

11. Learning More About the Suffering of Christ

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to live as godly examples in the world. At times, they may be forced to suffer for their faith because of the fact that those who reject Christ and treat Christ as an enemy will also reject those who are faithful as they speak for Christ. However, we want our children to see from our own lives that it is a privilege to suffer for Christ and be an example to the world that is around us. In order for us to know how to help our children more fully, we want to help them grow in their understanding of the suffering of Christ. That will be the focus of this topic.

In 1 Peter 3:18-20 we read, “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, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 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.” Here, we see that Peter reminded the Christians of the reason why Christ suffered. Peter knew that many of those to whom he was writing were suffering because of their faith in Christ. As a result, he knew that they needed to be reminded of the way that Christ suffered for them.

We see several things about the death of Christ. First, His sufferings were once for all. Hebrews 10:11-12 says, “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.” No further sacrifice will ever be needed because the sacrifice of Christ was forever. Second, His sacrifice was the just for the unjust. The word “just” speaks of one who is faultless or guiltless. The word “unjust” speaks of one who is sinful. Here, we are reminded that Christ was without sin and as the perfect sacrifice of God could die for those who are sinful and guilty.

Third, Christ died so that He might bring us to God. The word that is translated “to bring” means “*to draw near or to open a way of access to God.*” In the Old Testament, the high priest could only go into the Holy of Holies one day a year. On that day, he went in first to take blood as a covering for his own sin. Then, he would go out and get additional blood as a covering for the sins of the people. That blood only covered sin until sin could be taken away. When John the Baptist introduced Christ in John 1:29 we read, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” Christ died to take away our sins. As a result, Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “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. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Christ made it possible for each individual who places his or her faith in Christ to come boldly to the Father at any time or in any situation.

Fourth, Christ was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. Hebrews 2:9 says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Here, we see that

Christ became a man so that He might taste death for every person. However, Christ was made alive by the Spirit. Before Christ died, He answered the request of the thief on one of the crosses by saying in Luke 23:42-43, “Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” Christ died physically but His Spirit immediately went to Paradise.

When Christ died, we see that He went and preached to the spirits in prison. Luke 16:22-24 helps us to understand this statement when those verses say, “So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’” Prior to the resurrection of Christ, those who died in the Old Testament could not go directly to heaven because their sins were covered but not taken away. As a result, they went to Hades (the place of the dead), which had two parts. One part was called Abraham's bosom or Paradise and was a place of blessing. The second part was called the place of torment. We see that the rich man in the place of torment could talk with Abraham and Abraham could answer him.

When Christ died, He was on the side called Paradise or Abraham's bosom. Those who had rejected God were on the other side called the place of torment. During the time that Christ was in Paradise, we read that He preached to the spirits who were in prison (the place of torment). This included all those who were disobedient and were destroyed by the flood in the time of Noah as well as all of the other unbelievers throughout the Old Testament. Only Noah and his family were on the ark and went through the flood safely. For the rest, the flood was a time of judgment. When Christ preached to those who were judged at the flood and to all other unbelievers, His message of His death and coming resurrection meant that those in the place of torment would experience eternal judgment. Those in Abraham's bosom also heard as Christ preached and the message brought great joy to them because it meant that the penalty for their sin had been paid once for all.

As a result, when Christ rose from the dead, He immediately took Paradise and all of the Old Testament saints in Paradise and presented them to the Father. Ephesians 4:8-10 says, “Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, *‘He ascended’*--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” As a result of the resurrection of Christ, all Christians now go immediately to heaven to be with Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:8 says, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” At the moment of physical death, we can look forward to the fact that our soul and spirit will immediately be with Christ in heaven.

We see that the passage goes on to talk about those who were saved with Noah during the flood. 1 Peter 3:21-22 says, “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, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” The word that is translated “antitype” means “a

picture or pattern of a spiritual truth.” The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is Hebrews 9:24 where we read, “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.” Here, we see that the Old Testament tabernacle and later the temple were a picture of the fact that Christ would enter into heaven to be in the presence of God for us.

Here, we see that “baptism” is a picture of the fact that we have died to the control of sin and have been raised to new life through the resurrection of Christ. Romans 6:3-6 says, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” Baptism does not take away sin. However, baptism is a picture of the fact that we have been raised to new life through Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Through the resurrection of Christ, we have been raised with a new nature that gives us the power to live a new life.

In addition, we see that Christ has gone into heaven where He is now sitting at the right hand of the Father. One of the things that Christ is doing as He sits at the right hand of the Father is making intercession for us. Romans 8:34 says, “Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” Here, we see that Christ is praying for us as He sits at the right hand of the Father. Hebrews 1:3-4 says, “Who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” Here, we see that the angels, authorities and power have all been made subject to Christ.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand all that the death and resurrection of Christ did for each one of us. When we realize that He suffered for us and in our place, it helps us and our children to rejoice when we suffer for Christ. When we realize that His resurrection means that Christ is now making intercession for us, we can help our children understand that we do not have to fear anything on this earth. Instead, we can look forward to eternity with Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn more about the suffering of Christ for us.