

1 Peter 3:18-22 “How the Lord saves us”

(1 Pet 3:18 NIV) “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

“He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, (19) through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison (20) who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

“In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, (21) and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.

“It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

Peter brought a lot to the table in our text.
To follow all his logic takes concentration.

Unfortunately, we cannot start with verse 18, where our reading begins.

Note that the word “*For*” begins our text. “*For*” refers to something that has already been established.

We have to go back several spaces to understand Peter’s reasoning here.

Otherwise it is like sitting in a math class and working on one of those famous story problems.

Recall those thought-provoking story questions we used to get in school?

It is 100 miles (really 86) from Milwaukee to Chicago.

If a train leaves Chicago at noon traveling north at 80 miles per hour and another train leaves Milwaukee at noon traveling south at 90 miles per hour, at which mile marker will they meet and at what time?

Some could easily work that problem in their heads.

Imagine someone presenting the problem, but not telling you when the trains depart.

I know little about math, but I am certain that you cannot solve the problem unless you receive all the pertinent information.

We cannot understand this text today unless we go back and figure out “when the trains left” so to speak.

Let’s push our analogy a little further.

Suppose that you are a railroad dispatcher, and there is only one track.

The track has no signals.

You need to know when and where those trains might meet so you can warn those on board. You know what is in store for them, otherwise.

How does this relate to our text?

Have you recently considered that you are on a collision course with death?

We are all on a high-speed life-track that eventually collides with death.

We need to know how to deal with that fact.

Our verses tell us how to do that in a positive, loving way.

But we cannot read this text without reading several verses before and after.

Once we do that we can do more than cope.

We can live powerful, victorious lives.

In order to do that, here is the necessary “train” information.

We all struggle with loneliness, guilt, hate, war, fear, death, and family relationships.

Folks often say things like the following:

“He doesn’t love me.”

“She doesn’t understand my needs.”

One Sunday school teacher told of her frustration in another situation:

“I was testing the children in my Sunday school class to see if they understood the idea of getting to heaven. I asked them, ‘If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church. Would that get me into Heaven?’

”NO!” the children answered.

”If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?”

“Again, the answer was, ‘NO!’

“By now I was starting to smile. Hey, this was fun!

‘Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my husband, would that get me into Heaven?’ I asked them again.

“Again, they all answered, ‘NO!’

“I was just bursting with pride for them.

‘Well,’ I continued, ‘Then, how can I get into Heaven?’ A five-year-old boy shouted out,
‘YOU GOTTA BE DEAD.’”

Few of us recognize that all of us are as good as dead.

As Paul said to the Ephesians (2:1):

“**You were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you used to live.”**

If we are as good as dead, how can we live?

1. First, Jesus gave us a perfect example.

So how did Jesus act?

What did he do?

He endured insults and suffering.

They beat him, spit in his face, mocked him, and pounded nails through his hands.

They humiliated him on a cross naked, exposed, and in agonizing pain.

Though innocent, he never fought back and never hated his tormentors.

He died pleading, “**Father, forgive them.”**

He died and was buried, but three days later came back from the dead.

He promised us that we can share in his resurrection.

If you want to follow me, he said, here’s the game plan.

You will succeed only if you follow it.

After a couple of trying days a few years ago, I sat down to watch the end of two college basketball games--the last 4-5 minutes of each.

In each game, the favored team lost.

The coaches formed excellent game plans.

They likely diagrammed plays and prepped the players on dealing with certain situations.

2. Here is the game plan Jesus left us for winning heaven.

People usually fail because they don't follow the Lord's game plan.

A prior verse in 1 Peter (1:13) reads:

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action.”

My racquetball instruction book reads:
“Don't go out onto the court without being ready to be aggressive against your opponent. Don't just react. Go at your opponent with your game.”

Next Peter wrote: **“be self-controlled.”**

In one of those basketball games, a player drove recklessly toward the basket and a commentator said of him: **“He was out of control.”**

**Do you follow Jesus's game-plan for life?
“Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”**

Are your eyes fixed on Jesus return?

Much of 1 Peter 2 is dedicated to Peter's advice us how to stay under control.

Peter outlined Jesus' game plan for us as Christian citizens, even slaves (now employees), employers, wives, and husbands.

To each group, Peter repeated this theme: “Don't retaliate--even if you are innocent.”

“Bless your enemies.”

Jesus' teachings and his actions are our game plan.

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”¹

The above is our example.

**Coach Jesus showed us how to play:
“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”**

¹ 1 Pet 2:23, 24 NIV

Throughout 1 Peter, the apostle brings us back to the same theme:

Don't retaliate. Bless your enemies.

Notice how Peter repeated the theme.

- **“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” (3:9)**
- **“Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” (3:14)**
- **“Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.” (4:1)**
- **“So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”(4:19) The above are (NIV).**

In the midst of these statements about non-retaliation and blessing enemies, Peter gives our text today:

‘It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.’

Here an example of how this works:

Watchman Nee told the story of a Chinese Christian who owned a rice paddy. His neighbor was a communist. To irrigate his rice paddy, the Christian pumped water manually out of a nearby canal. Each day, after the Christian had pumped enough water to fill his field, the communist would come out and remove some boards that kept the water in the Christian's field. In this way he flooded his own field without having to do any work.

The Christian was beside himself with rage. Not knowing where else to turn, he took his complaint to God. The Lord, hearing his prayer, gave him an answer. The next morning the Christian arose much earlier and started pumping water into the field of his communist neighbor. Then he replaced the boards and

pumped water into his own rice paddy. In a few weeks both fields of rice were doing well. Not only that, his communist neighbor came to Christ.

That is how it is done. We seek reconciliation. If that doesn't work, and sometimes it doesn't, then we turn the situation over to God. We pray, "Lord, I've done all I can. I've tried to make things right. Nothing has worked. Now it's up to you. Whatever happens, please take the ache of anger and resentment out of my heart before it becomes destructive to me and to others."

Do you have a better way for dealing with anger? I think not.

Many, many people mess up their lives and the lives of others because they choose destructive ways to handle anger and resentment.²

“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

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² I have lost the source of this Watchman Nee example.