

“The Triumphant Ministries of Christ’s Suffering” part 2

Holiness

1 Peter 3:18-22

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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

Gracious and merciful heavenly Father, despite all the difficulties of life, we know that mercy will be the ruling factor because You are merciful to us. In the end mercy will prevail. And may it be so today that we will experience that for Jesus’ sake and His glory. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Men, one of the things I encourage you to do is that there is a wonderful little service on the Internet called [gracegems.org](http://www.gracegems.org).

<http://www.gracegems.org>

Participant: Amen.

I’d encourage you to go on and visit it on the Internet. Go and put it on your tablet or your computer, because every day they will send you a Puritan quote. A gentleman will read you a Puritan quote for about two or three minutes. It’s a wonderful devotional. They give you some materials. It’s totally free. They don’t ask for money. There’s no solicitation. But if you’re looking for just a very wonderful little meditation during the morning and some great historical truth from the Puritans, it’s called [gracegems.org](http://www.gracegems.org), and I’d encourage you to give that a shot. It’s a wonderful opportunity. I listen to it every morning and it’s just very, very encouraging. They’ll send you some material you can read. There are other resources on the page if you want them. But the one that I find most helpful is that three- to five-minute little vignette of a Puritan thought from the greatest Puritan preachers of the past. Somebody reads that for us and it’s a great encouragement. So it’s just a wonderful way to start your day with a little devotional.

I need to tell you a quick little story here. You know, with my physical therapy with the Parkinson’s, one of the things that I’m trying to do is to stay as active as I can. Last week I went to the health club and I tried to jump rope. (*Laughter.*) I used to be an avid jump roper.

And I’ll tell you what, it was a comedy of errors. (*Laughter.*) First of all, I can’t get my feet off the ground. (*Laughter.*) Secondly, my shoulders don’t move. (*Sympathetic sighs.*) And so I’m trying to jump rope and get my arms to go like this and my feet to go like this. (*Appropriate motions.*) And it was a comedy of errors. I mean, people were standing there, actually laughing. They thought I was some sort of a clown. (*Laughter.*)

But I’ll tell you what. That really motivated me. I said, “I’m going to get this done.”

Participant: Good.

Bruce: “You can laugh at me now. But I’m going to come back in a week and I’m going to get it done.” So every day I’ve tried to jump rope. And the other day I did it.

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(*Cheers and applause.*) In fact, one of the instructors came over. And she said, “Did you used to jump rope?”

And I said, “Yes. I was an avid jump roper all the time.”

She said, “Well, your body has memories. Your body has physical memories. You just keep at it because your body’s going to kick in.”

Well, it did. The other night I ended up doing it and got on both legs. It wiped out my artificial knees, but boy, I got to jump rope! (*Laughter.*) So now I’m stiff in the knees. But I can jump rope. (*Laughter.*)

Well, let’s turn in our Bibles, men. One other prayer request I have for you. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago about the family who asked me if I could help their son in their relationship. There’s a tremendous difficulty between a Christian mother and her two Christian children, a son and a daughter. Just pray for reconciliation. We could just pray that the Lord would be pleased to touch the heart of this son and daughter to help them to understand how disrespectful they are to their mother. Even though they may not agree theologically, there still has to be some respect for the mother and father. And so would you just pray for reconciliation in this family? And I’ll keep you posted, and I appreciate that. Thank you.

Let’s turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of 1 Peter. We’re looking again, as we were a couple of weeks ago, (and Ted, thanks for filling in last week. It was a wonderful way in which he led us to the throne of grace and I greatly appreciate it.) 1 Peter chapter 3, beginning with verse 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, 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 an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of 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.” May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from His word.

What is it that you think about , men, when you see somebody else suffering? There are probably several different responses that we might have. You might say, “Well, I’m glad that’s not me.” Or we might say, “How in the world do they sustain themselves in the midst of that?” There are several different reasons why one might compare themselves to somebody who is suffering.

Peter is essentially telling us about this. We need to understand a couple things about the triumphant ministries of Christ’s suffering. There are certain things that Christ accomplished as a result of His suffering ministry.

