

Sermons by Spurgeon - 1 Peter 1

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SERMONS ON 1 PETER BY C H SPURGEON

1 Peter 1:3-5 A STRING OF PEARLS

BY C. H. SPURGEON

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 28TH, 1870,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. — 1 Peter 1:3-5.

WE THE persons whom Peter addressed were in great need of comfort. They were strangers, strangers scattered far from home; they had in consequence to suffer manifold trials, and therefore needed plenteous consolations. Such is our position in a spiritual sense, we, too, are strangers and foreigners; we are pilgrims and sojourners below, and our citizenship is in heaven; we also require the word of comfort, for while our banishment lasts, we look for tribulations. The persons whom Peter addressed were God's chosen, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," and one sure result of divine election is the world's enmity. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." So you too, my brethren, chosen out from among men, to be the peculiar people of God, must expect to be partakers of the cross, for the servant is not greater than his Lord; since they persecuted him they will also persecute you. Therefore to you, as to those of old by Peter, the word of consolation is sent this day. The apostle also addressed the sanctified. Through the Holy Spirit they had been sanctified and set apart; to the "obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus" they had been brought. They were a people who had "purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit;" and rest assured no man can do this without encountering fiery trials. He who swims with the stream shall find all things go easily with him until he reaches the cataract of destruction; but he who stems the torrent must expect to breast many a raging billow; and therefore to such the strong consolations of the gospel are necessary.

Speak we then this morning to the same characters as those addressed by Peter, even to you who "are not of the world," but "strangers;" to you who are "chosen of God," and therefore the object of the enmity of man; to you who maintain the separated life of true holiness, and are therefore opposed by the profane; ye have need of comfort, and in the Word, and by the Holy Spirit, your need is more than met. Our apostle cheers these troubled hearts by exciting them to a song of praise. I might almost entitle these three verses a New Testament Psalm. They are stanzas of a majestic song. You have here a delightful hymn; it scarce needs to be turned into verse; it is in itself essential poetry. Now, my brethren, to lead the mind to praise God is one of the surest ways of uplifting it from depression. The wild beasts of anxiety and discontent which surround our bivouac in the wilderness, will be driven away by the fire of our gratitude and the song of our praise. When the Psalm recounts with joyous gratitude the mercies which God has given us, it supplants distress by thankfulness, even as the fir tree and the myrtle take the place of the thorn and the brier where the gospel works its wonders. In these three verses we have a string of pearls, a necklace of diamonds, a cabinet of jewels; nay, the comparisons are poor, we have something far better than all the riches of the earth can ever typify. You have here the heritage of the chosen of God; your heritage, beloved, your own peculiar portion, if you belong to Christ, this day. We shall conduct you through this mine of treasure, and ask you to dwell upon each several blessing, that your souls may be comforted, and that you, lifting up your hearts in blessing, and praising the God of all grace, may forget your cares and sorrows, and find a young heaven begun below, a

paradise blooming amid the desert.

There are seven choice things in the text, a perfect number of perfect things. One might see more than seven, but these will exhaust all our time. Therefore we shall speak briefly upon each one.

I. First, I see in the text as the source of all the rest, Abundant Mercy.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.”

No other attribute could have helped us had mercy refused. As we are by nature, justice condemns us, holiness frowns upon us, power crushes us, truth confirms the threatening of the law, and wrath fulfils it. It is from the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin. Mercy is needed for the miserable, and yet more for the sinful. Misery and sin are fully united in the human race, and mercy here performs her noblest deeds. My brethren, God has vouchsafed his mercy to us, and we must thankfully acknowledge that in our case his mercy has been abundant mercy. We were defiled with abundant sin, and only the multitude of his lovingkindnesses could have put those sins away. We were infected with an abundance of evil, and only overflowing mercy can ever cure us of all our natural disease, and make us meet for heaven. We have received abundant grace up till now, we have made great drafts upon the Exchequer of God, and of his fullness have all we received grace for grace. Where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded. Will you, my fellow debtor, stand still awhile and contemplate the abundant mercy of our blessed God! A river deep and broad is before you. Track it to its fountain head; see it welling up in the covenant of grace, in the eternal purposes of infinite wisdom. The secret source is no small spring, no mere bubbling fount, it is a very Geyser, leaping aloft in fullness of power; the springs of the sea are not comparable therewith. Not even an angel could fathom the springs of eternal love or measure the depths of infinite grace. Follow now the stream; mark it in all its course. See how it widens and deepens, how at the cross foot it expands into a measureless river! Mark how the filthy come and wash; see how each polluted one comes up milk-white from the washing! Note how the dead are brought to be bathed in this sacred stream, and mark how they live the moment that they touch its wave; mark how the sick are laid upon the bank, and if but the spray of the river falls upon them they are made whole! See bow on either bank rich verdure clothes the land! Wheresoever this stream cometh all is life and happiness. Observe along the margin the many trees whose leaves never wither, and whose fruits in season are always brought to maturity; these all draw their life from this flood, and drink from this river of God, which is full of water. Fail not with gladsome eye to note the thousand barques of fairest sail which scud along the mighty river with colors flying, each vessel laden with joy. Behold how happily they are borne along by the current of mercy to the ocean of infinite felicity! Now we reach the mighty main of mercy, dare you attempt with wings of faith to fly over that glassy sea? No shore gives boundary to that great deep, no voice proclaims its length and breadth, but from its lowest deeps and all along its unruffled bosom I hear a voice which saith, “Herein is love.” “Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out,” but this we know, that his love towards his elect surpasses all conception, even —

