is not theology, so don't confuse it.

Okay. Let's say we have a group of a hundred people and they're all told if you meet me at the Atlantic City Pier, I'm going to show you how to get to heaven. And so the group of a hundred meets at the pier and they're told, "If you want to get to heaven, here's what you have to do. You have to jump off this pier and you have to swim to England." Okay. They think about it. That's a pretty hard request but I'm here, I've come this distance, I may as well try. So the all hundred, they jump in the water and they start

swimming. And after awhile a boat goes out to start picking up the stranded swimmers. Thirty of them have swum less than a mile. Sixty of them have gone, well, one to three miles. Seven of them swim four miles or more and three swim ten miles or more. Well after awhile they've all been gathered up and they're all standing on the boat, they decide they're going to individually reward each swimmer. The first thirty who swam less than a mile, they're all disqualified. The next sixty get bronze medals. The seven who went four miles get silver medals and the three who went ten miles or more, they get gold medals. And in the midst of the ceremony awarding the medals, the Master of Ceremony comes in to remind everybody that they all, including the gold medal winners, missed England by thousands of miles. The thirty who were disqualified represent the morally bankrupt. You know, they're the really bad people, the one that everybody says, oh, they deserve to go to hell. The sixty bronze medalists represent the regular folks who just play by the rules, maybe they even go to church. The seven silver medalists represent the "really good" people, the "holy" people, maybe they read their bibles every day. And the three gold medalists, well, these are pastors, missionaries, full time Christians. These are Mother Teresa types. And you see, if we all look horizontally, they can certainly see these huge differences between these people groups. But God never looks horizontally. God looks vertically. And by his standards, every one of them,



including the gold medalists have missed England by over a thousand miles. And in fact, in God's economy, you could actually say that the thirty who were disqualified have an advantage because they know they don't qualify. I mean their shortcomings are obvious even to themselves. Jesus said in *Matthew 9*: *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE.'* For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. And you know, "the righteous" in this passage is clearly understood to be in big quotes because there's none righteous, no not one. And all that means is that no human being has ever flawlessly kept and maintained God's standard, so no one's ever been righteous.

But what about the Red Cross? What about Habitat for Humanity? What about Care? What about little league? What about all the good things that people do? Well, let's examine that. I want you to do a little exercise this morning. I want you to take a minute to think about the best thing you've ever done. I mean, you may have to go back a number of years, but there's probably, at least I hope there's something in your life that you're proud of. I want to ask, how does it stack up to God's standards? And I want to use myself as an example. Many years ago there was an incident that took place in front of our house. It was a nasty car accident. A young girl was stuck in a car and the car was on fire and I pulled

the girl out. There was an article in the paper, I got a nice plaque and two different award dinners with plastic laminated certificates telling me how neat I was. I even got a call from the producers of the TV show *911*, which I turned down. So let's say that was my good deed. I mean, for me that's the goodest thing I can think of as far as good deeds go. Now, let's ask if that was a good thing. Well, obviously a little girl is safe from a burning car, that's certainly got to stack up well. But how about God's standard? Okay. As they say, let's go to the videotape. Okay. We heard the car crash and my daughter Elisa who was in high school at the time, and we both took off, I followed her, and the car was starting to burn, the girl was unconscious, and Elisa turned to me and said, "Do something, Dad." I didn't know what to do, I mean, I was afraid of moving her because I thought she might have some serious internal injuries, and there was a broken window right by her. As we're standing, the fire is getting bigger and bigger and Elisa turns to me and says, "Dad, get her out of this car!" So I just reached in and pulled her out of the car because I seriously thought Elisa would have decked me if I hadn't. And the car just was fully involved and as I'm watching it get fully involved, I'm sitting on the guardrail holding this little girl, and I'm thinking, hey, I guess I'm a hero. And for all of the hoopla that followed, I actually thought, oh, how can I really appear humble, because that's the image I really want to project. You know, *911*

called and I said, "No, I did not want to appear like an idiot, so I didn't want to be on their show. You see, they didn't use actors, they actually used the actual people. I had no interest in projecting myself but if they had said, "Brad Pitt's going to play your part," I would have said, "Sure, no, problem." Again, to put this into perspective, God says above all, I have to love the Lord with all of my heart, soul and mind and my neighbor as myself. So I'm looking back at the best deed, the goodest thing I've ever done and I have to ask myself, have I met God's standard here? The answer is clearly no. I mean, I first and foremost loved whom? I love myself. Was my desire only that God be glorified? Not at all. I wanted some of that glory for myself. Understand, I'm talking about my best deed ever, and I fail to even come close to doing it by God's standards. And by God's standards, my good deed was not even close to perfect and therefore not good.

So what about your standards? I mean God knew that we couldn't meet his standard and so he paid our penalty. I tell folks all the time that Jesus Christ hung on a cross, paying not just for my obvious sins but for the finest deeds I've ever done. And I suspect the same for you. We just don't realize how far from perfect we are.

