

Peter Series Part 4

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[0 : 00] May you always experience the joy that comes from putting Christ at the center of your lives. Now, if a pope is going to send a final tweet, it's difficult to argue with these words as his final blessing. It is a blessing, but it can also be taken as a sound piece of advice.

Put Christ at the center of your life. But is Christ only to occupy the center of people's lives, and that only inasmuch as we grant Him that place of preeminence? The Bible portrays Christ and His redemptive mission as standing at the very center of human history, not only in the individual lives of believers, important though that is, but Christ as the very center of the whole sweep of universal and human history. All of history before His appearing was moving towards Christ. And all history since His appearing proceeds from and is grounded in His life and work. Indeed, Christ is not only the center point of history, He is the center of everything, the very cosmos itself.

In the words of Paul, as he writes to the Christians in Colossae, in Him, in Christ, all things hold together. Now, we see something of this in the verses that we will be considering this morning in 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 10 to 12. And they are only three verses.

We've read them already, but let's read them again to have the content of them as familiar in our minds as possible as we proceed to think about what it is that Peter is saying. So, let's read from verse 10 of 1 Peter chapter 1 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 Christ 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.

The verses that we've read are concerned with this salvation. That is how verse 10 begins, concerning this salvation. This salvation, the object of the believer's living hope that Peter has already spoken of, secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In further instructing on this great subject, Peter is careful to place the person and work of Christ at the very center not only of his message, but of the whole suite of human history. The heart of these verses, verses 10 to 12, is found in the words that we read in verse 12, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. Sorry, in verse 11, the end of verse 11, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. This is the heart of the heart of this section. At the very center of what Peter is saying lies this reality of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. What comes before the sufferings of Christ?

[4 : 30] Well, what comes before are the prophets who point to Christ. That is what leads to the coming and the sufferings of Christ. That is what leads to Christ. That is what leads to the suffering and the glories that follow. What comes before are the prophets pointing towards this great event. And what comes after his sufferings? Well, Peter touches on that also as he speaks of those who preached the gospel to the believers that he is writing to. These preachers, apostles and preachers, what did they do? Well, what they did is they pointed back to the coming of Christ, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that flowed from his sufferings. So, as we consider these verses, we can do so in that fashion. First of all, to think about what lies at the center of what Peter says in these verses, what lies at the center of this passage, what lies at the center of his message, and what lies at the very center of human history. The person of

Jesus Christ, who has the power of Jesus Christ, who has the power of Jesus Christ, and very particularly, His sufferings and the glories that follow from them. This is what we will think of first of all. But having done that, we then want to notice that which preceded His sufferings. What Peter says concerning the prophets who pointed to the coming Messiah, and then to look at what follows,

as Peter speaks of those who preached the gospel to his readers, those who, following the coming of Christ, the suffering of Christ, preach this gospel and point hearers back to Christ and to what He has done. First of all, then, the center of human history, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. At the center of human history, we find the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world, suffering. He came to suffer and die. The charity Save the Children employ very vivid images of emaciated infants to impress upon us a powerful message, no child born to die. As yesterday,

I saw that advert, I saw that advert, not for the first time, no child born to die. And it's a very powerful message accompanied by very vivid and disturbing images. But I confess, if indeed confession it is, that as I see that advert, what always strikes me or what always comes to my mind is that there was one child who was born to die, one child who was born to die. And it is this child, the Christ child, He was born to die. He came to suffer. The Word became flesh and the Word suffered in the flesh.

Peter speaks of the sufferings of Christ, the sufferings of Christ.

He suffered in many and diverse ways during His mission to and for the world. But the darkest hour, the deepest pain, the most intense anguish was reserved for Calvary, both in the expectation and experience of the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as He contemplated His impending death, the agony reached such intensity that Jesus sweated, as it were, drops of blood.

Jesus knew that what awaited Him was not only the physical torture of crucifixion, horrendous though that was, but the far greater agony of bearing the sin of the world, of being made sin for us, made sin for us, and so made repugnant to His Father who turns from His Son as He is hanging there on the cross. And so, provoking the cry that echoes poignantly through the centuries, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[8 : 55] Jesus Christ suffered. Well can Peter speak of the sufferings of Christ. He suffered and died for the sins of the sins of the world. He suffered and died in the place of sinners, in our place. He endured the judgment of God upon our sin. He paid the price of our redemption. Jesus Christ suffered.

We will never appreciate, we will never understand, we will never grasp all that is encompassed in these simple but choice words of Peter, the sufferings of Christ. The sufferings of Christ.