“Imagination’s utmost stretch

In wonder dies away.”

Turn to the words of the text a moment, for there is great suggestiveness in them. It is God’s great mercy that is spoken of herein. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy.” Everything in God is on a grand scale. Great power — he shakes the world; great wisdom — He balances the clouds. His mercy is commensurate with his other attributes, it is Godlike mercy! Infinite mercy! You must measure his Godhead before you shall compute big mercy. My soul, think for awhile, thou hast drank out of this exceeding great and wide sea, and it is all thine to drink from for ever. Well may it be called “abundant,” if it be infinite. It will always be abundant, for all that can be drawn from it will be but as the drop of a bucket to the sea itself. The mercy which deals with us, is not man’s mercy, but God’s mercy, and therefore boundless mercy.

But note again, it is the mercy of the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is the mercy of God in Christ. God’s mercy is always special, but his mercy in Christ is specially special. I know not how else to describe it. His mercy in nature is bright, his mercy in providence is conspicuous, but his mercy in his dear Son, his mercy in the incarnate God, his mercy through the perfect sacrifice, this is mercy’s best wine kept to the last, mercy’s “fat things full of marrow.” When I see Jesus descending from heaven to earth, Jesus bleeding, Jesus paying all the debts of his people, I can well understand that the mercy of God in Christ must be abundant mercy.

Note carefully another word, it is the mercy of “the Father.” You have read this last week, I dare say, and felt sickened as you read, the fearful stories of the wounded and their sufferings on the battle field. You have read also descriptions of how the wounded when they are brought into the divers German towns, are met by their compatriots, who rejoice in their victories, but at the same time lament for the valiant men who are maimed for life. You stand on the platform of the railway station, a stranger, and you see a fine young man with an arm shot away, looking sickly and pale from pain and hardships, and you pity him. I know you pity him from your heart, but an elderly man rushes before you, it is the father, and as he looks upon his son, whom he sent to the war so manly, so

strong, so full of health and vigor, now reduced to the mere ghost of what he was, he pities as a stranger cannot. His inmost bowels are moved with compassion for his son. The mercy of the Lord to us is not the mercy of a stranger to a stranger, but the mercy of a Father towards his own dear children. Such mercy has the Lord had on me, and I weep for joy as I tell of it. "Like as a father pitieth his children," so has he pitied me. I know if he had not loved me he could not have treated me so tenderly. Such pity, such mercy has he had on you; and he is still the same. Do you not rejoice to think that you participate in abundant mercy, divine mercy, the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, a father's mercy, the mercy of our God and Father? O reach to the height of the text, one more step will do it; the Father who is thus tender to us, is also the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and therefore such a Father as can be found nowhere else. The Father of him who is the perfect and the ever blessed, is also your Father; and all his mercy belongs to you. Let us congratulate each other my brethren in the faith; let us shake off all thoughts of our poverty and all tremblings because of our trials; we are rich and abound, for heaven's "abundant mercy" belongs to us. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name."

