



LIVING WITH REVELATION

SERIES: LIVING FAITHFULLY WHILE SUFFERING

1 Peter 1:10–12

4th Message

John Hanneman

January 24, 2016

When I was a teenager I had an assignment to read a book and write a report. The book was *Lilies of the Field*, a short book written by William Barrett. The story is about an ex-GI who helps some German nuns build a chapel in the desert. The story was also made into a movie starring Sidney Poitier.

On the night when I finished the book I remember being particularly inspired. So I opened a Bible to read the passages referenced in the book, probably the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. I grew up going to church but not spending any time in the Bible. But on that night as I read the gospel I had an amazing encounter with God. The words on the page seemed to be alive. My heart burned within me just as the two disciples experienced on the road to Emmaus with the resurrected Lord. I felt awe and wonder with the wisdom and beauty of the words. I was charged, lifted, overwhelmed. Even before I was formally a “Christian” I had an encounter with the power of Scripture that I will never forget. Have you ever had that kind of experience?

We have a tremendous gift and that is the revelation of God. God not only speaks to us through the created world but also through words that we call the Bible, a Greek word meaning “the books,” or literally “scroll.” The Word who was from the beginning is made known to us through the living Word. And these words can be a tremendous source of encouragement, especially when we are “grieved by various trials” as was the case for the readers of Peter’s first letter. We might ask ourselves this morning, what value do we place on the Bible and how does its witness to Jesus impact our life?

1 Peter is a letter written by the apostle to believers in Asia Minor, believers considered to be foreigners or aliens. They are encountering various kinds of suffering as a result of their belief in Jesus. Before Peter gets into the nuts and bolts, he begins with a doxology in verses 3–12 (one sentence in Greek) meant to be an encouragement. He reminds these believers that they have a living hope in an eternal inheritance kept in heaven for them. He reminds them that it is possible to rejoice even in the midst of hardships. He reminds them that struggles are “necessary suffering” that purifies their faith. He reminds them that they can love God even though they can’t see him.

We too need this encouragement because we too face various trials. We may not experience the kind of hostility and ostracism that Peter’s readers were facing, although many Christians around the world certainly do. But we encounter death, illness, conflict, divorce, and many other things. And

the dynamics of suffering are the same for us as for Peter’s readers. We face despair and hopelessness. We want a blessed life as we define blessed. Our frenetic pace, our preoccupations, and the wealth of Silicon Valley keep us from living in light of the future. In these opening verses of his letter Peter turns our focus to what is above rather than below.

Peter concludes his doxology in verses 10–12:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Pet 1:10–12 ESV)

Praise has now turned into teaching. The subject changes to the prophets and what they wrote and how that affected Peter’s readers. The transition from suffering in verses 6–9 to prophets in 10–12 is the word “salvation”—“concerning this salvation.” What is this salvation?

We have seen the word “salvation” twice in these opening verses. In verse 5 it refers to “an inheritance ... kept in heaven for you ... a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:4–5). In verse 9 it refers to “the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet 1:9). Salvation is the full culmination and realization of our life in Christ that we have begun to experience in the present.

One of the things that I love is a finished project. I want to reach the end, put away the tools, and check it off my list. I have an aversion to unfinished business. However, our salvation is unfinished business. There is a present reality but the end won’t come until the last days. We live in between now and then. We are a work in progress, ground under repair, kind of like a Caltrans project that just doesn’t end. Our earthly life can be filled with struggles. But we have a glorious future, our salvation which is the source of living hope and inexpressible joy.

Now concerning this salvation, Peter transitions to the prophets and gives us some amazing insights.

The prophets were God's spokesmen to Israel

Who were the prophets? Although there is some debate as to the identity of the prophets, most likely it refers not to charismatic NT prophets but to the Old Testament prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah, and Amos. Many of these prophets spoke the message of God to Israel during the time of the divided kingdom. They called the people to turn from idolatry and return to the Lord. They spoke words of judgment but also offered words of hope to a future time of redemption and salvation. Peter also has in mind the other Old Testament writings including the Psalms.

The prophets wrote about the sufferings and glories of Christ

What did the prophets write about? Peter says that these prophets spoke about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. Scholars debate as to whether Peter is referring to the suffering of Christ or the suffering of God's people on behalf of Christ and the woes that would occur before Christ comes again. This is actually a tricky issue. But the syntax of verses of 10 and 11 are identical, meaning that Christ is the recipient of the suffering just as we are the recipients of grace. Also, the word for suffering is used two other places in 1 Peter, both referring to the suffering of Christ (4:13; 5:1).

