

# Things Hard to Understand

## 1 Peter 3:18-22

### Intro

In **2 Peter 3:16**, Peter tells us that the Apostle Paul writes ***some things hard to understand...***

*And Peter's not lying...*

If you have read Paul's writings you ***know*** that there are many things that Paul writes that are difficult to comprehend...

*But Peter shouldn't sell himself short...*

Because Peter also writes some things here at the end of **1 Peter 3** that are challenging to interpret...

*Even so, this is a good lesson for us...*

As believers, we must learn to accept mystery...

- We must come to grips with the fact that we will *never* have it all figured out...

This reality should humble us and remind us that *we are not God* and as finite beings we will *never know all things...*

- With this in mind, we will do our best today as we move through a passage that contains ***some things hard to understand*** and trust that the Lord will speak to us through it...

*So, if you would, please follow along as I read our passage...*

**1 Peter 3:18-22 (NKJV)**

**18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,**

**19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,**

**20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.**

**21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**

**22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.**

*I've divided this challenging passage into 4 sections...*

***1) Suffering for Us***

***2) Spirits in Prison***

***3) Souls Saved***

***4) Subjects of the King***

*Let's move into our first section...*

## **1) Suffering for Us (vs 18)**

In this first section, Peter reminds us that the ***Lord Jesus suffered for us...***

*But before we get into that subject, let's put our text back into its context by going back to vs 13 of this chapter...*

### **1 Peter 3:13-17 (NKJV)**

**13 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?**

**14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."**

**15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;**

**16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.**

**17 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**

- [expand — exhortation to ***keep doing good...***]

*We pick up now in vs...*

**18 For Christ also suffered *once* for sins,**

As Peter has made clear in this letter, the Lord Jesus ***suffered greatly*** in the fulfillment of His mission...

*Likewise, as believers we too will suffer as we seek to fulfill our mission...*

**Philippians 1:29 (NKJV)**

**For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...**

*Continuing on in 1 Peter 3:18...*

**For Christ also suffered once for sins,**

Here Peter reminds us that the Lord Jesus offered a **once and for all** sacrifice for sins...

*For more on the Lord Jesus' **once and for all sacrifice for sins**, please turn to...*

**Hebrews 9:24-26 (NKJV)**

**24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;**

**25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—**

**26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**

*Now let's turn to...*

## Hebrews 10:11-14 (NKJV)

11 And every priest stands ministering *daily* and offering *repeatedly* the same sacrifices, *which can never take away sins*.

12 But this Man, after He had offered *one sacrifice for sins forever*, sat down at the right hand of God,

13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

14 For *by one offering* He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Now, if the Lord Jesus *offered one sacrifice for sins forever*, it stands to reason that there is *no salvation for anyone who refuses the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ...*[expand]

*Let's see what Peter had to say on this subject as we turn to...*

## Acts 4:8-12 (NKJV)

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:

9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well,

10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.

11 This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'

12 *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*"

*Please turn back to 1 Peter 3:18 as we continue on...*

**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust,**

The Lord Jesus is the **just** and we are the **unjust**; He is the *righteous* and we are the *unrighteous*...

- This is a vitally important point — the Lord Jesus suffered and died for us knowing that we are sinful people...

He didn't die for us because we were good — if we were good He wouldn't have needed to die for us... 😬

- He died for us because ***He is good*** — because ***He is just*** — because ***He is righteous*** — and because ***He loves us***...

Please hear this truth — ***God loves you*** — even though you are unjust...

*To take this truth to heart, I would encourage you to memorize...*

**Romans 5:8 (NKJV)**

**But God demonstrates *His own love toward us*, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

*Continuing in 1 Peter 3:18 we read...*

**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,**

*Please notice that the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus **was for a specific purpose...***

- And that purpose was to **bring us to God...**

**bring** — *to open a way of access, bring into someone's presence...*

- [expand on this picture — the Lord Jesus bringing us into the presence of God the Father...]

