

## 1 Peter 3:18-22

**Intro: (Potential)** This summer on our family vacation we got to go a place in Dearborn Michigan that Henry Ford built as a sort of celebration of American inventors. One of the buildings a hundred years ago that Ford moved to this property was the Menlo Park laboratory where Thomas Edison invented the light bulb.

I found it fascinating to walk through this long old two story building that it has all sorts of machinery and equipment as well as shelves that were lined with jars of all sorts of minerals and chemicals and elements. What you find out from the story is that Edison did magically invent the lightbulb in a week. The incandescent lightbulb itself...which is still in use in same basic form today, was the result of a whole team of people spending a whole bunch of money recording ideas, theories, experiments, and results, until they were able to actually develop something that worked.

The story goes that Edison and his team spent almost two years in experiments day after day. They recorded to have tried three thousand different minerals combinations and at least 6,000 different plants to be lightbulb filaments until he finally settles on the carbonized cotton.

Edison's grand achievement occurred when he lit a bulb on 22 October 1879 and it produced a nice orange glow for 13.5 hours. He would patent the light bulb a few months later.

Countless hours, experiments, elements, and money were put into developing something that has been one of the most common and taken-for granted things that exist in our lives. Most of us, including myself, know only vaguely how light bulbs work, but we know that doesn't prevent us from enjoying the benefits of them. But when we understand the process that goes into turning on a light, it brings a greater dimension of appreciation for what we have and may at times give us some knowledge to benefit even more from it.

This is the same idea when it comes to what we are discussing today. Last week Austin talked about how God uses our unjust suffering and persecution to bring about blessing. This week, we are not left to speculate what unjust suffering looks like. Peter takes us to the most evil and unjust persecution that has ever occurred in the history of the world, the crucifixion of Jesus.

What we are discussing in regards to the crucifixion of Jesus is the word atonement. Atonement is a big church word that simply refers to how is it that Jesus' death makes us at peace with God. How did the most evil event in the history of the world result in the greatest blessing that God has ever bestowed on mankind?

Let me be clear. Just as I don't have to understand the science of how Edison invented the lightbulb to enjoy the benefits of electric light, understanding the mechanism of how God used suffering to bring peace to us is not necessary to enjoy peace. The Bible says we must simply believe that Jesus saves us and stake our lives on that faith, and that is all that is required.

But in the same way, my appreciation for what Jesus did and how Jesus saves me will cause my love for him to be made stronger and more vivid when we think about the doctrine of the atonement.

### **The Universal Problem**

Atonement starts with a basic problem that afflicts mankind. We are each born with a sin nature that is in total rebellion to God and deserving of God's eternal wrath and punishment.

Romans 6:23

**23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Romans 3:23

**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

So every person ever born to a father and mother has the problem. We are sinners, and we will justly experience separation from God, which is hell.

### **Theories of the Atonement**

There are three basic historical ways that the church has used to explain how the death and resurrection of Jesus makes us to have peace with God.

- 1) Christus Victor theory- Christ's death and resurrection conquered all of the spiritual forces of evil that were allied against God and against us, granting us victory over them. Death and evil are no longer things to be feared by the children of God who belong to him by faith.

**Hebrews 2:14-15**

**14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

**15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

**Colossians 2:15**

**15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Every Christian should understand that Jesus death and resurrection is the key to victory over sin, death, and the forces of evil. But there is a divergence from there into two basic means by which Jesus achieves victory. One view is that he accomplishes this through moral influence.

- 2) Moral influence theory- Jesus demonstrates on the cross the greatest possible obedience to God and greatest love for mankind. His example of love inspires us to become better people who love others and obey God.

### **John 13:15**

**15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.**

### **1 Peter 2:21**

**<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.**

\*A cautionary note here. In theologically liberal Christianity there was developed in the late 1960s by a theologian named James Cone a school of thought known as liberation theology. Liberation theology basically holds that Jesus came to earth to identify with the poor and the oppressed of the world. The meaning of the cross for liberation theology is not that Christ has died in order to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Rather the meaning of the cross for Cone is that now Jesus knows what it is like to suffer like the poor and oppressed victimized groups of people throughout history so he can serve as an inspiration for them to free themselves politically and culturally from the chains of oppressors.

