

“The Triumphant Ministries in Christ’s Sufferings”

Holiness

1 Peter 3:18-22

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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Bruce: Good morning, men!

Men: Good morning!

Bruce: Don, do you want to have a moment of quiet and get us back to some degree of semblance? (*Laughter.*)

Don: You mean some degree of sanity. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: Let’s go before the Lord and know that He is God. (*Music.*)

Gracious and merciful Father, have mercy upon us, the sinners that we are. May you be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold You more clearly for Christ’s sake.

And all the Brave Men said with anticipation:

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Amen. Let’s turn in our Bibles, please, as we continue in our study of the book of 1 Peter, on the theme of holiness. We come to our study at verses 18-22 of chapter 3, reading again from the English Standard Version, beginning at chapter 3 of 1 Peter, verse 18, reading to 22.

“Christ also suffered for our 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, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison 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. 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, to the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels and authorities and powers having been subjected to Him.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God. **Bruce:** Amen and amen. Men, one of the things we’ve been learning in our study of 1 Peter is that suffering is a part of life. Suffering begins at our very first birth as a babe from the first wailings of the infant to the last breath of the elderly. It is found in the silent endurance of weakness and it’s found in the bold strength and struggles of power. In every rank and every station of life, suffering is a part of our human existence.

Now in verse 17, as we saw previously, Peter stated that it is better to suffer for doing good, if it’s God’s will, than for doing evil.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And now he sets an example of Christ as a means for us to look at the suffering of someone who went through suffering. Now why is it that you compare yourself with somebody else who has gone through suffering? Well, from a human perspective, we always identify with somebody who has gone through an experience like we have gone through. But in reality nobody can ever go through the experience that Christ went through in His suffering.

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So Peter is not teaching us to identify with Christ. There’s got to be another reason why he is using the sufferings of Christ as an admonition and instruction to us.

First of all, there’s another reason that Peter cites the sufferings of Christ. First of all, I think that it’s to divert our attention off of our own sufferings and put it on to the work of Christ. It is to divert our eyes from our own suffering and put them on to the sufferings of Christ, and secondly to develop a greater gratitude when we consider the magnitude of what Christ accomplished through His sufferings.

So Peter is going to teach us that he wants us to focus at the moment on the sufferings of Christ and what He accomplished. The suffering of Christ for us is the great motivation for gratitude, to engage us to suffer cheerfully for Him when the evil one throws his evil activities against us. And that’s because of what Christ accomplished in His suffering. Not only did He just go through the suffering, but Peter teaches us that there are three things that He accomplished in His suffering.

Our great confidence in suffering today for doing good is the gratitude that is produced when you and I understand what Christ accomplished in His suffering for us. So Peter again reminds us of the grand triumph that we experience as a result of the three accomplished ministries that Christ accomplished on our behalf for God’s glory when He suffered at the cross.

Three things we’ll notice in this passage—His pardoning ministry, His proclaiming ministry, and His ruling ministry.

Peter teaches us to get our eyes off of our own suffering. Put your eyes on the sufferings of Christ because He accomplished three things for us: His pardoning ministry, His proclamation ministry and His ruling ministry. Those are three things that Christ accomplished for us. And you and I now develop a sense of gratitude when we take our minds off of our own personal suffering and we transfer that to the sufferings of Christ—not only just His sufferings but what it is that He accomplished that puts us in a position to live our lives with power and gratitude. And Peter, as it were, says, “Look! Get your eyes off of your own suffering.” For a moment, focus on the sufferings of Christ and what He accomplished for us in His suffering. So let’s examine this as the Lord is pleased to take us through this.

Beginning at verse 18. I would say that he’s teaching us about the *pardoning* ministry of Christ. Now you see the word *pardon* in verse 18 in the word *sins*.

First of all, there’s a *need* for pardon. You find that in the little word *sins*. Unless a person comes to know and feel the need of something, that person will never really desire to have it removed. In other words, if you’re in a disrupted relationship with somebody and you’ve offended somebody, and somebody comes to you and says, “You know, you’ve offended your brother.” You would like to know what it is you have done so that you can go make restitution and reconciliation and be re-established in your relationship with that person. You’ve got to have a willingness to know that you’ve done something.

