

Arm Yourselves with the Same Mind

1 Peter 3:18-4:6

Introduction

In Peter's second epistle, Peter fairly accuses his brother Paul of writing things that are hard to understand in his epistles (2 Pet. 3:16). When we have the opportunity to speak with Peter, many Christians might be inclined to ask Peter if he had forgotten some of what he himself had written in his own first epistle. In this passage, there are some tough verses.

In this passage, Peter emphasizes the foundation of the hope of the resurrection (c.f., 1 Pet. 1:3), even in the worst of circumstances. We first must look to Christ. He suffered for us and provided atonement for us, dying and being raised again in the Spirit (3:18).

Spirits in Prison

Peter then seems to change the subject (3:19-20). Two possible understandings of this passage are as follows. The first is that Peter is referring to when Jesus (as we say in the Apostle's Creed) "descended into Hades" (Ps. 16:10, Eph. 4:9-10). While there, He preached ("heralded") His victory to the giants ("nephilim") and the "sons of God" from the days of Noah (Gen. 6:4). They had corrupted the earth (Gen. 6:1-12) and were not persuaded even by the impending judgment of the Flood, and so they were cast into prison (Tartarus, 2 Pet. 2:4) at their death. So, Jesus goes to Hades and announces His victory and dominion (c.f., 3:22), judging the spirits in Tartarus, having the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:18). Then in His ascension, He takes Paradise up with Him (Eph. 4:8, 2 Cor. 12:4).

Another reading is that Peter is referring to Noah's own preaching (2 Pet. 2:5) and building the ark (Heb. 11:7). Jesus, through the Spirit, proclaimed the coming judgment to the spirits who were disobedient ("unpersuaded" or "unbelieving") in Noah's days. Noah was the instrument the Lord used to make this proclamation. Peter says earlier (1 Pet. 1:10-11) that the Spirit of Christ instructed the prophets in ancient times, so this reading is consistent with that earlier passage. The unbelieving spirits were cast into prison to await final judgment. They were not in prison when they were preached to, but they are now. Peter uses this as an analogy to instruct his readers in their current context. Judgment is coming on Jerusalem like it came on the people who did not believe in Noah's day, and Peter is warning Christians to put their trust in Jesus even though it looks like things are falling apart.

The point in either case is that while the unbelieving spirits were judged by the Flood, Noah and his family were saved through the water. Why is this important to Peter?

Baptism Saves

Peter says that baptism is the antitype of the salvation of Noah through water. In the OT, there are many events or stories or objects that prefigure or are fulfilled in NT realities (e.g., Num. 21:4-9 and John 3:14-15). Types point to antitypes. In this, Peter is not trying to explain everything there is to be said about baptism. Like Noah was saved through water, so baptism saves Christians. How can this be? Remember that Peter just referred to what we call the substitutionary atonement of Jesus—the just dying for the unjust to bring us to God (3:18). Christians are saved through baptism, not the outward washing with the water, but by the appeal of a good conscience to God. Christians appeal to God on the basis of a

good conscience which is promised and sealed in baptism. This good conscience is not at all founded on one's own accomplishments or good deeds or effort of the individual. Rather, the appeal is made through the resurrection (and thus the substitutionary atonement) of Jesus.

Peter reminds his readers that in the midst of a world of sin and rebellion against God, God remembers the faithful. He sustains them, and ultimately, they will be saved if they cling to the hope of the resurrection sealed and promised by baptism. And this is true for Christians in every age and circumstance. We do not know if we will see tomorrow, and so judgment is always before us (Heb. 9:27). But we do know that if we have died and been buried in Jesus (like Noah in the ark) (Rom. 6:4), the water of our baptism is our appeal to God that we are righteous. If not, we will be drowned in God's judgment and cast out.

At the Right Hand of God

Peter continues to layer the hope that Christians have in Christ in the midst of even the worst circumstances. Not only did Jesus suffer for us and make atonement, not only does He save us by baptism through His resurrection, He is also seated at God's right hand currently, ruling over everything. He is there as our Advocate (1 Jn. 2:1) and has sent His Spirit to empower us as we run the race before us (Jn. 16:7).

Therefore, Arm Yourself

All of this leads to the one command in this passage: Therefore, arm yourselves with the same mind (4:1). Christ has suffered for you, for the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2), trusting in His Father to raise Him from the dead and conquer sin and death. This is what you are to arm yourself with. When Jesus died, He did so covered in sin, though He committed none. He took your sins and claimed responsibility for them, making them His own. He died for each of them. And then, God raised Him up to life. Sin stayed in the grave. Have you been buried with Christ? Have you picked up your cross to follow Him? Then Peter says you have broken with sin (4:1-3). "As our sin was the reason for Christ's death, his death is the death of sin in us" (Leighton). This is foolishness to the world looking on, and even draws the world's contempt (4:4). When you have been given life, it looks like death to the world. Peter says to let the world judge us according to the flesh, because we know that we live (and after death will live eternally) according to God in the spirit (4:6).

Armed with Hope

What does this look like? How should you arm yourself like Peter commands? Peter earlier says to "gird up the loins of your mind...and rest your hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13). Christian, arm yourself with the hope in the resurrection. Arm yourself with the grace of God. By the grace of God, you are dead to your sin. He who has died in Christ has been freed from sin (Rom. 6:7). You are made strong and able by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the flesh. They no longer have a claim on you because Jesus has a claim on you. You are His! And when you live like this, the world will think you are crazy.

Jesus is Lord of it all. If you believe that, you will realize how it is that you have been buried with Christ, because you will die to your flesh and your sin. And having died with Christ, we will be raised with Him.