There are two major problems where liberation theology does not align with what the Bible says about Jesus: 1) the goal of liberation theology is social and political revolution. The expectation of every Jewish person of Jesus as the Messiah is that he would lead a social and political revolution against the oppressors. But what did Jesus actually do? He completely and totally rejected the mantle of revolutionary at every turn in the Gospels. 2) There is absolutely no doctrine of individual sin for which Jesus *has* to die in order to make people of all races, nations, tribes, and tongues right with God. In other words, under the Moral Influence theory of the atonement, there is no sense in which Jesus' death has to happen in order to fulfill the purposes of God for salvation. **The one model of the atonement that gives the most complete explanation why Jesus had to die in order for us to be saved is what is called substitutionary atonement.**

- 3) Substitution Theory- If we begin with the brokenness of mankind's relationship with God in the garden due to sin, we understand that sin is a problem to which man doesn't have an answer. We have offended God's perfect honor and justice. Because God is perfect, he demands perfection and sinful man can never reach God's standard.

If salvation is to be achieved and anyone is to not receive the just penalty of eternal separation from God then the solution will have to come from God, not man. But likewise, in order for man to be reconciled with God means that there will have to be a payment from man. God himself becomes the solution in Jesus Christ, who becomes flesh, yet because he is God maintains his perfect deity. His death on the cross is unique in that it is the only death that was not deserved, and yet it was perfectly planned as the satisfaction/propitiation for what God demands in order for justice to be done on behalf of man's sin.

Because of the uniqueness of Jesus' death and the fact that he is the only man to ever be raised from the dead by his own power, the only way to receive victory over sin and death and be reconciled with God is through faith to accept Christ as the atoning sacrifice for your sins and follow him as Lord.

### **Romans 3:24-25a**

**and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**

### **2 Corinthians 5:21**

**<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

All of these various theories of the atonement are actually things that the New Testament teaches about the death of Jesus. Because of a book published in the 1930s by a Swedish theologian about the atonement, these three models are often portrayed as being in competition with one another. Since what has happened in the modern age is that people have become very uncomfortable with the idea of a God who has wrath for sin and has such a demand for justice that he would violently punish sin. This, of course, is exactly the who the God of the Bible is. But we have to understand that God demands justice because it is a part of his central nature. To deny justice would be to not be God as we know him.

But the God of the Bible is so loving beyond anything we can imagine...it's not that he punished some third party for our sin, it is that God stepped from heaven into this world for the central purpose of taking on himself the sin humanity, thereby defeating the powers of darkness once and for all.

Keep this in mind as we read 1 Peter 3:18-22. Remember that these are Christians in the throws of being cancelled. Their major question is whether it is worthwhile to suffer for identifying with Jesus Christ. Understanding how the death and resurrection of Jesus gives believers victory over evil is critical to understanding if Jesus is worthy of our suffering.

*Proposition: 1 Peter 2:18-22 gives us three pictures to describe how Jesus' death and resurrection bring us peace with God (atonement).*

**18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,**

**19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,**

**20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.**

**21** 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, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

*The First picture of the atonement is that Jesus is a blood sacrifice that appeases the wrath that God has against us for our sin.*

### **1 Peter 3:18a**

**18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,**

Here is 1 Peter 3:18 we have yet another of the New Testament's most clear statement that Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice *in our place*. Notice the parts of this verse

- 1) *Christ suffered*. Peter uses this word suffered to connect the death of Jesus to the suffering that his people are experiencing. We can suffer well because Christ has already endured the ultimate suffering....which is death on a cross, the temporary severing of his perfect relationship with the Father.
- 2) *Once*. Because Christ is the perfect sacrifice, there is no other sacrifice needed. Jesus declared on the cross *it is finished*. The full wrath of God was poured out on the person of Jesus at that moment. There is none left for all who are under Christ. Nothing needs to be added.  
Now some of you grew up Roman Catholic. For a catholic, the mass is viewed as a re-enactment of the crucifixion of Christ. But it has to be done all the time for the rest of your life because that is how you receive the forgiveness of sins. We don't do that in our church because of this word- Christ died ONCE. Nothing else is needed.
- 3) *For sins*. Very clearly here is the reason Christ HAD to die. For sins. We could die for our sins, but it is simply getting what we deserved. Christ death for sins actually gives us forgiveness for sins. *The righteous for the unrighteous* explains Christ suffered for sins, by explaining that his death is vicarious. That simply means that one thing was given in place of another. A righteous man...the only righteous man, died in the place of the unrighteous.
- 4) *That he might bring us to God*. Because Jesus on the cross suffered hell...complete and total abandonment and separation from God...he has brought us to God. We don't have to suffer what Jesus did on the cross. God will never reject us. He will never abandon us. We are his kids sitting in our rightful place at the Father's dinner table because we have been ushered in there by the only ONE qualified to bring us to God.

Now all of this language about Jesus as the final sacrifice for sins is there to explain a picture we have that permeates the OT. In the OT God is continually demanding that blood has to be shed in order for there to be forgiveness for sin. From the moment Adam and Even sinned and were kicked out of the garden, God killed an animal to give them clothes so that the shame of their

nakedness could be covered. When their kids Cain and Abel brought offerings to God, God was pleased with Abels because something had to die, but displeased with Cain's because Cain did not see the necessity of blood.

