

1 Peter 3:18-22

## The Sure Hope of Our Salvation

### PRAY

At the center of Christianity stands a Cross. But not just any cross, the Cross of Christ. From that Cross, Christ has accomplished salvation for us. Christ and Christ alone is the only way for us to be made right with God. And since he has come and accomplished salvation from the Cross, we who were once slaves to sin are now sons of God. Of all the teachings of Scripture we better get the Cross right. The Cross is the centerpiece of our salvation. But what on earth is the teaching of the Cross?

We are in the second week of our study of the doctrines that sealed the protest from the Roman Church, the Protestant Reformation, known simply at the 5 *Solas* or 5 Alones. These 5 truths help us correctly articulate the gospel of grace. Last week I presented a sentence to you that helps us understand the gospel of grace:

*Salvation (our only hope in life and death), according to Scripture, is through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, to God's glory alone.*

From that sentence, we can see the movements of the gospel of grace: Grounded in Scripture, effected through Christ, by Grace, through Faith, for God's glory. Today we focus on the second *Sola* – Christ Alone. Here is what we mean when we say Christ alone:

*Christ alone means Jesus is the unique Son of the Father and has accomplished everything necessary for our salvation.*

A key Scripture that helps us see this truth is Colossians 1:13-20. Listen to it:

*He (The Father) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be*

*preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

All those truths are ours because of Christ alone. We need these truths not just on occasions, but every hour. And sometimes, if we are honest, the waves of this present life batter against our hope attempting leave us hopeless. How should we respond to the doctrine of Christ alone?

Turn with me to 1 Peter. Because we are committed to the Authority of Scripture at Oxford we want to see these truths rise from the text. We began teaching on the Authority of Scripture from 2 Peter last week and that prompted a question in my mind. Can we see the 5 Solas of the Reformation from the writings of Peter? I think we can and I want to show you over the next few weeks that these 5 truths are truths that rise from the text and are not truths that have been inserted into the text. So, to show you Christ Alone, I want us to look to 1 Peter 3:18-22. Before we get to our text, we need the context. In this first letter, Peter is writing to a group of Christians who are scattered because of persecution. Listen to what he says in 1 Peter 1:3-12:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the*

*things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.*

Peter is grounding our hope in the finished word of the Cross. Why? Because, as Edward Mote taught us back in 1843:

*My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly trust in Jesus name.  
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.*

And,

*When darkness veils his lovely face,  
I rest on his unchanging grace;  
In every high and stormy gale  
My anchor holds within the veil.  
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.*

This leads us into our text this morning. 1 Peter 3:18-22. Peter is writing to believers who are suffering.

## READ TEXT

What does suffering for the cause of Christ have to do with the doctrine of Christ Alone? Christ who came and died calls us to follow him. He who came and died calls us to come and die so that by dying we may live. That sounds strange, doesn't it? We can know what living is by our dying? However, this is the gospel. At the center of Christianity is the Cross of Christ. How strange. God shows us himself as God our Savior through a Cross. He doesn't come as a rich and powerful man, not a political man, not even a poor man. Instead he reveals himself to us as God through a Cross. He doesn't show himself to us as God almighty by moving mountains or

throwing lightning bolts, not that he doesn't do the miraculous but his miracles are almost unnoticed by the larger audience. Instead he shows us himself by the way that he dies.

Think with me for just a moment. Death is the epitome of our weakness. We had nothing to do with our arrival, no freedom, we were powerless. Then we arrive into a world in which we will die. You can be religious all you want, try to do all the good that you want and still you will surely die. Death is the only thing that all of humanity has in common. And it is at this exact point – death – that God shows us himself. Christ alone has taken death and turned it inside out. Death is not the end, death is the beginning. Christ, by conquering death, has shown himself to be stronger than death and has secured our salvation.<sup>1</sup>

This is the hope that Peter seeks to ground us - the hope of Christ alone. Very quickly I want to make a few observations from this text so that our hope will be secure in the finished work of the Son.

### **1. Salvation in Christ Means Our Hope is Secure (The context of 18-22)**

We don't suffer like other people suffer. We suffer as Christians and sometimes for Christ. As Christians, meaning that the Cross gives us a new way to view all things, including these light and momentary afflictions that we encounter. All of our struggles and trials are preparing us for an eternal wright of glory. We now have a new reality in Christ. We have died, and our lives are hid with Christ. Our hope was secured by a hammer and three nails – Christ on the Cross.

Suffering often comes as we give answers for us just being who we are.<sup>2</sup> When these moments come, we don't think it strange. Instead, the opposite is true. The world thinks us strange. Remember what happened to the apostles when they were arrested and beaten for preaching the gospel? Acts tell us, *and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.* (Acts 5:40-42)

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<sup>1</sup> See Behr, *Becoming Human*.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

What kind of hope is this? A hope that anchors our souls to the eternal weight of his glory.

