

## ***A PRIVILEGED PEOPLE***

### **1 Peter 1:10-12**

**September 28, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

I heard the testimony this week from a youth pastor who told of a mission trip a few years ago to Timisoara, Romania. He shared about how they played soccer with the locals which, I have seen in our trips to Mexico, is a great tool in helping gather the community. After they had been soundly beaten by the Romanians, this youth pastor asked them to gather around because he had something he would like to tell them. He then shared the gospel through his interpreter. It was this particular statement of his testimony, which I paraphrase, that caught my attention. “I shared the gospel, unable to add any of the funny stories that we are accustomed to because I was speaking through an interpreter. And the people were captivated and wanted to hear more.”

He then told another story about working with a group of Goths in Denver. He had led a young girl to Christ and she began bringing her friends to church and asked this youth pastor to hang out with them. On one occasion he felt compelled to take the group a sack of burritos from Taco Bell for lunch. He began talking to the girl and asked how she was doing. She began to talk about her new relationship to Christ and pulled a New Testament out of her purse and began to read the story of the crucifixion out loud. This youth pastor said he was stunned as the entire group, cigarettes, chains, tattoos and all, listened attentively as she read. They remarked that they had never before heard this gospel. The Jesus they knew and the Christianity that followed Him they heard through the media.

These testimonies tell us two things. First, the entire world, of which the U.S. is a part, needs the gospel. We cannot assume any more that people have been to church and heard the gospel. My children’s generation is the first in our nation’s history that has no definite ties to the church. My generation had grandparents that went to church or at least talked about religion in a positive way. Two World Wars and a Great Depression spurred people to at least gather together as a community in church. That is no longer the case today. We must not assume that people have heard the gospel. And even if they have, the Christianity they have heard of and probably despise came from a media that tells them that Christians should be arrested for hate crimes against homosexuals.

The second thing these testimonies tell us is that many professing believers today, pastors included, have simply forgotten the power of the gospel for salvation. Why did it take these testimonies to lead this pastor to understand, and I quote, “We don’t need Bozo the Clown parachuting in from a helicopter to help people hear the gospel.” So we have those outside the church who have never heard the gospel, or if they have it is a skewed gospel from the media or a lusterless, stagnant, powerless gospel seen in the lives of professing believers who have lost a sense of awe and wonder concerning God’s grace.

What we learn from Peter this morning is that Christians, a special people, a hopeful people, a joyful people, are also a privileged people. They have a gospel that is complete, a gospel that those before the cross could only look forward to and died without having fully known the glory of the Cross. Peter closes this introductory section of the letter by reminding us that *God’s people have received a glorious salvation, a salvation which stunned and awed the prophets and angels and should still stun and awe the saints today as well.*

We are a privileged people. How?

## **I. The Prophets Were Awed by Our Salvation (1:10-12a)**

**“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries.”**

### **1. Our salvation was examined by them**

Notice first that these prophets inquired as to this great salvation. They carefully sought, deeply examined the truths concerning how sinful man could be reconciled to a holy God. In other words, they diligently searched the truths that they received concerning the gospel of God.

What Peter proclaims is that the Old Testament prophets knew that what was given to them was of utmost importance in God’s plan of redemption. A **“prophet”** was one who revealed God’s Word, a Word that was received directly from Him, to man. In Jewish thought, the **“prophets”** included anyone that God had called and specially set apart for this important work. It included men like Abraham, Noah, Moses, and David, along with those who we typically think of as the Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, along with 12 Minor Prophets. A **“prophet,”** then, was anyone that God gave a message to pass along to His chosen people.

When we read what God gave to these men, we see that the essence of the message was the gospel. It was a message of redemption and reconciliation, a message of how man might be made right with God coming from the One who had been offended by the human race. Even Adam was given a prophetic word in Genesis 3:15 in the *protoevangel*, the first mention of the gospel immediately following the Fall where God said that victory over Satan, sin, and death would come through the seed of the woman. There the message of the Messiah was first promised along with the way of righteousness that could come only through the sacrifice of innocent life as a substitute for those who were guilty. As we work our way through the Old Testament, we see this prophecy more fully defined in a person, Jesus Christ, and it is this person that is the very center of the gospel that these **“prophets... made careful searches and inquiries.”** While they did not know all there was to know concerning the gospel in its entirety, they did know that their message had eternal consequences for the souls of men.

