

1 Peter 3:15-22 **May 25, 2014**

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 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.

Intro: God's truth of the world-wide flood is so often challenged. I'm going to show you one person's assault. As you hear it, think about what is at stake:

- "I can think of no superior example thoroughly demonstrating why the Bible is not the holy word of any deity than the tale of Noah and his ark. ... The story's utter ridiculousness is probably why many polls indicate that an increasing number of Christians no longer claim a literal belief in the Old Testament." Source: an anti-Christian internet post

God answers:

- *"Every word of the Lord is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."* – Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 18:30
- *"The words of the Lord are flawless... O Lord, you will keep us safe and protect us forever from such people [who malign us]."* – Psalm 12:5-6

Even when the Flood is presented as a world-wide event, the main point – the central meaning – is often rejected and changed into something completely foreign to the Bible. That's what happened in the Hollywood movie *Noah* released 2 months ago. With its multi-million dollar budget, it depicted the earth-reeling effects of a global flood. But the movie is a thoroughly pagan, anti-Christian retelling of the Noah account. It "cast" "the Creator" as intent upon killing everyone, including Noah and his family, while Russell Crowe depicts a Noah who is a confused, sometimes bordering-on or crossing-into homicidal maniac.

How would you like a god like the movie version? That's not our God.

The Flood, yes, brought judgment on the unbelievers of the world. But don't miss: this was after 120 years of "the patience of God waiting patiently in the days of Noah" (vs.20). The time Noah spent building the ark was time God – through Noah – spent calling/reaching out. The ark could have held more passengers. Everyone else in the world rejected their need. This was no rash, ill-timed, temper-driven act on God's part.

And don't miss the other side of when and why God sent the flood. See what God did through this for all the believers left in the world. God used the water to lift them in the ark above the destruction. God saved them from death by means of the water.

Here is where we arrive at the point of comparison Peter makes with Baptism:

Look at the reason Peter brings up the flood. Peter shows an important point of connection that God wants us to see between the flood and baptism. Vs.21 – *“This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you.”*

God's truth of what really occurs in baptism is so often challenged.

- “...people now mock at Baptism, ignore the Word and decree of God, see in it nothing but the water..., and then rattle on ‘How can a handful of water help a soul?’” – Large Catechism, Martin Luther

Even many groups that baptize lose the main point. They change or reject the central meaning.

- Here are two views that are heard in Christian churches... only one is correct... Either we are offering something to God / making some covenant or commitment to him, or God is powerfully doing something for us / showering blessings upon us.

God tells us what baptism is in 1 Peter 3:21. Look: *“This water”* – that is referring to the water of the flood, which God used to save the 8 on the ark – *“points our attention now to baptism: baptism saves you and me. Baptism is not the removal of filth from the flesh. No, it is rather this: the pledge [better translation: answer] of a good conscience toward God.”*

What's the only way any one of us can stand before our holy God with a “good”/clear conscience? That's only possible if sin is all removed. We've all sinned. Denying it doesn't change that. All self-remedies fail to clean/clear one's record. If you still have your sin, then you know from God's Word that you must fear God's punishment.

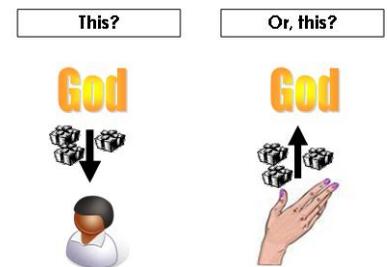
But God comes in his Word and brings you the answer: Baptism is a washing - not for the dirt that gets on the outside of your body, but for the sin that stains your soul. God gifts faith and washes away your sin through baptism. That is God's message right here, and in passages like Acts 2:38 *“Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (see also: Ephesians 5:25-27).

Now that we have clearly laid out what God does for us in baptism...