I have a friend who just recently called me about wanting me to talk with his son who’s doing some rather difficult things. And my first question to the father was this. “Does he know that he needs help?”

And the answer was “No.”

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I said, “Then I cannot help him.”

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: You see, if a person does not know the issue of why he needs help, there’s going to be no response or desire to receive any help. And so I said to the father, “When he comes to a point of saying, “I know I need help. I recognize that I need help.” “When he comes to that point bring him to me because I think I can help him through the Scripture. But I can’t help him at all until he recognizes that he needs help.”

You see, that’s what the little word *sin* does. Notice verse 18. “For Christ also suffered once for sins.” When you understand that little word *sins*, then you realize that I need to be pardoned. The word *sin* highlights the need for our pardon.

I’m afraid, friends that oftentimes, too much in our churches, we don’t understand the significance of the word *sins*.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: We just don’t understand the word *sins* and what it means. We think that it’s “Oh, I did something improper. I might have done something that I shouldn’t have done. I didn’t do the right thing.” We just flip it right off as some conduct issue. It’s a much deeper concept, Peter is teaching us. He said, (*paraphrase*), “Look! He died once for all for sins.”

In other words, it means this. If you don’t recognize your sin, you have no understanding of what it means to receive a pardon. The degree to which you understand your sinfulness will be the degree to which you understand the need for pardon. I’m afraid that most of us don’t feel the need for pardon because we don’t understand the vast significance and the depth of what sin does to us and to God.

Quite honestly, I wish I could stamp the word *sin* into everybody that comes into the church, not to offend them but to help them to understand this: that when you understand your sin, now you understand your need for pardon. So that one little word is very, very profound. It tells about the evil that we have done against the living God in heaven. That’s what the word tells us about the evil that we’ve done against the loving God in heaven, about our cosmic treason against the holiness of God. And when we come to get a sight of our own sin against God, you can never rest until you understand your need to be pardoned.

So the first thing Peter says is this. There is a need for us to be pardoned and that’s found in that one little word *sins*. You see, if you don’t understand that word in your life, you’ll have no desire to be pardoned. So Peter first of all says that there’s a need for pardon.

Secondly, what is the manner of pardon? He now introduces the *manner* of pardon and that would be this—“the just for the unjust.”

Now some people think that it’s enough just to ask for pardon. “Would You forgive me?” And they think it’s over. Others think that the way is to be sorry for your sins to receive pardon. Others try to do good as much as they can. Others say their prayers, have their quiet time, do what is right in their minds. They think they can work their way and receive pardon.

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But Peter says no. That’s nothing like what it really is. The method of pardon is this: “the just for the unjust.”

Now part of the gospel of Christ might include some of those things—forgiveness and sorrow and all those issues. It’s much more profound than that. The gospel is simple but it is not shallow.

If you ask me the one word that speaks about the gospel of Christ, it’s the word *substitution*. “The just for the unjust.” That’s what Peter says. He died once for all for sins, “the just for the unjust.” He’s saying that first of all you’ve got to understand your need for pardon. And when you understand your need for pardon, you’ll understand that pardon is basically a matter of “the just for the unjust.” It is substitution.

If you were to ask me to describe salvation in its briefest terms as fully as possible, I would say something like this. Salvation is the immediate present trust in Christ as my substitute on the authority of God’s word. It is the immediate and present trust in Christ as my substitute based upon the authority of God’s word. You see, that’s the manner of our pardon. It is “the just for the unjust.” The Biblical, the gospel manner of pardon is by substitution, “the just for the unjust,” by one Person taking the place of another, the just taking the place of the unjust, Christ taking my place, the holy taking place of the evil, the just Jesus, the holy Jesus, taking the place of the unjust and unrighteous me. You see, it can only be that way. That’s the only way pardon can be effective and efficient and glorifying to God.

And that is because God in His nature is just. And God in His nature is also holy as well as merciful and loving. And so He is a King and He’s a Judge as well as a loving Father. And the only way that pardon can be made possible is that the authority of the law must be maintained, justice must be vindicated and the law must be perfectly obeyed. And in the event of any disobedience, what does the Scripture say? The result of disobedience is—

Participant: Death.