II. The next great blessing in the text is that of Incorruptible Life.

Mark that, O believer. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope." One of the first displays of divine mercy which we experience is being begotten again. Our first birth gave us the image of the first Adam—"earthly;" our second birth, and that alone, gives us the image of the second Adam, which is "heavenly." To be begotten once may be a curse: to be begotten again is everlastingly and assuredly a blessing. To be born once may be a subject for eternal bewailing: to be born a second time will be the theme of a joyful and unending song. My brethren, saints "begotten again unto a lively hope" in the hour of their regeneration, when they are "born again from above." Have we been so born? If we have, we enjoy a blessing far exceeding anything which the natural man can dream of. The Holy Spirit comes upon the chosen in the hour appointed, and creates in them a new heart and a right spirit; in a supernatural manner anew principle is implanted, a new life is created within the soul. Just as assuredly as our first birth gives us being from our former nothingness, our new life brings us from utter death into the world of spirit, and into newness of life. We are new born by the "incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever." Not the fancied regeneration of those who impute to a mere ceremonial invented by men a change which is altogether of God's own working; not an imaginary charm worked by incantations and aspergings over an unconscious babe; but a real creation, a true life, not fictitious, but actual and operative, and one which is found to reveal itself in righteousness and true holiness. You shall know this new life by the faith and the repentance which always come with it wherever God himself is pleased to work it. The new life of a Christian is divine in its origin—God hath begotten us. The new life cometh not from man, it is wrought by the operation of the Holy Ghost. As certainly as God spake, and it was done, in the creation of the world, so he speaks in the heart of man, and it is done, and the new creature is born. The new life in us, as it has a divine origin, has also a divine nature. Ye are made partakers of the divine nature. The life of a Christian is the life of God — God dwelleth in him. The Holy Spirit himself enters the believer and abides in him, and makes him a living man. Hence, from its divine nature, the inner life of the believer can by no possibility ever be destroyed. You must first destroy the Godhead before you can quench the spark of the eternal flame that burns within the believer's bosom. Hath not the apostle told us it is a "living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever"? What a great mystery is this, but at the same time what a blessing! To be born again, to be born from above, to be born by the power of God into a discernment of spiritual truths, to hear spiritual voices, to see spiritual sights, and to be worshippers in spirit and in truth of God, who is a Spirit. God grant that if we have never known this we yet may, ere we go hence, be created anew in Christ Jesus.

Observe, dear brethren, to be begotten again is a very marvellous thing. Suppose a man born into this world, as is too frequently the case, with a predisposition to some sad hereditary disease. There he is, filled with disease, and medicine cannot eject the unwelcome tenant from his body. Suppose that man's body could be altogether new born, and he could receive a new body pure from all taint, it would be a great mercy. But, O my brethren, it does not approach to regeneration, because our supposition only deals with the body, while the new birth renews the soul, and even implants a higher nature. Regeneration overcomes not a mere material disease, not an infliction in the flesh, but the natural depravity of the heart, the deadly disorder of the soul. We are born again, and by that means we are delivered from the power of corruption; the new nature having no depravity in it, nor tendency to sin, "it cannot sin because it is born of God." The moment the heavenly life is implanted it begins to war with the old nature, and continues to struggle violently with it: there is a deadly enmity between the two; the new nature will never be, reconciled to the old, or the old one to the new, but the new will conquer and overcome the evil. You have smiled at the pleasant fiction of old men being ground young again in a mill, but that marvel would be nothing compared with this, for the old man made young would still be the same man, and placed in the same circumstances, would develop into the same character; but here is the old man crucified and a new man created in the divine image! Who can estimate the privilege of receiving a heaven-born nature, which, however weak and feeble it may be at the first, is ever-living, and by the power of God, will gain the ultimate victory? Let us then rejoice and be glad! We may be very poor to-day, but we are born from above. We may be much afflicted, but what of that if we are the twice-born sons of heaven! We may be despised and rejected, but the heavenly light hath shone upon our eyes. We have been regenerated, we have "passed from death unto life;" here is ceaseless cause for gratitude and joy, and if we rightly consider it we may forget our griefs.

III. A third blessing” strictly connected with this new life, is a Lively Hope.

“He hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.”

Could a man live without hope? Men manage to survive the worst condition of distress when they are encouraged by a hope, but is not suicide the natural result of the death of hope? Yes, we must have a hope, and the Christian is not left without one. He has “a lively hope,” that is to say, first, he has a hope within him, real, true, and operative. Some men’s hopes of heaven are not living hopes,” for they never stir them to action. They live as if they were going to hell, and yet they coolly talk about hoping that all will be well with them at last! A Christian’s hope purifies him, excites him to diligence, makes him seek after that which he expects to obtain. A student at the University hoping to gain a prize uses his best endeavors, burns the midnight oil, strains all his faculties that he may reach the mark which will ensure his passing the examiners. Even thus the Christian with a lively hope devotes himself to obtaining the blessings which God has promised in his word. The Lord hath begotten us to a “lively hope,” that is to say, to a vigorous, active, operating hope.

