

Place Lurgan Baptist 24:8:2008

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

12. VICTORY IN JESUS

Do you know the difference between a Bible scholar and a pastor ? Well, a Bible scholar has a lifetime to come to his interpretation of a passage of Scripture. A pastor has seven days. *He has got to have it between Sunday and Sunday.* So here I come today to one of the one most difficult passages in all of the New Testament, and I want you to be sure and understand the words that I am going to say. ***You see, words don't always mean what you think they mean.*** I heard about a man who walked into the surgery one day. The receptionist said, “ *Can I help you ?*” He said, “ *Yes, I would like to see the Doctor.*” And she said, “ *Well, what is your problem ?*” He said, “ *I have got the shingles.*” “ *Oh, my well sit down and fill out this form right here.*” About half an hour later the nurse came in said, “ ***Can I help you ?***” And he said, “ *I got the shingles.*” She said, “ *Well, come into this little room right here,*” and she took his blood pressure and pricked his finger.

About thirty minutes later another nurse came in and she said, “ *What is your problem ?*” He said, “ *I have got the shingles.*” “ *Oh,*” she said “ *well take off your shirt and the doctor will be in here in a little while.*” So a little

while later the doctor walked in and he said, “ *What's your problem ?*” He said, “ *I have got the shingles.*” The Doctor said, “ *Where are they ?* The man said, “ ***Out in the lorry where do you want them ?***” You see, words don't always mean what you think they mean, so listen carefully what I have to say today. You see, good and godly scholars have wrestled with this passage of Scripture. They have debated, discussed and disagreed, and have not always left behind a great deal of spiritual help. We may not be able to solve all the problems found in this section but we do want to get the practical help that Peter gave to encourage these believers in difficult days. Now remember Peter's overall theme is “ **When the going gets Tough.**” He has been speaking about unjust suffering. Do you recall for example in (Ch 2) he sets forth the sufferings of Christ as our great pattern. He says, “ *For even hereunto where ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps.*” (2:21) There Peter talks about the sufferings of Christ in the light of the **patience** Christ had, here he talks about the sufferings of Christ in the light of the **victory** He had. And each believer can know victory in Jesus.

In effect Peter is saying, “ *Don't be surprised or discouraged by suffering since Christ triumphed in His suffering even though He died an excruciating death.*” Now if you closely at this passage, you'll notice that it present three different ministries and if we understand these ministries we will be better able to suffer in the will of God and glorify the Lord Jesus.

(1) THE MINISTRY OF A VICTORIOUS SAVIOUR

The focus of attention here is Jesus Christ, not the recipients of the letter or those who would read it centuries later. It is Christ Himself. He alone is the focal point. Look at this great statement of faith regarding the Lord Jesus. Peter speaks of,

(a) CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION:

Look if you will at (3:18) The word “ *suffered*,” in (3:18) means “ *died*.” Christ hath once died for sins.

1. He Died Perfectly:

“ *Once*,” Christ did everything He intended to do in that death, and it needs never to be repeated. Do you recall that the writer to the Hebrews emphasis's that little word “ *once* ?” Speaking of Christ he says, He “ *needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for His owns sins, and then for the people's for this He did once, when He offered up Himself.*” (Heb 9:27) 1.

2. He Died Sacrificially:

“ *For sins, the just for the unjust.*” (3:18) He was the perfect substitute for sin. His blood became the one and only all sufficient payment to God for sins. Here is one of those times in Scripture where your name could appear in the place of the words “ *the unjust.*” Let me state in my case “ *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for Denis Lyle*,” or you could put your name there.

