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WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT SALVATION?

1 Peter 1:10-12

By

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1 Peter Lesson 4

What's So Great About Salvation? 1 Peter 1:10-12

As you think about your life, what consistently brings you the most joy? Some might answer, "My family"; but for others their family is the source of their greatest pain. Some may say, "My friendships" or "this new guy (or gal) I'm dating." A few may answer, "My job" or "career." Some may not be honest enough to say it, but they really live for their possessions or hobbies or leisure activities. Or, some might be brutally honest in saying, "I don't have much joy in my life."

For every Christian, the true answer ought to be, "The thing that brings me the most joy in life is my relationship with the Lord and the full salvation He has provided." The Lord and His salvation ought to be the hub of our lives from which radiate out the spokes of joy in our families, our friendships, our jobs, our possessions, and our other activities. If you take away the hub, everything else would crumble into meaningless ruin.

Yet I fear that for too many Christians, salvation is nice, but not necessary. It adds a little fulfillment to their well-rounded lives, but it's not the essential core without which life would disintegrate. If they were honest, they would ask with a shrug of their shoulders, "What's so great about salvation?"

God has a sure-fire method of getting us to answer that question: He puts us in the fires of affliction! Trials have a way of getting us to focus on the bare essentials of life. What really matters? What am I living for? What gives life meaning and makes it count? And, of course, the more life-threatening the trials, the more focused we are.

In 1777, Dr. William Dodd, a well-known London clergyman, was condemned to be hanged for forgery. When his last sermon, delivered in prison, was published, a friend commented to Samuel Johnson that the effort was far better than he had thought the man capable of. Dr. Johnson's classic reply was, "Depend upon it, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Peter's readers were enduring affliction. Some may have been facing martyrdom for their faith. Some were under pressure in their homes from pagan spouses, in their jobs from pagan employers, and in their communities from pagan acquaintances. Some were probably wondering, "Why suffer for our faith? Is it worth all the pain I'm going through?" Peter's answer is to get them to look up from their suffering to their salvation and see, "It's more than worth it because our salvation is so great! The salvation we enjoy is that which the prophets struggled to understand and into which the angels long to look!"

Because our salvation is so great, we should joyfully endure present suffering in light of the future glory.

To trace Peter's flow of thought, in 1:3-5 he points his readers to the greatness and certainty of their future inheritance in Christ. In 1:6-9, he shows how this great salvation results in inexpressible joy, even in the midst of present trials. In 1:10-12, he goes back to the past prophetic revelation about this great salvation to show how unsearchable it is—neither the prophets nor the angels fully grasped it—and how privileged we are who have received it. He means to encourage believers in the midst of trials. Just as Christ first suffered and then was glorified, so Christians may now suffer, but there's glory ahead. If we will focus on the incomprehensible greatness of our salvation, we can joyfully endure present trials.

1. Our salvation is so great.

Our text shows five reasons our salvation is great:

A. Our salvation is great because it is the message of God's grace.

Peter uses the word "grace" in 1:10 (and 1:13) as a synonym for the salvation which we have received but won't completely understand until Christ returns. As I mentioned last week, there are three tenses of our salvation: We were saved from sin's penalty when we put our faith in Christ; we are being saved from sin's power as we walk by faith; and, ultimately we shall be saved from sin's presence as we persevere by faith.

I want to camp on the word "grace" for a minute, both because it is an important word to Peter (used ten times in this book: 1:2, 10, 13; 2:19-20; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12) and because it is a widely

misunderstood concept in our day. Many Christians confuse grace for a hang-loose, laid-back flavor of Christianity that urges us not to be too rough on ourselves and not to be judgmental of others. We end up being tolerant of all sorts of sin that the Bible strongly confronts.

Grace is *undeserved* favor. You cannot appreciate God's grace until you both understand cognitively and feel emotionally how unworthy you are to receive anything other than judgment from the holy God. All true Christians agree that we're sinners, but many quickly turn around and argue that we're worthy persons, not unworthy. We're being told that the root of all our problems is low self-esteem. So one of the major tasks for Christians has become to build their self-esteem. One best selling book confronts the notion that we should view ourselves as sinners saved by grace:

Is that who you really are? No way! The Bible doesn't refer to believers as sinners, not even sinners saved by grace. Believers are called saints—holy ones—who occasionally sin. (Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* [Harvest House], p. 44.)

I was raised in a Christian home and believed in Christ at an early age. I've lived a relatively clean life. I've always subscribed to the biblical teaching that I am a sinner. But as a young Christian, I had no idea how sinful my heart really is. The more I've grown in Christ, the more I see how desperately wicked I am, which makes me cling to the cross more fiercely and revel in God's grace more joyously. I've had to learn that grace isn't God giving a little boost to a basically decent, churchgoing young man. Grace is God's mercy to me whom He justly could send to hell. It's only when I feel how much He has forgiven me that I will love Him much because of the wonder of His grace.