Consider the prophet Isaiah. One of God's choicest servants, the

premiere prophet of the Old Testament, one of the holiest men who ever lived, he was the gold medal winner in the swimming contest. In *Isaiah 6* he describes being taken up to heaven. And there he's confronted with the holiness and the perfection of God, and this is how he describes it. He says: *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."* "Woe is me!" Isaiah cries, "I'm undone, I'm ruined!" The closest we can come to capturing what Isaiah is saying is I'm literally, I'm coming apart at the seams. But understand, this is one of the holiest men who ever lived. He's confronted with God's holiness and he's literally disintegrating. That tells us something about our understanding of God's righteousness. I mean ours is relative, his is absolute. And when confronted with God's standard of goodness, we all just collapse. It was Isaiah who said in *Isaiah 64*: *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our*

*righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.* You know, Isaiah chose his words very carefully. And understand what he's saying here. He isn't describing our sins here, he's describing our finest deeds as filthy rags in God's sight. And what Isaiah was saying here went way, way, way beyond indelicate. I mean to the Jews he was addressing this was an unbelievably outrageous statement. These were kosher people to whom blood was sacred and uncleanness was hideous and the term filthy rags that he used was a term specifically understood to relate to used menstrual cloths. It was a statement designed to horrify the sensibility of his hearers. Understand, Isaiah's using it to describe not our sins, he's using it to describe our righteousness. He's trying to get us to see that our best efforts are absolutely unclean before a holy God. Now, does that mean that the Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity and Care and little league are filthy rags in God's sight and that they're all simply no good? No, it doesn't mean that at all. It means that their goodness, like your goodness and my goodness, is a relative goodness, it's something we can all thank God for. But when we lose sight of God's absolute goodness and begin to compare our goodness with his, we lose sight of our own unrighteousness, and that's when we start thinking of ourselves as bronze, silver or gold medalists. We forget that we are all pseudo swimming champions who've missed the mark by thousands of miles.

You see, Christ died for us once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous. We can't become righteous by obeying the law because we can't do it. We can't do it perfectly. I mean if we could then the law itself would have the power not just to convict us but to give us life itself and Jesus' sacrifice wouldn't have been necessary. But the law can't heal, the law can't empower, it can only convict. My tape measure can't make those fifty pieces grow the inch that they need to, it can only show me that those pieces don't measure up. In *Galatians 3:21* God puts it plainly, he says this: *If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.*

Well, that brings us to our fifth question. And our fifth question says: So why did Jesus come to rescue us? Well, our text answers that question succinctly and directly. Let me just read it to you. It says: *For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the*

*spiritual realm.* Simply put, Jesus came to ransom and rescue his own. And finally that brings us to question six: What did Christ's effort accomplish? What does *"being put to death in the fleshly realm but being made alive in the spiritual realm"* signify? Well, it signifies that Christ's sacrifice perfectly met the law's requirement and perfectly paid our penalty. I mean if Christ wasn't a perfect sacrifice for us, then he would have stayed dead and Paul's statement would have come true. This is what Paul said, he said: *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.* But he has been raised. He was *"put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm."* That's the very heart of the gospel. God perfectly exchanged his righteousness for our sin. It's an alien righteousness that doesn't come from us, it's a righteousness that meets God's own standard.

And that raises the seventh and final question: How do we get this righteousness? We get it the exact same way our father Abraham did. *Romans 4* says this: *What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."* Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who

*does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. See, in God's economy, faith equals righteousness, and faith is a gift. In Ephesians 2:8-9: For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift -- not from works, so that no one can boast.*

So here's the bottom line. God cannot and will not change his standards to match our abilities. His standard for us is the same as it was for Adam and that is our curse. We are not righteous before a holy God. But that holy God loved us enough to bear that curse for us in his Son, and by faith his righteousness becomes our righteousness. Jesus said in *John 3: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life."* That means the work's already been done. We know who Jesus is, he's the Christ; we know what he did, he suffered for sins; we know how effective it was, it was once for all; what he exchanged, his righteousness for our unrighteousness; and why he did it, that he might bring us to God; and what his efforts finally accomplished, being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm. And it's all captured in one simple sentence that *1 Peter* has given us: *For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm. Praise God*



for his great gift. Let's pray.

*Father, I just, I thank you for who you are, I thank you for what you have done. I thank you for all that is packed into this one verse, Lord, the amazing thought that you gave us your righteousness in exchange for our sin. Lord, it's almost too much to comprehend. I just praise you and thank you for this incredible gift. And I pray, Lord, that it would move our hearts not only to thank you for what you've given to us but to be willing to share that gift with those people you put in our path. Give us the grace, the strength, the wisdom and the courage to open our mouths and share that good news, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*