Therefore, Peter says, they sought to know more. They sought **“to know what person or time.”** While the prophets knew *what* they prophesied, they did not know the schedule, the time, the *when* in which these things would come to pass. Initially, they did not know the person, the *who* through whom salvation would come. So they dug, they asked, they inquired. And as they inquired, the Holy Spirit **“indicated”** or showed them the when and the Who of the gospel.

From this I would note two things. First, we see that the Holy Spirit was alive and active in the Old Testament. Some teach that the Holy Spirit did not minister or perform any role until His coming at Pentecost. These teach that the Old Testament era was overseen by God the Father, the gospel time between the end of the Old Testament and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was the time of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit began His ministry at Pentecost and will continue His work until the Lord’s return. However, while this might sound good, it is simply not biblical. While we do perhaps see fuller works of the Godhead in these periods, we certainly see that the entire Godhead has been involved in human history since the Creation. In Genesis 1:1 we read those wonderful words, “In the beginning, God created...” What follows is the glorious account of the work of God’s creation. However, immediately in v. 2 we read, “And the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.” The Holy Spirit was active in Creation from the very beginning. And Paul tells us in Colossians that this creative work was by, through and for Jesus Christ (1:16). As we make our way through the Scriptures, the works of the entire Godhead are plainly seen, as we see here in the Spirit working **“in them”** and

through the prophets to reveal God's Word to the people. And Peter uses the phrase "**Spirit of Christ**" to reinforce, as John MacArthur rightly suggests, that it was "the eternal Christ, inseparable from the Holy Spirit, that worked from within them to record God's infallible revelation."<sup>1</sup> Thus they knew that this salvation would be fully accomplished by Jesus Christ, according to God's redemptive plan in God's time.

But there is a second thing that we should glean from this. These "**prophets**" were not satisfied with simply receiving whatever truth it was that God gave to them to give to His people. They made careful inquiry. They dug for a fuller understanding of these truths. What does this say to us today? We have the full revelation of these things given to us – we have the rest of the story. But we too should "**inquire.**" We too should search; we too should dig, never being satisfied that we have plumbed the depths of the gospel! Too often today a person is satisfied with what the writer of Hebrews called "the elementary principles" (Heb. 5:12). While the elementary principles are foundational and of utmost importance, the writer of Hebrews goes on to show how being satisfied with the ABC's, how a failure to dig more deeply and inquire into these things, leaves one short of maturity at best and at worst still under the wrath of God. In other words, we must be ever mining the depths of the gospel, always seeking to unite these truths to our faith.

## **2. Our salvation was prophesied by them**

Peter continued, "**As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you.**" Notice that the gospel that was given to these prophets was the gospel of God's "**grace,**" a "**grace**" that was somehow still future to them but had been received by these to whom Peter wrote. This is not to say that the Old Testament prophets and saints possessed a different salvation than the New Testament believer as if the Old Testament provided one way of salvation, somehow apart from grace, and the New Testament another, by grace. This is not a declaration of the lack of grace in the Old Testament era. God's only way of salvation, and the way given to these prophets, has been and will always be by grace alone.

What Peter proclaims is that these Old Testament prophets had not experienced this grace *in its fullness* as those on the other side of the Cross would. Many Old Testament Jews interpreted the Old Testament revelation through the prophets as God's ultimate or final revelation. Thus, as we have written down for us in the gospels, they misunderstood Christ when He came. But that came about in their ignorance, and their ignorance led them to misinterpret that which was given to the prophets from God. The prophets themselves saw the Old Testament revelation as partial, not complete, as preparatory, and not final. Unlike many of the Jews, they understood that what they received pointed to a person and a time when God's salvation by grace would be complete.

But their prophecies did not stop there. The Holy Spirit also "**indicated**" to them a fuller message, that being the *how* that God's salvation by grace would be accomplished, that being "**the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.**" The prophets received certain truths concerning Christ before the events themselves took place. Here, they are given the nature of those events that would lead to the fullness of God's grace. The prophets testified of the humiliation of Christ, His "**sufferings,**" and the exaltation of Christ, "**the glories to follow,**" His sufferings. Even these prophets, who were limited in their understanding of the fullness of the gospel, understood that suffering had to precede glory. They had an inkling of the truth that there was a Cross that led to a Crown. Hear the prophet Isaiah:

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Peter*, 55.

**Isaiah 52:13-14** – <sup>13</sup> Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. <sup>14</sup> Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men.

