

The Longing of Angels

1 Peter 1:10-12

Perhaps the most fascinating Bible study ever in all of history took place during the 40 days when Jesus appeared to his disciples on earth after his resurrection, before his ascension. Two of Jesus' disciples were walking on the road to Emmaus. They were sad because their hopes for Jesus had been dashed. They knew Jesus was...

Luke 24:19 "...a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."

But they also knew,

Luke 24:20 "...how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. 21"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened."

They hoped. They expected. Even until the third day when Jesus had said he would be raised. But no Jesus. No triumphant victory for Israel. No mighty power. No Jesus. He was dead and crucified.

Little did they know as they walked down that road that Jesus stood before them, but oh what a Bible study it must have been. We read,

Luke 24:27 "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

He's talking about the Old Testament, isn't he? All the Scriptures, all that had been written. That's the Old Testament, isn't it? And how thrilling it must have been to hear all the

passages where Moses and the Prophets were predicting Jesus.

It's tempting to do just that this morning, to walk through the Old Testament, book by book, prophet by prophet, to identify Jesus. We might never finish. But we would start in,

Gen. 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."

Where is Jesus? "Then God said..." That's God's word, and God's word is Jesus. There he is, right at the creation of the world. And so,

Heb. 11:3 "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God."

And,

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."

So maybe on that road to Emmaus Jesus begin with Genesis 1:1-3. And maybe he ended with the last book of the Old Testament, written some 400 years earlier,

Mal. 4:2 "But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings."

Luke 24:27 "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

It is nothing less than,

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT WITNESS OF THE GOSPEL.

That's where we will start this morning, in 1 Peter, and then note more specifically the Old Testament witness of the work of Jesus. Then, as my third point, we'll ask that often useful question, "So what?" In other words, the relevance of the OT witness to Jesus.

By first, again, a simple definition of what that OT witness of the gospel was all about. Look at,

v.10 "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you."

Peter mentions salvation. And he mentions grace. Two pretty important NT words, both well established in the Old Testament. So Peter declares that,

A. The Old Testament prophets proclaimed the gospel of salvation by grace.

The prophets inquired about salvation. The word means the "searched out," very carefully. "They made careful search," as the NASB puts it well. The emphasis is upon the effort and diligence of the investigation. They worked very hard at it. The prophets worked very hard to search out, to understand and to declare the salvation of God.

So please don't ever be tempted to think that the OT is all about the law and the NT is all about the gospel. Please don't think that the OT is all about the judgment and wrath of God, while the NT is all about the salvation which God provides for his people. That simply is not how the Bible is divided up!

The Old Testament is all about salvation. And it's all about grace, too. The OT prophets prophesied about "the grace that

would come to you." So please don't think that the OT is all about a system of works-righteousness while the NT is about salvation by grace. All of those sorts of distinctions are harmful and deceiving. And they will keep you from rightly understanding the Old Testament.

This is the gospel, stated as clearly as possible,

Eph. 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

So where is that gospel of grace in the OT? We have to at least consider a few examples together. So how about,

Gen. 6:5 "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."

God brought the judgment of the flood, but saved Noah and his family! Why? Noah found grace! And Peter will refer to Noah specifically,

2 Peter 2:4 "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly... 9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment."

God saved Noah! And the water of the flood becomes a symbol of that salvation. Peter speaks of God's forbearance and long-suffering,

1 Peter 3:20 "...in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him."

Saved through the water, saved through cleansing, by grace, not by works of righteousness. Isn't that what the whole OT sacrificial system points out to us? Saved by cleansing, the removal of the filth of sin, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ! In other words, the gospel of salvation by grace. Proclaimed in the OT.

So we read passages like this,

Ps. 103:8 "The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."

That's grace, isn't it? The gospel of salvation by grace. I could also mention the revelation of God to Moses at Mt. Sinai,

Ex. 34:6 "And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no

means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." 8 So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. 9 Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance."

That's grace, isn't it?

We could look at Abraham, too.

Gen. 12:1 "Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

And when Paul wrote to the Galatians in the New Testament, he called that promise "preaching the gospel to Abraham beforehand."

Do you remember what else God promised Abraham? Children. Lots and lots of them, descendants. And this great promise of grace would be extended to those children. The covenant of grace which God preached to Abraham was focused upon God's blessing of the provision of children.

Gen. 15:5 "Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

Salvation by grace through faith. The gospel preached to Abraham beforehand. And I could keep on going. But let me move on in my outline to something just a bit more specific, noting that,

B. The OT prophets proclaimed the incarnation of Jesus.

Not just the gospel of salvation by grace. Not just Jesus in general terms. But something very, very specific. Peter writes in verse 10 “of the grace that would come to you.” But how? How did the grace of God come to his people on earth? Simple answer: in the flesh. The grace of God would come in the flesh.

In the language of the New Testament,

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

But how about the language of the OT, the words of the prophets that came before Jesus? How about the sign that God would give to King Ahaz.

Is. 7:14 “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

God with us! That’s the marvel of the incarnation. God with us! You could say that that promise is, in fact, the central promise of the whole OT. It is the central event in the whole Bible. What is the story of the whole Bible, in its simplest form? God with us! The OT prophets proclaimed it, and the NT apostles explained it.

v.10

Let’s move on to verse 11, with an emphasis not merely on the OT witness of the gospel but,

II. THE OT WITNESS OF THE WORK OF JESUS.

There is specific mention of what Jesus came to earth to do.

v. 11 “searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”

All of Christ’s work summarized in two headings, his sufferings and the glories that would follow. The language of our catechisms uses the descriptions, his estate of humiliation and his estate of exaltation. And it is good to think in those terms. First,

A. The experience of suffering.

To define it precisely, using the words of Question 27, “Christ’s humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.”