Now I call that suffering ministry because ministry is a function of suffering and suffering is a form of ministry, because when you and I suffer correctly, as Peter has been telling us, you’re calling attention to the fact that God’s grace is in your life and that you’re not according to the system of this world.

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So there are a couple reasons that I think Peter would highlight in the passage I just read, to help us understand the suffering ministry of Christ. I think they are twofold.

First of all, this. I think it’s going to get our minds off of our own suffering.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: When you think about the sufferings of Christ and what He went through, how can you compare your suffering or my suffering compared to His? You can’t. There is no way we can say, “I’m going to have that same reaction, that same experience.”

So I think that the first thing Peter probably does for us is to say this. Get your mind off of your own suffering and put your mind on the sufferings of Christ because He accomplished several different ministries for you, which he describes in that passage.

I think the second reason is this: to make us grateful.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Consider the sufferings of Christ to make us grateful. Let me show you the impact of a lack of gratitude and what it does. Would you turn with me to Romans chapter one? Go back a few books to Romans chapter 1 down to verse 21. Romans chapter 1 verse 21.

Now Paul is writing about God’s wrath on the unrighteous. Let me begin at verse 18 to keep it in the right context.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, because they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

Now go back to verse 21. “For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.” Now notice the consequence of not giving thanks. “But they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

What is the great protection about correct thinking? It’s gratitude. Notice. What caused them to become futile in their thinking, and their hearts were darkened? It was their lack of gratitude. Notice what it says. “For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.”

I think that one of the things we need to recognize, men, is this. Peter is writing to us and telling us about the triumphal suffering ministries of Christ so that you and I will have a spirit of gratitude.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Gratitude is one of the great defenders against the pollution of the mind, because when you’re grateful you’re not thinking about who?

Men: You, yourself.

Bruce: You’re not talking or thinking about yourself. You’re thinking about Someone else. And that’s the point of Peter in this passage. He’s basically saying, “Let us

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consider the sufferings of Christ and His triumphant ministry in your life, because the impact of that is so significant, if you understand what He accomplished in His suffering. Don’t try to compare your suffering to His suffering. But develop a spirit of gratitude and be thankful for His suffering.

Now Peter gives us three things to be thankful for—His pardoning ministry, His proclamation ministry and His ruling ministry.

His pardoning ministry which Ted and I have been talking about the last couple of weeks. Just quickly, His pardoning ministry. There’s a need for pardon. You find that in the word *sins*.

If you ask somebody about the most important words in the Bible, you would likely get the word *grace*, which I would not argue with. Somebody might say that it might be the word *love*, which you could not argue with. But I think that one of the most important words in all of the Scripture is the word *sin*. Now it’s not a word that we talk about much. But when you think about sin, look at the implications of that single word. What did Christ come to do? To take away the sin of the world. If you don’t understand sin, then you have no understanding of the Person and work of Christ.

Do you realize that, men? Sin is a very important word in the church. Sin is a very important word in the Scripture. It’s equal in my mind to grace and love and other issues, because listen to this. Christ came to take that away. And the greatest thing that you and I can understand is to be exposed in my sin, because you then know what? You can give that to Christ because He came to—

Participant: Take it away.

Bruce: Take away your sin. So don’t be afraid of the word *sin*. We don’t hear enough about sin in the church.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Now I’m not saying that we need to be Bible bashers. But I’m saying that we need to realize the value of that word *sin*.

Let me tell you what it reveals in the Scripture. It reveals this. It’s one of the greatest words in the Bible. It tells us about all of our offenses to God. In that one little word *sin*, it tells us of all of our offenses which are numerous and myriad, to a holy God. It also tells us about breaking His holy law. It tells us about breaking the law. The word *sin* helps us recognize that we have broken God’s law. We’re an offense to God. We’ve committed cosmic treason. It also tells us about the evil which we have done against a loving God in heaven.

You see, that one word just encompasses so many things. But the value of this is that when you look behind that word, you realize that God dealt with us in our sin because of the Person and work of Christ and His suffering ministry.

The first one is this: His pardoning ministry. And so the need for pardon is because of our understanding of the word *sin*.

