

Walking with Jesus in a Weird World

The Only Way to Really Live

Unedited Transcript

David Delk

Good morning, men. It's great to be with you today. We received an email at the office, similar to lots of them that we get. This one was about an event in 2004 when we did a seminar with a local church and Pat Morley happened to be the presenter. He talked about being involved with other men in a relationship after the event and helped get groups formed, which is something we teach churches how to capture momentum. This gentleman was just sharing with us that for twelve years, the group that was formed, none of them really knew each other, the group that was formed at the end of that event in 2004, for twelve years, that group has been meeting and has seen a number of new men come through who have been disciplined to become mature followers of Jesus Christ. He just wanted to express his gratitude for all the ways that we have resourced him over those twelve years. That story's happening thousands and thousands of times across the country. I want to say thank you to any of those of you watching that are discipling men, that are involved in partnering with our ministry financially or by your work, and of course everybody here, we're grateful for your involvement as well. A lot of what happens at this Bible study makes its way into the hands of leaders all across the country and across the world.

Well, we're going to look at 1 Peter chapter 3 today. 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 18 through chapter 4 verse 6. 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 18 through 4:6. I will warn you this is weird. Our series is about Walking with Jesus in a Weird World. Today we're going to be reading a weird passage about walking with Jesus in a weird world. Here we go.

"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 formally did not obey when God's patience waded 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 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."

"Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that has passed suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do: living in sensualities, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you. But they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does."

You know, I often close my scripture reading with, "May God add understanding to the reading of his word." You can see that I really mean that today.

Let me tell you about some bad trades. You've probably heard of some of these bad trades that have happened throughout history. One very famous one is in 1920, Harry Frazee, the owner of the Boston Red Sox, traded Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees for \$100,000, which was obviously a ton of money in 1920, and at \$300,000 loan. Not that bad. He wanted to use it to stage a musical. That's true, by the way. He really did want to use it to ... Well, of course, what happened? Babe Ruth hit 665 of his 714 home runs as a New York Yankee, hit 54 home runs the first seasons in the Bronx, and he led the Yankees to seven World Series appearances and four titles. I don't care how good the musical was, it was a bad trade. That was a bad trade.

On a business front in 1977, a little known director was making a weird movie of a type that nobody had ever made before. The studio was looking for some ways to cut their expenses and so they said to him, "If we can pay you \$20,000 less for directing this movie, we will give you all of the merchandising rights related to it." That movie was Star Wars and the combined revenue for merchandising is over \$3 billion today. That was a bad trade.

Now, neither one of those trades compares to the trade that I made a few weeks ago, because without looking at the schedule and the text that we were going to be talking about, I was supposed to be teaching next Friday. I traded with Brett Clemmer to get this spot. Then when I opened the spreadsheet and looked at what the passage I had to deal with, I thought, "Oh Lord, what have I done?" That was a bad trade. No, I'm excited to be here. I'm excited to look with you at this passage.

If we think about what we've been talking about in 1 Peter, Peter is describing for his readers the weird world that they're living in. Persecution had increased by the time this book was written. There was even martyrs by this time. There was an economic persecution. There was religious persecution, social persecution. All those pressures were out there. It was a very debauched society as we just read about. The Christians felt like aliens and strangers. Peter said, "The reason you feel that way is you are. This world is not your home." He goes into chapter 1, he is preparing them for what life is like based on this weird world that we live in, but also based on the reality of what Christ has done. He starts out highlighting the hope that we have in Christ and that's what we talked about in chapter 1. For the first time, we can experience full reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. This hope has been revealed, he talked about. People in the Old Testament were looking forward to something that was going to happen. Now we get to experience the full reality.

