

1 Peter 3:18-22 | “Suffering Doesn’t Mean Defeat!”  
*Preached on June 6, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Good morning, I’m glad that we can come together to once again look at God’s precious Word.

Turn in your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 3:18-22. *[pause]*

What first comes to your mind when you hear the term, “suffering”?

As I mentioned last week, the suffering that Peter is talking about in this section isn’t general suffering, but a specific type of suffering.

This is suffering for doing right as a Christian.

So now with that revised definition of suffering in your mind, what is the first thing that you think about when you hear of suffering for doing right? *[pause]*

In order to get your mind working, I’ll mention the examples of Christian’s facing this sort of suffering in our country that I gave last week.

And I want you to really consider what comes to your mind...*[pause]*

A high-ranking employee of the company “Crossfit” was fired for tweeting that celebrating homosexuality was a sin.<sup>1</sup>

A high school football coach was placed on leave for praying after a football game<sup>2</sup>, and a teacher fired for giving a Bible to a student.<sup>3</sup>

An InterVarsity organization was kicked off of a university campus for requiring its leaders to be Christian.<sup>4</sup>

Christians have faced fines and lawsuits.

The typical Christian in America can be hated, ostracized, spoken against, and slandered.

And there is a general disdain culturally for some Christian beliefs. *[pause]*

So what came to your mind?

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<sup>1</sup> Will Maule. “Christian CrossFit Spokesperson Fired for Saying Celebrating Pride Is ‘Sin’.” *Faithwire*, 7 June 2018, [www.faithwire.com/2018/06/07/christian-crossfit-spokesperson-fired-for-saying-celebrating-pride-is-sin/](http://www.faithwire.com/2018/06/07/christian-crossfit-spokesperson-fired-for-saying-celebrating-pride-is-sin/).

<sup>2</sup> Hanna, Jason, and Steve Almasy. “Washington High School Coach Placed on Leave for Praying on Field.” *CNN*, 30 Oct. 2015, [www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/us/washington-football-coach-joe-kennedy-prays/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/us/washington-football-coach-joe-kennedy-prays/index.html).

<sup>3</sup> Steve Novak. “Teacher Fired for Giving Student a Bible Is Back in Classroom.” *Lehighvalleylive*, 17 May 2017, [www.lehighvalleylive.com/warren-county/2017/05/teacher\\_who\\_gave\\_student\\_a\\_bib.html](http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/warren-county/2017/05/teacher_who_gave_student_a_bib.html).

<sup>4</sup> “University Kicks InterVarsity Off Campus for Requiring Its Leaders to Be Christian.” *RELEVANT*, 8 Mar. 2018, [www.relevantmagazine.com/current/nation/university-kicks-intervarsity-off-campus-requiring-leaders-christian/](http://www.relevantmagazine.com/current/nation/university-kicks-intervarsity-off-campus-requiring-leaders-christian/).

Anger? Pain? Sadness?

But what else came to your mind?

Did you think that suffering equals bad? Is that it?

Maybe you thought, ‘This is all just bad, what good can come out of this?’ [pause]

What about suffering equals failure or defeat?

As in, “Wow, as Christians we are utterly defeated in this country. The world has won, and we have lost.” [pause]

What about this, did you think, “Suffering for what’s right is a waste.”

Maybe you’re thinking, “Why even try? All we do is suffer, and it feels like a waste to even do anything.” [pause]

Or maybe if you have personally faced ridicule or mockery for your beliefs, have you ever thought that that suffering equaled punishment from God for something else? [pause]

You see, for us, for some reason suffering for righteousness is *always* connected to the negative.

I mean think about it, how often do you think of something positive when it comes to persecution?

How often do you put suffering and victory together?

How often does anyone do that? [pause]

Yet those are *exactly* the two things that Peter will bring together in our text today.

He will show us that suffering for doing right doesn’t mean defeat, but rather it’s a pathway to victory.

And he will speak in such a way so as to help strengthen us for suffering in this world, so that we can persevere for Christ. [pauseeee]

**Let’s READ THE PASSAGE.** [pause]

What Peter is doing is he’s showing us the truths of what he just told us *in action*, especially in Jesus and Noah’s lives.