## 2. Salvation in Christ Means the Wrath of God Has Been Satisfied

We will never understand the love for us displayed on the Cross until we feel the crushing weight of our sin, until we see the depth of our fall. The wrath of God is not a popular subject today. Just 4 years ago, back in 2013 the Presbyterian Church (USA) decided not to include one of the best modern, and my favorite hymn, *In Christ Alone*. The reason, one phrase, in the second verse:

*In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save.  
'Till on that Cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied;  
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid –  
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

They asked the writers if they would change the line, “Till on that Cross as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified.” The writers responded with a single word – No! The PCUSA decided to leave it the hymn out of the hymnal thus removing it from over 10,000 churches across America.

This wouldn't be a big deal if it wasn't for the witness of Scripture. Read verse 18. This idea of dismissing the wrath of God is not new. It began to get some traction with a guy named Marcion. Marcion was called the Father of the Heretics by Irenaeus. Marcion was the guy who popularized the idea that the Bible presents two different God's – the God of the Old Testament, the wrathful God, and Christ – the loving, forgiving God. Here is what Tertullian said about Marcion's ideas: *A better god has been discovered, one who is neither offended nor angry nor inflicts punishment, who has no fire warming up in hell, and no outer darkness wherein there is shuddering and gnashing of teeth: he is merely kind.*<sup>3</sup> Such a picture of God doesn't equate with this fact: Christ died for sin, for unrighteousness, so that he might bring us to God. We were separated from God and then Christ brought us near to Him through the blood of His cross.

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<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.27.

The next verses, those hard verses, show the satisfying victory of God. This language of him descending to hell in verse 19 refers, I believe to what we have in Colossians 2:15. Christ descended into death and paraded his victory over death. How was he able to do this? The wrath of God, which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, has been satisfied in Christ. What does that mean? It means the wrath reserved for us he took upon himself. Instead of us bearing the wrath of God, we bear the love of God.

Think with me. Why did Jesus have to die such a cruel death on an old rugged Cross? He had to bear the wrath of God. And he did so for us. If we dismiss the wrath of God then we have no answer for the cruelty of the Cross. But if we embrace the Cross, we have a sin bearer, we have the assurance that the Holy God of whose majesty we have profaned has been completely satisfied.

And since he died for sin, his death for us means the end of sin.

### **Salvation in Christ Means the End of Sin**

The way to remove the stain of sin is by the shedding of blood. This is how egregious sin is – only the shedding of blood can bring forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). This is what God has done for us by sending the Son. Look again at verse 18. *Christ also suffered once for sins....* Remember what John the Baptist said about Jesus when he saw him coming to him for baptism – *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* How does a lamb take away sin? He has to be spotless and then slaughtered.

Think about the extravagance of the Cross. There is sin, sin has brought about the wrath of God. This wrath has to be satisfied. The wrath is satisfied through sacrifice. Whose wrath needs to be satisfied? God's. Who brought about the wrath of God because of sin? Us. How is the wrath of God satisfied? Sacrifice. Who provides the sacrifice? God. God provides the sacrifice to atone, to cover, our own sin. His death brought an end of sin.

Because of the Work of God in Christ. We are right with God.

### **3. Salvation in Christ Means We Are Right with God**

He has restored our relationship to God. How? Through his death. God subjected himself to death so that we who believe in him would never die. God dying doesn't mean that he ceased to exist, no more than it means that we cease to exist when we die – that's not what it means to die. How in the world could God die? He had to bleed. How can God bleed? He had to become flesh. Did God become flesh? Yes, in the Incarnation of the Son. Without ceasing to be what he was he became what he was not. That is, he, without ceasing to be what he has always been –

God – became what he had never been – Man – all so that he could make us what he is – the perfection of God. Not that we become gods but that we become God’s. We belong to God, and he belongs to us. We are partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

He had to become like us so that he could heal us. He became man because man needed saving. And as Irenaeus said, “What has not been assumed has not been healed.” He became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God. He substituted himself for our sin, he died a death that should have been ours. He had no reason other than his love for us to die. He didn’t deserve death but died motivated by his love for us.

Which leads us to our final point.

#### **4. Salvation in Christ Is Sufficient**

Look at the rest of the verses in 1 Peter 3. Peter uses baptism the same what that Paul does in Romans 6. Peter uses the ark and baptism to point to the sufficiency of the Cross. All of these thoughts flow out of verse 18. Look at the last part of verse 18 – *made alive in the Spirit*. That refers to the Spirit breathing the breath of life back into Jesus’ dead body and causing him who was dead to experience resurrection. Look at verse 21 and 22. Because he has accomplished salvation through his death on the Cross, he has secured the hope of our salvation. We trust in Christ alone.

Do you trust in Christ alone for your salvation? I run into so many people and I ask them a question, “How do you know you are right with God?” Nine out of 10 start telling me how good they are and how they have done this and that. You know what that does? That kind of reasoning says that the work of Christ on the Cross is insufficient, is not enough. The sure hope of our salvation is Christ alone.

As we sang earlier

*My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly trust in Jesus name.  
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Can you sing that and mean it?