*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, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 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, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

Much of this scripture has stumped theologians for generations, and it still does today. So, what do we make of this difficult scripture, how do we approach difficult scriptures? Do we skip it, pretend like we didn’t see it, or perhaps for the bold of heart get lost in a deep search of google? One of the great church fathers Augustan said “the best way to clarify confusing scripture is to look at more scripture”. So using the context of 1 Peter let’s approach this passage of scripture faithfully.

In v.18 we find the entirety of the scripture in one verse. That Christ suffered for sins, making the unrighteous righteous, so that we could be brough to God, no longer enslaved to death and the flesh, but alive in Christ. The entire verse hangs on the linchpin of the word “once”, that Christ’s one sacrifice was enough for us today, who are unrighteous, just as it was for the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus who was literally being put to death for his sin. Jesus has not had to make any other sacrifices for any person at any time in the last 2,020 years to enter into Heaven.

With that context we look on to v.19- 20, that Jesus went and preached to “spirits in prison”. Does this mean that Jesus went to hell and preached to people that were there? To add to the confusion, it says that these spirits were disobedient during the times of Noah. So, what is happening? Well, we know that Jesus died once, that he didn’t make an ultimate sacrifice back in the days of Noah, but we do know that Gods judgement came upon those who were disobedient to God in the days of Noah, and people are still disobedient to God today in 2020. However, regardless of the disobedience of man, Gods message of salvation is always present, the truth of the coming messiah, Jesus, was evident in the years of Noah, even when people were disobedient, and the gospel message is evident today, even when people are disobedient. The gospel message meets people when they are in prison of sin, unrighteousness, and death and it frees them. In the flood only 8 people were saved though out the entire world, in some countries, only less then 1% is saved by the gospel.

Finally, in v.21 we find that Baptism is a representation of not only the burial and resurrection of Jesus but of the flood and Noah. That even though death was found in the water all around Noah, God kept Noah from being drowned in the waters and safely brought him through it. The clarification is that baptism is an appeal to God for a “good conscience” that we are following in obedience to God and his word which tells us to repent, believe, and be baptized, for this is what the Lord calls us to. This baptism is not made possible through our good deeds, but instead the word clarifies itself saying, “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”. It is only through the resurrection of Christ, that we are able to approach God and receive salvation. As now, the resurrected Jesus has all dominion on heaven and on earth so that we would serve a faithful and powerful savior.