*Here are a few verses that speak of this...*

**John 14:6 (NKJV)**

...**“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

**Romans 5:1-2 (NKJV)**

**1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**

*If you would, please turn to Hebrews once again...*

**Hebrews 4:14-16 (NKJV)**

**14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.**

**15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

**16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

*Let's turn back to 1 Peter 3 and look at the last part of vs 18...*

**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,**

*This seems to be a reference to the Lord Jesus dying on the cross and then being raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit...*

**Romans 8:11 (NKJV)**

**But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**

***So, just as the the Holy Spirit raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, the Holy Spirit will raise believers from the dead as well!...[expand]***

*Let's move now to our second section...*



## 2) Spirits In Prison (vs 19-20a)

Now, it is interesting to note that the great reformer, Martin Luther, considered this section of 1 Peter to be ***the most difficult passage*** to interpret in all of the New Testament...

- And there are several competing interpretations but we don't have time to get into them this morning...

*With that said, I will share what I understand this section to teach but I would encourage you to study this passage for yourself and see what you might find...*

**19 by whom (by the Holy Spirit) also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,**

**preached** — *proclaimed* — “made an official announcement”  
*\*not the word used for preaching the gospel\*...*

So, my understanding is that after the Lord Jesus died on the cross He went to a place where ***spirits were imprisoned*** and ***proclaimed*** something to them...

*As we move into vs 20, we are given a clue as to the identity of these imprisoned spirits...*

**20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah,**

These spirits in prison — whoever they are — *were disobedient during the days of Noah...*

***OK, but who are these imprisoned spirits and what was the Lord Jesus proclaiming to them?***

I believe that these spirits are not the spirits of human beings but that they are fallen angels who somehow contributed to the horrible depravity that took place during the days of Noah...[expand]

*For more on this subject, would you please turn to...*

**2 Peter 2:4-5 (NKJV)**

**4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;**

**5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;**

**Jude 6 (NKJV)**

**And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;**

As we put the pieces together, it seems that fallen angels sought to fully corrupt humanity in the days of Noah so that it would be impossible for God to bring His Messiah into the world...[expand]

- Thankfully, the fallen angels were unsuccessful and God eventually brought the promised Messiah through the line of Shem, the son of Noah...

And I believe that 1 Peter 3:19 refers to the Lord Jesus proclaiming His victory over those fallen angels who are imprisoned...[expand]

**Colossians 2:15 (NKJV) [*Jesus' triumph on the cross*]**

**Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.**

*Now, let's zoom out for a moment and get the big picture by focusing on 3 important truths...*

***1) Ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, humanity has been in a battle with evil spiritual forces who are opposed to both God and humanity...***

**Ephesians 6:12 (NKJV) [*Paul warns...*]**

**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.**

***2) As believers we are called to resist these forces of wickedness in the power that God provides...***

*To remind ourselves of this truth, please turn to...*

**Ephesians 6:14-18 (NKJV)**

**14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,**

**15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;**

16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints

***3) In the midst of the battle, we are to remind ourselves that the Lord Jesus will have the final victory over all the forces that oppose Him...***

*To see this, please turn to...*

#### **Revelation 21:1-4 (NKJV)**

1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; ***there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.***"

*Let's turn back to 1 Peter 3 as we move now to our third section...*

### **3) Souls Saved (vs 20b-21)**

*We will back up to the beginning of vs 20 to get the context...*

**who formerly were disobedient, (*imprisoned spirits*)**

**when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah,**

*I believe that this is a reference to...*

**Genesis 6:3 (NKJV)**

**And the LORD said, "*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.*"**

- [expand — 120 years between the command to build the ark and the Flood coming upon the earth...]

