



The Spirit and the Resurrection

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Where the Spirit of the Lord is / Resurrection / 1 Peter 3:18

Introduction

- Last week, as part of our communion service, we revisited the details surrounding the passion of Christ.
- I realise that for some of you, this was a little graphic and probably uncomfortable.
- However, I believe that it is necessary for us to occasionally meditate on these things because the brutality of what Christ endured and what the Father permitted says something about the severity of sin and the need for us to take it seriously.
- Thankfully, we know that the crucifixion and death of Christ was not the end of the story.
- The bible teaches that although Jesus died a real death, He returned to life again.
- And the Same Spirit Who sustained Jesus through the agony of death, empowering the great High Priest to complete the ultimate sacrifice of His own body for the sins of the world, is also the divine agent involved in His resurrection.
- There are two verses in the NT that speak to the role that the Spirit played in this event: [Romans 8:11](#) and [1 Peter 3:18](#).
- We will be taking a more in-depth look at [Romans 8](#) later in the series.
- For this reason, our focus today will be on [1 Peter 3:18](#).

- Now, when I first began to prepare for this morning, I thought, “How on earth am I going to preach a message on 1 verse?”
- Well, it turns out that this verse is widely regarded by biblical scholars as a pre-literary, early Christian creed or baptismal hymn that Peter incorporated into his epistle.
- Moreover, this verse contains most of the major themes that eventually came to form part of the Apostles Creed.
- As such, the verse has incredible richness and depth.
- Let’s read the verse together.

1 Peter 3:18 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...

- Now, if you were following along in your own bibles, you will have seen that the broader context of the passage includes a discussion of some additional themes, including the descent of Christ to preach to the spirits in prison. While this is a fascinating topic, we will be narrowing our focus to verse 18 only.
- As we do so, I would like for us to consider 3 themes under 3 headings:
 - The execution
 - The resurrection
 - The implication

1. The Execution

- The verse begins with a reminder of what happened on Good Friday.
- You might be thinking,

- “We just sat through a re-telling of the suffering of Christ last week; must we do this again?”
- Well, as John Stott once said,
- “At the foot of the cross, we find ourselves face to face with the gravity of our sin and the grandeur of God’s grace.”
- Heaven forbid that we would ever become a church that practices a Christianity devoid of a repeat consideration of the cross of Christ and the implications thereof for us.
- And so it is that the verse contains three phrases that summarise the cross.
- “Christ suffered once for sins...the just for the unjust...being put to death in the flesh.”
- Let’s consider these phrases, each in turn.
- The standout feature in the first phrase — Christ suffered once for sins — is the word *once*, ἅπαξ, *hapax*.
- It means once and for all. Once and never again.
- As we saw last week, in the OT period, priests would offer sacrifices daily for the sins of the people. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would pass through a curtain separating the holy of holies from the rest of the world, and would offer a sacrifice for the sins of all the people.
- As we saw last week, Christ was the great High Priest, but He was also the perfect lamb of God. Unlike the animals that would be sacrificed over and over again, this High Priest offered His own body as a sacrifice, but because His offering was perfect, He only needed to suffer once.

- This is what differentiates Christianity from Judaism. His offering was absolute, definitive, complete.
- So, Christ suffered once for sins.
- What then of the next phrase, “the just for the unjust?”
- Friends, this language encapsulates the core logic of what has come to be known as the doctrine of “penal substitution.”
- Allow me to share a brief story to illustrate.
- In the 7th century BC, there was a man by the name of Zaleucus, who established the first written legal code in ancient Greece for the colony of Locri (southern Italy). He created strict, explicit punishments for crimes, including a decree that anyone found guilty of adultery would lose both eyes. Legend has it that shortly after, his son was caught and convicted of the crime. If Zaleucus pardoned his son, he would be making a compromise and would undermine his own law. If he blinded his son, his life would be ruined. Zaleucus declared that the penalty of two eyes needed to be exacted to satisfy the law. But instead of taking out both of the eyes of his son, he ordered for one of his eyes to be plucked out, and offered up one of his own eyes to make up the balance. So goes the legend.
- While we cannot know for sure how much of this story is true, it illustrates a point: where there is a law, the credibility of the lawgiver demands that the law be upheld, even if the lawgiver must absorb the penalty for the breaking of the law himself.
- However, even this illustration falls short of fully demonstrating the reality of what Christ did.
- Zaleucus only took *half the penalty* for *one crime* made by *one other person*.
- Jesus, the only truly just man, satisfied His own holy demands by taking the *entirety of the penalty* for *all the sins* of *all of mankind*.