Bruce: Death. So somebody has to pay for that, either you or your Substitute, either me or my Substitute. The need for pardon is the recognition of this. I am sinful.

I think that one of the most powerful prayers in all of the Scripture is the prayer of the publican when he said this. “Have mercy on me,--“

Participant: “The sinner.”

Bruce: “The sinner.” You see, he’s basically saying this. I know that I have a need to be pardoned. It’s because I understand my offense to God, my cosmic treason against the holiness of God. I understand that. And would You have mercy on me?

But, you see, the only way that pardon can be accomplished is “the just for the unjust.” It is the justice of God being met through the Person and work of Christ.

And we’ve all disobeyed. So there’s no hope for any of us except in the obedience and the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. Yes, please?

Participant: When your friend asked you to talk to that boy,--

Bruce: Yes, sir.

Participant: And you asked the question, “Does he know he needs help? If he doesn’t know he needs help, I can’t help him.” With the substitution of the just for the

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unjust, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That offers hope for the future that maybe his heart will be touched down the road, which gives us a hope to continue to rely on God for that boy.

Bruce: Absolutely. I said that I will continue to pray for him, that the Lord would be pleased to remove the shackles of the blindness from his eyes to help him to realize he needs help because we can help him through the Scripture. But until he knows that he needs that help, I can give him all kinds of great theological treatises and great information, but it’s going to mean nothing to him because he doesn’t recognize that one little word *sin*.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: He doesn’t recognize that. And when he does, then we can give him hope, because Christ has died once for all for *sins*, “the just for the unjust.” There’s great hope in that. But the person has to recognize that “I have a need.”

And how can we institute that need? Perhaps just through prayer. So I told the father, “I will continue to pray for your son Dick.”

Participant: And if you continue to push it while they don’t see it, what you get is the same things holy to us. But they’ll turn, and it’s throwing your pearls before swine and they’ll turn and trample them. And then, actually, they get so angry at you that they turn and devour you.

Bruce: Now that’s exactly what happened to his sister, because the mother came and asked my wife to help the daughter. And Becky said, “I’ll be glad to help her and talk to her.” And she got mad at her mother for bringing my wife into the picture.

Participant: Yep.

Bruce: Because they don’t understand that they have a need, men! You can’t help them! All you can do is prepare them by praying for them. Yes, Ted?

Ted: This is the exact first step in AA for recovery.

Bruce: Yes.

Ted: Before the person says, “I was going to take that first step. I am an alcoholic and I am helpless against my problem,” they’ll say, “I don’t have a problem,” or “It’s not that bad.”

Bruce: It’s not that bad.

Ted: Right.

Bruce: Yes. Amen. Yes?

Participant: Will that come before regeneration or after regeneration?

Bruce: What?

Participant: Recognizing sin.

Bruce: You can’t recognize it until you’re regenerate.

Participant: So the soul has to be regenerated.

Bruce: You have to be regenerate before you recognize your sin. Absolutely. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. What can a dead man recognize?

Men: Nothing.

Bruce: Nothing! Something must happen first, supernatural regeneration, so that your eyes are opened. Now I recognize it! I recognize my sinfulness. I recognize my

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need for pardon. I now find the hope in the mercy of God’s grace in understanding this. Substitution is the way that I’m pardoned. Somebody had to pay for my personal disobedience. Either I do or my Substitute did. That’s what Peter is teaching us.

You see, the need for pardon is this. I recognize my sin. The manner of justification is “the just for the unjust.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: The holy for the unholy, the righteous for the unrighteous, Christ instead of me. Yes, Bob?

Bob: Bruce, what’s the best definition you can give us for the word *sin*? I’ve never heard you give one. Usually you have a definition for each word.

Bruce: I’d say, “Me.” (*Laughter.*) The best definition I know would be me.

Participant: How about 1 John 4:4?

Bruce: Go ahead and quote it for us.

Participant: “Sin is the transgression of the law.”