**Isaiah 53:1-12** – <sup>1</sup> Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. <sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? <sup>9</sup> His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. <sup>10</sup> But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. <sup>11</sup> As a result of the anguish of His soul (SUFFERING – GLORY), He will see *it and* be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

These things were still future to the time of Isaiah. Their reality is proclaimed by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11:

**Philippians 2:5-11** – <sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> For this reason also (SUFFERING – GLORY), God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could write that the prophets prophesied of the grace of God that “*would come*” and be fully realized in the person and work of Christ. The message of the prophets, though somewhat in a germinating form, was that salvation is according to God’s Word alone, as they themselves proclaimed, by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

### **3. Our salvation was revealed to them to be revealed by others (v. 12a)**

Their prophecies of the gospel did not stop with the source and content of the gospel, but the *means* of assuring that this gospel would have its effect was also revealed to them and by them. Peter continues, **“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things.”** The revelation they received was not for them only, it was not only for their benefit especially, but it was **“for you.”** Here we need to once again consider who Peter was writing to. He was writing to a primarily Gentile audience, those who had been scattered throughout Asia Minor (1:1). When Peter writes that these prophets knew that they were not **“serving themselves”** he suggests more than just the prophets personally, though they would be included, but that this gospel that they had received was for all men, Jew and Gentile alike, the whole world. The revelation was **“for you,”** Peter writes, and by implication, for us, as that revelation is proclaimed in the fullness of grace of God and the person and work of Christ.

Further, **“they were not serving themselves.”** This is in the imperfect tense in the Greek, designating a continual serving or continual ministering of some length. In this we see the wonder of God’s revelation of the gospel. These prophets, who had but a partial or preparatory revelation of these things, would continue to minister these things even after their death, even after that which was partial and preparatory was made complete and realized in Christ. How could this be? How do Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Amos and Habakkuk continue to preach to us today? Through Spirit-anointed and Spirit empowered preaching, or, to use Peter’s words, **“through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.”** This salvation, revealed thousands of years ago by these prophets, is received today by faith when the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to the heart of an unbeliever through the preaching of the gospel. Salvation comes as the Spirit applies the Word of truth to an unbelieving heart. Paul put it this way:

**Romans 10:11-17** – <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; <sup>13</sup> for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!” <sup>16</sup> However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?” <sup>17</sup> So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

The prophets understood what Paul wrote here years later. They knew that Word and Spirit works together in the spirit of men because they experienced it firsthand in receiving the message of the gospel, a gospel that they dug deeply to understand more. Have you received the gospel of Christ by the Spirit of Christ today? If so, does it continue to awe you, to amaze you, to wonder? Do you still hunger and thirst to know Christ and the power of His resurrection more? This comes only as you make **“careful searches and inquiries”** into the gospel and the Spirit of Christ more deeply etches the glory of that gospel more and more to your heart.

## **II. The Angels are Awed by Our Salvation (1:12b)**

Of this salvation, Peter writes are “**things into which angels long to look.**” “**Long**” or “**desire**” as some translations have it is a strong word here. It means to earnestly desire something, to yearn for. It has the idea of one sitting on the edge of their seat, gazing over the precipice of heaven and intently looking for something with great anticipation. Literally, the angels were stooping to see better, to inspect curiously and carefully, much like the prophets when they received the Word. So we have this picture of the angels stretching their neck to gaze at this wonderful sight.

And what were they longing to see? The salvation of God’s people! There is some disagreement here. Does it refer to the humiliation and exaltation of Christ that the prophets prophesied? Or does it refer to the application of the work of Christ to the believer? Given the context, I am convinced that this speaks of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. The sufferings and glory of Christ would certainly serve as a fitting conclusion to Peter’s encouragement to these in the midst of suffering. Just as the prophets prophesied, in the midst of suffering, remember Christ! Just as the angels crooned their necks to see, look to the Cross! Surely the humiliation of Christ has brought wonder and amazement to all since it took place. So to His exaltation, for it speaks of His Lordship over a kingdom that has both present and future results.

What better group to set forth the anticipation of the sufferings and glories of Christ than the angels? They announced His birth (Lk. 1:26-36; 2:10-14); they ministered to Him during times of testing (Mt. 4:11; Lk. 22:43); they stood by the grave when He rose from the dead (Mt. 28:5-7; Mk. 16:4-7); they attended His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:10-11); and they continue to serve Him by ministering to all believers (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 1:14). Remarkably, even though they cannot receive salvation, they rejoice and praise God whenever He saves a sinner (Lk. 15:7, 10).<sup>2</sup>

## **Conclusion**

1. Are you awed by the gospel today? The prophets awed what they only had in part, and the angels, who cannot be redeemed, continue to rejoice in the redemption of the saint in the person of Christ.
2. Do you understand that the path of suffering leads to glory?

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<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, 58.