

Is Jesus In Your Heart Or At The

Right Hand of God?

1 Peter 3:18-22

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999*

The Right Hand of God

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I. The Just for the Unjust

“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” (1 Peter 3:18).

God is Just

During the last two sermons I pray we have been blessed by the examination of verse eighteen. We see in verse eighteen the divine justice of God being satisfied in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God is just. He therefore cannot acquit the guilty. God does not make deals. People are not released on technicalities. He does not ignore sin. Lives are laid bare before Him and the sins of each and every single person on earth demand His punishment. God is just and justice will be served.

God is Merciful

But God is not merely just. He is also merciful, loving and gracious. And because He is loving and gracious He determined not to leave man in a hopeless condition but sent His Son, Jesus, in the likeness of sinful flesh, though actually sinless, to represent mankind as our advocate and Savior of our souls. In order to fulfill this office Jesus had to suffer for our sins. We are unjust but He is just. The just suffered for the unjust. The wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus in our place. In this we see a divine picture of God's justice and mercy working in beautiful harmony. And not only that, we see the hope of mankind. For it is through this divine satisfaction that we have peace with our creator.

The Bar of God's Justice

For anyone who has any sense of justice whatsoever, they must recognize that in the final analysis, Jesus is their only hope. For if there is such a thing called justice it had to come from someplace. And if there is a thing called justice, surely you must recognize that the exercise of justice toward you will be your undoing. It is a frightening thing indeed – to consider standing before the bar of God's justice naked and alone. It is a different prospect altogether to stand there clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We are to seek Him while He might be found.

II. Spirits Now in Prison

In the Spirit

Peter tells us that Jesus was put to death in the flesh but was **“made alive in the spirit”** (NASB). This is an obvious allusion to the cross. The victory of Christ is demonstrated by His power over death itself. But Peter seems to use this as a springboard into another subject; that “in the spirit” or working within the spiritual realm Jesus did something. **“In which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison”** (NASB).

Some of the Views

This is a very problematic verse. And I don’t wish to use the entire sermon going over all the arguments given for all the views. I personally take rank with the view of Augustine and I will tell you why in a second. First, some of the positions held are:

1. After Christ died he went and preached to people in hell, offering them a second chance of salvation. This would be inconsistent with the overwhelming number of scriptures which teach of the great chasm fixed between heaven and hell.

2. He preached to people in hell, proclaiming His triumph over them and their condemnation was final. This is the standard Lutheran view and my greatest question would be why would Jesus only proclaim this to those souls in prison from the days of Noah and not all history?

3. Jesus proclaimed release to people who had repented just before they died in the flood, and led them out of their imprisonment (in purgatory) into heaven. This is the a Roman Catholic view that began in 1586 by Robert Bellarmine. Of course this presupposes the existence of purgatory which is unbiblical.

4. Another view is that Jesus traveled to hell and proclaimed triumph over the fallen angels who had sinned by marrying human women before the flood. Again I would have to ask what the purpose of that would be and what of all the other fallen angels? I believe the view of Augustine to be the most tenable and applicable to the context of Peter.

Augustine’s View

To properly understand this, let’s take a quick look at 1 Peter 1:11 where Peter is writing about the prophets of the Old Testament that they were **“Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”** What we see here is that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets of old. I think we need to understand the Spirit of Christ, preaching through Noah in the same way. That while God patiently waited 120 years for the disobedient contemporaries of Noah to repent, Noah, by the Spirit of Christ, preached to them – these people whose spirits are now in prison. In case this is too confusing allow me to read an extended paraphrase from Wayne Grudem:

“In the spiritual realm of existence Christ went and preached through Noah to those who are now spirits in prison of hell. This happened when they formerly disobeyed, when the patience of God was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

Not only is this position theological and grammatically sound but it also fits the context of Peter's purpose. This example of Noah would be of help as Peter sought to encourage his readers, which include us, in a number of ways.

A Comparison for Encouragement

First, Noah was in a small minority of believers surrounded by a group of hostile unbelievers. So were Peter's readers and so might we feel a great deal of the time.