The second thing we saw a couple of weeks ago was the *manner* of pardon. And that is this—“the just for the unjust.” The Just suffered for the unjust. And how can you and I be complaining when we realize that a just Person suffered for me?

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Oftentimes you hear somebody say, “Well, that’s not fair,” especially when you start talking about the wonderful, gracious, merciful doctrine of election. People say, “That’s not fair.” Well *fair* is not one of God’s twenty-eight attributes. (*Laughter.*) Righteousness is. Holiness is. Fairness is a human term of equality, of comparison. But it is not a characteristic of God. You and I ought to be very, very grateful, brothers, that God is not fair.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Because if He were fair, it would not be “the just for the unjust.” It would be the unjust for the unjust. It would mean this—that I would have to die for my own sin!

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: But hallelujah! The Scripture says this, that Christ came to take away the sin of the world, of which I am the chief sinner. So recognize this. Yes, please?

Participant: I was listening to something yesterday and it was a teaching by Steve Lawson on sovereign election. I believe that was the title. And he said that what is not fair is that everyone who deserves death receives eternal life. He used a different word, but—

Bruce: Same thing. It’s “the just for the unjust.” You see, that’s the manner of pardon. Someone who is just suffered for someone who is unjust. So friends, don’t ever say that God isn’t fair. Just be grateful and say, “Thank You, Lord, that You are not fair. Thank You that You are righteous, that You are holy, that You are loving, that You’re compassionate.” Because I’ll tell you what’s not fair, friends. It’s not fair that Christ the Just died for me, the unjust.

Participant: That’s one thing we forget all the time, that fairness, or fair, is a relative term.

Bruce: Exactly.

Participant: But the forgiveness of sins is absolute.

Bruce: Absolutely. “The just for the unjust.” Yes, Brian?

Brian: I think if you tie those together and realize your sin, realize the graciousness of God. If you want gratitude, that’s where it’s found.

Bruce: Absolutely. What does that do? It produces a spirit of gratitude. That’s Peter’s whole point. It’s helping us become grateful by the ministry of Christ in our lives in what He accomplished, so that you and I are motivated now not by guilt. We’re motivated by gratitude.

So the need for pardon is the word *sin*. The manner of pardon is “the just for the unjust.” Look at 2 Corinthians 5:21. It’s a great summary of the word *substitution*. If you want to know how salvation is described, it can be described in basically one word. That is *substitution*. It is “the just for the unjust.”

2 Corinthians 5:21. “And God made Him who knew no sin to become sin in our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ.” There is a great definition of the manner for pardon, and that is “the just for the unjust.” It is the wonderful doctrine of the substitutionary work of Christ which He accomplished in His suffering.

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The third thing we noticed, just very briefly as a review, and that is the *reason* for pardon. Notice the reason for pardon—“to bring us to God.” The reason He suffered, the reason for “the just for the unjust,” is to bring you to God.

I remember several years ago that there was a campaign by a para-church group and it basically said this. The bumper sticker said, “I found God.” Well, frankly, I didn’t know He was lost. (*Laughter.*) And yet they were saying, “I found God,” putting all the emphasis on us.

Now I understand what they mean. And God was pleased to use it. Now let me say this about things like this. God will use any amount of truth that He needs at the moment of time in a person’s life because He’s the One who is sovereignly ruling his life. He may not have all the I’s dotted and the T’s crossed like you and I would like him to. But you’ve got to understand this. God is sovereign. He’s the One who is ruling. It’s not about our methodology. God will take any amount of truth that He needs to bring somebody to saving faith because He’s a sovereign, loving, compassionate God. He will do that.

So we should not get hung up and say, “Well, you didn’t say the right word.” Or “you don’t have the right bumper sticker.” We have to realize that it’s not about the right bumper sticker or the right words. It’s about a sovereign God who is drawing people to Himself. And He did that through the sacrificial work of Christ, because they need pardon. And the manner of pardon is substitution, “the just for the unjust.” And the reason is to bring people to God. You see, God brings us to Himself. And the reason He does that is because of the accomplishment of the sacrificial ministry of Christ in His suffering. That’s what produces within us,--

Men: Gratitude.