The sufferings of Christ that lie at the very center of human history. But not only sufferings, not only sufferings, Peter speaks of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Jesus died with a view to the glories that would follow. We think of the words that we have recorded for us in the letter to the Hebrews and in chapter 12 and in verse 2 where we are encouraged, exhorted to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross. Especially these words that speak of Jesus enduring the cross, but in doing so, in the light of and with a view to the joy set before him, the glory that awaited him, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. What glories follow from the sufferings of Christ? The glory of his resurrection, the glory of his ascension to the right hand of the Father, the glory of his present sovereign rule over the universe, the glory of his headship over his growing and expanding church, the glory of the ingathering of the elect whose sins are washed in his shed blood, the glory of his imminent return, the glory of the new heavens and the new earth, his new creation, our glorious inheritance, and yes, our glorious joy, to use the very language of Peter that he has employed just a few moments earlier. At the very center of history lies the person of Jesus Christ, his sufferings, and the glories that follow from said sufferings. Glories that follow not simply chronologically, but causally and of necessity.

[11 : 55] You see, the same mouth that uttered, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, also cried out, it is finished. The work of Christ, the promised Messiah, is a completed work, and his completed work births the glories that follow. So, this then lies at the center of what Peter says in these verses we're considering at the center of his message, at the center of our message, indeed at the center of human history, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that follow. But we also want to think this morning of what came before pointing forward to the coming of Christ and the sufferings that he would endure. In the verses that we've read, Peter identifies the prophets as those who came before and pointed towards the coming of Christ and his sufferings and the subsequent glories. And of these prophets, we can ask three questions. We'll ask the same three questions of the preachers that Peter speaks of in verse 12. The prophets pointing towards

Christ, the preachers who point back towards Christ, of both three questions can be posed and answered. And the three questions are this, what is their message? By whom do they declare their message? And to whom is it directed?

So, we want to ask these questions, first of all, of the prophets, and look for answers to these questions in our passage. And then we'll pose the same questions of the preachers that Peter also makes reference to. Of the prophets, then, what was their message? Well, the heart of the message of the prophets is captured in a beautiful and simple phrase in verse 10.

Notice what Peter says, Notice what Peter says, Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you. What did the prophets speak of?

They spoke of the grace that was to come. The grace that was to come. The message of the prophets was a message at heart in its essence of God's grace.

[14:32] The grace that unprovoked love of God that chooses to love the unlovable, to embrace the disease, to welcome the rejected, to breathe life into the dead. The grace that was to come. This lies at the heart of the prophets' message.

But of course, the full expression of the grace, and the one by whom this grace would be revealed, was as yet a future prospect for the prophets.

But though it was a future prospect, the prophets did not speak of grace in a vacuum. They did not speak of salvation in the absence of a Savior. They pointed to Jesus. They did not see Jesus for themselves, but they pointed to Jesus.

They pointed towards His coming as Messiah. They prophesied concerning the Messiah that would come, the suffering servant who would come sent by the Father.

Did the prophets understand all that they prophesied concerning the coming Messiah? There was much that they did not understand. Indeed, there were aspects of what they declared that they could not fully understand.

[15:57] But any lack of understanding on the part of the prophets was certainly not for the want of trying. What does Peter say about these prophets through whom God spoke?

Well, there in verse 10, we read that 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.

They searched intently and with the greatest care. What did they search? What did the prophets search? What was it that they brought to bear, to consider, and to search, and to dig into?

Well, they searched the Scriptures. They searched the Word of God that had preceded them, those who were able to refer to that which had already been revealed and declared by God.

They searched the Scriptures. And, of course, they searched and considered the Word that God brought to them as prophets. They were to deliver the message that God gave to them.

[17:01] But even that message was something that as they received it, so they wrestled with and searched and inquired of. We sometimes read of the prophets how they agonized over the message that they were to proclaim, not because they were working out what to say.

No, the message came from God. But that message that they received, they would search into and inquire of. They compared and contrasted.

They delved and dug deeply into the Scriptures. They prayed intensely that God would grant them light and understanding. How they longed not only to know concerning the time and circumstances of the coming Messiah, but to know the Messiah Himself.

As New Testament believers, we are to pray the words that we find at the very end of the New Testament. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Well, the prophets prayed in a similar vein.

Amen. Come, Messiah. Come and bring consolation to Israel. The message that they declared at heart, a message of grace concerning a coming Redeemer, a coming Savior, the Messiah.

