

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity, November 18, 2012**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 425, 427:7, 437, 428, 16:4.

Lessons: Daniel 12:1-3, Hebrews 10:11-18, John 5:25-29.

Sermon Text: I Peter 3:18-22

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

The first Epistle of Peter tells believers in Christ about suffering as followers of Christ. It does not speak of suffering as a punishment for doing evil, but as suffering for doing good. Peter writes: *"If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."* I Pet. 2:20-21 Christ was an example of suffering for doing good. For he is the holy Son of God and he suffered innocently for wicked mankind. Christ's example is an encouragement to us to willingly follow in his steps and bear the suffering that results from leading a Christian life.

What our text brings out is that Christ is also much more than an example to us. He is above all our Savior who innocently suffered to redeem us, the dear Savior who humbled himself and became our divine Substitute so that we might have eternal salvation. When we know this and believe it by the grace of God, we have the precious Gospel as a comfort in all the suffering we endure for Jesus' sake.

In our text we have both the damning message of the Law showing us that we are sinners, and the precious comfort of the Gospel, so that we may learn:

**WHY WE SHOULD TRUST IN CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOR.**

- 1. By his death as our Substitute, Jesus once for all saved us from our sins;**
- 2. There is no salvation for those who reject the Gospel and die in unbelief; and,**
- 3. Only in the resurrected, exalted Christ is there salvation, made ours in Holy Baptism.**

Peter writes: *"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."* For all believers who suffer for their faith, these words are intended as comfort. The words that really stand out are these: *"the righteous for the unrighteous."* We are the unrighteous ones because of our sins, and Jesus is the Righteous One. We are the sinners because of our many transgressions of God's Law; Jesus is the sinless One because he is the holy Son of God. Jeremiah prophesied of Jesus as the one whose name is *"The LORD Our Righteousness."* Jeremiah 23:6 Peter told the Jews that they *"disowned the Holy and Righteous One."* Acts 3:14 Stephen, the first Christian martyr, called Jesus *"the Righteous One."* Acts 7:52

God the Father has given a sure testimony that his Son is the Holy and Righteous One. At Jesus' baptism, the Father in a voice from heaven said: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* Matt. 3:17 Such a holy, righteous one could be the Substitute for sinners that would be acceptable in God's sight and who could redeem us from our sins.

Let us not fail to see ourselves in the word *"unrighteous."* We are unrighteous for two reasons: Firstly, we are a part of sinful mankind of whom God says: *"There is no one righteous, not even one."* Rom. 3:10 That is our natural condition as we are born, for we all have to confess with David: *"Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* Ps. 51:5 Secondly, we are unrighteous because of our transgressions of God's commandments. With Daniel we have to confess: *"We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws."* Dan. 9:5

This we must confess today if we are to be honest in the Lord's sight. We surely have needed One who could be our divine Substitute.

This is what Jesus is: the Righteous One who could take the place of the unrighteous people of this world. This he did in suffering and dying on the cross. Paul writes: **"We are convinced that one died for all."** II Cor. 5:14 John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said: **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** John 1:29 John the Evangelist writes of **"Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."** I Jn. 2:1-2 The Book of Hebrews says that **"he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."** Hebr. 2:9 Jesus took all our iniquities upon himself and bore them for us on the cross. He was our Substitute in the most perfect sense of the word.

Our text also tells us that we should trust in Jesus as our Savior because he **"died for sins once for all."** Christ made one sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God, and that was sufficient for all sins, for all people, for all time. No other sacrifice of any kind is ever necessary again. The Bible says: **"When this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God"** Again: **"By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy"** Hebr. 10:12-14

This now is the blessed result: **"Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."** By his sacred work as our Divine Substitute, Jesus has been able to bring sinners to God. It is for Jesus sake that God now looks upon us sinners as being righteous in his sight. We can stand before the holy God as forgiven sinners. Jesus bringing us to God ultimately means that through Jesus we have the bliss and glory of heaven as ours in eternity.