Bruce: Gratitude. We’re motivated by an attitude of gratitude. And so the reason for pardon is “to bring us to God.”

And then lastly, what are the results? We just touched on that. The two results, I believe, first of all is this. The removal of guilt is a motivation to do anything spiritual. When you understand the suffering ministry of Christ and the pardoning ministry of Christ, one of the things you’ll understand is this, that God never uses guilt as a motivation to do anything spiritual. God never uses guilt as a means for doing anything spiritual. He uses gratitude. In this pardoning ministry, one of the results would be removal of guilt as a motivation.

Notice Romans 8:1. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” It doesn’t mean that we’re not worthy of it. It just means you’re not exposed to it anymore because of the suffering ministry of Christ and what He accomplished for your pardon.

And the other issue is this. The replacement of gratitude is a motivation for service and ministry. That’s why I wanted to show you that verse in Romans 1:21, because what is the great protection about guarding your mind from becoming futile, and our hearts being darkened? It’s gratitude, giving thanks. You see, the more you and I are giving thanks, the more we’re going to focus on His life and not our lives, on His sacrifice and not our lives, and on His ministry and not our own. And so gratitude, friends, is a great

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protection against the futility of your mind and the darkening of your heart, because they did not know God and they did not thank Him.

You see, Peter is saying this. When you understand the pardoning ministry of Christ, guilt is no longer a motivation. Gratitude is. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, I don’t want to spend a whole lot of time on this.

Bruce: Sure.

Don: I know you want to get to your second point of proclamation.

Bruce: Yes, sir.

Don: But you say that guilt is never used in Scripture to motivate. What about 1 Corinthians? What about all the rebukes of Paul concerning the Lord’s Supper, or the resurrection, or heresies and divisions?

Bruce: Well, those things are to expose us in our failure and our sin. And the result of that exposure is what?

Participant: Gratitude.

Bruce: Gratitude. So that’s what I mean by that, Don.

Don: Okay.

Bruce: What I’m saying is that yes, those things will call attention to my sin. And when I think about my sin I think about what?

Participant: Forgiveness.

Bruce: Forgiveness, the pardoning ministry of Christ. And that produces within me??

Men: Gratitude.

Bruce: Gratitude. So those things are to heighten the interest in our gratitude and bring it to the forefront. So that’s what I mean when I say that, Don.

Don: Okay.

Bruce: Is that helpful?

Don: Yes.

Bruce: It points to the fact of our gratitude because those things, the rebukes, are given to us as a means of helping us to draw back to the work of Christ. And when we think about the work of Christ and not our own failure, we become grateful for His ministry because it is “the just for the unjust.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Thanks. Good question, Don. So the first triumphant ministry of Christ’s suffering is our atonement. It is permanent. Christ died for our sins. It is propitiatory. He died for our sins. It is personal, “the righteous for the unrighteous.” And it is pardoning, “to bring us to God.”

Now the second triumphal ministry that we see in this passage is His proclamation ministry. And you’ll see that in verses 19-21. Notice in chapter 3, verses 19-21. “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 when the ark was being prepared.”

Now to whom did He go and preach to? Well, the Scripture says fallen angels. The word *spirit* means fallen angels. It doesn’t mean people. It means fallen angels or demons, not people.

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And so what did He proclaim? The word *proclaim* here is different than the word *preach*. It means to pronounce or announce. It’s not the word that is used to preach the gospel. And there’s a reason for that. This is not the gospel that He went to preach, because salvation for angels is foreign to the New Testament to fallen angels, to demons.

Take a look at Hebrews 2:16.

(Transcriber’s Note: Hebrews 2:16 “For surely it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham.”)

Bruce: Salvation for fallen angels or demons is foreign in the New Testament to those individuals. And secondly, this. In Hebrews 9:27, the opportunity for salvation ends at death. There is no opportunity for salvation after death.

(Transcriber’s Note: Hebrews 9:27 “Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgement, . . .”)

