

Things Into Which Angels Long To Look

I Peter 1:6-12

Pastor John Piper correctly declares, “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.” This morning we will see that this truth can be lived out even when we are experiencing difficult circumstances and deep trials.

Last week, Pastor Jeff helped us celebrate the great salvation we have entered into through repentance and faith in Christ. Our entrance into this salvation is a work of God the Holy Spirit – Who we celebrate and honor this Pentecost Sunday.

According to I Peter 1:4, our resurrected Lord Jesus has won for His followers an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading and kept in heaven for us. Let me ask a question at this point. Is this inheritance also reserved in heaven for the Old Testament saints? Yes. When followers of the true and living God – such as Noah, Job, and Abraham trusted in God’s temporary provisions for their sins – which were designed to point to Christ – it was reckoned by God as faith in Christ. And how did the Old Testament saints come to the place of humility, where they confessed to God that they could not fix themselves, but had to trust in God’s provision for their salvation? It happened by God’s grace and through the work of the Holy Spirit. And so God the Holy Spirit regenerated people through out the Old Testament times, but it was often referred to – as being circumcised of heart. And so when Christ poured out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which was ten days after His

ascension, it was not as if the Holy Spirit had never been at work in this world before. What happened on the Day of Pentecost, was that the Holy Spirit began a depth and breadth of work that was greater than what He did during Old Testament times. One of the evidences of this greater work of the Holy Spirit – was that Gentiles began pouring into God’s Kingdom in much greater numbers than the Jewish people, who by and large had stopped loving God and were just going through the motions of serving Him. I hope none of us are doing that today.

We will see from this morning’s text that the Gentile followers of Christ were excited about their inclusion into God’s covenant people. But when I Peter was being written, Christ’s followers, both Jews and Gentiles, were going through fiery trials – which were going to get worse before they got better. And so Peter was helping his fellow believers to understand why being a part of God’s elect was at times very difficult. Peter addresses this issue in verses 6-7,

“In this [great salvation] you [Christ’s followers] rejoice, **though now for a little while**, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials [and here is why God was allowing this],⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

In these two verses, Peter is assuring his fellow persecuted Christians – that they would receive relief and vindication from their various trials, in just **a little while**. But they also needed to know that these trials were being used by God to purify, strengthen and prove the genuineness of their faith in Christ. Friends, Satan tempts us – hoping we will fail. God tests

us – to make our faith grow and to demonstrate to us and others – that our faith is real.

I can still remember years ago, after I had gone through a particularly rough stretch of road, with my love for God still in tact, it dawned on me that I could not have made it through that trial if God wasn't truly working in my life. That insight greatly strengthened my faith in Christ. It actually helped me gain an assurance of my salvation. Do all of you have an assurance of your salvation? Do you know that you really know Christ in a saving way? Or are some of you doing good things to try and offset the bad things you have done? If that is so, then you are trying to work your way to heaven – and you won't make it. I am not saying anything against good works. What I am saying is that good works do not produce salvation – they follow salvation. The Bible says we are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works.

It would seem that Peter's original readers were truly rejoicing in the great salvation that Christ won for them. But they were perplexed because even though they did what was good and right for their neighbors, many of those neighbors returned evil for their good. And so what would give these early Christians – relief from the lies spoken about them and the evil done to them? In verse 7, Peter explains that their relief, praise, glory and honor would come at the revelation [or revealing] of Jesus Christ.

To understand what this revelation of Christ may mean, we need to back up to verse 5, and talk about God's elect being "guarded through faith for a salvation [a deliverance] ready to be revealed in the last time."

Brooke Westcott, a highly respected Greek scholar in the 1800's, said that "last time" can be understood in two different ways: (1) it can refer to the end of the world as we know it; or (2) it can refer to a time when wickedness reaches its limit, and Christ's power against it is displayed.

Without doubt, the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ will occur when He comes at the end of this New Covenant Age to raise the dead and finalize eternal destinies. But I do not think Peter had that revelation of Christ in mind, since it is still in our future and therefore would not bring relief to Peter's original readers. There are a number of indications in I Peter that deliverance from the persecutors of Christianity was at hand when Peter was writing this letter.

Who were the major tormentors of believers in Peter's day? In Acts 12:1-3, we learn that when king Herod put James, the brother of John to death, he saw that it pleased the Jews, and so he also arrested Peter and intended to kill him. In Acts 13:50, we are told that it was the Jews at Pisidian Antioch who stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district. In Acts 14:2 we read, "But the unbelieving Jews [of Iconium] stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers." Both Pisidian Antioch and Iconium are located in modern day Turkey, which is where the original readers of I Peter were primarily located.

We need to remember that when I Peter was written, there were far more unbelieving Jews than there were Christians. Is that the case today? No, there are far more Christians than there are Jews. And the Jewish

people we are rubbing shoulders with today are not trying to kill us. They may not agree with us about everything we believe, but that helps us to practice respect and genuine tolerance for each other.