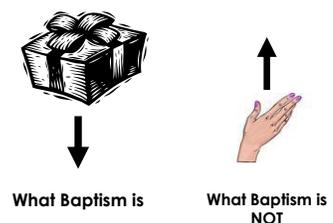
Let's see how this is connected with the rest of what Peter says here. Peter goes on in vs.21: *“Baptism saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

You see how the truth of baptism is wrapped in this section on everything Jesus has done to rescue/save us. Follow the list through: (vs.18-20a,21b-22)

What is BAPTISM?



BAPTISM is a gracious GIFT of God, NOT a good work done by humans.



- [project these] *“Christ died for sins **once for all** the righteous one for the unrighteous ones to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body”*

Yes, that’s the extent – the extreme – He went to in our behalf.

Yes, his body rested lifeless on the cross, and then in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. But remember the words of Jesus from the cross: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” As soon as Jesus died, His spirit was with the Father.

Easter morning Jesus’ spirit returned to his body, which had been cold and lifeless in the tomb the past 3 days. Peter writes:

- *“He was made alive by the spirit.”* His body surged with life: heart beating, blood flowing, lungs gulping in air.

Body and spirit reunited... What next?

- *“He went and preached to the spirits in prison.”* What does this mean?

He journeys to hell. Why? To suffer? No. His suffering was done on the cross. Does he journey there to give the spirits there a 2nd chance to believe? No. The Bible is clear: a person’s chance to hear and believe is during their lifetime here on earth. Hebrews 9:27 says: [project this] *“man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”* Then what was Jesus doing there? The message “preached” by Jesus was that of a champion proclaiming his victory over his enemies – the outcome of the battle – the declaration that he conquered sin, death, devil and hell!

And the Holy Spirit inspires Peter to make this event of Jesus’ triumphal descent known to us. Why? It is for our confidence and comfort! We, through Scripture, see Jesus make the public spectacle that shows: “Satan, you struck my heel. But I have crushed your head. Your judgment is sealed. And you have no claim on any soul who has faith in me.”

To us, his people, Jesus says:

- *“I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”* Revelation 1:17-18

“Don’t be afraid.” – Revelation 1:17

Friends, Peter tells us: Jesus’ resurrection is the foundation - the power - in baptism. Baptism saves. Baptism saves because God’s Word promises that: Jesus’ saving work is given here (with the gift of faith, all God’s blessings are wrapped up and gifted to you here – forgiveness & salvation). See the awesome work of God in baptism:

- Galatians 3:26-27 – *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*

- Acts 2:38-39 – *“Be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*
- Col 2:12-13 *“you have been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins... God made you alive with Christ...”*
- Romans 6:4-5 *“we were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”*

Now, look on to the close of Peter’s words in Vs.22 - *“Baptism saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”* Our God, our Savior, lives and reigns over all.

You’ll meet many people who take the Bible’s account of the Flood and mock it, and ridicule whoever believes it. They’ll pick at other parts of the Bible that display God’s power and grace, in attempts to reason them away. There are those who empty baptism of its meaning, claiming it is only a symbol or twisting it into an act of obedience on their part. They fail to trust God’s simple, clear Word on the matter. They may question you about what you believe. I’ve had family and friends who have had individuals challenge them over whether they are really Christian at all, when they were simply holding to God’s truth about baptism. Be ready for things like that.

But don’t fear such situations. There is no need to fear what someone might do, or say, to you as you give an answer for the hope you have. The truths Peter gives here in ch.3 provide you strength and comfort to set apart Jesus as Lord. – Set apart Jesus as Lord! – Trust Him. Trust His Word. You need not worry about the response you’ll receive in return. If you are dishd something painful or unpleasant to deal with, your comfort when you suffer like that for doing good is: you are secure in Jesus’ saving work for you, and in the assurance that He lives and reigns over all for you. He’s got you in his hand, he’s not letting go, and everything in all creation is under his rule. He will work out everything for your good. Continue in your faith in Him. Trust him, as you continue to honor and serve Him – your Jesus – as Lord.