Especially as we partake of the Lord's Supper, may we sincerely confess our sins before the Lord who knows all things. Let us also be assured that Christ paid for all our sins in full. Believing this, we can stand before the Lord on the Last Day and hear his words of invitation to enjoy all the blessedness of heaven which he has prepared for us.

We should also trust in Christ as our Savior because there is salvation only in him. From our text we learn that there is no salvation for those who reject the Gospel and die in unbelief.

## 2.

Our text says of Jesus: **"He was put to death in the body but made alive in the spirit, through which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built."** Flesh and spirit are here contrasted. Jesus was put to death in the flesh, that is, as a man with a true body of flesh and blood. He was made alive again in the spirit. When Christ died, **"he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."** John 19:30 He commended it into the hands of his heavenly Father. Then, on the third day after his death, his body and spirit were again reunited. In this new spirit-life, Jesus as the glorified and exalted Savior descended into hell.

Our text says he went there to preach. But what did he proclaim to the spirits in prison, the souls of the disobedient who died in unbelief at the time of the great flood? Certainly he did not preach the Gospel to them. He proclaimed his victory over Satan and sin which he had won by his death on the cross and his resurrection. What he proclaimed to the disobedient spirits in hell was also a condemnatory message. He held before the disobedient spirits the fact that they had deprived themselves of the precious salvation in heaven because they had rejected the Gospel of Christ the only Savior. That Christ preached a condemnatory message in hell, and not the Gospel, is manifest from the fact that the Bible makes it clear that there is no second chance after one has died in unbelief. The Bible says: **"Whoever does not believe will be condemned."** Mark 16:16 The Bible says that **"man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."** Hebr. 9:27

The disobedient in the days of Noah are mentioned in our text as an example of all who disobey the Gospel and are lost in hell. These people in Noah's day were given 120 years time to hear the Gospel promise of salvation in the coming Messiah. But they did not listen. To them it must have been a big joke when Noah built a big ark on dry land far from any body of water. Noah is called **"a preacher of righteousness."** II Pet. 2:5. From Noah's words and actions in building the ark, they had ample warning about the flood God said he would

bring upon the earth, and they also had ample opportunity to learn about the coming Savior. Our text says that God waited patiently for them to repent in the time of grace given them while the ark was being built.

This is a warning of tremendous significance for all people today who think it is not necessary or important to hear the preaching of God's Word from those whom God has sent. Of the unbelieving Israelites it is also said in the Book of Hebrews that they did not enter the promised rest in Canaan ***"because of their unbelief."*** Hebrews 3:19 Then the warning is given to us: ***"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."*** Hebrews 3:19-4:2

Our text concludes with the assurance that only in the resurrected and exalted Christ is there salvation, made ours in Holy Baptism.

### 3.

Referring to Noah's ark, Peter writes: ***"In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 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, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand - with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."*** The water that caused the ark to float and saved eight people, Noah and his family, symbolizes the water of Holy Baptism which saves us. It is, of course, not the water itself that saves us when we are baptized, but, as Luther says, "the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word of God in the water." Proof from the Bible for the fact that Baptism is a means of grace which saves us from our sins is cited by Luther in two passages: ***"He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."*** Mark 16:16 ***"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."*** Tit. 3:5

The water of Baptism does not serve to remove dirt from the body, but it is a pledge of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Christ. God assured us by raising up his Son from the dead, that he has accepted the work of redemption done by his Son, and therefore we are justified in his sight. This gives us a good conscience before God. And this resurrected Savior is also the one who has ascended into heaven to rule over all things for the welfare of all believers in Christ. He rules, for all authority and power, even the angels, are in submission under him.

Our assurance, therefore, as believers in Christ, is that no one can rob us of God's love or of eternal salvation in heaven, so long as we put our trust in Christ as our Savior. To him we should pray:

"Lamb of God, I do implore Thee,  
Guard, support me, lest I fall.  
Let me evermore adore Thee;  
Be my everlasting All." Amen.  
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 357:6)

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