- So, not only did Christ suffer once for sins, he suffered that penalty as our substitute.
- This brings us to the third phrase summarising what happened — Christ was ultimately “put to death in the flesh.”
- But what is significant about this phrase is that in the original language, it leaves no room for confusion.
- Jesus did not swoon. He did not lapse into a coma and somehow revive.
- His body underwent real, absolute, irreversible, undeniable biological death.
- The grave had claimed the body of the the Great High Priest, our substitutionary Lamb.
- And, of course, this brings us to the next theme in the verse.

2. The Resurrection

- While the Son of God suffered and died a real death, the verse goes on to make it clear that He was made alive again.
- And notice who the agent was that made this possible:
 - Peter tells us that it was the Holy Spirit.
 - Paul tells us in Romans that it was the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Now, let’s take a moment to consider this.
- Picture in your minds a tomb. Inside lies a battered, scarred and lifeless corpse, wrapped in linen and aromatic resins.

- If you were to peel back some of those layers, you would see a body that was beyond the point of recovery.
- Resuscitation was an impossibility.
- But then, the exact same Spirit Who had hovered over the dark and lifeless void of creation hovers again, this time in a dark tomb over the lifeless corpse of the Second Adam.
- While the Scriptures do not tell us how He does it, I can imagine the Spirit breathing new life into that cold and lifeless body, reanimating the person of Jesus.
- This, however, is not a resuscitation like what we saw with Lazarus.
- This is a transformative act, where the flesh of Christ was transformed in a glorified, incorruptible resurrection body, the first of its kind.
- As we read in the accounts of Jesus' appearing between the period of His death and resurrection, this body exhibited characteristics unlike anything we have ever seen. It is described as a real physical body but had transcendent capabilities as well.
- This is a little hard for us to comprehend.
- But consider the words of Charles Spurgeon on this topic:

The electric telegraph, though it be but an invention of man, would have been as hard to believe in a thousand years ago as the resurrection of the dead is now. Who in the days of pack-horses would have believed in flashing a message from England to America? Everything is full of wonder till we are used to it, and resurrection owes the incredible portion of its marvel to our never having come across it in our observation—that is all. After the resurrection we shall regard it as a divine display of power as familiar to us as creation and providence now are.

Charles Spurgeon

- Spurgeon, of course, is arguing that while the nature of the reanimation is foreign to us now, one day it will become not only clear but familiar.
- This brings us to our final theme.

3. The Implication

- We have considered the work of the Spirit in
 - Facilitating the incarnation,
 - Empowering Jesus through His earthly life,
 - Sustaining Him through His death, and
 - In resurrecting Him from the tomb.
- While these things are wonderful and awe-inspiring, we must ask the so what question: what are the implications for us?
- Peter gives us the answer right in the middle of verse 18. He says these things were done “so that He might bring us to God.”
- The verb that Peter uses for this act of bringing is the word προσάγαγε, *prosagage*, which, in the ancient world, was a word that was used in connection with a royal court.
- In those times, you could not simply walk into the presence of a monarch. If you did so uninvited, you would face the possibility of execution. To approach the king, you needed a *prosagogeus*, a royal official whose function it was to usher people into the royal presence. He controlled access to the king.
- Friends, consider what this means in light of what we have covered in the past two weeks.

- The Great High Priest has entered into the holy of holies, where the Almighty resides.
- But because of what He has done, He does not enter alone.
- This was the point of His coming, that he might take us by the hand, and usher us into the presence of the Father, saying,
- “I have paid the price for these; consider them pardoned.”

Conclusion

- Friends, as we come to a close, consider the words of Tozer:

The promise of the resurrection makes the difference for the man who is a believing Christian. If men are not to be raised from the dead, why not eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!

A. W. Tozer

- The Christian faith stands or falls on this central doctrine.
- As Paul says, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then our preaching is pointless, our faith is futile, and we are the most pitiable creatures on the face of the earth.
- Ah, but if it is true, then we can rest assured that He was resurrected for a reason, and that to usher us into the presence of the Father. What a privilege! What a grace!
- Thanks be to the Spirit for reanimating our Redeemer, and we look forward to the day when He will do the same for us.