

## 1 Peter 3:19

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**Given 29-Jan-94; Sermon #112s**

I thought with this sermonette that I would get back to a bit more basic approach than I have in the past few times that I have given sermonette. I have been a little bit philosophical, I guess you would call it, in the last couple. So I thought I would do something more simple and explain a difficult scripture.

The idea that there is a place such as purgatory or Hades or hell has a long history. Many ancient peoples held a belief of this kind to one degree or another long before Christ's ministry, long before the modern "Christian" way of looking at it. (I put Christian there in quotes.) The ancient Greeks and the Egyptians for sure. And I am sure many other cultures did as well.

These cultures had certain deities that they described as ruling or guarding the land of the dead in a place like the Greeks called it Hades. And they had a god, that is, Pluto (well, that is the Roman one. The Greek name for that god is Hades), but he ruled the land of the dead. Now, this land of the dead, whatever they called it, was a holding pen, for lack of a better term, where the spirits of dead people either waited for judgment or experienced some period of time of imprisonment or punishment before they were granted entrance into paradise. Or maybe they were never granted entrance into paradise. However, Catholicism adopted this idea and adapted it somewhat into the heaven-hell-purgatory scheme.

But does true Christianity have anything of the sort? Now, the scripture that we have to look at in this regard and trips people up is I Peter 3, verses 18 through 20. And this is the difficult scripture that a lot of people stumble over.

**I Peter 3:18-20** For Christ also suffered once for sins. . .

And I want you to understand this, that this is the topic that we are talking about, Christ's suffering. And in fact, in my New King James here, it is subtitled Christ's Suffering and Ours. So keep this in the back of your mind as we go through this.

**1 Peter 3:18-20** 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 longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

It is verse 19 that really hangs people up. Christ through the Spirit went and preached to the spirits in prison. Now, what is this? It would seem on first reading this, that while Christ was in the grave or just as He arose from the dead, was resurrected, that He went to hell or Hades or wherever the souls of the dead were, and He preached to them, whatever the message happened to be. But the question is, is this really the case? Did He really make a witness to the people in hell or Hades or purgatory or whatever this place was? So, is there a Hades or a purgatory or a hell where the spirits of the dead go after death? Or is there some other explanation?

There are several explanations for this section of Scripture, but I only wanted to talk about two today because I feel that only those two have any merit whatsoever in explaining it. Now, several of the sources that I studied in doing research for this said that this section is one of the hardest or the most difficult in the New Testament to explain because of the way the Greek is. And I would have to agree. So instead of giving you an overview of all the different explanations, I want to give you the two that I think best fit it and then we will see which one of those two is the better.

The first explanation is that Christ's death and resurrection fulfilled the preaching done by Noah. Remember it says there that he preached to the spirits in prison who formerly were disobedient in the days of Noah. I skipped over a little bit there, but it definitely links this preaching somehow to the time of Noah when Noah was preparing to build the ark. Now in II

Peter 2:5 it is talking about a similar subject. It says there that Noah is called a preacher of righteousness. And we know that he not only built the ark and was the means by which the eight were saved and humanity was given the opportunity to start again, but that he also preached God's way of life and was a witness to those people then.

So the idea is that as the God of the Old Testament, Christ through the Holy Spirit, inspired Noah to proclaim the idea of salvation to the wicked people of his day. As the section goes on to explain, the process of salvation is through the waters of baptism. And you will see that in verse 21, at the end of verse 20 also. It says that eight souls were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us [nearly(?)] baptism. And it goes on explaining the waters of baptism, and that the type of the Flood was a picture of baptism and our own salvation. So that in the waters of baptism, we are now raised to a new and better life. The old man dies and the new one is raised. A man is given a new fresh start. All his sins are forgiven and he is given a clean slate.

But how were these people in the days of Noah imprisoned? They were called "spirits in prison." How would those people, the wicked people, the carnal people of Noah's day, how were they imprisoned? Well, in this explanation, the only good explanation is that Satan's influence over man is the jailer. That man has been so deceived that Satan's influence is like a straitjacket and man cannot release himself without the message that Christ would have preached through Noah of salvation. I hope that is clear because we are going to go on to the next part. Just the rudiments of that is that Christ preached to these people during the time before the Flood through Noah or by way of Noah, by inspiring Noah.

The second explanation is slightly more involved. And the real reason that this section is so difficult is because of the different ways that it can be translated from the Greek. And the reason why it can be translated different ways is because of the translators' predisposition on certain doctrines. That if they believed in a hell, they will translate it to conform to that idea of there being a hell or a Hades. They translate it to conform to their own beliefs rather than going strictly by what the Greek actually says. So we are going to look at what the Greek actually says for just a few of these words.

First, the word translated "preached." "By whom He went and preached to the spirits in prison." Now you would think that this word means preached because that is how they translated it. But it is not. The word is *ekeryxen* and it means to proclaim. It does not necessarily mean to preach, like someone would be standing at a pulpit and preaching. It means to proclaim, like a herald would do, or to announce, as a forerunner would do. The word normally translated preached, as in to preach the gospel, is *evangelizimo* or *evangelizimi*, which means to evangelize. That is what we normally think of when we think of the word preach, to evangelize.