God's grace, properly understood, is not at odds with obedience to God's Word. Rather, grace is the motivation for obedience (Rom. 2:4). No sooner does Peter tell us that we should fix our hope completely on God's grace (1:13) than he tells us to be obedient and holy (1:14-15). An emphasis on grace is not opposed to an emphasis on obedience.

But don't miss the point: Our salvation is great because it's the message of God's grace. That means that there's hope for every sinner, no matter how great his sin! That's good news! The only

thing that keeps you from experiencing God's grace is your pride that tells yourself that you're a good person who doesn't need grace. If you'll confess your sin, the cross of Christ is sufficient to forgive you completely.

B. Our salvation is great because it was predicted by the Old Testament prophets.

The Old Testament prophets made careful search and inquiry as they sought to know what time (a better translation than "person") or circumstances the Spirit of Christ was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow (1:10-11). Peter is saying, "The salvation you have received is the very thing that these great men of God spent their lives looking for!" That doesn't mean that they weren't saved. But they couldn't understand it the way we do because they lived before Christ came.

Some have explained it by saying that the prophets saw two mountain peaks: Mount Calvary, where Christ would die for our sins; and, Mount Olivet, where He will return in power and glory to set up His kingdom. But they couldn't see the valley between the two peaks, much as we can't when we look at two distant peaks. So they didn't grasp that the same Messiah who would suffer for our sins would ascend into heaven for 2,000 years before returning to reign in glory.

Note how Jesus Himself interpreted the prophet Isaiah when He was preaching in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-21): He read a few verses, then stopped in the middle of the verse and announced, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Why didn't Jesus finish the verse from Isaiah? Because it goes on to say, "And the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 62:2), which refers to His second coming in judgment. It's easy to see why the Old Testament prophets missed the 2,000-year gap between the two halves of that verse!

Note also Daniel 9:2-3, where Daniel seeks by prayer and fasting to grasp what Jeremiah had prophesied. In answer to his prayers, God gave him the prophecy of the 70 weeks (9:24-27), which I'm sure Daniel himself did not understand! In 12:8, Daniel admits that he couldn't understand what the angel was telling him about the future. He was told that these things are concealed for the end time (12:9).

The question arises when we suffer: What if Christianity isn't really true? What if I'm believing in myths or something purely psychological? What if I'm suffering for nothing? Peter's answer is that our salvation is rooted in prophecies made hundreds of years before Christ came. Even though the prophets didn't understand everything the Holy Spirit (here called the "Spirit of Christ" because He bears witness to Christ) revealed to them, it has been fulfilled in the death, resurrection, ascension, and promised second coming of Christ. As Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:19, "We have the prophetic word made more sure." Our salvation is great because it is nothing less than that predicted throughout the Old Testament.

Two applications: (1) Read the Old Testament! So many Christians neglect the Old Testament, complaining that it's too hard to understand. It is hard to understand in places. Daniel himself had trouble! But it speaks to us of Christ. We will be impoverished if we neglect it.

(2) Apply yourself diligently to understand the Bible. I confess that I've never sought the Lord with prayer, fasting, sackcloth and ashes, and confession of sin as Daniel did to understand a portion of Scripture! But so often we just give up in frustration rather than applying ourselves to try to understand and obey God's Word. Peter admits (2 Pet. 3:16) that some of Paul's stuff is hard to understand. But God saw fit to put it in Scripture, so we need to seek Him to grow in respect to our salvation.

C. Our salvation is great because it is revealed by God to man.

The prophets weren't religious geniuses who invented all the things in the Bible. They got their stuff from the Holy Spirit. Verse 11 establishes the divine inspiration of the Old Testament. As Peter explains (2 Pet. 1:21), "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The apostles didn't cook up their own message, either. Peter tells his readers that those who preached the gospel to them did so "by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (1 Pet. 1:12).

When we talk about the inspiration of the Bible, we mean that "God superintended the human authors of Scripture so that using their own personalities they composed and recorded without error His message" (Charles Ryrie, Study Graph, "Bible Doctrine I")

[Moody Bible Institute]). As Charles Hodge put it (*Systematic Theology* [Eerdmans], 1:154), "Inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of his mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God that what they said, God said."

A critic may argue that we're reasoning in a circle: We say that the Bible is inspired because the Bible says it's inspired. Any book can make that claim for itself. But if you read the Bible, you discover that it is a self-authenticating book. Though written by many different authors over thousands of years, there is a unity and integrity to the Bible that could not exist apart from supernatural influence. Furthermore, if you reject the divine inspiration of the Old Testament, you must reject the teachings of Jesus Himself, because He repeatedly taught that Scripture is from God (Matt. 5:17-18; 22:31-32, 43; John 10:35).

Thus our salvation is great because it is the message of God's grace; it was predicted by the Old Testament prophets; it is revealed by God to man.

D. Our salvation is great because it is a mystery to the angels.

Peter says that even the angels long to look into our salvation! The word "look" means to stoop to look into (it was used of Peter stooping to look into the empty tomb--John 20:5) or to gaze intently at something (James 1:25). It implies intense interest. When Satan and the other fallen angels sinned, God did not provide salvation for them. He provided it only for fallen human beings, and that at great cost: He took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and died in our place on the cross. His plan is that His manifold wisdom might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10). Jesus taught that the angels rejoice over the salvation of one repentant sinner (Luke 15:10).