3. He Died Purposefully:

“ *That He might bring us to God,*” Do you see that word “ *bring*,” ? (prosagogeus) it has a Greek background. At the court of the Kings there was an official called “ *the introducer.*” His function was to decide who should be introduced to royalty. He as it were held the “ *keys of access.*” My through Christ and His atoning work we are brought right into the presence of God. In the words of Scripture, “ *Through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto the Father,*” we have “ *boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.*” (Eph 3:18 Heb 10:19) My have you grasped that tremendous truth ? Are you living on the benefits of it ? Do you know what it is to come daily, continually, boldly to the throne of grace through Christ's atoning work ? (a)

(b) CHRIST'S PROCLAMATION:

Do you see what Peter says ? “ *Being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the spirit, by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.*” (3:18-19) Now scholars tell us that the end of (3:18) should read like this. “ *being put to death with reference to the flesh but made alive with reference to the spirit.*” Then according to Peter the Lord Jesus made a special proclamation to the spirits in prison. Now what in this world does this mean ? When exactly did this occur ? Who were these spirits that He visited ? And what is the proclamation that Christ made ? Those who say that these “ *spirits in prison,*” were spirits of lost sinners in hell, to whom Christ brought the good news of salvation have some real problems to

solve. To begin with, Peter referred to people as souls and not spirits (3:20) In the New Testament the word “ *spirits*,” is used to describe angels or demons, not human beings and (3:22) seems to argue for this meaning. What then is Peter saying here ? He is saying that between the time of Christ’s death and His resurrection, as pertains to His spirit, there was no limitation. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive with reference to the spirit. ***Did you know that Jesus Christ preached while His body was in the tomb ?*** While Christ’s body was there in that tomb the Lord Jesus went on a preaching mission. Well, to whom did He preach ? “ *To the spirits in prison.*” Who are these spirits in prison ? Well, let Peter tell us. (2 Peter 2:4) Now the word translated “ *hell*,” here is the Greek word “ *tartarus*,” and it seems to refer to a prison, an abode of these fallen angels. Now why were these fallen angels there ?

Well, just keep turning the pages of your Bible. Go to the Book of Jude. Now remember these fallen angels are in Tartarus, reserved in everlasting chains of darkness. Now look at (Jude 6) ***Now why did the Lord do that ?*** What terrible thing did they do that should bring such punishment to them ? Well, look at (Jude 7) He is saying that these fallen angels committed something that was similar to what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah. Well, what took place there ? *There was sexual deviation.* He is saying that these fallen angels got involved in sexual deviation. When did this happen ? Alright go back to (1 Pet 3:19-20) Peter says their terrible sin occurred in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared.

Now put your finger there and go back to (Gen 6:1-4) It seems that phrase “ *the sons of God*,” is a reference to fallen angels. Look at (Gen 6:2) Sexual deviation. These fallen angels came in bodily form and somehow had intercourse with human women. Now watch the result ? (Gen 6:4) You say, what was Satan’s purpose in all this ? ***To corrupt the lineage of Jesus Christ so that the Messiah could not come to redeem man.*** Now Satan gives you big problems, but Satan’s ultimate goal is God. Here was his attempt to infect the human line so that the Lord Jesus could not come. God solved the problem and sent the flood, eliminated what Satan had done, and placed these fallen angels in a place called Tartarus. It was there the Lord Jesus made His victorious proclamation ?

Well, what in the world did Christ preach ? The word that is used here is not the word for preaching the gospel, rather the word here (*kerusso*) means “ *to proclaim as an herald.*” It means to make an announcement. What did Christ announce ? What did He proclaim ? That He had fulfilled His mission. He had died for the sins of the world. That the work of salvation was accomplished. That their judgment was sure. That all of their attempts to sabotage the cross, to keep it from happening, were null and void. He went to that place to proclaim His victory at Calvary. What a wonderful Saviour we have. We have a Saviour who is Lord not only in heaven, who is Lord not only in this earth, but He is Lord under the earth, and the Bible says that one day “ *every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*” (Phil 2:10-11) (a) (b)

(c) CHRIST'S RESURRECTION:

For Peter says we are saved “ *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* ” (3:21) You see, He “ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” (Rom 4:25) There is nothing quite like the hope we derive from our Lord's resurrection. Every Easter we celebrate it. In fact every Lord's Day we're to be reminded of it.

