

Our Authority: God's Word

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from 1 Peter 1, verses 1-13. And chapter 2, verses 2 and 3. As found in your liturgy or in your pew Bibles. A reading from the first letter of Peter. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

[1 : 26] In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

[2 : 47] Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. We have, over this past month, just been slowly introducing this noble letter of 1 Peter to you and exploring some of the themes of the letter in this opening text that you just heard.

And I want to just remind us this morning, who are the people for whom this letter was originally written? Who was reading it? Who was receiving it? We're told that these are Christians who were, they were living as exiles.

They were like the people of God who'd been exiled to Babylon many years before. They were displaced foreigners in central and northern Turkey.

Christians living as resident aliens there forming this little counterculture amidst the dominant culture of the empire. And in that place and in that condition, they were experiencing the cost of their discipleship.

[4 : 02] They were experiencing the high cost of walking in the way of Jesus. And that's why Peter talks in verse 6 about suffering grief in all kinds of trials.

It's why in verse 7 he talks about these trials that they're undergoing as Christians as being like a fiery furnace in which their faith and the genuineness of their faith is being refined and being proved.

And so these are people, they're men and women, ordinary everyday Christians, men and women just like us, who need comfort, people who need courage.

And so Peter's writing to them in the midst of their trials and in the midst of this fiery furnace that they're in to tell them that there's something that massively transcends their trials.

Something that's even greater than this fiery furnace. It's something that he's been describing as hope and as joy. And today we're going to pivot our attention to look at verses 10 to 12 in this text.

[5 : 09] And you'll notice there that Peter introduces three different entities. He speaks first of all about the prophets. And then secondly about the Holy Spirit.

And then finally about the angels. And so we're going to look at all three of those and sort of take them in different order. And see how Peter's giving men and women like us comfort and courage.

Through the prophets, through the Holy Spirit, through the angels so that we can keep following Jesus as a counterculture. Does that make sense? So what Peter's saying is that salvation by grace is adored by the angels, spoken by the prophets, and shared by the Spirit.

That's what I want to talk about. That salvation by grace is adored by the angels, spoken by the prophets, and shared by the Spirit. First of all, let's think about the way in which salvation by grace is adored by the angels.

Look at verse 10. It says, It says, Now in the preceding nine verses, Peter's been outlining the essential salvation that's by grace.

[6 : 29] And in verse 12, he calls that the gospel or the good news. So what does Peter mean when he talks about this good news of salvation by grace?

And why does Peter tell us in verse 12 that even the angels long to look into these things? Why do they long to look into this gospel of grace?

Well, this is important because many Christians think that the basic essential message of the gospel is something that you look at and you learn one time.

And then, you know, you're converted. And then you leave behind those basics of grace and of the gospel in order to go on to more intermediate subjects and more advanced topics.

And if you think that way, Peter's like, Oh, hold on. Wait a second. Consider the angels. Consider these immaterial, spiritual, perfect beings that God created before the human race.

[7 : 29] And what do these angels do? Peter says they long to look into the grace of the gospel. And that word longing means they have a strong and earnest desire.

That the angels have set their hearts on it. They're hungry for it. They're thirsty for it. It's their passion and their obsession. Their longing, he says, to look into. Which means to pay close attention.

And to continuously gaze and to meditate and to penetrate more and more into the meaning of these things. The angels, he says, they never get tired. They never grow bored with this gospel of grace.

It mesmerizes them. And they just simply can't get enough. And suffice it to say this morning, angels are not idiots. Right? I've never met an angel.

But what I know about them and what I anticipate experiencing one day from them, they're really smart. Angels are very smart. They're smarter than anybody in this room, believe it or not.

[8 : 30] And angels are not young. Angels are very old. In fact, angels are beyond ancient. And they've been looking into this gospel of grace for a very, very long time.

And Peter tells us that the more they look, the more they see that it's like a kaleidoscope of endless, multidimensional beauties that absolutely astonishes and amazes them.

And they say, please give us more. Now, think about that. The angels were the eyewitnesses of creation. Right? God spoke that word, let there be light, and bang.

Vast galaxies just burst into existence. And astronomers, you know, estimate that there are 3,000 billion trillion stars, which is three with 24 zeros after it.

And maybe you've seen some of these images from the James Webb telescope. Anybody just looking at these, marveling at these James Webb images? Okay, you need to go home and look

these up. Every one of those stars that we can see through that telescope and what it's capturing for us, every one of those stars puts out the amount of energy every second that's equal to the energy of a trillion atom bombs.

[9 : 43] Every second, each star. And the angels saw when God first created that. And yet there's something more wonderful than even that.