Another major persecutor of Christians began his morbid oppression in A.D. 64. Two highly regarded Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius, testify that Caesar Nero put to death immense multitudes of Christians – the Apostles Peter and Paul were among them. And yet shortly after I Peter was circulated, both Nero and unbelieving Israel were severely judged. **This soon coming judgment upon the persecutors of Christianity was a revelation, a revealing of Christ's power over the wicked.**

I have asked James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus, to join us this morning and help me demonstrate what I have just said. Please go a page or two backwards in your Bible and look at **James 5:1-9**, written sometime around A.D. 40 – 50,

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.³ Your gold and silver have corroded [even though what James is saying is still in the future, he speaks of it as already done. This is called prophetic certainty], and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days [all of the people James was writing to – were living in the last days of the Old Covenant Age, which was characterized by animal sacrifices offered at a stone temple. Do you know when that age officially ended? It disappeared when the stone temple at Jerusalem was swept away in A.D. 70].⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.⁵ You have lived on

the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter.⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, **for the coming of the Lord is at hand** [near].⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

James was not talking about a far off judgement, but a coming of the Lord [a revealing of Christ] that the generation in which James and Peter lived, actually experienced. Christians need to think carefully about saying that James and Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand in their day. If they indeed wrote that, then we need to stop saying that the Bible is without error – because Christ’s Second Coming has not yet happened 2,000 years later. I am bringing this up now because we will have to talk about it again when we come to I Peter 4:7, where Peter declares, “The end of all things is at hand . . .”

Let’s move on to what Peter writes in verses 8-9,

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Peter had seen Jesus with his physical eyes and had personally witnessed how Christ responded to every circumstance imaginable, while accomplishing innumerable miracles – which caused Peter to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. But the people Peter was writing to had never

seen Jesus in the flesh. And yet they loved Him and believed in Him and rejoiced in Him with joy inexpressible and filled with glory.

How could that be? Because when Jesus died, He didn't stay dead. He rose again and ascended back to the Father's right hand – as the all powerful, omnipresent King of kings and Lord of lords. This is why Christ could live in the hearts of every believer in Peter's day and can dwell in all of our hearts today. The Apostle Paul never lost his wonder about this truth, which caused him to proclaim in Colossians 1:27, “. . . [it] is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Do all of us here this morning love and trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord? And do we rejoice in Christ and in our great salvation with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory? If we do not, why not? Are our lives filled with more trials than the lives of the believers in Peter's day? I think not. Perhaps our problem is that we really don't believe what we say we believe. Peter and his original readers truly believed that Jesus has won for them a great salvation. How great of a salvation? Let's read verses 10-12,

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours [followers of Christ] searched and inquired carefully,¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.¹² 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.”

The Old Testament prophets would have dearly loved to live in the

days of the Messiah, who paid a terrible price on the cross, but through that suffering secured glorious blessings for His people. The Old Testament prophets foretold Christ's sufferings in Psalm 22, Psalm 69 and Isaiah 53. And they also foretold the glories He would achieve in Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 – which are the two most quoted Psalms in the New Testament. And may I point out that both Psalm 2 and 110, reveal truths about the glory Christ that we do not often think or talk about today. And that is a problem that needs fixing. Listen to **Psalm 2:6-12**,

“As for me [God the Father], I have set my King [God the Son] on Zion, my holy hill [speaking of Christ's ascension to His heavenly throne] . . .⁷ The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you [officially established your kingship].⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations [Gentiles] your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way . . .”

Remember, all judgment has been handed over to the Son. Listen also to **Psalm 110**,

“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’² The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! . . .² The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.³ He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth.”

There is a whole lot of death and judgment in these Psalms. What we modern Christians need to understand is that Christ's power and authority to judge the wicked **is a part of His glory**. And it is very clear from these

psalms, that Christ doesn't save up His wrath until an end of the world judgment extravaganza. He judges wickedness all the time – so that righteousness can continue to move forward.

Without doubt much of our glorious inheritance and treasures are laid up in heaven, where moth and rust cannot get to them. But not all of the glories which Christ has secured for us – and which the angels long to look into – take place in heaven. Jesus prayed that God the Father would not take us out of the world, but instead keep us in the world – while empowering us not be of the world. In Christ we have become new creations – so we can bring God's blessings into this fallen world. We are to work and pray that God's kingdom comes, and that His will is done, on earth as it is in heaven.

I personally see the Kingdom of God on earth when courtrooms bring just verdicts that protect law abiding citizens from lawbreakers. I see the Kingdom of God when the civil laws of a nation are in harmony with God's Law. I see the kingdom of God when Christians are meeting pressing needs. I see the Kingdom of God when the people of God – glorify God – by truly enjoying Him and helping others to do the same.

You have heard the saying that some Christians are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. Of course this is not true of Christians who are genuinely heavenly minded. The Apostle John says, you cannot love God if you do not love people. And to truly love people is to serve them, try to protect them from evil, and point them to Christ. And the more people who become new creations in Christ by embracing His

Kingship, the more Christ's Kingdom grows in this fallen world – the less judgements the nations will experience and the more blessings they will enjoy. The Apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 15:8-10**,

"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised [Jesus was born of the Jews] to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs [among whom are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob],⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written . . .¹² The root of Jesse [Christ] will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."

God's sworn promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have never been rescinded, or nullified. Instead, Christ came to confirm those promises. In closing I am going to read God's glorious promise to Abraham, recorded in **Genesis 22:16-18**, and you tell me if these promises are to be fulfilled in heaven or on earth,

"I swear by myself, declares the LORD . . .¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,¹⁸ and through your offspring all the nations on earth will be blessed . . ."

The source of these blessings is from heaven. But the place where these blessings will be experienced is right here on earth. All of these salvation blessings were planned by God the Father, paid for by God the Son and are being set into motion by the regenerating work of God the Holy Spirit. Let's pray.