Whatever angels know, we can assume that they know a lot about God. They stand in His holy presence (Isa. 6:1-3). They are sent out to do His will (Heb. 1:14). They have tremendous authority and power (2 Pet. 2:11; Jude 8-9). They're impressive beings! And yet, there is something about the majesty of God's Being that

He is teaching even the angels through our salvation! How privileged we are to enjoy such a great salvation!

E. Our salvation is great because it involves the sufferings and glories of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the center of world history. His coming to this earth, His dying for our sins, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, and His promise to return bodily, are the most important facts in human history. Nothing else comes close by way of comparison. He is the center of all Scripture. As the risen Savior spoke to the men on the Emmaus road, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27). Christ is at the center both of human history and of Scripture.

And the cross is the central reason Christ came to this earth. Thus, as Alexander Maclaren declares (*Expositions of Holy Scripture* [Baker], 1 Peter, p. 47), it is not enough to preach Christ; we must preach Christ crucified. It is not enough to preach the ethical teachings of Jesus, although we must seek to live by them. It is not enough to point to Jesus as our great example, although His life should be our model. It is not even enough to speak of His death as a brave sacrifice, unless we make it clear that He "died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). He accomplished that salvation through His death on the cross.

When Paul reasoned from the Scriptures with the Jews in Thessalonica, he explained and gave evidence "that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead," saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" (Acts 17:3). The sufferings of Christ refer to His death that satisfied the justice of God as payment for our sins. The glories of Christ refer to His resurrection, His ascension, His present exalted place at the right hand of the Father, His bodily return, and His future reign in power and glory. Our salvation is great because it is centered on these, the most crucial truths in history.

2. We should joyfully endure present suffering in light of future glory.

This point stems from the context of our text. Peter is arguing that our salvation is so great that whatever we must endure for Christ's sake now is nothing compared with the glory that awaits us. Just as Jesus first wore the crown of thorns and then the crown of glory, so with us who follow Him. We may suffer now, but we already have tasted of this great salvation that the prophets foretold and into which the angels long to look. We can't even fathom all the riches which God has in store for those who love Him. So when you suffer for Jesus' sake, hang in there with joy, knowing that glory lies ahead!

Conclusion

When you study your Bible, one secret is to look for words that are repeated for emphasis. Sometimes these words are not significant in themselves, but their repetition makes them significant. In our text, there is a word that occurs once in 1:10 and three times in 1:12 that drives home Peter's message: the word "you." He writes of "the grace that would come to *you*" (1:10); "they were not serving themselves, but *you*, in these things which now have been announced to *you* through those who preached the gospel to *you* by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (1:12). The point is simple: Even though the message of God's salvation is the greatest message in human history, it does you no good unless *you* personally lay hold of it by faith.

I began this message by asking, "What consistently gives you the most joy in life?" The Reformed Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 begins with a similar question: What is your only comfort in life and death? It's a personal question with both temporal and eternal implications. If your honest answer is anything other than, "Jesus Christ and the salvation He has given to me by faith," you need to do some serious soul-searching. You may be a church member or even involved in Christian ministry, but if you've never responded personally to the great salvation God provided in Jesus Christ, you are lost. I fear that as in Jesus' day, so today it is often the most outwardly religious who have the most difficulty responding to the salvation Christ provides because it requires admitting that we are not good people; we're undeserving sinners.

Years ago, Bishop John Taylor Smith, a former chaplain general of the British army, was preaching in a large cathedral on the text, "You must be born again." He said, "My dear people, do not substitute anything for the new birth. You may be a member of a church, ... but church membership is not new birth, and our text says, 'You must be born again.' The rector was sitting on his left. He continued, "You may be a clergyman like my friend the rector here and not be born again, and you must be born again." On his right sat the archdeacon. Pointing at him, he continued, "You might even be an archdeacon like my friend here and still not be born again, but you must be born again. You might even be a bishop like myself and not be born again, but you must be born again."

He finished his message and went his way. But several days later he received a letter from the archdeacon which read, in part, "My dear Bishop: You have found me out. I have been a clergyman for over 30 years, but I have never known anything of the joy that Christians speak of. I could never understand it. But when you pointed at me and said that a person could be an archdeacon and not be born again, I understood what the trouble was. Would you please come and talk with me?" Of course, Bishop Smith did talk with him and the archdeacon responded to Christ's call to salvation (H. A. Ironside, *Illustrations of Biblical Truth* [Moody Press], pp. 49-50).

If you do not know today the great joy of salvation, perhaps it is because you have never personally responded to Jesus Christ. Why not do so right now? Then you will know what's so great about salvation!

Discussion Questions

1. Must we feel our sinfulness in order to know God's grace? Is this only at salvation or ongoing?
2. Does the Old Testament apply to us who are not under the Law? How?
3. Why is the cross the center of our salvation? What practical implications does this have?
4. Is your salvation truly the greatest thing in your life? If not, why not?

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