Bruce: There you go. “Sin is the transgression of the law.” The word literally means missing the mark.

Participant: Or the Shorter Catechism.

Bruce: Please.

Participant: “Sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God.”

Bruce: Okay. Excellent. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: Enmity against God.

Bruce: Enmity against God is a great, simple definition, absolutely.

Participant: Anything displeasing to God.

Bruce: Anything displeasing to God. Another way I define it is cosmic treason—

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Against God. Cosmic treason against the holiness of God. There are many ways that you can define sin. However you get into it, the best example I know is, look in the dictionary and you’ll see my picture. (*Laughter.*)

That’s why to me, brothers—and I mean I’m serious—when somebody says to me, “What is the most important prayer, Bruce, that you can ever pray?”, it’s this. “Have mercy upon me, the sinner!”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You see, that’s got to be the focus of my life because the degree to which I understand that will be the degree to which I will have the immediate present trust in Christ as my Substitute according to the Word. That’s salvation. Yes, Bill?

Bill: When Jesus told His disciples that when He went away He would send the Holy Spirit, one of His jobs would be to convict the world of sin.

Bruce: Amen.

Bill: So if the Holy Spirit doesn’t convict somebody of sin, then there’s nothing you can do.

Bruce: That’s a good point, Bill. Here’s the role of the Holy Spirit: to convict you of your sin, and then convince you of your sin, convert you from your sin, and then comfort you in the new way of life and control your life thereafter.

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Take a look at that. First of all, the Holy Spirit *convicts* us of our sin. Once you’re convicted you need to be *convinced*. And when you’re convinced of your sin, you beg for help and you understand pardon. And then you’re *converted* from your sin. And then you’re *controlled* and *comforted* in your new way of life, controlled by the Holy Spirit as you live your life. Five c’s—convict, convince, convert, comfort, and control.

Participant: Mm.

Bruce: That’s the role of the Holy Spirit. And remember this. It’s to guide us into all truth. What is the Holy Spirit’s work according to Jesus? His definition is to call attention to the Person and work of Christ, not to call attention to Himself.

I can’t speak for the Holy Spirit, but it just seems to me, based upon the job description that the Scripture gives us that Jesus verbalizes—and I’m not going to argue with Him—when He says that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. I think that sometimes the Holy Spirit might be offended for all the attention that we give Him, because who does He call attention to? The Person and work of Christ! That’s His job description! And we use the Holy Spirit to be the means to point us to the Person and work of Christ, to our Substitute, to help people to understand their need for pardon because of their sin, and the manner of their pardon because of “the just for the unjust.”

So Peter is basically saying to get your eyes off of your own suffering. Put your eyes on the suffering of Christ and what He accomplished *for* you. He accomplished a pardoning ministry. There’s a need for pardon. There’s a manner of pardon.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: When you talk about that boy,--

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: When he sees and says, “Come and talk to me,” one of the ways is, couldn’t you help him in the sense of proclaiming the gospel which must include this issue of sin and his state and his condition? And the Holy Spirit will use that proclamation of truth one way or the other, either to make him angry or to bring him to a place of repentance?

Bruce: I have no idea. That very possibly could happen. But that was not how the Holy Spirit led me at that moment. All I can do is be an aggressive responder to what the Holy Spirit is doing.

Now I know that situation very, very intimately. And I know the kid is hard headed. And I know that there is a whole bunch of background that I know about the kid. So that was my response because I knew the situation. Now it may not be the same response in another situation. That’s where you have to know the situation and trust the Holy Spirit. You don’t have a clone answer for everybody who says, “Can you help?” Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

Bishop Rodgers: I have a son-in-law and I think he is not a believer. And so I keep talking to my daughter about how I can be of help. But I remember that one day she said to me, “Dad, he just isn’t interested.” All I can do is pray.

Bruce: Absolutely. You see, we can’t-- Listen! Guys, we need to quit trying to be somebody’s Holy Spirit.

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Men: Amen.

Bruce: We are not the Holy Spirit. Try to quit being one. We always think that I can go and be somebody’s Holy Spirit and get them to do something. You can’t do that! It is the role of the Holy Spirit to convict, to convince, to convert, to comfort and to control. We just need to be aggressive responders to the situation as God is pleased to use us, trusting the Holy Spirit. Yes, please?