These angels who dwell in heaven, who are always in the presence of God, these angels who are immersed in greatness and saturated in glory 24-7, they're stooping down and they're leaning in with intensity.

Why? Because the salvation by grace eclipses everything else that God has ever done. It's as if the angels are nudging one another and saying, have you ever seen anything like this?

What is so amazing to them about grace? Well, grace is defined as unmerited favor. Grace is showing kindness to someone who's totally undeserving of it.

And in fact, they deserve the exact opposite. And what these angels see is they see that God made human beings in His image. And that God put human beings in His perfect paradise.

[10 : 50] But from that moment onwards, we have been unleashing sin and death into God's good creation. We've been spoiling it and ruining it. We've been vandalizing it and polluting it.

But the angels see that when we rebelled against our creator God, and when we rebelled against all of our fellow creatures, when we rebelled against the creation itself, we forfeited every claim that we ever had on God's love.

And that we deserve nothing but condemnation and misery and suffering as a result. But the angels don't just see us. The angels see God. And they see that God is a God of grace.

Right? God could have done nothing. God could have just left us to stew for a very long time in our own juices without any sort of grace or intervention.

Or God could have, He would have been perfectly just to just pour out His wrath immediately, right away, boom. Or God could have said, Okay, here's a way out of your human predicament.

[11 : 54] Here's a way of salvation, but you're going to have to work for it. You're going to have to earn it. You're going to have to abide by all of these religious observances. You're going to have to live by this code of ethics.

You're going to have to adhere to these high moral standards. You're going to have to obey perfectly the Ten Commandments and live out the Sermon on the Mount. You're going to have to do good and help people and be friendly and love your neighbor and fight for justice and peace. And then maybe, just maybe, if I'm pleased enough with your performance, I might reward you with my favor and with my kindness. Which is how every other religious and philosophical system in the world works.

But the gospel, friends, is not about how we save ourselves or our work of self-salvation. The gospel is about God's work of salvation by grace.

It's about how He saves us, though we are totally undeserving of that salvation. And this is what thrills. This is what excites the angels.

[13 : 00] This is what gives them a passion and an obsession to look further into this gospel of grace. Because in all the unfathomable ages before the universe was created, these angels saw the Son of God who had dwelt in the heart of the Father from all eternity.

And these angels knew about the promise that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit each had made to one another in eternity past before the foundation of the world that they would send Jesus as the savior of humanity.

But then these angels actually, in real time, they see God the Father actually send God the Son.

And when they see Jesus step out of eternity and down into time, and when they see Jesus leave behind all the strength and the riches and the glories of heaven to enter into the virgin's womb, to take on human flesh, and when they see Jesus voluntarily, intentionally becoming weak and poor and vulnerable on the earth and subjecting Himself to the will of sinful human beings, and they see Him coming down to be a servant in this role of what Peter calls the Christ, which is Greek, or the Messiah, which is Hebrew, which means the Anointed One.

When they see this Anointed One come to do what Peter describes in verse 2 as sprinkling His blood, and what he describes in verse 3 as rising from the dead, the angels are amazed by God's grace.

The angels are astonished at what God has done because did we do anything? Did we perform for any of this?

[14:52] Is this gospel about what we have done or what we must do? No, the gospel is about this God of grace doing for us what we could have never done for ourselves, doing for us what we did not deserve, and doing for us something utterly unrelated to our performance.

Friends, the gospel is not good advice. The gospel is good news. Peter is giving comfort and courage to these Christian exiles who are suffering great grief and all kinds of trials, undergoing this fiery furnace of these trials that are refining their faith, and what he's telling them is that Christianity does not depend on you.

Christianity depends entirely, utterly, solely, and exclusively upon Christ and what He's done for you. And so he's saying, do you see this great difference between salvation by our performance and salvation by God's grace?

Christianity is summed up in that one word, grace. Saving grace, amazing grace. And the angels, Peter says, they never get tired of thinking about and looking into God's grace.

Every day they see new glories, new beauties, new wonders to behold. And that's the question for us is, do we adore God's grace in the way that the angels do?

[16:24] Do you long to look into it? Salvation by grace is amazing. It's adored by the angels, Peter says.

But he goes beyond that. He says, salvation by grace is not only adored by the angels, salvation by grace was spoken by the prophets. Salvation by grace was spoken by the prophets.

Look again at verse 10. He says, concerning the salvation, the prophets who spoke of that grace that was to come to you, they searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

That's a big statement, and it's a provocative statement. Because what Peter, this Jewish man, is saying is that the 37 books of the Hebrew canon of Scripture are all about one thing.