There are many passages in the prophets and psalms that speak of a suffering Messiah, for example Ps 22, 34, 69; Isa 50, 52, 53; and Zech 12, 13. There are also several passages that speak to the glories, for example Ps 2, 16, 22, 45, 110; Isa 9, 40, 42, 61; Jer 33; Ezek 34; Dan 7; and Mal 3

Some of you might be aware that Ash Wednesday is in two and half weeks. This begins the season of Lent that culminates in Good Friday and Easter. This is the season in which we remember the sufferings of Christ more than any other time of the year. During this time and especially during Holy Week we read what the prophets wrote about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Revelation came to the prophets through the Spirit of Christ.

How did the prophets gain the content of which they wrote? The agent was the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ is the same as the Holy Spirit. Luke refers to the Spirit of Jesus in Acts 16:7 and Paul to the Spirit of the Son in Gal 4:6. The Holy Spirit foretold the sufferings of Jesus. Peter is emphasizing that Christ was actively involved in the period of the OT. He was always involved and did not “come lately upon the scene—unprecedented, unanticipated, and unheralded”¹

Why does Peter mention this? Why is this important? Let me suggest three reasons. First, the sufferings of Christ were foretold before it happened. Therefore the suffering of Jesus validates and confirms that he indeed is the Messiah. The Messiah was always intended to suffer. This was always God's plan of salvation for humankind. Jesus is not Plan B. He was always Plan A right from the beginning and he was always involved in the working out of this plan. “The cross is not an

untimely accident or tragic mistake but rather a necessity that had long been foretold”²

Second, knowing that Jesus fulfills God's plan of redemption that was revealed to the prophets brings Peter's readers into continuity with Israel, God's people in the OT. Christianity is not a new religion but a continuation of what God has been doing throughout history. Believers in Christ are now part of that plan. We are connected to the saints throughout history. The prophets lived in expectation of the Messiah of which they wrote. We live in the fulfillment of what they wrote. Peter will develop this idea more in the next section of text.

Third, if Christ had to suffer, then it is no surprise that followers of Jesus can expect to suffer. But we can also expect to receive the glories. Paul writes in Romans:

... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Rom 8:17).

This is a theme that Peter will develop more in chapter 2.

Peter is seeking to encourage his readers. Living as foreigners they are facing opposition and hostility, various kinds of trials. The temptation would be to give up, to doubt their faith, to think that they have been sold a bill of goods. The temptation would be to avoid and deny the suffering or seek comfort in indulging their flesh. Peter wants to assure them that Jesus is the Christ, they are part of God's mysterious plan, and suffering is normal for God's people.

Whenever we encounter suffering we face the same temptations no matter the source of our hardship. Have you ever doubted God—whether God was good or God was for you? Has your faith in Christ wavered? Have you ever thought, is this really the right way? Especially when people are throwing insults at you? So we often need the same encouragement as Peter's readers—to know that our salvation and our faith is grounded in history, reality, and truth. Our hope is secure even when everything else is falling apart.

I know that when I face some sort of struggle my tendency is to get me-centered and my vision gets very narrow. I lose sight of the big picture. This probably is the case with most of us. But Peter centers and anchors us and allows us to accept what is rather than what is not. He reminds us of the big picture. Our window here in the auditorium represents the story of the Bible—creation, fall, Israel, the church, and the New Jerusalem. We are part of every chapter and our ultimate salvation is secure.

The prophets were captivated to fully understand what they wrote.

Through revelation the prophets became aware that the Messiah would suffer. But Peter indicates that they were captivated to know more. They had an insatiable curiosity to know “what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating” (1 Pet 1:11). This is a difficult phrase to translate but probably means that they sought to know what the

circumstances would be and in what season the sufferings of the Messiah would take place, meaning, when would God's promises be fulfilled.

The prophets' intensity is described by three different words—searched, inquired carefully, and inquiring. These words imply an active effort in searching. "Inquired carefully" means to search "through something like a house, a tent, a city, or a country in order to find some person or thing"³

All of these words are used of searching Scripture. The prophets were sorting through earlier writings, their own writings, and trying to access the events of the current time. It is like they were on a massive scavenger hunt.

