

“Why the Prophets Longed to be Where We Are”

1 Peter 1:10-16

It’s not unusual to sometimes think about the past and wish we could go back in time and relive an event or romanticize about ‘how great it was back then’. It’s not wrong to have these thoughts but the even the Bible warns us not to romanticize the past or wish we could return to that time frame. In Isaiah we read in Is. 41:14,

This is what the LORD says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

“For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.

¹⁵ *I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King.”*

¹⁶ *This is what the LORD says—He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, ¹⁷ who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:*

¹⁸ *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.*

¹⁹ *See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

²⁰ *The wild animals honor me, ^{the} jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen,*

²¹ *the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.*

In Isaiah God warned the Israelites because of their rebellion against Him, that He would send them to exile in Babylon. BUT, that He would return them miraculously like He had in the exodus; this will be a new exodus! So, if you long for the days of the exodus when you saw God do amazing things, don’t forget, you were in bondage back then (oh yeah) and you actually wanted to return to Egypt (oops, forgot that) and you had no faith to enter where God promised He would take you.

A more biblical perspective on time then is to focus on looking forward. And here Peter gives us a glimpse of how the prophets of old were looking forward. While we sometimes wish we could go back in time, prophets longed for the future time when we lived! Us? Why in the world would they desire our time? Because we live post cross while they lived pre-cross! Isn’t it ironic that the prophets longed to be where we are today. And if you’re thinking, it’s not that great a time to be alive, perhaps we need a refresher course on what time frame we live in and how blessed we are.

We have a strong connection to the believers Peter wrote to here in 1 Peter. He begins ...

To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Why call them ‘Strangers in the world’ and why were they scattered? These believers had fled the major cities of their day to live in the wilderness [archaeologists have uncovered caves in Galatia and Cappadocia where Christians hid and lived] to avoid persecution by Rome and the social ostracism of non-believers. That’s why they are ‘strangers and aliens’. They don’t belong on earth. Their citizenship is in heaven and they are temporarily living in a foreign environment. So before you (and us) long for the past you better take stock of what you have in Christ. Peter begins 1:10 with,

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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.

“This salvation” refers to all he just said in vv.3-9. Peter says the prophets looked forward to what we have

We Have Received the Grace the Prophets Longed For (1:3-10)

The prophets “searched intently and with the greatest care” about ‘this grace’ trying to find out the time and circumstances regarding the Messiah’s coming. Peter just elaborated on ‘this grace’ that we call salvation. What the prophets had a hard time figuring out (and so do many still today) that we have received are,

Spiritual blessings because of the cross (vv.3-5)

See how he started his letter, elaborating on the blessings of what we have in Christ?

³ 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, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ 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.

One of the greatest introductions in the New Testament letters! Why? Because these believers were suffering since they had these blessings. And how did they get these blessings? Christ suffered and God is greatly merciful in that He gives us the faith to be born again to a living hope [living = have this now and it won’t die] and guarantees that this faith results in an eternal inheritance, kept in heaven for you. Why was that important? Because many of these believers had given up a lot of earthly things like homes, family, jobs for Christ. Don’t worry about what you’ve lost to gain Christ, focus on what’ve you gained through Christ by choosing to lose. The prophets did not fully understand about the sufferings of the Christ. Only two passages spoke of them that we’ll explore in the next 2 weeks. They knew there were great blessings awaiting the child of God, but they didn’t understand their eternal nature more than their temporal nature nor did they gather it came from God’s plan to cause His Son to suffer for our sins.

And another blessing we have more than they had is,

The great assurance of hope in trials (vv.6-7)

Many psalms speak of hope in the face of trials, but they didn’t have the same eternal confidence based on Jesus’ resurrection; the fruit of suffering:

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

If Peter is writing approximately 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, most if not all of these believers never saw Jesus but, their advantage over the prophets was that Peter and the others had. They were eyewitnesses. They confirmed the resurrection. When you read about the future for the Old Testament believer, the focus is mostly on this great time when Israel will be glorious once again. Very little about personal resurrection. But for the A.D. believer we are far more secure in our hope because we know Jesus died and rose and are assured that we will rise to new bodies after our own deaths or Jesus' return. So, while the prophets longed for Messiah's coming

We long for His return (vv.8-10)

⁸ 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, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The prophets searched for Messiah's coming, mostly as we know from the disciples, expecting this glorious rule over their enemies. And as times grew worse and hope seemed so far away, when Jesus came and did not fulfil many of the Jewish beat-up-the-Romans-bring-in-the-kingdom-of-David-reign, they crucified Him as a blasphemer. Only for some and now more Gentiles realized, He was/is the Messiah and now we look for His return with confidence because He already came. Another advantage we have that the faithful prophets did not quite grasp but longed to be around when these things happened. So, Peter tells suffering followers of Jesus not to get too down on yourself because of the temporal oppression of this life but think again about how much better we have it than those prophets because

We Can See Far More Clearly Why Christ Had to Suffer Before Receiving Glories (1:10-12)

They longed for the coming of the Messiah, but they did not fully comprehend the need for a human blood sacrifice Saviour. We look back at the Law and the sacrificial system and with perfect 20/20 hindsight we get it. Hebrews really points this out when it describes how priests never sat down because they were constantly making sacrifices since people always sin. We have a sin problem. I'm sure there were many Jews who got tired of the sacrificial program. 'This is so messy. Why do we have to keep doing this?' But tucked away in Isaiah 53 God did show them that He would put all our sins on His Son who would take up our infirmities upon Himself and be sacrificed for us. And we don't have to do sacrifices! I'm sure the prophets would have loved that!