In chapter 2, he shows us how this affects the way we live as God's people in a hostile world, that we submit to authority, that we submit to masters, that we are supposed to be a holy people, a people for God's own possession. In chapter 3, he talks about wives and husbands and how those relationships work in this crazy world that we're in, how to handle suffering which comes up over and over again in this book, this persecution, this suffering, this feeling like the world is against you. Then, last week, Pat led us and talked about how to be a Christian is to love everyone and to want God's best for them. What an anti-cultural kind of position that those who are persecuting you, those who are opposed to you, that instead of wanting to get even with them, instead of wanting to beat them, instead of wanting to win, we actually want God's best for them. Wow. That's the stance that we, as Christians, are supposed to take in a weird world.

Today, we are going to continue that theme, talk about the only way to really live. Now, before we do this, I want to talk a little bit about a sidebar about how to handle a difficult text. If you didn't notice, this text had a lot of stuff going on and a lot of it was happening very quickly and a lot of it is not tremendously clear. We've got Jesus preaching to spirits in heaven, they somehow are disobedient in the days of Noah. Then he goes off to the flood and saving eight people and that's like baptism for us. What in the world is going on?

I want to do a little bit of a sidebar on how you handle a difficult text. If you read the commentaries about this text, you will see there are at least five major opinions about what this text is about, five major opinions throughout church history. How do you handle a difficult text? Some of you might want to snap a picture of this screen, you might want to write this on the back of your sheet, maybe something that you want to put in your Bible even. This is so important and so many people get off base here.

A little bit of a preamble to this is that we should not be surprised that occasionally there are some things in the scriptures that are not as clear as others. It's written in a common tongue from 2000 years ago that only lasted the couple hundred years beyond that as a dominate language because, by then, Latin had taken over. In many ways, it's remarkable that there are only a handful of places in the whole New Testament where there's any significant discussion or confusion about what a text means. If you think about it, you can look back at something like Shakespeare which is written in our same language and there's all kinds of passages in Shakespeare that scholars debate and argue about, "What does he mean? Why did he say this? Was this some kind of a colloquial expression of the time? Was he literally meaning this?" On and on and on and all this kind of stuff. I mean, pages and pages and pages of debates. In the New Testament, there's literally only a handful of places.

A couple things we know. One is we know that this made perfect sense to the people who read it. There are all kinds of expressions that we use today that probably in 50 years people are going to have a hard time understanding. You can watch an old movie or read a book from the early 1900s and they'll use some colloquial expressions and you're like, "What does that mean? I don't even know what that means." This made perfect sense to the people who read it. That helps us think through, "What might he have been talking about?"

Let's talk about how to handle a difficult text. Well, the first thing is that you want to find the main idea in context. What is it that is clear about this passage? Anything that's obscure about the passage can't contradict what's clear about the passage. He must be continuing the point that he's making.

In Peter, in this book of 1 Peter, we see that what Peter is talking about, and you see it at the very first of chapter 3 verse 18 even, is that Jesus was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. It's talking about Jesus' suffering and victory over sin and death. That's kind of the context that we're in here. That he triumphed over that. We take that big idea and then we say, "Okay, now how do we interpret the rest of this text in light of, not only that big idea, but also the rest of the scripture?"

For example, one of the minority opinions about this text was that Jesus went to preach to spirits who were dead who were in hell or Hades or limbo or purgatory or something like that. The difficulty with that interpretation is that there is no other place in scripture that supports that kind of idea. When we do have statements made about what happens when people die, for example, the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." You have the parable of the two guys that one of them is in

heaven, one of them is in hell. There's no indication at all that there's any kind of a second chance or anything like that. Therefore, in light of the rest of the scripture, that makes that interpretation unlikely.

What are some other things that would fit this context that we see in the rest of scripture? Well, the interpretation that I am going to suggest to you today, the two major ones that are around today, one, is this refers to the preaching through Noah to the disobedient people in his day, which is certainly a possibility. Many people take that.

