

When I was in Bible College, they taught us that “you always want to start your sermon with a captivating story / joke / illustration – something to capture people’s attention, to get them listening (right at the beginning)... And I thought for a while, about how I would begin today’s message (because we’re all different)...

- Some of you are deep thinkers, and love to chew on the word of God... God doesn’t just want us to love Him with our emotions – He wants us to love Him with our minds... And I hope, and I pray, that as you hear these Bush Disciples messages (week by week), you are beginning to love God more and more with your mind, and more and more, you’re **wanting** to chew on God’s word, and think deeply on what He’s saying...

And to catch the attention of these people, I would say, that today’s reading (in my opinion), is one of the most difficult to understand passages (not only in the whole of the New Testament, but in the whole of the Bible), and to even **begin** to understand this, we’re going to have to love God with our minds, and study it.

- But the problem is, an introduction like that’s going to put some other people off – it’ll make them afraid that it’s going to be too complicated, when they enjoy a simple, take-home message they can remember, and apply to their lives and help them in their walk with God.

And to catch the attention of these people, I would say, this:

Today, we’re going to be talking about the Spiritual

realm... Peter's going to be opening up to us, the spiritual dimension of Good and evil / of God and Satan / of Angels and Demons, And how the fallen-ness of the world, and our salvation in Christ, have a deeply spiritual dimension to them, that impact our lives...

- But, then there's other people who love the abstract, the obscure and the weird...

And to catch their attention, I reckon I'd probably say: Today's Bible reading, contains some of the most obscure and bazaar verses that you'll find anywhere in the Bible...

I've read a whole bunch of commentaries, and I've found 4 major theories as to what they think it's about, and good solid rock Bible scholars all seem to disagree with each other.... And for some people, that's going to really pique their interest, because they'll probably have their own pet theories of what it means...

Alright, so now I've given you 3 **different** intro's, I don't know if I've piqued your interest, or whether I've scared **everybody** off, so maybe the best way for us to begin, is to simply pray...

*Let's pray,
Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for Your Holy Scriptures. And we ask that you would open these up to us today, that your Holy Spirit would help us to understand what you*

are saying to us, and that you would touch our hearts, drawing us deeper into your will. Amen.

Righto:

You've probably picked up by now, that there's a couple of difficult verses in this passage. The main point of today's reading, is actually pretty easy. It's about:

- the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and the Spiritual dimension to Salvation...
- Even if we lose our physical life,,,,, in Christ, we are Spiritually alive; And
- not even the evil one can take that away from us...
- Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the whole spiritual realm, are now subjected to Him. He has overcome them, and He is supreme.

That's not that difficult to understand, is it. What **is** difficult, is the example Peter uses, to explain this point. And the example actually leaves me with more questions than answers.

So, the way I thought we'd attack this today, is to have a bit of a look at the difficult part, and we'll see what we can and can't make sense of, because I don't want to just skip over it, but I don't want to get bogged down into pet theories, when Peter's only using this as an illustration of his main point.

OK? So here's the tough bit:

(Jesus) was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the

spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared

And the difficulty arises because Peter doesn't really explain it. There's an unanswered Who? When? And What?

- **Who** are these spirits that Jesus preached to?
- **When** did Jesus preach to them? And
- **What** did Jesus preach to them?

And the short answer is, "We don't really know". There's several major theories, but I read four different commentaries, and each one of them disagreed with what it means, and so I cannot tell you with confidence, what it means.

Here's the four major theories:

1. The first theory, is that the spirits Jesus preached to, are the angels who stepped out of the bounds of God's order. In Genesis 6, just before Noah's flood, it tells of a time when the angels took human women as their wives, and this theory is that Jesus preached to these imprisoned spirits in the day and a half that Jesus was in the grave.
2. The second theory, is that the spirits Jesus preached to, represents the **people** who Noah preached to. If Noah was a prophet, he preached by the Holy Spirit of God, and if Jesus preached by that same Holy Spirit, it could be said that, "The same Jesus, who is preached today, preached through Noah, those thousands of years ago." And there is some truth in that. If the Holy Spirit is at work through the preacher, Jesus is at work in the

preacher.

