

May 9 & 10, 2026 – Easter 6

1 Peter 3:17–22

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

When the MVP of the Super Bowl is first interviewed, often times he will be asked, “You just won the Super Bowl, what are you going to do next?” He will reply, “I’m going to Disneyland!” Where did Jesus go after he rose from the dead? Peter tells us, **“He also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison.”** That’s talking about souls in hell. It seems like a strange thing, doesn’t it? “You just conquered death! Where are you going Jesus?” “I’m going to hell!” But that’s what he did.

Why did he do that? To make **“an announcement to the spirits in prison”** who **“disobeyed long ago in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”** Some think that he was giving them a second chance, rescuing them from hell. We know that can’t be true because the Bible says in Hebrews 9:27 that, **“people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”** Throughout the Bible God’s Word consistently says that hell is eternal. Once you’re there, you’re there. There’s no getting out. Dante’s Inferno pictured hell with a sign above the entryway which said, “All who enter here abandon all hope.” There are no second chances.

So what was Jesus doing in hell? In Colossians chapter 2:15, Paul wrote that after God disarmed the rulers and authorities, (which is referring to the powers of hell and their powerful followers on earth,) he **“made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ.”** If this is referring to Jesus’ descent into hell, then the best we can speculate was that he was proclaiming his victory over hell, especially over those who were perhaps the most hardened of sinners, over those who resisted the most in Noah’s day.

Why does God especially mention these unbelievers in hell? God had given them plenty of years to repent while Noah was building the Ark, and they still refused to do so. We have no idea how much taunting and danger Noah and his family were in by the time the Flood finally came about. Imagine how evil people would become by giving them over 700 years of good health and prosperity. But when the waters of the Flood came, they were washed away and drowned while Noah and his family were lifted up and saved. These were the quintessential unbelievers who had hardened their hearts against Noah’s call to repentance. Jesus had a message for them, a triumphal display, and it doesn’t seem to have been good news for them.

Peter then uses this as a segue to talk about what this means for us today. We live in times that are becoming more and more dangerous and more and more evil. Christians are being pursued in court through lawsuits. It is getting more and more difficult to associate with our unbelieving world especially when it comes to our views of sex and marriage. But if God was able to conquer an evil world and save only 8 people through water and a boat back in Noah’s day, then God can do the same thing yet today for many more. It’s not like he’s gotten any less powerful. Peter writes that, **“He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.”**

There’s a thought progression throughout this section, a reason why Peter mentions Jesus’ descent into hell. He quickly goes from Jesus’ descent into hell, to the flood, to baptism, and it all is connected to the resurrection. Peter writes that **“corresponding to that** (how God saved Noah and his family through the Flood), **baptism now saves you.”** How does baptism actually save? He writes what baptism ISN’T and what it IS. It is **“not the removal of dirt from the body.”** So this isn’t a physical thing. It doesn’t have anything to do with outward cleanliness. Then what does Peter say it is? It is **“the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** How can being baptized guarantee you a good conscience? And what does it have to do with the resurrection of Jesus?

Here’s where we need to turn to other Scriptures. When Peter preached to the crowd at Pentecost, he said to them in Acts 2:38, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** When you are baptized, God says that this is how he chooses to wash your sins away and cleanse you. How can this be? In Romans 6 Paul talks about what happens in baptism. He asks, **“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”** So Paul says that two things happen to you in your baptism. God crucifies you and

buries your sinful nature and your sins with Christ. So that when Jesus is dying on the cross, God looks at it as if you were dying and being punished there with him. But there's also a positive aspect to this as well. He also raises you from the dead with Jesus as well when he gives you the Holy Spirit who connects you to Jesus and enables you to believe in Jesus. So in God's eyes you have already been crucified and raised from the dead. You were exonerated with him. It's as if you were glued to Jesus, united to Jesus, bound to Jesus. Everything that happened to him, also happened to you. Paul also says that God looks at you as if you were literally clothed with Jesus. (Galatians 3:26) Why? Because you were baptized. In God's eyes you were washed with Jesus and bathed with Jesus. So Baptism is a powerful and affective thing that has living ramifications for now and eternity.

This is why Peter says that baptism is **“the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** Whose guarantee is it? It's God's guarantee to you that you can have a good conscience. If we look like Jesus, then we actually look holy and righteous because of what he did for us. It means that our sins are covered from beginning to end. That's why Peter has no problem saying that baptism saves. It saves because it connects us to Jesus. My conscience can be clean before God because I know that my baptism makes me look clean in God's sight, despite my many failures and sins as a sinner.

So how is your conscience? Do you find yourself constantly feeling guilty over a sin that you've committed in the past? Do you call yourself derogatory names because of your failures? Do you sometimes drink or smoke marijuana in order to loosen yourself from the sadness, fear and anxiety over who you are? Do you feel that there's no way God could love you or forgive you or want you because of the thoughts or the words that you constantly struggle with? Do you call yourself a loser? Worthless? It's good that you take your sins seriously. That's part of repentance. But that doesn't mean you should despair. It means you should look to Jesus for forgiveness. And where do you find forgiveness? The first place, and the lasting place that sticks with you throughout your life, is in your baptism. Your baptism is a constant status before God that you can hold to in faith. I'm baptized. Despite my sin, I'm still baptized. It still works for me today. It's God's promise to me.

Do you believe this? Could a part of the problem be that you really don't trust in your baptism? That you really don't see yourself as completely forgiven? That you don't think about it? You don't cherish it? That you act as if it was something in the past and that it has no affect on you for today or the future? So you have no confidence at all. You live as if your baptism were absolutely worthless, and you treat it as no big deal. Is it any wonder that you find yourself giving in to sin time and again, because of your attitude towards your own baptism?

But pastor, what if I've done things I know are wrong and sinned terribly? What if I've abandoned my baptism and lived like an unbeliever? Then repent and go back to your baptism. Go back to the promise. Get back on the boat that was built for you. Cherish it once again. God hasn't abandoned you. God still wants you. God still adopted you. Jesus still died for you. If you want to get back with him, he's still here for you with open arms. We celebrate Mother's Day today. Think of the love a mother has for her children. She is always there with open arms for her children. So the Lord is always there for you. Baptism assures you of this.

It might seem strange for Peter to lead us into hell with Jesus during this Easter season. But this brings us comfort, because he went there to show them who is King and who is Lord. What does that mean for us? He conquered the unbelieving world of Noah's time through water, and he still conquers the world through the water of baptism. He adopts us, protects us and cares for us. He rules over all things for the good of his Church. When Noah and his family got on the boat, I'm sure it was a scary journey until they finally landed. But God kept them safe and protected them throughout. The risen Lord will do the same for you. You have his promise of salvation that comes to you through your baptism. Believe his promise. Trust in it. **Trust in Jesus through Hell and Back! Amen.**