

**Text: 1 Peter 4.6**

One of my commentators say that some claim our verse is the most difficult to interpret in the Bible. I think it is challenging, but I am not sure it is the most difficult... 1 Pt 3.19, preaching to the spirits in prison, comes to mind...

I changed the title I gave in the bulletin, "The Purpose of the Gospel" to:

*The Benefit of the Gospel to the Dead*

That change reflects the challenge in interpreting the passage, but as I said, I think some of Peter's other statements are more challenging.

The best way to approach this, I think, is to lay out the building blocks of the verse, and then put them back together again. I will follow the Greek word order as we lay out these blocks.

First, we need to remember the overall theme of the section, and perhaps the main theme of 1 Peter, which is: **Peter encourages Christians to persist in faith despite persecution.**

Several of our messages have involved giving reasons why we should adopt this outlook on life — despite all the negative pressure from the world, we should press on in faith.

**For:**

Our verse starts with "for" – a connector word, which gives a reason why we should follow the imperative, "arm yourselves with this same purpose" (v. 1)

**This purpose:**

Lit. "into this" – the question is, does "this" point back to what was just said, or forward to something that is coming up next?

**Even to those who are dead:**

Next in Gk word order

Indirect object of the verb

Question, who are the dead? When was the gospel preached to them?

## The gospel has been preached:

Gk: is “euangelizomai” – the word we get “evangelize,” “evangelical” from.

Meaning: to give good news, or to preach good news

It is aorist passive, meaning that the dead received the evangelizing at some point in the past.

It is also in the third person: “it has been evangelized” – meaning this has no connection with Jesus proclaiming to the spirits in prison (recall 3.19).

## That:

A little “purpose particle” that seems connected to “into this” at the beginning of the verse

Thus, “For into this ... in order that” seems to mean “into this” points forward to the end clauses

## [untranslated particle]

In Gk, there is a little particle “men” that looks for a following particle “de.” This sets up an “on the one hand” but “on the other hand” construction.

One the one hand : [Clause 1]

On the other hand: [Clause 2]

These particles are sometimes not translated, but “though” in our version sets up the first clause, with clause two being the logical parallel.

A rough first step in putting the building blocks together:

For this purpose it has been evangelized to the dead, so that though [clause 1], on the other hand [clause 2].

**Proposition:** The preaching of the gospel gives powerful assurance to pressured believers: nothing they can do to you matters.

## I. Identifying “the dead”

A. The options

1. Could mean “spiritually dead”
2. Could mean “literally dead”

## B. Reasons for “literally dead”

1. Peter never uses νεκρός of the spiritually dead
2. The previous verse clearly speaks about literally dead people
3. There are no clues in the passage that suggest a shift in meaning

## C. Who are these dead people?

1. They heard the gospel at some time in the past
2. The implication is that the evangelizing benefits them
3. They are thus Christians who have died in consequence of their conversion to Christianity, *i.e.* martyrs

Remember the theme, **Peter encourages Christians to persist in faith despite persecution.**

- Persecution produces pain, suffering, and fear (in those not yet persecuted especially).
- The worst that could happen with persecution is death
- So, it would seem Peter imagines the worst in setting up this assurance

## II. Understanding “judged in the flesh as men”

### A. What would the world believe concerning believers who suffer death by persecution?

1. “Some good their weird faith got them”
2. “Their faith promised a better life, and all it got them was trouble and death”

Believers who haven’t suffered to this extent might be tempted by the same thinking

## B. What about the term “judged”?

### 1. The sentence of death is on all men because of Adam

1 Cor 15.22 For as in Adam all die...

Rm 5.14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

### 2. When men die, they suffer the judgement of Adam (even Christians)

Remember, God said to Adam, “you will surely die” — lit. “dieing you will die”

### 3. Thus, Christians who die as a result of persecution seem to be judged: note the term “though” in our verse

Thus, our rough translation: “For this purpose it has been evangelized to the dead, so that though **dead believers might be judged in the flesh as men**, on the other hand [clause 2].

In other words, dead believers seem to have lost out and died just like other men, but...

## III. Believing “live in the spirit according to the will of God”

### A. The other side of the coin

1. Notice that our translators use a “small s” here
2. Though these believers are judged in the flesh as men, *i.e.* have died
3. This happened that they might live in the spirit according to the will of God

2 Cor 5.8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

### B. The message to believers

1. Arm yourself with the same purpose of Christ, to endure persecution
2. Because your conversion guarantees that the worst they can do is kill you, and the other side of the coin is far better

Rm 8.18 ¶ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

“The fact that they had died like other men might raise the question of whether their new faith had gained them anything. In the eyes of their opponents, they seemed to have gained nothing. Though they claimed to have received a new life, they died like other mortals. Peter assured them that though they had died, they would fully share in the life brought by the Savior. They live with Him now in the spiritual world, and will share with Christ blissful vindication when He returns in glory. That assurance led naturally to the emphasis on Christian living in light of the eschatological hope set forth in verses 7–11.”<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The preaching of the gospel gives powerful assurance to pressured believers: nothing they can do to you matters.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1997), 267.