It is a “lively hope” in another sense, namely, that it cheers and enlivens. The swimmer who is ready to sink, if he sees a boat nearing him, plucks up courage and swims with all his strength, because now he expects that his swimming will be of effectual service to him. The Christian amid the waves and billows of adversity retains his hope, a glorious hope of future bliss, and therefore he strikes out like a man towards the heavenly shore. Our hope buoys up the soul, keeps the head above water, inspires confidence, and sustains courage.

It is also called a “living hope,” because it is imperishable. Other hopes fade like withering flowers. The hopes of the rich, the boasts of the proud, all these will die out as a candle when it flickers in the socket. The hope of the greatest monarch has been crushed before our eyes; he set up the standard of victory too soon, and has seen it trailed in the mire. There is no unwaning hope beneath the changeful moon: the only imperishable hope is that which climbs above the stars, and fixes itself upon the throne of God and the person of Jesus Christ.

The hope which God has given to his truly quickened people is a lively hope, however, mainly because it deals with life. Brethren, it may be Christ will come while yet we live, and then we shall not die but shall be fitted for heaven by a change. However, it is probable that we may have to depart out of this world unto the Father by the usual course of nature, and in expecting to do so let us not look at death as a gloomy matter, as though it could at all jeopardise our welfare or ultimately injure us. No, my brethren, we have a living hope, a lively hope. Charles Borromeo, the famous bishop of Milan, ordered a painter who was about to draw a skeleton with a scythe over a sepulcher, to substitute for it the golden key of Paradise. Truly this is a most fitting emblem for a believer’s tomb, for what is death but the key of heaven to the Christian. We notice frequently over cemetery gates, as an emblematic device, a torch turned over ready to be quenched. Ah, my brethren, it is not so, the torch of our life burns the better, and blazes the brighter for the change of death. The breaking of the pitcher which now surrounds the lamp and conceals the glory, will permit our inner life to reveal its lofty nature, and ere long even the pitcher shall be so remodelled as to become an aid to that light; its present breaking is but preparatory to its future refashioning. It is a blessed thought that the part of us which must most sadly feel the mortal stroke is secured beyond all fear from permanent destruction. We know that this very body, though it moulders into dust, shall live again; these weeping eyes shall have all tears wiped from them; these hands which grasp to-day the sword of a conflict shall wave the palm branch of triumph. My brethren, it were not just that one body should fight and another body should be crowned, that one body should labor and another body have the reward. The same identical body shall rise from the dead at the Lord’s coming, marvellously changed, strangely developed as the seed develops into the full-blown flower, but still the same, in very deed the selfsame; this very body shall be resplendent with glory, even the same which now beareth sickness and pain. This is our lively hope, that death hath no dominion over any part of our manhood. There is awhile a separation between the soul and the body, it is but for awhile; there is for the flesh a temporary slumbering in the tomb, it is but a slumber, and the waking shall be in the likeness of Christ. As for the soul, it shall be for ever with the Lord, waiting for the latter day and the coming of Christ, when the body itself shall be raised from corruption into the likeness of the glory of him who is the first begotten from the dead.

Thus, then, I have brought you up from the abundant mercy to the new life, and onward, to the lively hope.

IV. We cannot tarry, but must notice, in the fourth place, another delightful possession which ought effectually to chase away from all of us the glooms of this life, and that is A Risen Savior.

He hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Our best friend is not dead, our great patron and helper, our omnipotent Savior, is not lying in the tomb to-day. He lives, he ever lives. No sound of greater gladness can be heard in the Christian church than this: “The Lord is risen, the Lord is risen indeed!” Now, brethren, observe the connection between a risen Savior and our living hope. Jesus Christ died, not in appearance, but in reality; in proof whereof, his heart was pierced by the soldier’s spear. He was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, truly a corpse. Not a spark of life remained. The only difference between his dead body and the dead body of any other was that still the preserving