He's saying that the Old Testament is one great prophecy. And it's a prophecy about what? Well, he says that basically in the Hebrew Bible, God the Holy Spirit has been making these preliminary announcements about God the Father's plan of salvation by grace that is going to be put into effect and put into operation by God the Son who's going to come as the suffering Messiah.

[17:54] That's the theme of the whole Bible, Peter says. The theme of the Bible from beginning to end is about salvation by grace through the sufferings of the Messiah. And when Peter says that, what he's telling us is that Christianity is not novel.

Christianity didn't start with the birth of Jesus. If you want to properly understand Christianity, you've got to go back, all the way back, and look at those great covenants that God made with Adam, and with Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and David, and all the people of Israel.

And Peter's saying the roots of Christianity lay deep in this soil of prophetic grace. Do we read the Bible that way?

He says that the prophets predicted the sufferings of the Messiah. And of course, to predict means to foretell the future. So when we pick up and we read from Moses to Malachi, and I hope that you will.

When we read the prophet Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, when we read Habakkuk and Hosea and Haggai, those prophets of grace were not just serving their own generations in their own times, though they were doing that.

[19:12] But he says more than that, they were looking over the horizon into the future. And that through divine inspiration, those prophets were able to predict what was coming hundreds, if not thousands of years down the line.

Now, maybe you've heard this old joke that economists have successfully predicted nine out of the last five recessions. You ever heard that? The Economist magazine, every year they publish predictions.

They call it the world ahead 2023. And to their credit, and they're saying, here's what's going to happen in 2023. And then to their credit, at the end of 2023, they publish, here's how we did with our predictions.

And it's massively entertaining. Because, you know, sometimes they're right. But a lot of times they're wildly off, just in trying to predict the next 12 months.

So, imagine you doing that. Like, who of us can predict what's going to happen next month? How many of us can predict what's going to happen this coming November?

[20 : 24] And that's why you all need some Xanax. Like, that's why I know you're anxious about that. But when you think about the Economist magazine, and their predictions, and then when you think about these prophets, and their predictions, and their promises of this Messiah that were beautifully fulfilled in the life of Jesus, and in his church, hundreds and thousands of years later, it's enough to blow your mind if you think about it.

And so the question is, where do we see these predicted sufferings of the Messiah that Peter's talking about? Where do we see that in the Bible? Now, I don't have the whole morning here, and praise God for that, to teach you the entire Old Testament.

But I'll just give you three quick examples. From the different sections of the Old Testament, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Law is the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses.

And if you look at Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, you find there this mother prediction, this mother promise of God's grace, that immediately after the fall of humanity, immediately after our rebellion against God, God comes in, and he announces to Adam and Eve, he says, the offspring of the woman, the son of this woman, is going to come, and he's going to be horribly struck by the serpent.

Horribly struck. And yet, he's also going to, the son is going to crush the head of the serpent, in triumph and in victory. When you fast forward from the Law to the Prophets, you read the Prophet Isaiah.

[22 : 00] He's probably the greatest of the prophets. And if you pick up Isaiah, and you read chapters 1 to 39, you'll see that over and over, Isaiah is talking about this promised king that's coming.

And then in chapters 40 to 55 in Isaiah, that promised king, it actually turns out he's going to be a suffering servant. And then in chapters 56 to 66, Isaiah says, well, that promised king is actually going to be a suffering servant who's actually going to become the healer of the whole world.

So that's the Law, that's the Prophets. And then there's the Writings. The Psalms are part of the Writings, and we have many, many of these Messianic Psalms. And I'll just mention, probably the one you know the best, Psalm 22, which says that the coming Messiah is going to be scorned and despised.

He's going to be insulted and mocked. People are going to cast lots for his garments, and they're going to pierce his hands and his feet, and people are going to stare at his naked body. And if you read to the end of that Psalm, it says that eventually, he's going to be delivered and rescued in victory by God.

So in each of these different parts of the Old Testament, it's saying that the Messiah who's going to come is going to be struck, he's going to suffer, he's going to be pierced. And why is Peter addressing these Christian exiles, these men and women like us, who are suffering grief and all kinds of trials because of Jesus, going through this fiery furnace that's refining their faith because they're following the way of Jesus, why do they need to know that the sufferings of the Messiah were predicted well ahead of time by these prophets of grace?

[23 : 44] Because he wants them to know that the sufferings of the Messiah and the sufferings of the Messiah's people are not random. The sufferings of the Messiah and the sufferings of the Messiah's people are not random.

They're part of God's eternal plan. The suffering and death of Jesus was not an untimely accident. It was not a tragic mistake.

But rather, Peter says, it was foreseen and it was foretold that the Messiah had to get these sufferings so that we could get the grace. But more than that, if the sufferings of Jesus preceded the subsequent glories of Jesus, then followers of Jesus should not be surprised that we also share the pattern of his life.