*Death cannot keep his prey
Jesus my Saviour
He rose triumphantly
Jesus my Lord*

But don't stop there. You see, Peter touches upon,

(d) CHRIST'S ASCENSION:

“ *Who is gone into heaven,* ” what a day that must have been. To see our Lord go back to the place of glory in bodily form. What must it have been on the other side when the angels of glory were made subject unto them. I see the ascended Lord as He comes through the gates of glory “ *Lift up your heads, O ye gates and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory ? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle,* ” (Ps 24:7-8) He won the victory on the cross and now He carries the victory through the clouds into the presence of God. And oh, the angels, the thousands of angels, must have lined up on glory road when Jesus got back to heaven. When Jesus

went walking through glory with blood stains from dark Calvary. I wonder if the angels sang “ *Holy,* ” and fell in worship ? And how the Father must have greeted him and He gave to Him His position “ *on the right hand of God.* ” My that's where He's praying for you, that's where He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, that's where He is interceding for you. (1)

**(2) THE MINISTRY OF A COURAGEOUS
PREACHER**

For here Peter introduces us to Noah. Now Noah was held in very high esteem among Jewish people in Peter's day, and also among believers. Do you recall that Noah is linked with Daniel and Job, two great men in the Book of Ezekiel ? (14:19-20) Do you remember that the Lord Jesus refers to Noah in His prophetic sermon ? (Matt 24:37) He is also named with the heroes of faith in the Book of Hebrews (11:7) Now relationship did Peter see between his readers and the ministry of Noah ? Well for one thing, Noah ministered,

(a) AT A DIFFICULT TIME:

He was a preacher of righteousness during a very difficult period in history. In fact, as we have seen already Noah *walked with the Lord* (Gen 6:9) and *witnessed for the Lord* (2 Pet 2:5) in a period of sexual deviation. Surely the fact that he kept doing the will of God, when his ministry seemed to be a total failure must have been a tremendous encouragement to these suffering saints. Will you allow Noah to encourage you this ? “ *But he*

didn't know what it is to be opposed, ridiculed, reviled." I am sure he did? " But he didn't know what it is to live in a permissive society." I am sure he did. " But he didn't know what it is to " stand alone for the Lord," I am sure he did, and the God who enabled Him is your God whose resources are limitless. (Eph 3:20-21) (a)

(b) TO A DISTANT TIME:

That is, his ministry and the events relating to it were far reaching. For Peter sees here the flood as a picture or type of a Christian's experience of baptism. Look if you will at (3:20-21) *Now how does the flood symbolize baptism ?* The flood pictures death, burial, and resurrection. You see, the flood destroyed every living creature (Gne 7:21) buried the earth in judgment, but lifted Noah and his family up to safety. The early church saw in the ark a picture of salvation. Noah and his family were saved by faith because they believed God and entered into the ark of safety. So sinners are saved by faith when they trust Christ and become one with Him.

Now when Peter wrote that Noah and his family were saved through water he was careful to explain that this illustration does not imply salvation by baptism. Peter is not talking here about what some people call "*baptismal regeneration.*" Baptism is a figure of that which does save us, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (3:21) I tell you water on the body or the body placed in water cannot remove the stains of sin. (the filth of the flesh) Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that.

***What can wash away my sin
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
What can make me whole again
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.***

But do you know what ? *Baptism does save us from one thing. A bad conscience. For it provides us with " the answer of a good conscience toward God." (3:21)* The word "*answer,*" is a legal term, meaning "*a pledge.*" When a person was signing a contract he would be asked "*do you pledge to obey and fulfill the terms of this contract ?*" His answer had to be "*Yes I do,*" or he could not sign. Now when converts were prepared for baptism they would be asked if they intended to break with their sinful past, to obey and serve the Lord all the days of their lives. You see, Peter is reminding them of their baptismal testimony to encourage them to be true to their Lord. Tell me, have you been true to your baptismal pledge and testimony ?