power hovered over him, and as his body had been defiled by no sin, so his flesh could not see corruption, as it would have done had it been the body of a sinful man. Then, at the end of the appointed time, the same Savior who was laid in the tomb rose from the dead, not in secrecy, but before the Roman guards who watched the sepulcher. They fled in terror. He met his disciples sometimes one by one, sometimes two at a time; on other occasions, four hundred at once saw him, credible witnesses, persons who had no reason for forging a falsehood, persons who so believed that they saw him that many of them died for their belief the most painful deaths. He rose, not in phantasy and figure, but in reality; for one of the witnesses put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side; and in the presence of his assembled disciples, the risen one ate a piece of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb. He really and literally rose from the dead — the self-same Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, and afterwards ascended into heaven. That fact is as well proved as any fact in human history. There never, perhaps, was any incident of human history more fully verified than the rising of Jesus of Nazareth from the tomb. Now, note ye well the comfort which arises out of this fact, since it proves that we possess a living advocate, mediator and high priest, who has passed into the heavens. Moreover, since all believers, being partakers of the incorruptible life of God are one with Jesus Christ, that which happens to him virtually happens to them. They died in his death, they live in his life, they reign in his glory. As in Adam all die who were in Adam, so in Christ shall all be made alive who are in Christ: the two Adams head up their dispensations; whatsoever happeneth to either of the Adams, happeneth to those represented by him. So, then, the resurrection of Jesus is virtually my resurrection. Were he dead still, then might I fear, nay know, that I, dying, should die; but he, having died, arose again in due season and liveth; therefore I, dying, shall also rise and live, for as Jesus is so must I be. If I have within me the new life, I have the same life in me that is in Christ, and the same thing happeneth to me as happeneth to Christ; if his life dieth, mine, being the same, dieth also; but, as he hath said, "Because I live, ye shall live also," my life is secure. Here, then, is the top and bottom of the Christian's hope: "We are begotten again into a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." As we see him alive, we rejoice that he liveth, because he liveth for us, and we live in him.

Let me give you an illustration. When Joseph was in Egypt, he was highly exalted and placed upon the throne. Now, while his brethren did not know him, they were grievously afraid to go down into Egypt: they thought him to be an Egyptian, a haughty ruler of the land, and that he treated them roughly; but when once they and their father were persuaded that Joseph their brother was alive and on the throne, then they cheerfully joined with the old man when he said, "Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die." Now, into the unknown land our Elder Brother has gone — where is he and what? Why, he is King of the country; he sitteth on a throne. O brethren, with what comfort do we now go down into that Egypt! With what consolation will we enter the unknown country, which some think to be shrouded in darkness, but which, now that Jesus reigns on its throne, is full of light to us. Or take another image. When the children of Israel went through the Jordan, they were told that the Jordan would divide before them, but they were still more fully assured when the priests went forward with the ark; for as soon as the feet of the priests touched the Margin of the river, the waters began to divide. As they saw their priests March through the bed of the stream, and come up on the other side, all doubts about the security of the passage must have vanished at once, for the priests were the representatives of the people before God, and where they passed safely all Israel might go. See ye then, my brethren, the "Great High Priest of our profession" has led the van, the ark of the eternal covenant has gone before, death is dried up, so that we can say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" And you and I may with perfect confidence, full of a lively hope, march onwards into the glory land, for Jesus Christ hath safely passed the flood, and even so shall we. Here, then, is reason for joy. We will not fear the present, we will not dread the future; for Christ is risen indeed, and our lively hope is fixed on him.

Thus we have set before you four out of the seven precious things.

V. The fifth is exceeding rich, but we can only give a word where many sermons would not exhaust — An Incorruptible Inheritance —

an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

God has been pleased in his abundant mercy to prepare for his people an inheritance. He has made them sons, and if children, then heirs. He has given them a new life, and if a new life, then there must be possessions and a place suitable for that new life. A heavenly nature requires a heavenly inheritance, heaven-born children must have a heavenly portion.

Now I shall only ask you to notice that the inheritance which God has prepared for us has a fourfold description appended to it. First, as to its substance — it is "incorruptible." The substance of everything earthly by degrees passes away. Even solid granite will rot and crumble. The substance of things seen, I may say in paradox, is devoid of substance. Empires have grown great, but the inward corruption within their constitution has at length dissolved them. Dynasties have been wrecked, and thrones have tottered by internal corruption, but the inheritance of the saints of God has nothing within it that can make it perish. For ever and for ever shall the blissful portion of the sanctified be theirs. Heaven, and the streets thereof, are all said to be of precious stones and pure gold, because they are imperishable.

Next, for purity — it is "undefiled." Earthly inheritances are often defiled in the getting. Some men have grown rich by fraud, by violence, by oppression of the poor. How many a heritage is polluted all over with the slime of the serpent! and he that inherits the

goods of such a one inherits therewith a curse, for God will surely avenge injustice and wrong doing, even to the third generation. But our inheritance is undefiled, for it was won by the obedience, the perfection, and sufferings of Jesus. No thought of wrong was used in the getting of the portion of the Well beloved of God. An inheritance may be defiled after it is possessed, but heaven never shall be. Satan shall never enter there, nor sin of an kind pass through the gate of pearl. O brethren, what a joy is this! Defilement is on everything in this fallen world. We cannot purge ourselves completely, earthly things all bring a measure of defilement with them; but up yonder our portion shall not be stained with sin, we shall be perfect, and all around us perfect too.