So He didn’t go and proclaim the message of salvation. He went and proclaimed the message of victory over evil and the victory over Satan. This was a proclamation not of the gospel, but it was an announcement of the victory over death and over the consequences of evil sponsored by the evil one. He announced that He, by dying, triumphed over evil, and for those people that was bad news. For us it is good news. He did not go to proclaim the gospel. He went and said, (*paraphrase*), “By My suffering ministry on the cross I have overcome evil and the evil one. You have been defeated.” He did not offer them the opportunity for salvation. That is not what He did. He proclaimed His victory over Satan and the evil forces of this world, and that has tremendous implications for you and me. When we realize what that means, for us that is great news.

It means this. Christ has gained victory over Satan and all of his hosts. Would somebody read Colossians 2:15? Look at Colossians 2:15. It’s an announcement of victory.

Participant: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.”

Bruce: That’s the announcement that He made. Now what are the implications for you and me? Think about that.

First of all, you’ve been pardoned. You’ve been brought back to God. That’s the first triumphant ministry in Christ’s suffering.

The second one is this—His proclamation ministry. He proclaimed something that has tremendous impact on your life and my life, and that is this: that He has defeated Satan.

What are the implications and applications in your life today when you understand that truth? You see, that’s what Peter is saying. You’ve got to understand the consequences of His triumphal ministry in His suffering.

And the second one is this—His announcement over the victory of Satan. What does that say to us application-ally today?

Participant: Freedom.

Bruce: Yes, freedom. From what? You are no longer the slave of this world. You and I do not fight for victory. We fight *from* victory.

Participant: Amen.

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Bruce: Do you realize that? We need to act like it! We act like we’re defeated. We let the world system implode upon us. You see, we are the victors! We’re super nikes! We’re more than conquerors because Christ says, “I have overcome the world.” And if you’re in Christ, what have you overcome?

Men: The world.

Bruce: You’ve overcome the system of the world. You and I are not victims of the system of this world. We need to recognize that Christ has already won that battle. And the bad news for them is they’ve lost. The good news for us is that He won.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And now you and I can recognize that we don’t have to submit ourselves to the pressures of this world because we are operating from a point of victory, not a fight for victory. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, I’m curious about one thing. In verse 18, I’m reading from a different translation, the New King James.

Bruce: Uh-huh.

Don: When it says in your translation, “put to death in the flesh.” And yours says, “made alive in the spirit,” is your *spirit* with a small s or a capital S?

Bruce: Small s.

Don: Small. Okay, mine is capital.

Bruce: Yes.

Don: So, you know—

Bruce: There’s a good distinction there.

Don: Well, yes. And the distinction can give different interpretations too for that passage.

Bruce: It can. So go ahead and explain what the capital S means and I’ll explain what the little s means.

Don: Okay. I believe that the capital S is the Holy Spirit.

Bruce: Correct.

Don: And it’s not a matter to quibble over, but I’ve heard that the spirits in prison are talking about the souls of humans in hell, and that Jesus through the Holy Spirit preached to the people in Noah’s day.

Bruce: Right.

Don: I just wanted to point that out. No big deal. It’s a difficult passage.

Bruce: Oh, it is a difficult passage. Some translations have a capital S for the Holy Spirit. Some have a small s which would be the spirit of the person.

Participant: Well, there are no capital letters in Greek.

Bruce: That’s correct.

Participant: So it could be either one.

Bruce: It could be either one.

Participant: It becomes a matter of interpretation.

Bruce: The real issue is this. What did He talk about? What did He announce? His victory.

Participant: Amen.

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Bruce: That’s what He did. And certainly that was under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. But the spirit of the person received that. You and I receive that in our spirit because we recognize this: that we are operating from a position of victory, not fighting for victory. That’s the point of the passage.

Participant: For sure.

Bruce: He announced His victory over the evil one. Now that has tremendous implications for us, and how you and I act in the system of this world. So when the system of this world comes and persecutes us, what should we do? Recognize that that’s going to be fairly normal because we are not of this world.