I think that based on the word here, the word is proclaim, "in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison." That if you take a passage like Colossians chapter 3 that talks about Jesus triumphing over the powers of this world and you have that sense almost of Jesus celebrating, doing an end zone dance if you will. It's kind of the imagery you have in Colossians 3. In Ephesians, you have the conquering king. It says, "He made captives captive and he brought people in to see his triumph." He publicly made a spectacle of his triumph, basically in Ephesians. Here in Peter, this proclamation could very well be that he is announcing to the spirits, "Nanny nah nah nah nah. I did what I said I was going to do. We won. It's over."

This is an interpretation that many people take, that Jesus is announcing his triumph to the spirits. Part of the reason is that in the intertestamental period, the period between the Old and the New Testaments, there was a lot of writing about the spirits influencing evil in the days of Noah. There's actually a whole passage about that in the book of Enoch. If the people would have been familiar with that story, then you have this tied in that Jesus, the same spirits that were promoting evil in the days of Noah amongst the people, the reason that things got so bad with Noah, was that people were allowing evil spirits to influence them. Jesus goes to those spirits and says, "No more. It's done. I've won the victory. This is not happening anymore in the lives of my people." He proclaimed his victory over them.

We interpret what the text says in light of the rest of the scripture. Now, don't look for certainty about lesser points. Either way, if this is preaching through Noah to people, if this is proclaiming victory to the spirits, either way, the point is Jesus has triumphed in bringing salvation. That's the point. We know that's the point. We don't have to nail down every little detail to figure out that that's the point.

Then, third, we need to apply the main idea to our heart and life. Sometimes we get a text like this and we're like, "I don't know. It's just confusing." We just kind of throw it away. No, this is God's word. We need to allow his spirit to do the work that he wants to do in our hearts and minds. That's what we're going to do this morning. We're going to apply the main idea of this passage to our hearts and minds. The main idea, in context, is that Jesus triumphed through suffering, saving us and transforming us to live for him. That's what we're going to see in this passage. The verse 18 through around 20 talks about Jesus triumphing through his suffering. He suffered for sins and he triumphed over sin and death. That message was proclaimed on his behalf, that victory was proclaimed to the spirits in prison.

What does it mean that Jesus triumphed over sin and death? Well, what it means is that should have consequences for us. As a man then, I can't live as if I'm a prisoner to sin. I should not be living as if sin is something to be trifled with because it's not. Yet, many of us, as Christian men, allow the seeds of sin to sit there, to get their claws in us, and we don't realize what's really going on.

I was reading about some birds in the Galapagos Island that they're afraid are about to go extinct. The reason they're about to go extinct is there's this fly that got imported from somewhere else. It lays these

larva and these larva get in the nests and they crawl over to the baby birds, and they have these little hooks on their bodies. They hook into the skin of the birds and they kind of pull themselves far enough inside to where they can start sucking the birds' blood. The problem is they're tiny and the bird can not get rid of them. It can't shake them away, it can't fly them out, it can't pick them out because these hooks are in there. Once it has its hooks in you, it's very difficult to let it go. That's what happens with sin. We allow sin to get that tiny little foothold in our heart and our mind.

It could be that we're become overly fixated on a hobby and we justify it. "I deserve some fun. I mean, hunting two weekends a month. Come on. That's not that big a deal. My wife loves for me to get away. I enjoy the outdoors." All of a sudden, we're not in church. We're missing our men's group and we're spending all this money and we're putting stuff on the credit cards and we're not making the payments. Three or four years down the line, our wife's like, "Look, you've been gone every weekend. Don't talk to me." "I haven't been gone every weekend. I only went when you said I could." Yeah, right?

We don't realize where these things are heading. It might be pornography. It might be working too much. I need to secure our financial future. If I just can get this one more deal, if I can get this project done, if I can build this new line of business. It's only going to take a couple years. We don't realize what's really going on. This passage teaches us that Jesus has triumphed over sin and death. We no longer are powerless before sin.