But we understand now why we suffer too because we suffer as Jesus did and we won't experience the glories until after we die also. This is how Peter was encouraging those who were struggling in their faith because life was full of difficulties. The normal difficulties of life (hard work, strained relationships, poor decisions, diseases, sickness, aging, death) plus believers have a bonus package of suffering for Christ. However, we can endure because our Saviour Jesus took on humanity and experienced hard work, strained relationships, the sorrows of other's sickness and deaths and then even His own terrible persecution [crucifixion] that ended in resurrection. The prophets had glimpses of a resurrected Saviour, but they did not have the understanding of two comings of Jesus separated by a large gap of time.

One thing they did grasp when they diligently searched the Scriptures for signs of His coming, was that the work they were doing would benefit future generations of believers who, 1) would also need the encouragement of hope that the Scriptures points out even if Jesus doesn't return in their

day; and 2) they served people who will need to come to faith before Jesus returns. And that's why we study prophecy too, to encourage all of us in this gap of time and future generations of believers to wait for Jesus' return (to hang in there because we know He's coming) but to warn those who are not prepared for His coming. But Peter doesn't stop here, as if studying the Bible is all that matters.

Look now at the practical direction Peter takes as he talks about the importance of prophecy:

¹³ Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴ As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

"Therefore" because we have far greater understanding than the prophets did ...

Our Holiness Should be Greater **(1:13-2:3)**

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Greater knowledge of God's Word should result in being more holy. What does holy mean? Means separate, distinct, like God since He is holy. Since He is perfectly holy and no sin dwells within Him the simplest understanding of holiness is to sin less. You want to be holy? Sin less. Obey God more. Obey the Word of God that you're studying more. Peter, any tips on how to do that?

Focus less on earth's glories and more on eternal grace (vv.13-16)

"Set/prepare your minds" to act. Obedience/action only happens when we rehearse and commit in our mind to do it. Let's say you have a problem gossiping or criticizing but you want and know you should stop. Why don't you? Because we don't have verses in our mind that we rehearse good verbal, godly habits. And we ignore those inner spiritual rebukes by the Spirit who convicts us ['I shouldn't have said that'] so we don't apologize for what we just did.

Obedience never just happens, it has to be a mental discipline based on Scripture that quickly goes through a mini-check list that when we're tempted to sin (be unholy) we've rehearsed in our mind to ask, 'Will I glorify God? Will I encourage this person? Will I follow the Spirit's leading?' Because we have all of Scripture available to us that the prophets did not. Imagine for a moment that you only have the Old Testament. How much reading do you do in the Old Testament? Probably about half as much (or less) as we read the New Testament. So, we will be held more accountable because we live post cross and have no excuse not to engage with our Bible personally (but I'm rushed in the morning or tired at night) or corporately (but I don't want to get up earlier and go to Sunday School or go out in the evening to Bible study or meet with other Christians). Funny how we're never too tired to watch that game or favourite program or get up early to do something we want to do, forgetting that as believers the goal of our life is to grow more like Jesus and glorify God. Jesus will review how we lived in the body.

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Here's the irony. When we read our Bibles, we look up at the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, etc. and say man that'd be something to be a prophet. Meanwhile Peter is saying that the prophets wish they could have been us, and lived a post cross life, having more revelation from God.

“Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Yes, we've received salvation by grace through faith which results in the future blessing of eternal holiness and peace and joy which we will receive by grace too. So be holy – sin less – because God is holy.

And Peter's not done with his practical implications of how “this salvation” should change the way we live. In vv.17-21 he tells us that holy living also happens when we ...

Humble ourselves because God has given us a meaningful life (vv.17-21)

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God

Live your gift of salvation life in thankful awe of God who rescued us by the blood of Jesus redeeming us from an empty way of life, that everyone has who never comes to faith in Christ. Being saved is a fantastic blessing of giving us meaning in life. Now we understand why we're here, to glorify God. Most people think life is simply get ahead, make money so you can provide for your kids, have a nice home, and enjoy things. That's not meaningful, that's just existing. Everyone tries to do that. But as a believer, let's humble ourselves realizing God chose you and I to be recipients of His grace and understand what life is about and where it's going ultimately. And so many people are not prepared for an eternity that comes after this life ends.

And another way we become more holy is by

Changing our attitude about the people God brings into your life (1:22-2:3)

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord stands forever.”

And this is the word that was preached to you. ^{2:1} Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

If you're a believer, you've tasted a lot of spiritual blessings. It's very good. But sometimes we don't have sincere love for others and we taste the bitterness of envy, slander, deceit, etc. How do I taste the goodness of God more than the bitterness of sin? Same old solution.

crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

Sometimes we think ‘Won’t it be great when we get to glory and meet Paul, Timothy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Abraham ...’ and ask them what was it like to live such holy lives? Meanwhile they are up there now looking forward to asking us ‘What was it like to have lived after Jesus’ death and resurrection, having a completed Bible waiting in the days prior to Jesus’ return?’

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