Jesus said, “Sanctify them by the truth. . . . Do not remove them from the world, but protect them” through the Word. You and I recognize that the world is after us because we are the antithesis of the world. And it’s going to be our normal Christian life that we’re going to suffer. But you and I come from a point of victory, realizing that we are not victims. We’re always the vessels in the circumstance. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from ourselves.” You and I are never, ever the victims of circumstances. We’re just the vessels in the circumstance, because in that circumstance and how we respond, what is happening? Ministry is occurring, because you are giving away to someone else what God gave you. And that is your understanding of the fact that you’ve been pardoned because of the suffering ministry of Christ. Evil has been vanquished and there is victory over evil. And I’m no longer a victim. I’m now a vessel. And you give that attitude away in your response.

That’s why Peter says in the previous passage, “Be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you.” And what is the reason for the hope that’s within us? We recognize this. I’ve been pardoned.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Satan has been defeated. That’s my hope! Therefore you and I have a different response with the same thing that other people go through. That is what may call attention to the fact that we are in Christ.

So it’s very important for us to understand His proclamation ministry. Not only are we pardoned, but Satan has been rendered powerless.

And lastly, I want you to see His ruling ministry—verse 22. After His pardoning ministry was finished, after His proclaiming ministry was finished, Christ ascended to the right hand of God. And that is the position of authority and rule. That is where He is now, at the right hand of God, at the position of authority and rule.

Now I believe the point that Peter wants to make is Christ’s complete victory over all angels, authorities and powers. That’s what you saw in Colossians 2:15. Brian, do you want to read that again for us? Colossians 2:15? Now Peter’s point is this. He wants to make it clear that we understand that Christ has gained power over all angels and authorities and powers in the universe.

Brian: He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.”

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Bruce: There’s nothing on earth or nothing in heaven outside of the empire and control of Christ Himself, Nothing outside the control of Christ in the universe. He is enthroned at God’s right hand. All powers and all authorities are made subject to Him. He is the Lord of all. He’s the Lord of death. He’s the Lord of life. He’s the Lord of hell, the Lord of heaven. And so He is able to save all those for whom He died. He is able to accomplish that because He is the Lord of all of authority. Christ is in the position of supreme privilege and sovereignty in the universe.

Everything is subject to His sovereign rule. The word *sovereignty* basically means this: the right to rule. Christ now because of His suffering ministry now has a ruling ministry. He has the right to rule.

The sovereignty of God can be translated this way for us application-ally. Whatever God is pleased to permit in your life, it’s for His glory and our good. Whatever God is pleased to permit in your life and mine, it’s for His glory—to call attention to Himself—and for our good—to mold us into the image of Christ, to transform us into the image of Christ.

Now brothers, I know that we all go through different issues in life. And this is not Pollyannaish or Hollywoodish, what I’m saying. This is supernatural stuff. This is the sheer grace of God performing a transformed life, when you and I respond radically different to the normal things of this world because we’ve been pardoned, Christ is the authority over evil, and now He is in a ruling position and I understand His sovereignty.

The great comfort we have in the difficulties of life is realizing that God is—

Participant: Sovereign.

Bruce: Sovereign. For me, that’s the great comfort. I look back on my life and say, “You know, God is sovereign.” I may not understand it all, but I trust it. I submit to it. I relish it. I worship. And I also say thanks for it. Thanks for the fact that God is sovereign because friends, that is our great, great comfort. I don’t have to know all the reasons why. I just want to know the One who is.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And that is the God who is sovereign. Yes, Ted?

Ted: I just wonder, and I’m just posing this question.

Bruce: Sure.

Ted: If our reaction to difficulties, whether it’s illness, financial difficulties, families, it’s a little schizophrenic. On the one hand, we say “God is sovereign. God’s sovereign action is always for our good and His glory.” And yet when something bad happens we get up and announce it. And everybody says, “Oh, that’s just terrible!” When really I just wonder if we’re having our feet in both worlds. The world reacts to illness—Parkinson’s or whatever—with “Oh gosh! That’s awful!” But on the other hand, we’ve all had experiences—I with job loss and other things—where I look back and I said, “That was perhaps the best thing that could have ever happened to me.”

Bruce: Absolutely.

Ted: So I just wonder. I don’t know.