Men who don't know Christ don't have any choice. You wonder why they act the way they do? It's because they have parasitic sins all over their body sucking their blood out. The next time you deal with an angry guy that's acting irrational, picture them that way because that's what's really going on. That's why he's angry. That's why he's irrational, because he's got parasitic sins all over his body, sucking out his life. That's the way he behaves the way he does. We don't have to be that way. We can follow Jesus in his triumph over sin and death.

The second thing we see is down in verse 22. Jesus has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. This is the other reason I prefer that interpretation that Jesus was proclaiming his victory over the spirits, because it fits with the context in verse 22. He has authority in this world. What does that mean for us as men? It means that we also don't have to live as if we are under the circumstances.

You've probably heard the old preachers thing where he asks a woman how she's doing and she said to him, "I'm doing pretty well under the circumstances." He said, "Well, what are you doing under the circumstances? You're not supposed to be under the circumstances. You're supposed to be on top of the circumstances."

If we believe that Jesus is sovereign, if we believe that he really rules over spirits and authorities and powers, then we know that the things that are coming into our lives have been sifted through his hands. We don't have to kick against the goads. We don't have to fight too hard.

It's interesting. We have a very difficult election this year. I'm not going to get into all that because we could talk about that all day and we could start throwing chairs around the room or something. You know, there are a lot of people who are viewing what's happened as a judgment of God. When you think about how extraordinary ... I mean, we have two candidates, both of which have over 64% negative rating. Think about that. How does that happen in a democracy where both people have 64%? We have

a weird system where that can happen. It had to align, the stars had to align for something like this to happen. There are people who are saying, "Look, this could very well be the judgment of God, because how else can you explain this?"

You have difficulties that come in your workplace. Let's go back to this new division you're trying to start and you work on it and you work on it and you work on it. You try everything and you just keep going and pushing and pushing and pushing. People around you are mad at you and your vendors are upset with you and your partners are frustrated with you. Well, at some point, and I realize this is a fine line because determination is needed, but at some point, I think we have to say that we are trying to make it happen instead of let it happen, that we are trying to overcome what God is obviously blocking in our lives. We can come to that place because we believe that Jesus has power and authority, that Jesus is sifting these things, that these are not random events that are happening to us. An illness with our child, a problem in our marriage, a frustration in relationships, a financial crisis, these are not random things that are just happening, Jesus actually rules today. Therefore, we can have faith and hope like Peter's asking us to in the midst of all these crises.

Then, the third thing that we see here is that we are saved and can endure suffering and live righteously. This is where he takes the turn there in chapter 4. Now, part of the reason that I believe he references Noah and the eight persons is talking to Peter's audiences about you're a minority and he's been saying that to them. Look, all these people around you believe differently than you do, but just like Noah, eight people were saved, you guys are the few that are saved now. Of course, as Christianity has blossomed around the world, there are lot more of us today. Peter was saying you've been saved and what should happen to us that we've been saved? Look at chapter 4 verse 1, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."

Now this phrase "arm yourselves" that's a military phrase. It sounds like it in English. It is. It's actually strapping on your weapons. It's a very active kind of description. I think that most of us as Christian men take this kind of idea very passively. We think, "I'm going to go to church. I'm going to go to my Bible study. I'm going to be involved in a group. I'm going to sit around. I'm going to read some things. Somehow, I'll have the mind of Christ." That's not what Peter says. Peter says we have to arm ourselves with the same way of thinking. It's an active kind of thing. We have to discipline ourselves to think the way that Jesus thinks. We do that by being in the word, by prayer, by allowing people to challenge us in our assumptions, by being open and honest and vulnerable, by admitting the places we're failing, by allowing people to challenge the worldview and the direction that we're heading in important areas of our lives.