And then it is added for its beauty, "it fadeth not away." The substance of a thing might endure after its beauty was gone, but in heaven there shall be no declining in the beauty of anything celestial. Milton sings of the amaranth, which he describes as blossoming at the foot of the tree of life in the garden of Eden. It was a flower of perpetual sweetness, whose beauty never faded; but he says —

"Soon for man's offense

To heaven removed, where first it grew, there grows

And flowers aloft, shading the fount of life,

And where the river of bliss through midst of heaven

Rolls o'er Elysian flowers her amber stream;

With these, that never fade, the spirits elect

Bind their resplendent locks, inwreath'd with beams"

The amaranthine inheritance is yours. The garden of Paradise shall never cease to bloom, and the wreath of victory shall never wither from your brows. Oh, what joy is this for you! Your inheritance is for substance incorruptible, for purity undefiled, for beauty unfading.

And then for possession, it is secure — "reserved in heaven for you." How I delight to dwell upon the thought that heaven is not to be scrambled for, that the portion of each saint in glory is given to him by lot even as was Canaan of old to Judah, to Reuben, of Manasseh, and the like. There is a place in heaven for me which none of you could fill. There is a harp which no fingers can strike but mine, and a crown which no brow can wear but this. And so with each of you — you shall have your own, your own appointed inheritance. He hath begotten each one of you again, you are as truly begotten as any other believer, you have the same hope, and you shall as surely stand in your lot at the end of the days. O clap your hands, ye righteous, shout for joy. Scanty is your portion here and hard your lot, it may be, but the undefiled inheritance will more than make amends. Therefore, lift up your hearts this day, and let not your hands hang down.

VI. Time fails us, therefore we must mention the sixth blessing at once, it is Inviolable Security.

The inheritance is kept for you, and you are kept for the inheritance. The word is a military one, it signifies a city garrisoned and defended. Think of a city besieged — Strasbourg, if you will — that is an emblem of your condition in this world. The enemy pour in their shot, they keep up the fire day and night, and set the city on a blaze, and even thus Satan bombards us with temptations, and beleaguers us with all the hosts of hell. Our great enemy has determined to raze the citadel of our faith even to the ground, his great guns are drawn up around our bastions, his sappers and miners are busy with our bulwarks. Even now it may be his shells are tearing our hearts, and his shot is setting our nature in a blaze. Herein is our confidence, our great Captain has walled us around, he has appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks. We are safe, though all the devils of hell surround us, for we are garrisoned by omnipotence. Each believer is kept by that same power which "bears the earth's huge pillars up," and sustains the arches of heaven. Jerusalem, thou art besieged, but thou mayst laugh thine enemy to scorn, he shall never break through thy ramparts.

"Munitions of stupendous rock

Our dwelling-place shall be,

There shall our soul without a shock

Our vanquish'd foemen see."

Our enemies shall assemble, but when they perceive that God is known in our palaces for a refuge, they shall be troubled and hasten away; fear shall take hold upon them there, and pain as of a woman in travail. Every believer is kept by the power of God, but the power of God does not produce in us sloth but faith. We are commanded to watch, that is what we are to do, but we are told both to watch and pray, because our watching is not enough; we need God's watching also, and we are to pray for it. Faith is the

under captain of the city. God's power protects it — "the King is in the midst of her;" but faith is the high constable of the tower, he it is that goeth on the walls, arms the warders, strengthens the bastions, and brings help out of the sanctuary. While the sword of the Lord and of Gideon is at work, the Midianites cannot prevail.

This keeping, observe, my brethren, for I must leave the point, this keeping is complete and continuous, it will never end until we shall need keeping no longer. We shall be kept "unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." I believe this means that we shall not only be kept till our souls reach heaven, but we shall be kept till the advent. You say, "How is that necessary?" I reply, only half of our manhood goes to heaven at death, the other part, namely, our body, waits below till the resurrection. Yet our dust is precious in God's sight, and therefore it is watched over until the day of Christ's appearing, for that is the appointed hour for the redemption of the body.

"Sweet truth to me, I shall arise,

And with these eyes, my Savior see."