How do I know this?

Because in verse 18, Peter says, “For Christ also suffered...”

So this is building off of what was just said.

He explained that God's eyes are on the righteous and his ears are open to them, but his face is against the wicked.<sup>5</sup>

Now he will show us that truth in Jesus' life and in Noah's life....

There is blessing for the righteous, but judgment for the wicked. *[pause]*

Peter explained that if we suffer for righteousness, we will be blessed<sup>6</sup> - now Peter demonstrates that truth.

For Jesus suffered, yet was vindicated.

Noah suffered reviling, yet was saved. *[pause]*

Peter talked about how we should not fear, but sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts.<sup>7</sup>

Now he will show us that Christ *is* Lord.

He conquered with his suffering, death, and resurrection - and even now rules and reigns over all powers and authorities. *[pausee]*

Both Noah and Jesus bore witness to the truth in their generations to those around them.<sup>8</sup>

And truly, those who are against God's people will be put to shame<sup>9</sup>, since Christ is victorious. *[pause]*

All in all, Peter is showing us that, as he says in verse 17, "it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."

And now he says, "For Christ also suffered..." *[pauseee]*

*So Peter is trying to encourage his readers in their suffering that their suffering doesn't mean defeat, for even Jesus suffered and was victorious, and that leads me to the first point...*

### **I. Christ's victory was secured through his suffering, death, and resurrection.**

When you suffer for doing right, does this indicate punishment?

I mean, why would God allow evil to be dominating good?

Why would good people suffer at the hands of evil people? *[pause]*

Does this suffering of God's people mean that something in the plan of God has gone awry?

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<sup>5</sup> See 1 Peter 3:12.

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Peter 3:14.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Peter 3:16.

How can anything good come out of it? And doesn't it seem like God is not in charge? *[pause]*

If your revilers and persecutors treat you badly, does this mean that they will have the final word? *[pause]*

These are the very questions that Peter will answer decisively through talking about the life and death of Christ.

He will show us that suffering for righteousness is never defeat, but victory, and it's all because of Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

I want to expound briefly on the statement, "for Christ also suffered once for sins."

**Just think about it - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and perfect God-man, suffered!**

If even *He* suffered, why do I expect myself to be the exception? *[pause]*

He did nothing wrong, yet suffered greatly.

He had God's complete favor because he's in the Trinity, and yet he suffered.

Why would I throw a pity party for myself, when the Son of God suffered *for my sins*. *[pause]*

He suffered at the hands of evil men, but he suffered because of me and because of you.

**We were the reason he suffered.**

Out of everyone, he didn't deserve the suffering he faced, yet he went through it for our sins. *[pauseeee]*

Our Savior suffered, and in his suffering, he shows us a perfect example of one who handles suffering for righteousness.

He is the ideal sufferer, and his suffering reminds us of a couple things...

First, suffering for doing right is not a wrench in the plan of God, but it happens only because it is the will of God.

Peter just told us this back in verse 17, and now he's showing it to us in the life of Christ. *[pause]*

**Christ suffered for doing right according to the will and purpose of God.**

His suffering *wasn't* a waste.

His suffering *wasn't* purposeless, but it was the very will of God - it accomplished redemption! *[pause]*

God's purpose was being worked out in Christ's suffering. *[pause]*

This highlights to us that our suffering isn't a waste, it isn't purposeless, but God is doing something in it.

Our suffering for His name is worth it, for it is preparing in us an eternal weight of glory.<sup>10</sup>

Though it's hard and painful, we go through it with faith, knowing that even Christ suffered on the path to victory, so that in our path of suffering, we already have victory in Him. *[pauseee]*

Christ was victorious *through* his suffering.

In fact, the pathway was suffering to glory.

The Victim became the Victor! *[pause]*

And yet, why do we act like our suffering for doing right is a waste?

Why do we think it's purposeless and only bad?

Why do we think it's a wrench in the plan of God?

Suffering for doing right is not an indicator of God's punishment of us, but an indicator of blessing! *[pauseee]*

We are told in this verse that in the suffering of Christ, our sin and separation problem was triumphed!

He suffered once for our sins.

The atonement for our sins has been accomplished; it's a done deal.