If Jesus experienced sufferings first and then he got the glories that would follow, so it must be with us. The sequence of our lives follows the sequence of Jesus' life.

suffering grief and all kinds of trials, but then glories to follow. Now, I don't know about you, but I take great comfort and courage from this that suffering because of the way of Jesus is not a sign that God has betrayed us.

[25 : 08] It's not a sign that God is no longer in control of our lives, but rather it's a sign of our fellowship with our suffering Messiah, Jesus.

And it's a sign of those glories, that those same glories that followed for him are going to be the glories that follow for us. So friends, do you know that your sufferings, as a Christian, whatever those might be, whatever hard decisions you might be needing to make because you're following Jesus, do you know that those sufferings are not random?

They're not an accident. They're no more a mistake than the sufferings of Jesus himself. And in the midst of your suffering, in the midst of this fiery trial that you may be going through, are you focusing on your suffering Messiah?

Are you focusing on the glory that he's entered into and the glory that is surely yours to come?

Peter says that's what it means to have a living hope.

That's what it means to be filled with joy that's inexpressible and full of glory, is to embrace the fact that you, little you, little me, we've been united to the suffering yet glorified Messiah.

[26 : 27] Praise God. Okay, last thing. Salvation by grace is adored by the angels. Salvation by grace was spoken by the prophets. But finally, salvation by grace is shared by the Spirit.

It's shared by the Spirit. We'll close with this. Verse 12. It was revealed to the prophets that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even the angels long to look into these things. What's Peter doing here? He wants these suffering exiles to see that even though they are experiencing trials and suffering grief and all kinds of different trials that are like a fiery furnace refining their faith, he's telling them that even in the midst of that, they have an incredibly privileged status.

He says, your knowledge of the gospel, your knowledge of salvation by grace is superior to both the prophets and the angels. By comparison with the prophets, you, the people of God, are privileged historically.

And by comparison with the angels, you, the people of God, are privileged cosmically. The prophets had been searching with intently and with the greatest care to learn about what you now experience.

[28 : 00] And the angels have been longing with a holy passion and a holy obsession to understand what you now possess. But Peter goes on and he says, you have an even more privileged status than that because you have the Holy Spirit.

Consider the Holy Spirit that was sent from heaven to you, he says. Consider that Holy Spirit that was in the prophets. Consider that Holy Spirit that conceived Jesus in the womb of a virgin. Consider that Holy Spirit that anointed Jesus at his baptism. The same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus for his ministry. The same Holy Spirit that enabled Jesus to lay down his life and sacrificial suffering.

The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. That same Spirit that was in the prophets and that same Spirit that was in Jesus, that Spirit has been sent from heaven to you, Peter says.

And why was the Holy Spirit sent from heaven to you? So that the gospel of grace might be shared with you. Why is the Holy Spirit poured out on the church in each new generation?

[29 : 16] It's so that you might receive the gospel of grace directly from the Holy Spirit. Peter says, yes, you're exiles. Yes, you are suffering grief and all kinds of trials.

Yes, you are going through a fiery furnace that's refining your faith. But you are a massively privileged people. Because by the Holy Spirit, you've been enabled to hear Jesus Himself speaking to you through the Scriptures.

And by the Holy Spirit, you've been enabled to feel Jesus Himself touching you through the sacraments of water and bread and wine. And by the Holy Spirit, you've been enabled to experience Jesus Himself loving you in the fellowship of the saints.

the Holy Spirit's using the Scriptures and the sacraments and the saints and so many other means to reveal Jesus to you.

And Peter says, do you realize how supremely privileged you are? You are more privileged in the grand sweep of cosmic history, in the grand sweep of redemptive history.

[30 : 35] You are more privileged than the great prophets of old and the angels above because you're living in the age of the Holy Spirit. And you belong to a church that's full of the Holy Spirit.

And you yourselves are people who become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. So Peter says, remember in the midst of your exile, remember in the midst of suffering trials, remember in the midst of enduring a fiery furnace that you have the reality that the prophets have been searching for and the angels have been longing after.

And so he says, rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy that the Holy Spirit has seen fit to share with you this most precious message of the gospel of salvation, not by your performance, but by God's grace.

Friends, are you longing? Are you longing to look into the gospel like the angels look into the gospel? Friends, are you searching the gospel intently and with the greatest care like the prophets search intently and with the greatest care?

Friends, are you cherishing this gospel that's been so graciously shared with you by the Holy Spirit? If so, I want to close with Peter's word in verse 13.

[32 : 03] Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on that grace that's going to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed and is coming.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.