3. The third theory, is this: When Jesus died, that wasn't the end of Him. Those who flogged and crucified Him may have killed his body, but they could not kill His Spirit. And when Jesus descended to the dead, His Spirit was very much alive. And Jesus was very active, and when He descended to the dead, He did there, the same as He did anywhere else He ever went – He preached.

And this interpretation holds that Jesus preached to the Spirits of those who died in the flood, but what we cannot know, is **what** Jesus preached.... Because their lives were cut short, does that mean that Jesus gave them yet another chance to them to turn to God and ask for forgiveness? Or, because they ignored the preaching of Noah, did He preach to them the judgment that is coming on judgment day?

And we don't know

4. The fourth theory, is similar to the first one... Usually, when the bible refers to "Spirits" it's not referring to the spirit within me – you see, human beings '**have** a spirit', but we are not 'spirits'... And so, when the Bible talks about 'spirits', it's referring to Angels or Demons...

Where the 4th theory differs from the 1st one, in part, depends on how we interpret the original Greek word φυλακή (phylakē), which can mean a "jail/prison/ **or** a place of refuge"... You see, the very same Greek word (a very close derivative of it), is used by Peter (in his

second letter), only this time he applies it to Noah (preserved Noah)....

Let me explain. In English, we could use the phrase “keep watch over” or “Guard”, to mean 2 different things... You can keep guard, to in effect, create a prison, or you can ‘keep guard’ to create a place of refuge... and it’s the same with the Greek word here... So it’s a bit ambiguous, as to whether its spirits in ‘prison’, or in a place of ‘refuge’...

But who are the Spirits? Well, in Genesis 6, it describes the increasing corruption on the Earth, that God decided to deal with, with a world-wide flood... And part of this corruption, had a spiritual dimension to it: Some Angels took human women as their wives, and they bred the Nephilim, which were giants...

And so, in Peter’s letter, it’s pretty hard **not** to connect these fallen angels with ‘the spirits’ in the days of Noah...

But, are the demons yet “imprisoned”? And I think to that, the answer is “no”... Satan’s evil minions (demons) are actively trying to deceive the Children of God. Teaching of demons, is trying to lead people astray in the church. Even when Jesus cast a **legion** of demons out of the man who lived in the cemetery at Gerasene, the Demons begged Jesus to let them take refuge in herd of pigs, and He allowed it...

And so, in a way, Satan and his demons have a temporary time of refuge... On the day of judgment, they’re going to be thrown into the lake of fire – that’s

for sure... But until that time, God has allowed them a time and place of refuge... They've already been overcome. Their fate is assured; they **will** be thrown into the fiery pit, but not just yet...

We can catch a glimpse of this in Revelation 12, and you can go to the Bush Disciples sermons page (June 2017), and you'll find more of an explanation...

Now, as I said at the beginning, I cannot 'nail down' Peter's example with confidence, and tell you what it means... But what I **can** tell you (with utmost confidence), is what His main point is:

He's just been talking about how disciples of Jesus should live righteously (even if we're being persecuted), and we don't retaliate, and we don't repay evil for evil, because it's better to suffer for righteousness sake (than for evil),,, which is what Jesus did...

But even if it should lead to death, death is not the end... It may seem that evil is getting the upper hand... Not so!!!

They took Jesus' physical life, but He was spiritually alive... And what did Jesus do, even after they took His physical life? He proclaimed/preached.

Alright, so if he preached to the spirits/fallen angels/demons,, what did he preach? Well, it's probably what we read in V22, where the resurrected Jesus Christ **has gone into heaven**

and is at the right hand of God, with angels,
authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

I reckon, He was preaching to those evil spirits, and telling them their demise. Through His resurrection, the whole spiritual realm, is now subjected to Him. He has overcome them, and He is supreme.