He suffered once and for all - "it is finished."<sup>11</sup> *[pause]*

The Righteous One suffered for the unrighteous.

He took our place, and took our sin upon himself.

The perfect, spotless Lamb of God suffered and died for us, the unrighteous and undeserving.

And this was so that we could be brought to God. *[pause]*

He reconciled our relationship with God, so now we can approach him.

His righteousness is credited to our account, so that when God looks at us, he sees Christ's righteousness.

We have been brought to God! *[pause]*

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<sup>10</sup> See 2 Corinthians 4:17.

<sup>11</sup> See John 19:30.

We, who were unrighteous, have now become the righteous because the Righteous One suffered for the unrighteous. *[pause]*

This wasn't some imaginary thing, but as Peter says, "being put to death in the flesh."

Jesus literally and physically died that day.

But that's not the end, for he was "made alive in the spirit."

He suffered, died, and was raised. *[pause]*

So now when I think of Christ's suffering it reminds me that I have been reconciled to God.

It reminds me that He, the Righteous, died for me, the unrighteous.

It reminds me that I now have access and a relationship with God.

Victory has been won through suffering! *[pause]*

This is so important, for it means that suffering doesn't mean defeat, for the victory has already been won!

Suffering doesn't change my standing with God.

Death doesn't alter my eternity.

And my revilers and persecutors are powerless against the most important things about me.

I am already on the winning side, so that right now my suffering for righteousness may be hard...

...It may be painful, but suffering is merely light and momentary because there is a weight of glory to come for me beyond all comparison.<sup>12</sup> *[pauseeee]*

If Christ didn't win the victory.

If Christ didn't die for my sins or bring me to God, then I have great reason to fear.

I have great reason to want to give up because it would mean that my suffering would have the final word.

My persecutors would win, and I would be shamed - but thanks be to Christ, whose suffering claimed the victory for us. *[pauseeee]*

Christian, though you are undeserving and were unrighteous, Christ suffered for you, so that now you have been brought to God.

If Christ suffered for you in this way, why can't you suffer for His sake?

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<sup>12</sup> See 2 Corinthians 4:17.

Why can't you speak up for Him, even if you are mocked for it?

Why can't you do what is right, even when it's hard?

Look at what he did for you! *[pause]*

Suffering for doing right doesn't mean it's punishment for your sins, for you have been brought to God!

This is your status! *[pause]*

Suffering doesn't mean it's a waste or it's a wrench in the plan, for look at Christ's suffering.

Look at what it accomplished, and look at the outcome.

He was vindicated, and was raised.

And someday because of His work, your suffering won't have the final word, but your resurrection will.

Since Christ was raised, so you also will be raised. *[pauseeee]*

This is so helpful for our moments of suffering for doing good...

For it helps us in the present because we remember that our biggest enemies have been dealt with.

Our sin problem and separation from God problem have been dealt with, and that's the most important thing in the Universe.

We are forgiven, declared righteous, we have access to the Heavenly Father, and our future is secure.

No unjust suffering changes that. *[pause]*

But it also reminds us of the future...

Our suffering isn't the end, but it's the pathway to glory.

Though we suffer now, someday we will be vindicated and resurrected, just like Jesus was, and only because Jesus was.

His suffering that led to victory, means we have victory in our suffering, and our suffering will lead to glory. *[pauseeee]*

*Not only was Christ's victory secured through his suffering, death, and resurrection, but also...*

**II. Christ's victory was prefigured in Noah's Ark, which corresponds to baptism.**

We have come to the tricky, difficult part of this passage.

This is one of the hardest passages in the New Testament to understand.

I don't want to get bogged down in the details, for that can become confusing and be long.

There's a time and place for that in maybe a Bible study time, but in a Sunday morning sermon, it's not the time.

Yet I do want to touch on the different views, just so you can be aware of them. *[pause]*

Looking at the end of verse 18, let's pick up there.

Peter says that Christ was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,...

...because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared." *[pause]*

Well, that's interesting, isn't it?

This really makes you ask a lot of questions...

Who are these spirits in prison?

What exactly did Christ preach?

When did he go and do this?

There are two main interpretations and I'll give both briefly. *[pause]*

One interpretation is that these 'spirits in prison' are the fallen angels of the time of Noah.