Wheresoever my dust may be scattered, though to the four winds of heaven it be divided, though it pass through every conceivable change and combination, yet each atom of my dust shall hear the sound of the archangel's trump, or if not each earthly particle of this my frame, yet each essential constituent shall hear the voice of God, and bone to bone each bone shall come, and the body shall rise intact and perfect, for it is kept by the power of God unto the salvation ready to be revealed. O my brethren, what a glorious thing it is to know that the salvation God has given us in Christ, is a perfect salvation of our complete manhood! There shall not a hair of your head perish; you shall go into the furnace, you shall walk amid the glowing coals of death, but you shall come forth with not a smell of fire passed upon you. At the Lord's appearing you shall be none the worse for the fall of Adam, you shall be none the worse for your own transgressions, you shall be none the worse for all the scars of battle, you shall be none the worse for dying, you shall be in heaven as bright as God himself could have made you if you had never fallen, and never sinned. Do I exaggerate? Nay, verily, for it is written, "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We shall wake up in his likeness. Oh, the glory of complete victory over Satan's arts, and Satan's strength! He shall be defeated all along the line; he shall gain nothing by all his attacks upon our God, and upon us, but we in the image of Jesus shall laugh at the complete defeat of evil, and glorify God and the Lamb for ever.

VII. The best I have reserved for the last. Out of the seven treasures of the Christian the last comprehends all, is better than all, though what I have already spoken be everything — it is A Blessed God.

We left this to the last, though it comes first: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is joy to have heaven, it is joy to possess a now life to fit me for heaven, but the greatest of all is to have my God, my own Savior's God, my Father, my own Savior's Father, to be all my own. God himself has said, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." He has not given you earth and heaven only, though that were much, he hath given you the heaven of heaven — himself. Herod spake of giving the "half of his kingdom;" but the Lord has not given you the half of his kingdom, nor even the whole of his kingdom only, but his own self the blessed God has in covenant made over to you. Will not this make you rejoice? Methinks you may go forth with those that make merry and rejoice before God with a joy that knows no bound: "Sing unto God, sing praise," sing, unto God, sing praises! Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice."

Brethren, the practical point is, show your gratitude and your joy by blessing God. You can bless him with your voices. Sing more than you do. Singing is heaven's work, practice it here. At your work, do if you can, quietly raise a hymn and bless the Lord. But oh! keep the fire on the altar of your hearts always burning. Praise him, bless him. His mercy endureth forever, so let your praises endure. Bless him also with your substance. He is a blessed God. Do not give him mere words, they are but air, and tongues but clay. Give him the best you have. In the old superstitious times the churches used to be adorned with the rarest pearls and jewels, with treasurer, of gold and silver, for men then gave mines of wealth to what they believed to be the service of God. Shall the true faith have less operative power upon us? Shall the "lively hope" make us do less for God than the mere dead hope of the followers of Rome? No, let us be generous at all times, and count it our joy to sacrifice unto our God. Let us give him our efforts, our time, our talents. Bless the Lord this afternoon, you Sunday-school teachers. Teach those dear children under a sense of your own obligations to God. You who go from house to house this afternoon, you who will preach in the streets, and lift up your voices in the comers of the thoroughfares, preach as those who are begotten unto a lively hope by the abundant mercy of God. Preacher, live thou more intensely and ardently than ever thou hast done. Deacons, serve the church more thoroughly than you have done as yet. Elders, give your whole souls to the care of Christ's flock, which he hath redeemed with his blood. Each one of you workers for Jesus Christ work not for him after an ordinary sort, as men do for a master whose pay is no larger than he can be compelled to make it, but work with heart, and soul, and strength for him who loved you to the death, and poured out his soul to redeem you from going down into hell. Thus prove that the divine nature is truly in you, and that you possess the "lively hope" implanted by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Lord bless you all, for Christ's sake. Amen.

1 Peter 1:7 THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 2ND, 1888,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE

“The trial of your faith.”-1 Peter 1:7.

IT is a great thing if any man can truthfully speak to you, my brother, about “your faith,” for all men have not faith, and wherever faith is found, it is the token of divine favor. True faith is, in every case, of the operation of the Spirit of God. Its nature is purifying, elevating, heavenly. It is, of all things that can be cultivated in the human breast, one of the most precious. It is called, “like precious faith,” and it is styled “the faith of God’s elect.” Wherever faith is found, it is the sure mark of eternal election, the sign of a blessed condition, the forecast of a heavenly destiny. It is the eye of the renewed soul, the hand of the regenerated mind, the mouth of the new-born spirit. It is the evidence of spiritual life: it is the mainspring of holiness: it is the foundation of delight: it is the prophecy of glory: it is the dawn of endless knowledge. If thou hast faith, thou hast infinitely more than he who has all the world, and yet is destitute of faith. To him that believeth it is said, “All things are yours.” Faith is the assurance of sonship, the pledge of inheritance, the grasp of boundless possession, the perception of the invisible. Within thy faith there lies glory, even as the oak sleeps within the acorn. If thou hast faith, thou needest not ask for much more, save that thy faith may grow exceedingly, and that all the promises which are made to it may be known and grasped by thee. Time would fail me to tell of the powers, the privileges, the possessions, and the prospects of faith. He that hath it is blessed; for he pleases God, he is justified before the throne of holiness, he hath full access to the throne of grace, and he has the preparation for reigning with Christ for ever.