2. Noah was righteous through this and Peter exhorts his readers to be righteous in the face of unrighteousness as well.

3. Noah witnessed boldly to the unbelievers around him and warned them of the upcoming judgment. Peter exhorts his readers to do the same even though they might be scoffed at.

4. Christ, though unseen, was preaching through Noah. Peter exhorts his readers to sanctify Christ in their hearts that, though He is unseen, He is very much at work.

5. During the time of Noah God waited patiently but judgment was sure. The message remains the same. The wheels of God's justice grind slowly but they grind to powder.

6. Noah was rescued with a few others. Peter encourages his readers to realize that, like Noah and his family, they too will be saved.

III. Baptism

Saved Through Water

It is of interest to note that Peter writes, **“in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.”** As you're reading this it would seem more natural to say that they were saved through the ark. How is it they were saved through water? Simon Kistemaker suggests (and I agree) that when Noah went into the ark he **“left behind a sea of iniquity...Noah's family left the ark and knew that God had saved them from being drowned by an ocean of human corruption”** Peter is about to make a statement of comparison between the symbolism of the waters of the flood and the waters of baptism. **“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism” (1 Peter 3:21a).** Kistemaker states that,

“...as the flood waters cleansed the earth of man's wickedness, so the water of baptism indicates man's cleansing from sin. As the flood separated Noah and his family from the wicked world of their day, so baptism separates believers from the evil world of our day.”¹

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker's Commentary on 1 Peter, pp. 146,147.

Not the Removal of Filth from Flesh

And to avoid confusion, Peter immediately states, **“(not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God)” (1 Peter 3:21)**. In other words, that it is not the sacrament of baptism which saves but that which it is a sign of. The divines of Westminster addressed this issue in chapter 27, chapter 2.

“In every sacrament there is a spiritual relationship or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified. And so the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

Ananias might have said to Paul, “get up be baptized and wash your sins away.” Thus acknowledging the spiritual relationship between the sacrament of baptism and the spiritual act of baptism. But this in no way suggests that mere water can or does bring a sinner before God with a good conscience. In other words we cannot separate the sign from the thing signified. Baptism as an outward rite. And though God may use it as a means of grace to the person receiving it and those around, putting water on somebody, in and of itself, will not yield a good conscience before God. The folly of thinking that you can stand before God with an unsaved, uncircumcised heart and appeal to a day when you had water sprinkled on you has been the demise of many poor souls – mostly Roman Catholics.

Baptized into Christ’s Death

The baptism which saves is, by the grace of God, being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The old man dies and the new man lives. The appeal of a good conscience that is now obtained before God finds as it’s source of power the resurrection of Jesus Himself. There is no human behavior, not ritual, no prayer, no thought, not even a sacrament that can purge the conscience and allow a man to stand naked before the living God justified. Paul says Jesus was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). Apart from faith in the resurrected Savior the conscience remains defiled and man estranged from His creator.

IV. The Right Hand of God

The Alien Righteousness

And although Jesus is to be sanctified as Lord in our hearts – and although His Spirit dwells in the hearts of the saints – He is not in our hearts, nor is He found in the hearts of men but He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God. I should not be tempted to look for Him in the world, not even my own heart. But as His Spirit dwells in me I am called to look outside of myself to the alien righteousness of another – of Christ. I do not fix my eyes on my own heart but on Jesus who is at the right hand of God.

All Authority

And lest I think that Satan has charge over men and things (a common error of many modern teachers) and perhaps doubt Christ's providential hand in every detail, including His power to overcome my sin and save my soul, Peter tell us that **“angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22).**

Believe and be Baptized

There is a kingdom. And the King of that kingdom is the King of kings. But unlike any other king His love for His people expressed itself by Him immersing Himself in the depravity of His adulterous bride. He also immerses (baptizes) His adulterous bride in His own unique and holy righteousness. It is called the good news and I pray that you would call on His name for entrance into His kingdom is refused to no one who calls on His name. If you have not yet, I would encourage to call on His name, believe in your heart, repent and be baptized. If you would be baptized as a sign of God's gracious work in your life, please see me that we might obey Christ in the administration of this sacrament.