Don’t forget, the incarnation was an act of humiliation. Just being born. He took to himself a human nature. Just that was an act of unparalleled humility.

Phil. 2:5 “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

We forget what an astounding act of humiliation that was. And the Old Testament proclaims of all of it, never more clearly than in,

Is. 53:1 “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the

arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”

And in the words our Lord uttered as he hung upon the cross,

Ps. 22:1 “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? 2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. 3 But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. 4 Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. 5 They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed. 6 But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. 7 All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8 "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" 9 But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. 10 I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. 11 Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help.

12 Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. 13 They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. 16 For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. 18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots. 19 But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! 20 Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. 21 Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.”

Let me make one very personal application at this point, for your encouragement, and that is to fix your eyes upon this Jesus. Not some imaginary Jesus, one whom you create as a figment of your imagination. Not the Jesus of sentimentalism or liberalism, not the Jesus who would champion the cause of world peace or racial reconciliation or third world poverty, but the Jesus who suffered. The Jesus who hung upon the cross, shedding his own blood, and endured the damnation of God's justice, for you. For me.

Heb. 12:1 “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

That's practical, isn't it? Look unto Jesus, who endured the estate of humiliation. But don't forget, the OT also declares to us,

B. The glories of Jesus.

And I use the plural, glories, because it is plural in Greek. I believe the emphasis is upon the great and glorious works of Jesus, his glorious deeds and triumphs.

And what are they? How about this prophecy,

Ps. 72:1 "Give the king Your judgments, O God, And Your righteousness to the king's Son. 2 He will judge Your people with righteousness, And Your poor with justice. 3 The mountains will bring peace to the people, And the little hills, by righteousness. 4 He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, And will break in pieces the oppressor. 5 They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure, Throughout all generations. 6 He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, Like showers that water the earth. 7 In His days the righteous shall flourish, And abundance of peace, Until the moon is no more. 8 He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth. 9 Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust...17 His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed. 18 Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! 19 And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen."

The testimony of the OT is all about the glories of Jesus. "Let the whole earth be filled with His glory."

And then, that probing question. So what? What difference does all of this make? What is the practical benefit for you and

for me? And Peter answers that question in verse 12, showing us,

III. THE RELEVANCE OF THE OT WITNESS OF JESUS.

Why bother studying the OT? What is,

A. The ministry of the OT to us today?

v.12a

Peter says that the Old Testament prophets are ministering to us. To us, today. So let me ask you something. Don't raise your hand, but think. Search your own heart. Do you appreciate the prophetic witness of the Old Testament? Do you read as much from the OT as from the New? Would you rather hear preaching from the New Testament? Would you rather have a Bible study from the NT?

Why is that? We think it's more relevant, more appropriate. We get easily bored and distracted by things in the Old Testament. But that ought not to be the case. Those prophets labored for you, for your benefit. But not just the prophets, the Holy Spirit. Now Peter really must be mistaken,

v.12 "...they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven."

Not just a reference to the Holy Spirit, but an explicit declaration of his origin, from heaven. The gospel was preached in the Old Testament by the Holy Spirit. So what is,

B. The ministry of the Holy Spirit to us today.

Simple, isn't it.

2 Peter 1:21 "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

The words of the Old Testament were written,
2 Tim. 3:16 "...by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Sometimes, we don't give enough attention to the work of the Holy Spirit today, but it is He who gave us the Old Testament prophecies. It was He who gave us the Old Testament writings. All of them. And all of it "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." All of it has as its purpose "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So if you don't study the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament enough, you are shortchanging yourself. You won't understand the nature of corporate worship. You won't understand the nature and significance of infant baptism. You won't fully understand election. Or grace. You won't understand the law.

You won't understand the covenant. Or the Trinity. Not creation nor even, I believe, the end times. And even more practically, you won't gain the fullness of wisdom as we find in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, nor learn how to pray or sing like the psalmists. Your grasp of all of those things will be distorted or insufficient to the same degree that you depreciate your study of the Old Testament.

Beloved, the ministry of the Holy Spirit to you today must include, by definition, the ministry of the Old Testament in your life and soul.

And lest you think I'm making a big point out of something

relatively unimportant, look at how verse 12 ends. These are "things which angels desire to look into." Isn't that marvelous? Peter identifies,

C. The delight of the angels.

Even the angels delight to look into these matters so well revealed by the Old Testament prophets under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The longing of angels is to look into and study this whole matter of the salvation which God has provided for his people.

So, if the angels delight in these things, shouldn't you? Interesting question, isn't it? If the angels want to know about God's revelation given in anticipation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, shouldn't you want to know about those things too?

We live in such a practical age. Such a process oriented age. Such a technological and intellectual age. We want results. We want organization. We want solutions. How-to books. Psychological encouragement. We want our own felt needs satisfied.

But there is something more fundamental to your spiritual well-being than all of those things, namely a deep, consistent and studied understanding of just how it is that you would come to receive and enjoy the salvation of your souls, a work which God has accomplished through Jesus Christ.

If you are not a Christian, not a believer, then I offer to you that salvation. It is yours by faith, the faith to receive a free gift. A gift of grace, not of works, so that no one can boast. The delightful thing about a new Christian is the excitement, isn't it? Excitement in a new found understanding and commitment of salvation.

So if you are a Christian, a believer, then learn to delight in these things like the angels do. There ought to be nothing more exciting, nothing more exhilarating, than what we are doing right here and now as we study God's word as a congregation of God's people. Even angels long to look into these things, and so should you.