So this view would say that after Jesus' resurrection, probably during his ascension, he went to these spirits in prison and proclaimed triumph to them.

This is certainly possible, but I'll give the other main interpretation. *[pause]*

The other interpretation says that Christ in the Spirit preached through Noah in Noah's day to the people then, but who are *now* in prison.

So they would claim that Peter is saying that these spirits in prison are those people of Noah's day, who are currently in prison.

These people were preached to by Christ in the Spirit speaking through Noah, but they were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, and they are *now* in prison.



So according to this view, the preaching happened back in the days of Noah, not after the resurrection, and ‘in prison’ is describing their current state, not the time when Jesus preached. *[pause]*

Listen to the NASB’s translation of this text, as it hints at this view...

Christ was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; *in which* also he went...”

So it’s in the spirit that he went and proclaimed.

It continues, “he went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison.”

Both of those interpretations are viable, and whatever one you deem more accurate, it doesn’t change the main meaning of this passage. *[pause]*

If Jesus preached triumph to the fallen angels, we rejoice in the victory of Christ, just as we have been talking about already.

If he preached through Noah in Noah’s day, we remember that Christ is with us even now, empowering our witness in the world...

...And both applications are true according to the rest of Scripture.

But either way, the main point remains: we can endure suffering remembering Christ’s victory through *His* suffering. *[pauseeee]*

This detail about Noah’s day leads Peter to expand upon Noah and the Ark some more.

Yet you may be wondering, “Peter, why even bring up Noah?”

We’ll think about the Noah story.

There was a small, persecuted, yet faithful group of believers, who were saved amidst all the wickedness and persecution of the world around them.

That’s the situation that Peter’s readers were in! *[pause]*

Noah and his family were delivered despite experiencing suffering for doing right.

Noah even bore witness for God through this persecution. *[pause]*

In Noah’s day, judgment was on its way, so now in our day, judgment is on its way for those who reject Christ.

In Noah’s day, salvation of his people came, so now in our day, salvation of God’s people comes. *[pauseeee]*

This story is encouraging for us, if we face suffering for doing good.

We can be assured that it's worth it to do what's right.

It's worth it to keep being faithful.

Our small numbers against the mass of those against us doesn't change the truth.

Though the world may be against us, God is for us.

Though the world may look like it's winning, God will get the victory and save his people.

Though we are mocked and ridiculed for our faith, we will be vindicated, and our enemies shamed - all because of our standing with God.

No wonder Peter thought of the Noah story!

It's a great illustration of what he's speaking about. *[pause]*

So be encouraged sufferer, as Noah and his family were saved through water, so now you are saved *through baptism???*

That's what Peter says!

But how can this be?! How does baptism save us? We aren't Catholics here, but Baptists, who believe in believer's baptism!

Well let's unpack it a little bit...

Peter says, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

So he's linking baptism with Noah being saved through the water.

He says that it corresponds to this, or we could say Noah's Ark prefigured the meaning of baptism. *[pauseeee]*

What Peter's doing is he's saying that we are saved through water in a sense, through what the waters of baptism are picturing.

Peter already told us that Christ's death and resurrection brought us to God, so he can't mean that water baptism itself saves you from your sins.

He even concludes by saying that it's "through the resurrection," so again this cannot mean that water baptism itself saves you.

Then what does he mean?

Well look at Peter's qualifying statement after he says that baptism saves you...

“Not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Do you see it?

He’s saying, “It’s not about the water or any special things in the water itself, but about something deeper!” *[pause]*

By saying, “Not as a removal of dirt from the body,” he’s saying that it’s not that the water has magical powers.

Just by being baptized by the water of baptism doesn’t save or give some special grace, but rather it’s about what it’s picturing that matters.

It’s picturing being baptized into Christ.

Water baptism is a picture of what happened at faith. *[pauseeeee]*

In Noah’s time, the water around them represented death, so in baptism, going into the water represents dying with Christ.

In Noah’s time, coming out alive after the flood represented life, so in baptism, coming up out of the water represents life in Christ. *[pause]*

We come up out of the water because of his resurrection, and that’s why Peter says it’s “through the resurrection”.

