

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
July 2, 2017

Today, Not Tomorrow

1 Peter 3:18-22

3:18 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,
3:19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,
3:20 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.
3:21 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,
3:22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

We sometimes encounter the confusing sections in the Bible. Some of them are verses 19 and 20 of today's reading. Here it describes that Jesus went down to the land of deaths, called Hades, after His cross and visited to the spirits passed away by the flood in Noah's generation. This story could be well known by the early Christians, yet Christians of present time like us don't quite understand why Peter indicated by means of Noah's flood in this context.

When you read the Bible pretty first time, you can't make too much effort to understand in details; you may prefer to simply proceed. There are some essential points we need for our salvation and nourishing our faith, yet God marks them very clearly to let us

recognize right after reading. Thus, while the beginner of reading the Bible, it'd be better for you to understand the simple-but-important things. After guided into faith, read and learn the simple stories of the Bible pretty much, however, you might love to study the suggestive sections like today, to solve your questions in detail. While the process, you would discover the truth and could comprehensively read the Bible.

Now, here is the very important tip of reading the Bible; you can't add your preference to the sentences. You should distinguish what is written and what is not written. It's accepted and welcomed to discover the truth, yet we have to be careful not to reflect our preference out of the Bible. If we read the Bible within our preference too much, it could authorize the things not taught in the Bible as the teaching of the Bible by ourselves. It's the wrong way to avoid.

Furthermore, we should read the Bible, and even other books, following the context in order to adequately understand. Today's verses, also, we shall distinguish what is written, if we concern about the meanings of the verses in 1 Peter, and refer to other sections and verses in the Bible.

1. Christ's Sufferings and Glory

So, what the context of today's verses begun from verse 18 in the First Letter of Peter. Peter taught Christians to glorify Jesus as their Lord, and live justly to witness Jesus, even when they were suffered from the manner of this world. Stand firm, not to be afraid or disappointed. Also, look up Jesus Christ, who came down to earth as the servant of suffering and was resurrected as the Lord of glory.

The Christ's descending to Hades and the flood of Noah are the parentheses. If we read the sentences by skipping these, we can easily follow the context. "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... 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." We'll see, here it writes about Christ's death on the cross, resurrection and ascension. It's repeatedly written in the Bible; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Philippians 2:5-11, 1 Timothy 3:16, and so on. These verses say that the sufferings and glory, or the cross and resurrection of Christ is the theme of the Bible (1 Peter 1:10-11). It is the "gospel" or "mystery of faith" which saves us. We will be saved by believing that the cross and resurrection was for me.

Jesus Christ came down to earth from heaven. He furthermore went down to the deepest place, death on the cross, and visited to Hades, the world of dead souls. However, He won against death and was resurrected, then risen in the glory of heaven. This shows clear shape of letter "V", and surely means Victory. We, the believers in Jesus Christ cannot overcome the sufferings in the world by our efforts. We can overcome them only to be connected to Christ by faith, and receive the victory which Christ has already won for us. So, Peter taught that the believers shared the sufferings of Christ when they suffered because of faith. Peter encouraged them they would receive the glory with Christ when they were suffered for Him. The early Christians experienced the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ in their daily life. The cross and resurrection was not only the event

outside of them, on on the hill of Calvary.

2. Christ's Declaration of Victory

When we read today's scripture focusing on suffering and glory of Christ, we begin to understand the meaning of verse 19 "in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison." This means that Lord Jesus anticipated upcoming Resurrection and Ascension and that He proclaimed that He is the Lord.

Jesus Christ says in Matthew 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," but we can see that Jesus is not only the Lord of heaven and earth, but also the Lord over the realm of all the dead. Jesus Christ judges the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Jesus is indeed the sovereign Lord and the Lord of hosts.

Christians in the days of Peter strongly believed and hoped that Christ would be back while they were alive. Therefore, they were worried if the believers who died of sickness, old age or persecution without witnessing the Second Coming of Christ would really see the glory of Christ. However, the fact that Jesus went underneath was a big comfort to the believers, because He proclaimed the fulfillment of salvation and gave hope of resurrection to those souls, who could not see it and died with faith. Psalm 139:8 says "If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" And this verse is fulfilled by Jesus Christ. As Romans 8:38-39 says, if Lord Jesus Christ rules Hades and death, they will be able to separate us

from Jesus.

3. Invitation to Repentance

Verse 19 said that Jesus went down to the land of death and visited a specific place. It was a “prison” in Hades. It was the place that a judge had determined and no hope existed there. There were the people who “formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared.” Noah called everyone “The world will be destroyed by flood, get into the ark and be saved!” However, they ignored his invitation and chose to be perished.

In any generations, there were people who lived for their own sake; but, why does the Scripture feature the happening of Noah's flood? Because it is that “Noah's flood” was the final judgment of the old world. Later, God promised not to destroy the world by flood; however, the current world will be destroyed by fire according to 2 Peter 3: 5-7. It says, “But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these wasters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” Noah's flood was the first judgment, and the type for the second and final judgment. The reason why Peter used “Noah's flood” here was to warn the people facing to the final judgment.

The Scripture describes the world before the flood, saying, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

in Genesis 6:5. Even though they were wicked, God sent them warning in order to be saved from the flood. What a generosity and patience of God! But, people trampled on God's generosity and patience. Everyone could see the ark, which saved them; but they did not get into the ark.

Many of modern people hear the Word of God, but do not answer; they can see the gate of salvation in front of them, but don't enter. We can't laugh at the people destroyed by the flood. We are doing the same things. But, God has been patient for us in order to save more people. 2 Peter 3:9 reads "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

God is waiting for us as He was waiting people before the flood of Noah. Noah was the witness of God's tolerance and patience in his days, but now Christians are the witnesses of the love and grace of God. The ark was the means of the salvation ago, but now the Cross is the sign of the salvation. And we in this dispensation will be saved by repentance and baptism, as Noah and his family were saved through water.

God said, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."(2 Corinthians 6:2) The Holy Spirit also said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness" God is merciful. He's waiting patiently for us to return Him. However, there is a time limit we can answer God, as every thing has an expiration date. No one can answer God after the date. The time limit

is when we leave the earth; the hour of our death. And, no one knows when it is. Therefore, God earnestly call us to have faith today, not tomorrow, and now, not later.

When Noah and his family entered in the ark, “the LORD shut him in.”(Genesis 7:16) This action meant that God gave secured protection of the crews of the ark. But, it also meant God’s probation time finished. The end time will come to the life of everyone sooner or later. Before the end time, receive the Lord today. Follow Him with repentance now.

(Prayer)

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You sent Your Son Jesus to Hades for our salvation. We can be saved from sin, death, and judgment by the sufferings and glory of Lord Jesus. We can live with power and die in peace because of Lord Jesus. Our life and death are in His hands. The Lord is with the believers always and everywhere. Lead us to live our daily life with the Lord. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.