Most men don't do any of that. Most of us just kind of go on autopilot hoping that somehow we become Godly men. We're satisfied with being nice rather than being powerful. You can be a nice guy by osmosis, just because it's a pain to get in trouble. Who wants people mad at you all the time? I'm just going to be nice. It's easier. That's not what it's talking about. Being a powerful man, a spiritually powerful man, who transforms people's lives around him, his family, his workplace, his neighborhood, his church, that happens when we arm ourselves with the same way of thinking, when we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ. He says, "When you have suffered in the flesh, you've ceased from sin." He's referencing both Jesus, but also when we are willing to realize that we can endure suffering, that we don't have to give in to this world, that we don't have to give in to the pressure, then we too can cease with sin. We can live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

This is actually Pat Morley's life verse, chapter 4 verses 1 and 2, that he would live the rest of his earthly life for the will of God. This is what Peter is saying. What Jesus has done, he's like a trailblazer who's hacked his way through the jungle. What we're supposed to do is we're supposed to follow him. We're supposed to follow that trail and it will allow us to not do what the Gentiles do, to not get involved in all these things that end up in destruction, but instead to live a life of righteousness and holiness before Christ.

Let me just give you an illustration of what I think this is like. Imagine that someone came up to you and they said listen, we have a new show, a new contest that's happening, and we have a \$1 million prize. \$1 million, you're going to play one game and you're going to get to choose what game you play. For that one game, whoever wins gets \$1 million. These are your opponents. You and a partner are going to play them. You're going to play them in either basketball or chess. That's your choice. You're going to choose basketball or chess. Here is your teammate. LeBron James. Now, which sport are you going to choose to play against those two guys for \$1 million? I hope you pick basketball. I don't know how good of a chess player LeBron James is. He may be really, really good. I'm still going with basketball.

Here's the deal. This is exactly what happens with us in the gospel. We have a partner. We have a leader. We have a trailblazer. He says, "Look, if you will play my game, if you go the direction I'm going, then I will give you power, I will transform you, I will give you patience and peace and gentleness and self-control and all these things that you've always wanted as a man can be yours, but if you go play some other game, I can't really help you with that. If you're going to play the game of trying to find all your fulfillment in your career and that's where you're going to look for success and meaning and significance and happiness, well, that's not my game. This is Jesus. I don't play that game. If you're going to play the game of looking for sensuality and pleasure to bring your significance and happiness and joy from pornography or hobbies or material things or experiences or adrenaline or whatever it is, that's not my game. I can't really help you with that."

We're like picking LeBron James playing chess with him instead of playing basketball for \$1 million. Jesus says, "That if you will play my game, if you play the game that I want you to play, if you'll live the life that I want you to live, then I can give you everything that you've always wanted to be, everything you've always wanted to have to be the man that God has called you to be."

The Big Idea for today is that **Real manhood follows full surrender**. Jesus has triumphed over sin and death. Jesus rules over powers and principalities. We can live a life in his footsteps that is the kind of life that we want to live as men and that brings him honor and glory. Today, I just would ask you: Are you living a transformed life that really is the kind of life you want to live as a man? Is it the kind of life you know you were made to live as a man? Are you living as a man who can have that kind of self-control? Can you apply your energy to the things that God really wants to see done in your life? Are you influencing the people around you in significant ways? If that's not happening, perhaps we need to ask ourselves: Have we fully surrendered? Have we recognized that Jesus is the one who has triumphed over sin and death and we can fully trust him? Jesus is the one who rules and we can fully trust him. We don't have to look to the same thing the Gentiles did. We have a much greater savior. We have someone even better than LeBron James on our team if we will simply agree to surrender and play with them.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for today and I thank you for these men that are here and this commitment that they've made to study your word together, to be in relationship with one another. I

pray that you would build into their hearts and minds today everything they need to become the men that you've called us to be. Each one of us, Lord, could find places in our lives where our hearts have wandered from you where we have gotten off track and started to look to something else. Lord, we pray that this passage in Peter would remind us that the only hope of salvation, that the only way to make it through the flood of this world is by trusting in you. Lord Jesus, would you just show us how powerful and great and majestic you are that we would be willing to then surrender and follow you all the days of our life? For your glory we pray, in Jesus' name, amen.