When God made a covenant with Abram he sealed it with the deaths of animals...first when God had Abram slaughter them so the God could swear on his own life that he would keep the promises he was making to Abram, and later when God sent a ram to die as a sacrifice in the place of Abraham's son, Isaac.

So when God later gave the law to Moses, he kept up this picture one thing having to die in the place of another. A whole regiment of animal sacrifices was instituted so that the people knew that unless something died, then God's wrath wouldn't be forestalled for another day, another week, another season, another year.

I have luckily gotten a picture of this because I've finally been able to kill deer when I hunt. What I didn't know before is that processing deer..gutting them, skinning them, quartering them, trimming the meat, grinding the meat is a hard and laborious process.

When we think about priests today we usually think of sort of weak intellectual guys who don't work with their hands. The priests of the Old Testament had to be men's men because The law was a bloody and laborious process of taking animals every day and killing them, trimming them, cutting them up, and cooking them exactly how God specified. In fact, the priests were the only people in the OT who had a mandatory retirement age (50 years old) because they were too old for the heavy labor. If you want a picture of how this worked, you can look at Leviticus 16 later.

This OT picture of Jesus as THE sacrifice for sins comes into full view in the Gospels. When Jesus publicly appears on the scene as John is prophesying and baptizing the nation in the Jordan he loudly and publicly declares for all who could see Jesus.

**John 1:29 "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**

So Jesus is the final sacrifice for sins, but the passage goes further to tell us what he actually accomplishes with his suffering. He doesn't suffer without purpose, but he accomplishes out salvation. Now demonstrate what it means to be saved, Peter gives us the picture of another famous OT story.

*The Second picture of the atonement is that Jesus is an ark that protects those who are in him from the judgment of God against sin.*

**1 Peter 3:18b-20**

**being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,  
19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,**

**20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.**

1 Peter 3:19 is one of the top five most difficult verses in the Bible. There are several different ways that people have interpreted this.

- 1) Jesus after his crucifixion descended into hell to preach salvation to the spirits of people who had died.
- 2) Jesus went to hell to declare his victory over demons who are being held in prison there.
- 3) Jesus declared his victory over demons as he passed through the air in his ascension to heaven.
- 4) The view I find most convincing is the view of St. Augustine because it matches what follows in verse 20.

1 Peter 3:20 references the story of Noah. Most of you know the story. We usually look at it as a kids' story, but it is actually one of the most brutal and terrifying stories in the entire Bible. It also happens to be one of the most wonderful pictures of salvation.

We are told in Genesis 6 that in the days of Noah that the earth had become full of violence and people didn't think of anything all day long except doing evil. They were so evil that they would continually invent new ways of doing evil. God's patience ran out. He regretted that he had ever created man because of how evil man was and God determined to wipe out the human race.

But there was one man and his family who God viewed favorably, this man was named Noah. He came from a godly line of men. God determined that he would save Noah when he wiped out the human race. So in the days when no one had seen rain and they didn't live near the sea, God told Noah to build a huge boat. This boat would be shaped like a box and would be large enough to preserve not just the lives of Noah's offspring, but every type of creature on the earth.

Building the ark was such an undertaking that it took Noah over 100 years to build it. But in the year that Noah's grandfather Methuselah died, the time of God's patience was up he told Noah and his kids to get in the ark. He brought two of each of the animals to the ark. Then God shut the door. And he caused floods the likes of which the earth never saw and has never seen since to literally rid the earth of every stinking sinful human.

But through all of this shut up in the box Noah was saved *through* the vengeance of God's wrath.

The book of 2 Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher, in fact the only preacher, of righteousness. You can imagine that Noah starts building this strange box nowhere near the water. At first, people are asking him questions. "What in the world are you doing? Why would

you spend your time on a waterproof box? Where did you get those blueprints?” As the project turned into years, you can sense that the questions probably turned into dismissal and then to outright disdain. There goes crazy Noah. He’s expecting a flood. He’s not enjoying himself. He’s pouring his free time and his life’s savings into building a giant box.

The Bible says the earth was actually filled with violence. Maybe it took 100 years because Noah was physically attacked. Maybe people even destroyed the ark a few times. In any case, there was ample opportunity for Noah as he was building to be preaching against the evil that surrounded him, to declare that God would destroy the earth, but also to offer salvation in the ark.

Nobody took up Noah’s preaching.

Genesis 6 tells us that that earth in those days was under the influence of spirits who were in rebellion against God and had created offspring that were filled with strength and violence. Noah was doing his preaching to these spirits AND to the people who were being influenced by them.