Bruce: That’s a great point, Ted. We need to realize where are our minds? Now go back to Romans chapter 1 verse 21. What is it that’s going to cause us to be futile of

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mind with a darkened heart? It’s not being grateful. And my point is this. Gratitude is going to be the defense against moving into the system of this world and having our feet in both camps.

We don’t have to understand all the things that we go through in life when you look back. In fact, I think this. People always ask me. I want God’s will for my life.

Ted: Yeah.

Bruce: Well, if you want God’s will for your life, then look backwards to see where you’ve come from, because that will tell you where you’re going.

Participant: That’s good.

Bruce: Most of us are saying, “Tell me what’s going to be my next job.”

Well, I would say, “Let’s look back over your work history and see what God has done sovereignly to prepare you for the next position so that you can find that out.” But if you really want to find out what God is doing in your life, look backwards. Look in your past.

That’s the whole Old and New Testament concept of remembrance. Remembrance is a key theme in the Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. When they crossed the river Jordan, why did they build the little rock temple? So that the next generation would remember what God had been doing in His sovereign grace in leading the nation of Israel. We need to have remembrance be a part of our lives. Look backwards to see the mercies of God.

You see, friends, when you and I look backwards and consider the mercies of God, we’re going to be less likely to think of the miseries of the present.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: I think the most perfect example of that is Paul in his Damascus road experience. I mean, he lays it out, what he was by the world’s standards. I mean, this was the man’s man.

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: But he missed one thing, Jesus Christ. And when Christ said, (*Paraphrase*), “Hey, you’re persecuting Me, Paul,” then he began to understand that one element that was missing in his life. And he was extremely grateful from then on.

Bruce: Amen to that. Yes, Don?

Don: Brother, would you feel comfortable expounding verse 21?

Bruce: About being saved by baptism?

Don: Yes.

Bruce: Yes. We’re not saved by baptism. Baptism is a prefiguring of the work of Christ and what it describes. He’s saying this. He’s using the illustration of the flood of Noah, saying that they were saved through the water that saved them. Now all he is saying is that is pointing to the Person and work of Christ. And when you and I are baptized, it doesn’t save us. It’s an expression of our union with Christ and what happened to us internally.

So he is not saying that you are saved by the act of baptism. That is called baptismal regeneration. That is not what he’s referring to. He’s using the illustration of Noah and

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the flood as a symbol of what happens to a person in his baptism when he is transformed by the Holy Spirit and then comes into an identity with Christ. But it does not save them in that sense. It’s using a description to describe something, a description of what Christ did for us. Yes?

Participant: Isn’t he really referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit by Christ and not the baptism of water in the church?

Men: No.

Bruce: No. This is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Participant: Well, wait a minute.

Bruce: It’s a pre-figure.

Participant: Christ baptizes us in the Holy Spirit.

Bruce: Correct. We are baptized. That’s correct.

Participant: And that’s what I think he’s referring to.

Bruce: He’s using the illustration of Noah. Here’s an illustration of Noah. It was in that issue that they were saved. In the same sense you are saved—not by the act of baptism but by what God does to you when He transforms your life in union with Him. That’s what it is.

Participant: That’s good.

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: In regard to Jesus being at the right hand of the Father and having all authority subjected to Him, it was written that God the Father said, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool.”

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Participant: What exactly did that mean?

Bruce: I think it means “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool.”
(*Laughter.*)

Participant: Thanks, Bruce. That was really helpful. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: I think it means what it says.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: Everything is subject to Him to begin with. Is there extra work going on right now, that God is bringing His enemies to—

Bruce: God is sovereign and He has always acted through the accomplishments of the Person and work of Christ. Christ said, “It is finished.” Whatever He has accomplished, God is now applying that because of the accomplishments of Christ. But there is nothing more to be earned or nothing more to be done. Christ’s ministry is finished in what He accomplished, and now God is just applying that in His sovereign grace. It’s the application of what was accomplished. But there’s nothing more to be done. That’s what we need to understand. There’s nothing more to be done. It’s being applied.