Participant: Can’t we be good examples in our walk?

Bruce: Oh, absolutely. That’s what Peter has been teaching us. Remember, all of these instructions that Peter has been giving us are premised by one thing—holy conduct. Jesus doesn’t want people talking about Him who are not living for Him.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: If you’re not living a holy life, keep your mouth shut. That’s basically what He’s saying. He doesn’t want us talking about Him if we’re not living for Him. So absolutely. Our holy conduct is a model, an example that precedes everything that we say verbally. Remember this. Conduct precedes communication. That’s Peter’s premise. Conduct precedes communication. Live a holy life. Then you can give the answer for the hope that’s within you, Peter says.

The reason they are attracted to you, for some reason, is because of your conduct. Now you’ve got a reason for that. As Peter says, have a prepared answer. “Be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within you.” And that hope is generated by your holy conduct.

So Peter basically says this. The idea is to live life before you start talking about it. Yes, please?

Participant: Which is the Word becoming flesh.

Bruce: Absolutely. We saw that a couple weeks ago. The Word becomes flesh. Now you can describe it. Now you can say that this is the reason I have hope. It’s because I’ve been attracted by something in your life that is different from the system of this world. That’s our holy conduct.

Now I would say to all of us, just as a reminder today, brothers, that you and I are lost. Unless we are pardoned, we’ll be lost forever. You see, the Lord Jesus Christ, men, is God’s appointed Substitute, “the just for the unjust,” the Substitute here and the Substitute now. And in God’s name and on the authority of His own word, the Father says this. (*Paraphrase.*) “I present to you Jesus as the Substitute for your sins. I present Him,” God says, “to you as your Substitute for your sin.” If you trust Him, you’re pardoned. If you don’t, you’re lost. You’re lost. The manner of pardon is “the just for the unjust.” Yes, please?

Participant: With all this being said, your focus on sin, how bad is it,--one being not bad at all and ten being horrendously bad,--how bad is it whenever we get into the churches and say, you know, “God loves you. Jesus loves you. And that’s why you should come,” rather than really pointing out this gospel, which is your sin and that you need desperate help?

Bruce: Well now, Paul in Romans s chapter 1 says this. “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power unto salvation for all who believe.” Now the word *it* is a

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preposition and it refers back to what? I’m not ashamed to share the gospel, for *it*—the gospel. That means it’s a message. The message is the power unto salvation—not my manipulation, not my characteristics, not my personality, not my presentation. It is the content of a message that is the power to get somebody to believe. And that’s the role of the Holy Spirit, to guide us into all truth.

The real issue in my judgment, Brian, to your question is this. We preach an Americanized version of the gospel.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We have a very weak, man-centered gospel. We make it about us when the gospel is not about us. It’s not for us. It’s about God and for God.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We’ve made it about us. It is not about us! The gospel is about God in His glory. It’s about God and His law. It’s about our need for obedience. It’s about the substitutionary work of Christ. The gospel is about the Person and work of Christ.

So, in my judgment, we have such a weak, powerless gospel preached in our churches that there’s very little regeneration. Yes, Don?

Don: It’s interesting to me that you quoted Romans 1:16. And what does Paul say in Romans 1:18? Does he say “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?” No. “The wrath of God is being revealed.” And for two or three chapters he goes into that in great detail. And I think that we’re doing people a great disservice when we say to them, to introduce them to the gospel, “Well, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” And what’s the reaction going to be? “Well, good! I knew that all along. I don’t have anything to worry about.”

Bruce: Yes. We have to be careful of what the content of our message is. Now here’s the basic direction that I use. We’ve been teaching this for years.

The gospel contains six issues. The holiness of God, that’s where you start. Unless somebody realizes that he’s offended God, he will not have a need to trust God. So you start with the holiness of God.

Then you talk about the sinfulness of man. You see, that’s what Peter is doing. Christ died once for all for *sins*.

The holiness of God. Set the standard. God is the standard. Mankind is not the standard. God is.