For Peter, the power of the picture of baptism is only because of the resurrection of Christ. *[pauseeee]*

When you go down into the water, you are picturing judgment, for Christ died and was buried for the punishment of *your* sins.

But he was raised, and new life arose.

So when you come up out of the water, it pictures that you were raised with Christ. *[pause]*

Since Christ emerged from the waters of his death, so the believer emerges from the water, picturing that they have been baptized with Christ. *[pause]*

The water baptism doesn’t save you, but the reality behind the water baptism does.

You were immersed in Christ, who died for you and rose. *[pauseeee]*

There is salvation through judgment.

The world was judged by water, but through that water, Noah and his family were saved by being the ark.

So now the world is going to be judged, but through that judgment, we as those who believe in Christ, are saved by being in our Ark, who is Christ. *[pauseeee]*

The takeaway for us is that in our suffering, we can rest assured that we are saved and will be saved like Noah.

We are already saved in being united with Christ, and on judgment day, we *will* be saved.

We won't be overcome by our persecutors, for they will perish.

We won't be overcome by judgment, for Christ is our Ark that we are brought safely home to God in. *[pauseeeee]*

*The third point comes from verse 22, where we see that...*

### **III. Christ's victory is displayed in Christ's Lordship.**

Verse 22 is talking about Jesus and it says, "who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."

We see that Jesus didn't *just* suffer, die, and rise, but there's more...

...He has ascended, is seated at God's right hand, and authorities and powers are subjected to him. *[pause]*

The point is that Jesus' suffering and death wasn't the end for him, but rather, he triumphed in it, and now he is Lord over all.

His suffering wasn't the final word, but he is now vindicated and exalted on high. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus Christ is the undisputed Lord.

He is reigning over the evil powers of this world, for they are subjected to him. *[pause]*

Angels, authorities, and powers refer to evil spiritual beings that influence and have some power in this current world.

But do you see what Peter is saying?

He's saying that actually they are under Christ's dominion, rule, and authority!

They are subjected to Him!

They can't do as they please, but in reality, they are under the Lordship of Christ. *[pause]*

This is such good news!

It means in your suffering for doing right, the fallen angelic powers behind your persecutors or the worldly system against you have already been triumphed over!

Their doom is sure, and your salvation is certain!

*They will not ultimately win, but they have already lost, for Christ reigns over them!*

They may look like they have free reign on earth, but they are on a leash, and someday they will be judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire, never to deceive ever again. *[pauseeeee]*

*Christ is Lord, but is he set apart as Lord in your heart?*

When he is set apart as Lord in your heart, then you can persevere through suffering, remembering that the forces behind your enemies are subject to Christ...

*...They will not ultimately win. [pauseeee]*

*What we see today is that...*

**Christ's victory through suffering assures us that our suffering doesn't mean defeat, but victory!**

So is suffering for doing good worth it?

*Is it worth it to persevere in those times, or is it a waste and only a negative thing?*

It's worth it, for Christ has won the victory!

*For even Christ suffered, and his suffering didn't mean defeat, but triumph.*

It was exactly *through* his suffering that led to victory.

**The Suffering Servant has become the Victorious Lord.**

So now the victory is secure for us because we are in union with Him!

*Since he claimed the victory, then we share in that victory! [pauseeee]*

For the Christian, yes, there will be suffering for doing right, for we share in Christ's sufferings, but we also share in his victory. *[pause]*

*This is so critical to know when you are in the middle of suffering for doing good.*

Because the point is that the outcome of Christ's suffering assures us that our suffering doesn't have the final word.

**If his suffering didn't mean defeat, then it won't mean defeat for us, too, because we are in Christ.**

Just as he suffered, but was vindicated, so you may suffer now, but God will vindicate you someday.

Just as his suffering led to triumph and glory, so our suffering will lead someday to triumph and glory in Heaven. *[pause]*

What an encouraging thing to remember in the darkest days of suffering!

Your suffering doesn't mean defeat!

It won't have the last word on your life, but there is a glorious future awaiting you!

**Therefore follow God wholeheartedly!**

And remain faithful under suffering, for God will vindicate you, and no amount of reviling, nasty words, or slander will change that.