*Continuing on in 1 Peter 3:20...*

**while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.**

***Please note the fact that there is no biblical author who disputes the historicity of the Flood account...[expand]***

*Now, here in vs 20 we are confronted with an interesting phrase...*

**eight souls, were saved through water**

In other words, the water that **killed** the unrepentant people of the earth **was the very same water** that **delivered** Noah and his family from those people...

- The water was a judgment upon the unrepentant but it was deliverance for Noah and his family...

[expand — The Lord Jesus is a **Merciful Savior** for those who trust in Him for forgiveness but He is an **Unyielding Judge** to those who reject His forgiveness...]

*Moving on in 1 Peter 3 we come to another verse that is very challenging to understand...*

**21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**

What now?... 🤔🤔🤔

The best explanation that I found for this verse comes from the *The Complete Word Study Bible*...

*It is a lengthy quote that I have broken up and put on the screen...*

**“In 1 Pet. 3:21, baptism is referred to as an antitype or figure of salvation or a physical act corresponding to the spiritual reality of salvation.”**

*Water baptism is a physical act that represents as spiritual reality...*

***“According to Rom. 6:3-14 baptism is a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection...It is a copy or an impression of something that has reality, standing instead of the real thing.”***

*[expand — water baptism pictures our death, burial and resurrection with Christ...]*

***“In this passage baptism does not refer to the water at all, but to the ark in which Noah and his family found their salvation through the water. The water in the case of the flood symbolizes not salvation, but the means of destruction used by God, even as the fire will be the means of destruction in the end times...”***

*[the Ark saved Noah and his family from the Flood — Christ is our Ark to save us from the judgment of God...]*

***“Therefore, baptism, which is a symbol of our having been rescued by God through our voluntary entrance into the ark of His salvation, is here called the symbol that saves us.”***

***“However, it is not the symbol itself which saves us, but what it symbolizes which is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The one who appropriates Christ's death and resurrection is saved even as the people in the days of Noah who entered the ark.”***

***QUESTION — Have you entered the Ark of Christ? He is the only escape from the judgment to come...[expand]***

*Now, before we leave this section, it is important to understand that the Bible **does not** teach **baptismal regeneration**...[expand]*

- [ex. The thief on the cross / Cornelius and his family (**Acts 10**)...]

*Also, the Apostle Paul wrote in...*

### **1 Corinthians 1:17 (NKJV)**

**For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...**

- [expand — baptism is an important symbol and it is an important act of obedience but it is *not salvific*...]

*We move now to our final section...*

## **4) Subjects of the King (vs 22)**

*Let's read vs 21 again...*

**21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**

- [expand on the Lord Jesus Christ's bodily resurrection — it is proof that God the Father approved of Jesus' sacrifice...]



**Acts 17:31 (NKJV)**

**“[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”**

*Continuing on in 1 Peter 3 to vs 22 we read of the resurrected Lord Jesus...*

**22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God,**

- [expand — bodily ascension / seated at the right hand of the Father (place of prominence and authority)...]

*The Lord Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father is a partial fulfillment of...*

**Psalm 110:1 (NKJV)**

**The LORD said to my Lord,  
"Sit at My right hand,  
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”**

- [expand — God the Father will give the Lord Jesus direct rulership of the earth during the Millennial Kingdom...]

*Now to the final section of vs 22...*

**who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.**

*One commentary puts it this way...*

***“All created spiritual authorities and powers are subject to Jesus Christ. As the writer of Hebrews explains, the Son of God is the Creator of the angelic world and therefore angels, principalities, authorities, and powers in heavenly places submit to him.”***

*So take heart, believer, because the Lord Jesus is on the throne...*

## **Conclusion**

*This brings us to the end of our study and Lord-willing we will pick up in 1 Peter 4 next week...*

***But before we close in songs of praise I would encourage you to remember three things...***

***1) Remember that the Lord Jesus suffered for you, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring you to God...***

***2) Remember the the Lord Jesus is the only Ark that saves people from the judgment to come...***

***3) Remember that the Lord Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and the day is coming when He will rule and reign over all things...***