The holiness of God, the sinfulness of man. Then you talk about the Person and the work of Christ. The Person of Christ and the work of Christ. That means His sinless perfection and His perfect obedience is the means by which God has provided in His grace a means for me to deal with my sin. It is because of the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. And then you talk about the response, which is repentance and faith.

Now Brian, I think your question is that we don’t preach that. We don’t preach the whole counsel of God in the pulpit, in our churches. What we do today is that we preach that which is going to entertain people or get their response.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Look at it logically. How is it that we evaluate evangelism?

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Participant: By numbers, results.

Bruce: Numbers. That’s how we do it, by numbers. Scripture says this. The only way you can evaluate ministry is, was truth proclaimed?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: So let’s take fifty thousand people in a stadium. Twenty-five thousand people come forward and trust Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. And so when the evangelistic campaign is over, what do we say? Twenty-five thousand people came forward. God was honored. What about the twenty-five thousand who rejected Christ?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: God was honored by that just as much as He is by their acceptance, because any time truth is proclaimed God is honored. You see, some people respond to His love and His mercy. Other people reject it and take His wrath and His judgment and His holiness. Either way God is glorified.

So you see, the only way you can evaluate a campaign is this. We proclaimed truth to fifty thousand people. Some God is pleased to regenerate. Some God was pleased not to do that. But the evaluation is not twenty-five thousand people. You never proclaim the gospel of Christ to get a response. You proclaim the gospel of Christ for the glory of God.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Let it happen. The Holy Spirit does it. Don’t try to be somebody’s Holy Spirit.

And so, in my judgment, we have a very weak gospel being preached because we’ve eliminated the very thing he’s talking about. You don’t start with sin. You start with who God is and His nature, His character, His attributes. You talk about His holiness, because what is sin? Enmity against God and His holiness, cosmic treason against God. You’ve got to start with that.

You’ve got to help the person understand. Is there a need for me to listen to the rest of what you’ve got to say? Is there a way in which somebody has made it possible for God’s holiness to be vindicated? And yes, there is. It’s in the Person and the work of Christ. Yes, Jim?

Jim: Bruce, it seems to me that part of the reason it is done is a theological issue. They just do not believe in the consequences of the Fall. They believe that they can talk people into the Kingdom, manipulate people.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Jim: They don’t think that we’re helpless, as we really are.

Participant: The legacy of Charles Finny.

Bruce: Yes, please? Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

Bishop Rodgers: Being a teacher I’ve had to read a lot of liberal theology. Since they don’t accept sin in the sense that we’re speaking of it today, they actually heap pejorative language about the blood of Christ and everything we’re talking about. Everything we treasure as a pearl they actually hate.

Bruce: Yes.

Bishop Rodgers: I guess it’s because it humbles us to admit that we’re sinners.

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Bruce: Absolutely. It deals with our pride and every issue. Yes, Jack? You had your hand up?

Jack: Yes. You were talking about, you know, what we proclaim in the gospel. I’m a little different because I spent most of my life outside the United States.

Bruce: Sure.

Jack: And as I look at the United States church, I think that we have a goal, and you’re talking about the numbers and that kind of thing.

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Jack: So sometimes I think that we have a goal that we were commanded to convert people.

Bruce: Correct.

Jack: And when I read the Bible, it doesn’t say to me to convert people. It says that we need to proclaim the gospel.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Jack: In season and out of season, and kind of leave that to the Holy Spirit. But we get focused, I think, on the results instead of the proclamation.

Bruce: Absolutely. Good point, Jack. And you would speak that from your thirty years of experience of being a missionary in Morocco. You would understand that and I appreciate that. That’s actually right. We are proclaimers. We are not the converters. We’ve got to go back and look at the Holy Spirit’s ministry. Bishop Rodgers?

Bishop Rodgers: I was just thinking that we make disciples, but that’s after God converts.

Bruce: Absolutely. It’s after conversion. That’s correct. Yes, Ted?

Ted: I just want to make a connection with what Bishop Rodgers said.

Bruce: Yes.