In other words, there are consequences when you make a choice and you finish something. There are consequences that are perennial. We just keep on going. Those are

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the applications being done now as a result of His finished work. Don, the baptism thing, is there anything you want to add to it?

Don: No, no. You did very well. Thank you. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: Well, I’m humbled by your observation. (*Laughter.*) Thank you. Yes?

Participant: Bruce, several years ago you taught us that God always, always, always leads. And if you go back to the transcripts, I think that’s what you’re talking about.

Bruce: Yes. Back in 2 Corinthians, remember our study on the New Covenant? “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and spreads everywhere the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him?” You see, God is always leading and is always in triumph.

Now our triumphs don’t always necessarily look like His triumphs. That’s the thing we have to understand. We have to look at this through eyes of faith. It’s His triumph, not our triumph. It’s not our definition of triumphant, it His definition of triumph, whatever that may mean. And sometimes that takes a long time for you and I to see. And sometimes we have to look backwards to see that oh yes, that was a triumph. That’s what Ted said. You look backwards and sometimes you see something that God is doing, and it gives you a spirit of gratitude. So what we need to realize is that His triumphs are not our triumphs.

Let me give you an illustration. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples were walking after the Crucifixion and they were distraught and discouraged. And Jesus comes along and they don’t recognize Him, and He says to them, (*Paraphrase*), “Why are you discouraged?”

And they said, (*paraphrase*), “Well, we thought that He was going to redeem Israel.”

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Now what had He just done? Redeemed Israel! (*Laughter.*) How did He do it? By the cross! In their minds, triumph was a political, military one. But you see, God’s triumph was a spiritual one. And so they were griping about something that He had just accomplished. They did not understand it because they didn’t see it.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: Sometimes, men, you and I have to realize that these are His triumphs, not ours.

Participant: Preach it, brother!

Bruce: Be careful not to wrap our definition of what a triumph is, and realize that it’s His triumph, not ours. Yes, Brian?

Brian: I think a lot of people are getting frustrated in today’s world, where, you know, we’re seeing Bruce Jenner being celebrated and how upside down this world is. We can quickly and easily forget that Christ has already won. And in wrestling with that, you know, we can say, “Hey, listen! God is sovereign,” and choose to do nothing about it and be a little bit too laissez-faire. And so I was wrestling with how I get involved. And this is what my thought process was, getting involved with my children, getting involved with those in the church, to make us realize how different we need to be because we are so worldly now, and getting us to be more Christlike. I think that’s even more important.

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Bruce: One of the reasons I think you asked the question and why there are divisions in the church, there are many different reasons. One of them is this. I think it’s so the sheep can be separated from the goats. If there’s no contrast, there is no reality where truth is. I think that’s why there are some divisions in the church, so that which is accurate and that which is true may be distinguished from that which is false.

Now Peter is going to talk about that in the book of 2 Peter. We’ll get to that in several months. But I think that one of the reasons we have divisions and concerns like that is so that you can see where the truth really resides, because if you don’t have that contrast, you’ll never observe it. We just need to make sure that we’re bold and standing for the truth.

And when we take a look at these three accomplishing ministries of Christ, we see this. If you’re in Christ, you and I can be encouraged. We can be confident and we can be bold because of the ministries of Christ accomplished by His suffering. Because of these ministries you have been pardoned—His pardoning ministry. Satan has been rendered powerless—His proclamation ministry. And thirdly, you are sovereignly protected—His ruling ministry. His pardoning ministry, His proclamation ministry, and His ruling ministry. You are pardoned. Satan is rendered powerless. And you are sovereignly protected.

It means this. Christ the Sufferer has become Christ the Victor. And Christ the Crucified has become Christ the Crowned.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: May it be so for His glory.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Let’s pray. Father, we thank You for the clarity of Your Scripture. We thank You that what You have accomplished for Your glory on our behalf, we now have the benefits of what You’ve accomplished for us. Help us recognize, Father, that You pardoned us to bring us to God. Satan has been rendered powerless. And You are now sovereignly protecting us by Your grace. Because we are in Christ we can be encouraged, we can be bold and we can be faithful. May it be so. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen!

Bruce: Thank you. See you next week. (*Applause.*)