Augustine’s position is that even though Jesus had not yet been born, the spirit of Jesus was nonetheless present in the preaching of Noah. The unbelievers who rejected Noah’s preaching are symbols of those who hear the Gospel of Jesus’ salvation but reject that preaching today

“But to the men of Noah’s time the gospel was preached in vain, because they believed not when God’s long suffering waited for them during the many years in which the ark was being built (for the building of the ark was itself in a certain sense a preaching of mercy); even as now men similar to them are unbelieving, who, to use the same figure, are shut up in the darkness of ignorance as in a prison, beholding in vain the Church which is being built up throughout the world, while judgment is impending, as the flood was by which at that time all the unbelieving perished....” - Augustine

Why would Augustine say this? Because of the picture that Noah is presenting that finds its fulfillment in Christ.

Mankind is hopelessly evil. We oppose God and fill the world with our violent thoughts and actions. God is going to destroy the world and us because of our sin. But there is a narrow way of salvation through the impending torrent of God’s wrath. The box of salvation is to enter into the protection of the saving blood of Jesus.

And just as God was faithful to allow Noah to get off the ark on a new earth, so he will be faithful to all of those who are in Christ to give us life on the new earth that he creates after his final judgment and destruction of sin.

The coming of God’s wrath is symbolized by the water of the flood, but it is not the only way that water gives us a picture of Jesus’ salvation.

***The Third picture of the atonement of Jesus is our own baptism.***

I am super excited to get to be in a church where we are continually seeing people who called to salvation, have given their lives to Jesus, and are symbolizing that by obeying the example of Jesus in baptism. We are having a baptism this morning after the 11:00 worship.

It just so happens that baptism is one of the greatest pictures we have in the church today of what Jesus is doing in saving us.

**1 Peter 3:21-22**

**21 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, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.**

Let's go through the phrases of verses 21 and 22.

- 1) *Baptism, which corresponds to this*, the Greek word calls baptism an antitype. That is a fancy Bible word to say that the water in the flood corresponds to the water in baptism. We use water in baptism because it is dangerous. It symbolizes death. If you don't come up from your baptism, you will die, just like humanity did in the flood.
- 2) *Now saves you*, this would appear to mean that you have to be baptized to be saved and that it is the water that saves you. In fact the reason that many in the early church wrote of baptism as the equivalent of salvation is because it was inconceivable to the church fathers that anyone would actually trust Christ as savior but not obey him in being baptized. Perhaps that's you this morning. How can you expect to obey God in the difficult areas of life if you won't follow him in the simple and clear areas. Now on the other side of this, many of you might have grown up thinking that. Baptism *is* salvation. I call that the *O Brother Where Art Thou View of Baptism*. You know the one, I had a come to Jesus moment, I walked the aisle, I went down to the river and had all my sins washed away.

<https://youtu.be/Q4UJ5zBFqbl?t=216>

- 3) *not as a removal of dirt from the body*. It is clear that the saving power is NOT in the water of baptism itself, but in the union with God that it represents.
- 4) *but as an appeal to God for a good conscience*. This is where, through faith, we merely ask God to give us what we cannot give ourselves. Namely a clear conscience. The desire to not only do right and obey God, but to actually follow through with it. And we know that God will deliver on this request because it is
- 5) *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him*. Unlike the sacrifices that preceded Christ, he is the sacrifice who was raised from the dead,

who actually defeated sin with his resurrection. He ascended into heaven sits at the right hand of God, ruling the cosmos, indicating that ALL authority has been subjected to him. We can EXPECT to overcome sin not because of anything special about our request, but because of who we are asking.

Think of it this way. My wife is a special education teacher, and like every teacher, she gets in the classroom and sees things that are going in the name of the law that are making education more difficult and not serving students. She comes home to me and tells all these things that need to change and I'm like "you're exactly right, you know what you're talking about, those things need to change for the betterment of our schools." But my words carry no weight. They help Jennifer to know that she's not a crazy person, but they don't have the authority to change anything.

But this week she wrote a letter about a change that the state legislature made some years ago that she can demonstrate has made education worse. She had me read the letter, and she's going to send it to the people in the NC legislature who are in the committee on education. If they read the letter and think her request makes sense and they decide to act on it, well now that matters and some changes will be implemented. Why? Because in North Carolina those are the people to whom we have given the authority to actually do something about it.

It's the same way with Christ. Our faith is sufficient to deliver on what we need, not because of anything in us, but because of the *authority* of whom we are asking.

### Which leads to our final question

#### Challenge

How am I responding to the sin that I see present in my life? Am I embracing the natural defiance against God that generates disorder and death? Or am I viewing sin as something that was put to death on the cross and no longer possesses the power to enslave me.

Let me leave you with one final thought from Romans 6:3-11

**3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