Ted: It’s not only the liberals that are a problem. It’s in our own evangelical community where we have a very low doctrine of sin. I was having a conversation recently with two Pentecostal brothers who think that because they feel something the Holy Spirit tells them that it has to be true.

Bruce: Right.

Ted: They have no sense of the sin, the fallen nature, the flesh. And this may be a distorted understanding. And they’re not getting God’s viewpoint. And I kept saying this to my brother the other day, and he said, “Well, what about the Holy Spirit?”

And I said, “The Holy Spirit deals with your flesh. And I mean, you’re still going to have problems.” He was incapable of conceiving that. So we have a problem in the evangelical community. Forget the liberals. We have a huge problem in the evangelical community. We do not accept the profundity and the absolute alienating power of sin.

Bruce: On the wall of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, there’s a statement by Charles Finny, who says this. “Evangelism is not an act of God. It is an act of man.” And you do these five things and you’ll have evangelism.

Now basically, it’s this. Get a stadium. Get a prayer group. Try to get people to present it. And then offer Christ and salvation and come forward. Essentially, that’s what he’s saying. But he’s saying this. Revival is not the act of God. It’s the act of man!

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How is that possible? If we are truly dead in our trespasses and sins, what can we do as dead people? We can’t do anything!

When I studied the great Puritan preachers in England, their definition of revival was this: a sovereign visitation of God in all His power and glory.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: A sovereign *visitation* of the power and glory of God, at His disposal. There’s quite a contrast between revival as an act of man and revival as a sovereign act of the presence of God in all of His glory and power.

Did you know how the Puritans evaluated their evangelistic campaigns?? They would go back into an area where they preached three to five years afterwards, and they would look to see this. Is there increased holiness in the community? Is there less crime? Is there increased church membership? They were looking for signs of righteousness. That’s the evidence of revival. Is righteousness increasing? Is there an increase in righteousness and consequently a decrease in crime, sinful activity in that area? And thirdly, was there increased church membership?

Then they would say yes. The Lord is pleased to have a revival because there was a sovereign visitation in all of His glory and power. It’s something that He accomplished, not something we did.

So literally that means this. Can you schedule revival?

Participant: No.

Bruce: Can you schedule a revival?

Participant: You can schedule revival meetings. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: You can schedule a meeting. You may have a nice program but it might not be a revival.

I think I told you the story of when I got my doctorate in seminary. I did my doctoral work on the Puritan view of the pulpit. “Light and Heat, the Puritan View of the Pulpit: The Focus of the Gospel in Puritan Preaching” was the name of it.

And so I contrasted the Puritan preachers of the Puritan era versus the American preachers from 1850 to 1984. I basically contrasted it with what I call Neo-Finnyism, the new Finnyism, which is modern preaching today, a very man-centered gospel.

So one of the things that they always ask a graduating senior to do is to get up and give about a ten minute little review of his doctoral dissertation. So my advisor asked me to do that.

He said, “Bruce, I like it. Yours is rather unusual. I really enjoyed working on it.” (*Laughter.*)

“I want you to give a ten minute brief.” So he said, “I’d like you to submit what you’re going to say.”

So the first thing I said was this. “You can’t schedule revival.”

Now just prior to my getting up, (*laughter*), and giving my little ten minute review, they brought up a man and gave him a plaque for having scheduled three hundred revivals. (*Laughter.*)

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They gave him this nice plaque and a standing ovation. The Lord used him. I’m not belittling him. Please understand what I’m not saying, men. The Lord used this man graciously and powerfully and wonderfully and sovereignly. I understood that.

But they gave him a plaque for having scheduled three hundred revivals. (*Laughter.*) And my first statement was,--

Men: You can’t schedule a revival. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: I looked at my advisor when I got up to stand and he just went like this. (He folded his arms, leaned back and smiled.) (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Bring it on, Bruce. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: But then he shook his head, nodded up and down and said, “Go for it.” (*Laughter.*) And so I did.

Now I tried to be very respectful, and just said, “In all deference to my dear brother who the Lord used sovereignly, I have come to the conviction because of my study for which I’m most grateful, that you can’t schedule revival. And let me give you the reasons why.” So I did it in about five minutes instead of ten minutes. (*Laughter.*)

But you see, that’s the American way. You can schedule a revival meeting. But can you really schedule revival? We think we can, because we think that it’s an act of man. Revival, brothers, is a sovereign act of God in all of His glory and in all of His power.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Yes, Don?