So, what does all this mean for us??? Well, this is a tremendous encouragement, which is why Peter brings the Noah example up in the first place... Just like Noah was saved through the waters of the flood, in the ark, Peter tells us that **Baptism,,, corresponds to this...**

What does your baptism mean to you??? It's not about washing the dirt off your body... If it was, the baptisms we have in the muddy old Balonne River wouldn't do a very good job... Baptism, is an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ suffered for us – He **suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God**

And that's what Baptism is about – we are brought to God, through our baptism – we submit ourselves to Him, as an appeal to God for a good conscience.

- God, I give myself to you;
- I die to self;

- As we go down into the waters, we are baptised into the death of Jesus;
- And as we come up out of the water, we rise to spiritual life in Christ Jesus...

Our spirits are alive!!!... And we're going to learn more about that next week, when we get to 4:5&6... And in **those** verses, Peter's talking about preaching to the dead... And I'm pretty sure that at that point, he's not talking about preaching to the spirits – Jesus preached to the spirits in chapter 3; The Gospel is preached to the dead, in Chapter 4 – 2 different things... The dead are the spiritually dead. And, at one time, we were the dead (spiritually), but now we're alive in Christ...

Today's the first Sunday in the New year. It's always been interesting to me, that in the New year:

- Nicotine replacement sales go through the roof;
- As do gym memberships; and
- Diet supplements

All sorts of people make all sorts of decisions, "*It's a new year – I'm going to change this about my life*"...

But you know what? As disciples of Jesus Christ, let's forget about the "new year", and let's think about the new life we have in Christ....

Instead of "It's a new year – I'm going to change this about my life", let's have the attitude:

"It's a new life – I'm going to change this about my year, and my years to come."

But what about those who haven't yet responded to the Gospel? You know, Peter gives us a reminder here, that there is an end to God's patience. **God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared** But in the end, only a very few people were saved (8)... And so, we know, there was an end to God's patience. The whole time that Noah was building that Ark, he was preaching for people to repent, but only a very few were saved.

Likewise, we are in a season now, where God is patiently waiting. The Gospel is being preached; Christians are being persecuted; But we go on preaching, because we will be blessed if we suffer for righteousness sake. But we're being reminded here, that God's patience, will run out. **Jesus Christ, ²² ... has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers ... subjected to him.**

There's nothing left to be done. At any moment, Jesus will return... The question is, "Will we be ready?" or "Will we be like the people in the days of Noah, where only a very few were saved?"

Are you spiritually alive? The resurrection of Jesus has an enormous spiritual significance to the human race. We have the opportunity, as we give ourselves totally to Him, to be made Spiritually alive... And to be baptised into the Name of Jesus.

Where are you at with God? Are you spiritually alive? Or is God still patiently waiting for you?

And have you been baptised? You know, some people put baptism off, thinking “Oh, that’s just a religious act – I don’t need to be baptised.” Yes you do. It’s not an empty thing – It’s an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ – That sounds pretty important, doesn’t it..

And I believe, that there are some who are hearing this today, who know that God has been patient with them long enough. For some of you, it’s time for you to take the step, and to give your heart totally to Jesus. For some of you, it’s time for you to seek baptism.

And if God has been speaking to you today, you need to be faithful; and bold; and act on it. Make sure you talk to me today, and we will act on it. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and He has overcome – let’s not watch on – let’s get in the Ark, and be saved...

Lord Jesus Christ,
a simple and short prayer today:

Lord, I pray for those who have just heard this message:

Lord, I pray for those You have been speaking to,

That they would listen to You;

That they would hear You;

And that they would respond to You;

In faith;

And in actions;

That they would respond to Your Spirit;
In Belief;
And in Baptism,
To be saved.

And Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You;
And honour You,
As the One who is supreme,
Over every Angel and Demon;
Over every power and authority;

You are supreme;
You are Lord;
And You are our Lord;

Amen.