[18:23] Amen. But the second question that we said we would pose concerning these prophets is, by whom do they declare this message? Not only what is the message that they declared, but by whom do they declare it?

Well, Peter is explicit in this matter. We read there in verse 11 that they tried 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.

The language that Peter uses conveys the idea of God Himself speaking through the prophets. The pronouncements of the prophets were not the product of their searching intently and with the greatest care.

No, rather the Spirit of God spoke through them, and then they searched and inquired that which God had spoken. And that order is fundamental, and it's important for us to be clear on it. Peter uses language that, as I stress and repeat, points to God Himself speaking through the prophets. But what are we to make of the name given by Peter to the one who speaks through the prophets?

[19 : 50] The language that Peter uses, the name, the designation, whatever you wish, is the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ in them was pointing to the coming Messiah.

I think there can be no reasonable doubt that Peter here is referring to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. But why this name?

What is the significance of the name or the designation that Peter employs, the Spirit of Christ? Do we have here a rather mysterious emerging of the Son and the Spirit?

Well, no, that is not what we have. The import of the name or description is to emphasize that the message delivered by the Spirit through the prophets was a message concerning Christ.

He is the Spirit of Christ in the sense that He proclaims Christ, He points to Christ, He exalts Christ. His ministry has been described by some as a floodlight ministry, shedding all the light on Jesus.

[21 : 07] So, when we read of the Spirit of Christ, we're not to understand this as the Spirit belonging to Christ, but the Spirit that reveals and exalts Christ. He is the one by whom the prophets spoke.

He is the one who was in them pointing to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. But there's a third question, and the third question is, to whom is their message directed?

So, not only to notice, as we have very fleetingly, the message itself, the content of it, a message of grace, not only by whom do they declare it, by the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit in them, but also Peter speaks of their audience, if you wish, to whom they were speaking, who was being addressed, who was to be benefited by the message that they brought.

And there we have an intriguing affirmation or declaration by Peter in verse 12. It was revealed to them, that is, it was revealed to the prophets, that they were not serving themselves, but you. Not serving themselves, but you. Now, Peter, by saying this, is not affirming that the message of the prophets carried no meaning for the prophets themselves or for their original audience.

[22 : 38] That is quite manifestly not the case. In the message that they declared, there was a message for them, a message of hope, a message of consolation, and, of course, a message for God's people as they received that which the prophets declared.

But what Peter is saying is that the full meaning, perhaps we can't speak of the full meaning, but certainly the fuller meaning of what they declared, the identity of the one they pointed to, the salvation that the one prophesied would secure, would only be understood in greater measure, in fuller measure, with the coming of Messiah Jesus.

And it is only the privilege of those who live following His coming and the completion of His work, who can appreciate in greater measure the significance of all that the prophets declared.

In this, we can detect one of Peter's pastoral purposes in addressing his readers.

You see, those who are receiving this letter would have held the prophets in high regard, and for good reason. And what Peter is saying is, well, you hold the prophets in such high regard, and that is good and right that you should do so, but imagine this.

[24 : 09] Get your head round this. What they spoke was for you. They serve you. Yes, Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel, these great men of God, they serve you.

The message that they brought was for you. You can understand this message even better than they themselves. And Peter is saying to them, you think yourself a weak people, a scattered people, strangers in the world, but just get a hold of this.

The prophets, they serve you. They brought a message for you. Yes, for themselves. Yes, for those who first heard the message, but very especially, very particularly for you.

They were not serving themselves, but you. And of course, as Peter could say that to those who first read this letter, so it is true also for us.

The prophets serve us. As we turn to the Old Testament, we discover and can increasingly discover that it is indeed full of Jesus.

[25 : 22] And the Old Testament is for us. The writings of the prophets are for us. And may we know, and may we increasingly know, the thrill of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

We remember them after they had spent this time with the risen Savior, and how He had opened up the Scriptures to them. And what did they say? As they spoke among themselves, were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us. And why did their hearts burn? These disciples of Jesus, why did their hearts burn? Well, what is said that was the object of their conversation, but of Jesus' discourse, and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

So, the prophets, pointing towards, preparing the way for the coming Messiah, pointing to the sufferings of Messiah and the glories that would follow, the message that they brought, a message of grace, a message that they brought by the Spirit of Christ, a message for themselves, yes, for those who first heard their prophecies, but preeminently and wonderfully, a message for us. So, we've considered what lies at the very center, Jesus Christ, His sufferings and the glories that follow. We thought about what Peter says concerning what came before, the prophets pointing towards Jesus, but Peter also speaks of what comes after.