You see, in baptism we are witnessing to the world that the old has gone, and the new has come, in baptism we are witnessing that we are dead to sin and alive to God. In baptism we are testifying that we belong to Christ, and that by His grace we mean to serve Him all the days of our lives. (Rom 6:11 2 Cor 5:17) Are you living up to that ? Do you know what it is to "*die daily,*" unto sin ? To walk in newness of life ? To walk with the Lord so that you are reflecting your new life in Christ ? Well, we have seen something here of the ministry of Christ and the ministry of Noah, but look finally at,

(3) THE MINISTRY OF AN AMBITIOUS BELIEVER

That is, of a believer who is not satisfied with “ *the status quo*,” but who wants to learn, to grow, to develop, to mature. This has been a difficult passage, but let me try and tie it together with some lessons we need to learn. We must learn to,

(a) **EXPECT HOSTILITY:**

The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, yet He was crucified like a common criminal. (3:18) Now if the “ *just One*,” who did no sin was treated cruelly, what right do we who are far from perfect have to escape suffering. My as the Coming of the Lord draws nigh, our well doing may incite the anger and attacks of godless people. The Lord Jesus said, “ *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*” (Jn 15:18-20) Paul wrote to Timothy, “ *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” (2 Tim 3:12) My if we live godly, Christ-centred lives we will inevitably come into conflict with the satanic world system. Indeed the day may come soon when we believers in the Western World will be physically persecuted, tortured, as the world escalates its hatred of the gospel. (a)

(b) **SERVE FAITHFULLY:**

Do you know something ? If we measured faithfulness by success, or by results where would Noah have been ? Would he not have got a low grade ? After all he kept only seven people from the flood. Yet God honoured him. A ministry of what ? ***One hundred and twenty years, yet only seven souls saved.*** From those seven souls we take courage. Christ appeared a total failure when He died on the cross, yet His death was a supreme victory. The cause of Jesus Christ may seem to stutter and fail, but He will build His church, He will accomplish His purposes, and we must learn to serve Him by faith and not trust in results. Are you a faithful servant ? Are you keeping your hand to the plough in spite of the apathy, the apostasy, the antagonism ? On a day yet future will you hear those words of commendation, “ *Well, done good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*” (Matt 25:23)

(c) **OBEY IMPLICITLY:**

For baptism is important. Some think we make too much of believers baptism. Someone has said “ *that when it comes to baptism, Baptists are all wet.*” We are all wet alright because we believe in baptism by immersion. We believe it because the Bible teaches it. You see, baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ . Now you can't picture death, burial, and resurrection by sprinkling. You just can't do it. Suppose I die and you take me over to Banbridge Cemetery. You say, “ *we're going to bury the preacher, and you sprinkle a little soil on my head and leave me to soak in the rain.*” Wouldn't that be a disgrace ? Now, if I die, I want you to bury me.

Now make sure I am dead first. But I want you to bury me, to put me under. The Bible says “ *we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father even so we also should walk in newness of life.* ” (Rom 6:4) My you can go to heaven without baptism but you can't have a good conscience toward God without it. Is this matter gnawing on you ? Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God. It doesn't save your soul, it does not bring you salvation, but it brings you satisfaction, for you do what God says do. (a) (b) (c)

(d) CULTIVATE URGENCY:

Some folk try to use this passage to prove a “ ***second chance for salvation after death.*** ” But such a view is at variance with the Word of God which plainly teaches that far from there being an opportunity to repent after death, there is only judgment to look forward to for “ *it is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment.* ” (Heb 9:27) In other words, death ends the opportunity for salvation. What does that mean for you ? It means that you need to get “ ***concerned,*** ” about evangelism and missions. It means that I need to be burdened for souls that are dying and yet unfit to die. My have we lost our sense of urgency ? Our sense of responsibility to the lost ? Have we failed to grasp that souls we rub shoulders with today, may be out of reach tomorrow ? The Lord Jesus said, “ *Say not ye, there are yet four months and then cometh harvest ? behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest.* ” (Jn 4:34) Therefore

“ *Son go work today in my vineyard.* ” (Matt 21:28) Will you go ? To the lost ? Today ? To tell them about this wonderful Saviour “ who is gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God.” (3:22) He has ascended the high hills of heaven. Christ has been crowned in glory, have you crowned Him in your heart ?