The prophets provide a great example to us. How strong is our desire to search deeply in the Scripture, to know the truth clearly and accurately. How strong is our desire to search out the mysteries of godliness or lawlessness? There are some things we can't understand fully, like the timing of Christ's second coming. But as Proverbs reminds us we are to seek wisdom like silver and search for it like hidden treasures (Proverbs 2:1–5).

The prophets realized that they wrote for a later generation

Were the prophets successful in their efforts? Well, no matter how diligently the prophets searched, they could not come up with all the answers. But then they became aware through revelation that "they were serving not themselves but you." (v. 12) "Serving" is the normal word for ministry. Their ministry was to write for others. They "prophesied about the grace that was to be yours." (v. 10)

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Luke 10:23–24).

The prophetic word became the foundation of the gospel

How did the prophets serve Peter's readers? It is because what they wrote formed the foundation and content for the gospel. The prophetic word was part of the gospel that was preached to Peter's readers. Whoever these people are, Jew or Greek, they had a pretty good knowledge of the OT. Peter will quote extensively from the OT, including Isaiah 53.

Over and over the gospels say: "this happened in order to fulfill Scripture." Jesus said this or did this "in order to fulfill Scripture." Jesus says in John's gospel:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me (John 5:39).

What happened on the road to Emmaus?

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27).

What happened on the Gaza road? The Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah and "Philip ran to him and heard him

reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30–31).

The gospel is not just that "God has a wonderful plan for your life" or that "Jesus is the answer to all your problems." The gospel is that Jesus fulfills the Scriptures that predicted a suffering Messiah. The Old Testament continually points to Christ. This is the good news we announce to the world. How do we know that Jesus is the Messiah? It is because he fulfills what was written. No other religious leader can claim this historic validation.

The angels are spectators to the unfolding of redemption

Finally Peter gives us an interesting insight to the angels. He says that the angels are spectators to the unfolding of redemption and the fulfillment of the prophetic writings. They "long to look." Long is a word meaning "intense desire." Look means to "peek or peep into a situation from the vantage point of an outsider, usually one who is not seen by those being watched"⁴ (Gen 26:8; 1 Chr 15:29). And what the angels long to see and understand is the sufferings and glories of the cross and resurrection. In other words the angels are not omniscient. They are learning from believers. They are watching history unfold and thus rejoice over one sinner who repents.

What Peter is saying is that our knowledge of Christ is superior to that of the prophets and the angels. We have a tremendous privilege of living after the cross and resurrection. We have the knowledge of salvation. We know the story of God's people throughout history and we are part of that story. Therefore we can have tremendous confidence and hope despite the sufferings we encounter in life. We can live in light of the cross and resurrection.

Is there an invitation for you this morning from God?

Perhaps you are being invited to take the gospel more seriously. You have been dancing around a comfortable gospel, a pop gospel. Maybe you are undecided about Jesus and his role in your life. God might be inviting you to embrace the big picture of salvation, the historical evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Or perhaps Peter's letter gives you more confidence in sharing the gospel with friends or family members.

Perhaps there is an invitation for you to persevere in suffering? If we share in the sufferings of Christ then we can also expect to share in his glories. We have been raised with Christ and now we await the consummation of our salvation. We are connected to all of God's people through all of time. Our future is secure, our hope is steadfast, and our joy is in the Lord. Maybe you need that encouragement today.

Perhaps there is an invitation to place a higher value on Scripture. You realize the tremendous gift that God's word is and how it continually centers our life on Christ. Paul tells us that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,

equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17). We have been given truth and wisdom. This is why one of our core values at PBC is expositional teaching. We are committed to the fact that God speaks to us through his Word and illuminates our understanding through the Holy Spirit.

I can remember the first time I attended PBC in Palo Alto in 1973. Like I said I didn’t get a lot of Bible teaching growing up in the church. That morning one of the pastors opened the Bible and simply talked about what it said. My heart was warmed, just like it was when I was a teenager. The words of Scripture were speaking directly to me. The impact that the Bible has in our lives never gets old.

Benediction

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.
(Rom 16:25–27)

1. Douglas Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, (Brazos Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2009), 50.
2. Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2005), 41.
3. Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, (IVP Press, Downers Grove, 1988), 73
4. Grudem, *1 Peter*, 78.

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