[27 : 13] He speaks of the preachers who would also point to Christ, who would also point to His sufferings and the glories that flow from them. Then in verse 12, we read, 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.

Preachers, no doubt here, Peter has in mind the apostles, but not exclusively the apostles, all those who preached the gospel.

And we can ask the same three questions that we ask to the prophets of the preachers. First of all, what is their message? Well, there we read what Peter says, those who have preached the gospel to you.

The message that is declared is the gospel, the evangel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ, concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

It's the same message, essentially, as the message of the prophets, but from the perspective not of expectation, but of fulfillment. The fundamental difference is not in the content of the message, but the perspective from which it is declared, no longer of expectation, but of fulfillment.

[28 : 39] And the seamless and unbroken nature of the message is made explicit by Peter as he recognizes that the things that are told by the New Testament preacher are the very things the prophets spoke of.

Notice how Peter makes that very clear. there in verse 12. When they spoke, that is, the prophets, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel.

The things are the same things. The prophets spoke these things, and these things are now told to the believers by those who preach the gospel.

There is this essential unity and integrity to the message that is declared. And of course, that continuity, that homogeneous witness is secured by the subject of the message, the Messiah.

It's all about Jesus. It was all about Jesus in the message of the prophets, and it's all about Jesus in the message of the preachers. We began by giving some thought to the tweet of Benedict concerning whether we have Jesus at the center of our lives.

[30 : 07] Well, I hope that we do have Jesus at the very center of our lives. But a very important question for us who would purport to preach the gospel is whether Jesus is at the heart of our message.

Because if Jesus is not at the heart of our message, we have failed in our calling. And this is the calling not only of preachers, it is the calling of all believers.

We are all witnesses to the truth, all ambassadors of Jesus Christ. What was their message? The message of these preachers that Peter speaks of, their message was the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus, the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that would follow.

But then, there's a second question that we ask of the prophets that we now ask of the preachers. By whom did they declare, or do they declare, this message?

Well, we've stressed that it's the same message, and not surprisingly, as it is the same message, it is the same Spirit by whom and in whose power the good news is preached.

[31 : 22] That is what Peter says. Those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. The content of our message preserved in the pages of Scripture was given by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit continues to play a central and irreplaceable role in the preaching of

the sufferings of Christ and the glories that follow.

The Spirit of God, invisibly and yet powerfully working in preacher and hearer alike, makes the Word declared, proclaimed, effective unto salvation, and how we stand in urgent need of the Spirit of God to revive and empower, to anoint and convict, to point us, preachers and hearers, to Jesus, the one the Spirit is still and ever pointing to.

And the final question we pose are the preachers. To whom is their message directed? Well, Peter is speaking to the believers that he is writing to, and he says, the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you.

Peter encourages his readers as he reminds them that they are the ones who were privileged to receive the good news. It was preached to you. And of course, we also stand in that same place of privilege.

This salvation, to use the very words of Peter, this salvation, the grace that was to come, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow, all preached to you.

[33 : 12] And with privilege comes responsibility. What have you done? What will you do with the message preached to you?

Pope Benedict, Pope Emeritus, I believe he is now called, wisely encourages us to place Christ at the center of our lives.

But still, more gloriously, we discover that Christ is at the very heart and center of history itself. Before Him, history moved towards His coming, and the prophets pointed to His future sufferings and glories.

After His coming and work, preachers, and indeed every believer, points to what Christ has done, His sufferings and the glories that flow from them. Is this amazing?

These truths, this gospel, is it amazing? Is it thrilling? Is it exciting? Well, the angels think so. See, Peter ends these words or this section of his letter with this very intriguing claim.

[34 : 23] Even angels long to look into these things. The angels find the drama of redemption a gripping drama. They long to look into these things.

Now, what does that mean? What does it mean to say that the angels long to look into these things? Does it mean that they want to but can't? Somehow they're excluded?

I don't think that's what it's saying at all. The angels do look into these things. They do look on in perplexed and awestruck wonder at the sufferings of Christ and the glories that follow from his sufferings.

They look at the work of Christ in his people in you and me and words fail them. The angels are fascinated. They're gripped by the great drama of God's redemptive story.

And if angels who are in a sense outsiders to this drama the audience as it were if they are gripped how much more those of us who are the actors the objects of God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

[35 : 39] May we ever be likewise amazed. Let us pray. Every day a saga By the end, the jubik of God's every other intense Those of us in you Everffer Him I know how much more of you willservice or hear your love .

God's May we have a Yet God's about her name