So Christ did not preach to the spirits in prison. He did not preach to them a sermon or preach the gospel, but He announced or proclaimed something to them and this maybe will get you thinking that He may not have even said anything. He did not have to say anything. An announcement sometimes is more by one's actions or can be by one's actions rather than actually speaking words.

Let us go to the second thing. The word translated spirits in the phrase, "the spirits in prison" is *pneumata*. This word means spirit. Spirits, it is plural. Now, when this word is used in the Bible alone, that is, it is used without any qualifying adjectives, it always refers to supernatural beings like angels or God. It does not speak about human spirits, or I should say, spirits of dead human beings. It never is used in the context, as some would believe, of souls, of the immortal soul, that sort of thing. So it refers to supernatural beings like angels and it does not place any qualification on their character. It could be good and righteous angels or it could be fallen and unrighteous, sinning angels. So the best translation would be the angels in prison or imprisoned angels, one way or the other. It means the same thing.

Now, this idea that they are imprisoned angels concurs precisely with Jude 6. Let us turn over to Jude verse 6, just a few pages over.

**Jude 6** And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

Peter himself also says this in II Peter 2:4. He uses almost the same wording as Jude does, that there are angels that have been imprisoned. And as we

have been taught in the past that this prison is the earth, they have been restrained to this planet. And unfortunately, that is where we live too. Then they are waiting for their own judgment.

Now, the question then comes up: if Christ then proclaimed something to the angels who sinned, who have been in prison, then why does He talk about the time of Noah? What significance really does that have to this? Well, this could open up an entirely different and difficult can of worms and bring in other difficult scriptures that I really do not have time to explain right now.

But let us suffice it to say, that because of Jesus' statements about the wickedness of the days of Noah and how they are compared to the terrible wickedness that will occur at the end time, Peter used the time of Noah as the only example that men would understand of being the time when the demons had a heyday in influencing people to wrong, to wickedness. It was the worst time that Peter could think of when he could point back and say that it was at this time that the spirits who were in prison on this earth really made a mess of things and they did their utmost in being so wicked that God is reserving a time of judgment for them over and above their own rebellion against Him before man came.

So up to this point, we have seen that Christ suffered, was put to death, He rose to life in the spirit. And now as a spirit being, He proclaimed something to the fallen angels imprisoned on this earth, who really showed how wicked they were in the days of Noah. The question is: what did Christ proclaim? It is really very simple. Victory. He proclaimed that He had won.

This is what Peter goes on to say in verses 21 and 22. Let us read that, we read a part of it. He preached to the spirits in prison. They were disobedient in Noah's day.

**1 Peter 3:21-22** There is also an antitype which now saves us [remember he is talking about suffering and he is talking about how the process of salvation allows us to have the same victory as Christ had]—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.

What Christ proclaimed was that He had fulfilled all the requirements to take over the rule of this earth. He proclaimed the end of Satan's rulership and pronounced the ultimate judgments of the angels that sinned. He announced His own preeminence over all things, that only God the Father was not subject to Him. That He had gotten victory over His archenemy, Satan, and sin and death. And now He ruled all.

Now He had no reason to preach the gospel to these fallen angels. As a matter of fact, they probably knew it better than anybody on earth. They had constantly dogged Him during His ministry on earth. You can see that by how many demons He had to cast out. And through that we also show that they maintained their antagonism to Him at every occasion that they met. So this proclamation does not mean that He made a formal announcement to them either. Just by the fact that He died sinless, that He was resurrected on the third day as He said He would be, just as the sign of Jonah, that He was resurrected to spirit, and that He ascended to the Father, made it absolutely clear that their rule had come to an end or had begun to come to an end.

So what I think is that this second explanation is the more satisfying of the two. It fits in with the general subject of suffering that Peter goes into here. It starts at least in verse 13 and it goes past this by another chapter. In chapter 4, he is still talking about sufferings and how we have to follow in His steps, that we have to take partake of His sufferings. And in partaking of those sufferings that we have, we can also partake in the same glory, in the same victory.

And it also fits in better with those other parts of Scripture like Jude 6 (that we read) and II Peter 2:4, which talk about the angels that sinned and are being reserved in everlasting chains under darkness.

In conclusion, let us go to a passage that confirms what I have just explained, and that is Colossians 2. In a good bit of Colossians Paul is refuting some of the basic human philosophies that were extant in the Greek world at the time, and they are still around, and he traces them all the way back to demons.

**Colossians 2:13-15** And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all trespasses. [Now, this goes back to the process of salvation that Peter was talking about.], having wiped out the handwriting of requirements which was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. [Now we come to Jesus' dying, suffering] Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

But through His death and through His resurrection, He triumphed and declared victory over the angels of this estate.

Now let us go to chapter 3. This shows you the more positive aspects of it.

**Colossians 3:1-4** If then you were raised with Christ [remember, talking about the baptism that we went through, we were raised with Him], seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God [Remember, Peter mentioned that also, that He has now sat down at the right hand of God]. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

So what I have just said here is that Peter just had a little bit different way of saying it than Paul had. They both really said the same thing.

These passages are great messages of comfort and expectation and hope to everyone who walks the way of Jesus Christ our Lord, Savior, and soon coming King.