Don: Yes, Bruce. In verse 18 here,--

Bruce: Yes.

Don: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust.” And it says afterwards “that He might bring us to God.”

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: And last week someone read from Ephesians 2—Dale, I believe,--where it says that the unregenerate are aliens from the covenant of Israel, strangers,--

Bruce: Right.

Don: “Without hope and without God in the world.” And until the Holy Spirit convicts someone of that, they’re not going to believe that. They’re going to think, “Well, I’m just fine.”

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Don: And see, if you say something like “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” at the outset, then you’re blunting that.

Bruce: We need to recognize this. We are not suggesting, brothers--Don and I and Bishop Rodgers and Ted,--we’re not saying this. We’re not saying that you Bible bash people. We’re not saying that.

Don: No.

Bruce: Do you understand that? The Scripture always says this. It’s “grace and truth.” We need to proclaim truth with grace. It needs to be seasoned and wrapped around grace. We need to do it respectfully, with compassion, with sympathy, with empathy. We need to do all the things that we can do. We need to do that with grace and

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truth when we’re proclaiming the gospel of Christ. We are not Bible bashers. That’s not what we’re saying.

But you’ve got to understand this. You’ve got to have the right message, because the work of the Holy Spirit is to take the right message and guide people into all truth. If we do not proclaim truth, there’s nothing for Him to guide them into.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We short-circuit the work of the Spirit because we don’t give Him the tools to work with, and the tool that He works with is what?

Participant: Truth.

Bruce: Truth! The proclamation of truth. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, it just occurred to me. It doesn’t really need to be an either/or.

Bruce: That’s true.

Participant: Because “how will they hear” unless someone will preach? And so if we gather a hundred people in an auditorium, or however we do that, truth is preached and truth is proclaimed and the persons sitting there may be under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and hearing the truth may then decide that they are in fact sinners and that they need Christ.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: And how are they going to hear that unless we have “meetings?” So if you term it “a revival meeting,” it could be an opportunity to proclaim the truth.

Bruce: No question. Yes. My point is, what is the goal of a revival meeting? It’s not numbers. That’s what I’m saying. It’s not numbers. It is the proclamation of truth. Have your revival, but proclaim truth. And let the Holy Spirit do His work.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: The last thing before we wrap up today, I want to show you the *reason* for pardon. And you’ll see that in verse 18. “To bring us to God.”

The word *bring* is a Greek word which means the right of access. It means to gain an audience at court. In other words, it was used by the Greek culture in a court of kings. And they had an official in that court of kings known as the introducer. The introducer was the one who would give access to the person, whether to get into the presence of the king or not. He would deny the person access or he would approve the person’s access. He was known as the introducer. His function was to decide who should be admitted into the king’s presence and who should be kept out.

What Peter is saying is this. Jesus Christ, for what He has accomplished, is the introducer for us to be introduced to God. He takes us into His presence.

Look at Romans chapter five. Go back to Romans chapter five quickly. In Romans chapter five Paul writes this wonderful, powerful statement. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

You see, there’s a need for pardon. There’s the manner of pardon. There’s the reason for pardon. And the *result* of pardon is this. You have access to God through the Person and work of Christ. It is the work of substitution.

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We’ll pick this up in future weeks as we continue this message. There’s much more in this particular passage. I want you to remember this. Peter is basically saying this. Brothers, men, don’t focus on your own suffering. Focus on the suffering of Christ. And don’t only go there. But go on and look at what He accomplished for you.

He accomplished three things through His suffering—His pardoning ministry, His proclamation ministry and His ruling ministry. We’ll look at those in future weeks.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we’re overwhelmed that You have chosen to self-disclose Yourself to us. If You had not chosen to do that, Father, we would be sitting here talking about the God of our human imagination. But Father, keep our minds fixed upon that God of Biblical revelation. And may it be so for Your glory. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.” (*Applause.*)