So far everything is delightful. But then comes in this word, which somewhat startles, and, if we are cowardly, may also frighten - “The trial of your faith.” See you the thorn which grows with this rose! You cannot gather the fragrant flower without its rough companion. You cannot possess the faith without experiencing the trial; nor eat the lamb without the bitter herbs. These two things are put together-faith and trial; and it is of that trial of your faith that I am going to speak at this time, as God shall help me. It may be, my brother, that words said at this good hour shall comfort you while you undergo the sorer trial of your faith. May the Holy Spirit, who nurtures faith, and preserves and perfects it under its trial, help our thoughts at this hour!

I. And, first, let me say of it, Your Faith Will Be Tried Surely.

You may rest assured of that. A man may have faith, and be for the present without trial; but no man ever had faith, and was all his life without trial. That could not-must not be; for faith, in the very nature of it, implies a degree of trial. I believe the promise of God. So far my faith is tried in believing the promise, in waiting for the fulfillment of the promise, in holding on to an assurance of that promise while it is delayed, and in continuing to expect the promise, and to act upon it until it is in all points fulfilled to me. I do not see how that can be faith at all which is not tried by its own exercise. Take the very happiest and smoothest lives; there must, at any rate, be the trial of faith in taking the promise and pleading it before God in prayer, and expecting the fulfillment of it. Be not mistaken. God never gave us faith to play with. It is a sword, but it was not made for presentation on a gala day, nor to be worn on state occasions only, nor to be exhibited upon a parade ground. It is a sword that was meant to cut and wound and slay; and he that has it girt about him may expect, between here and heaven, that he shall know what battle means. Faith is a sound sea-going vessel, and was not meant to lie in dock and perish of dry rot. To whom God has given faith, it is as though one gave a lantern to his friend because he expected it to be dark on his way home. The very gift of faith is a hint to you that you will want it; that at certain points and places you will especially require it, and that, at all points, and in every place, you will really need it. You cannot live without faith: for again and again we are told- “the just shall live by faith.” Believing is our living, and we, therefore, need it always. And if God give thee great faith, my dear brother, thou must expect great trials; for, in proportion as thy faith shall grow, thou wilt have to do more, and endure more. Little boats may keep close to shore, as becomes little boats; but if God make thee a great vessel, and load thee with a rich freight, he means that thou shouldest know what great billows are, and should feel their fury till thou seest “his wonders in the deep.” That God, who has made nothing in vain, especially makes nothing in the spiritual kingdom in vain; and if he makes faith, it is with the design that it should be used to the utmost and exercised to the full.

Expect trial, also, because trial is the very element of faith. Faith is a salamander that lives in the fire, a star which moves in a lofty sphere, a diamond which bores its way through the rock. Faith without trial is like a diamond uncut, the brilliance of which has never been seen. Untried faith is such little faith that some have thought it no faith at all. What a fish would be without water, or a bird without air, that would be faith without trial. If thou hast faith, thou mayest surely expect that thy faith will be tested: the great Keeper of the treasures admits no coin to his coffers without testing. It is so in the nature of faith, and so in the order of its living: it thrives not, save in such weather as might seem to threaten its death.

Indeed, it is the honor of faith to be tried. Shall any man say, "I have faith, but I have never had to believe under difficulties"? Who knows whether thou hast any faith? Shall a man say, "I have great faith in God, but I have never had to use it in anything more than the ordinary affairs of life, where I could probably have done without it as well as with it"? Is this to the honor and praise of thy faith? Dost thou think that such a faith as this will bring any great glory to God, or bring to thee any great reward? If so, thou art mightily mistaken. He that has tested God, and whom God has tested, is the man that shall have it said of him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Had Abraham stopped in Ur of the Chaldees with his friends, and rested there, and enjoyed himself, where had been his faith? He had God's command to quit his country to go to a land which he had never seen, to sojourn there with God as a stranger, dwelling in tents; and in his obedience to that call his faith began to be illustrious. Where had been the glory of his faith, if it had not been called to brave and self-denying deeds? Would he ever have risen to that supreme height, to be "the Father of the faithful," if he had not grown old, and his body dead, and yet he had believed that God would give him seed of his aged wife Sarah, according to the promise? It was blessed faith that made him feel that nothing was impossible to God. If Isaac had been born to him in the days of his strength, where had been his faith? And when it came to that severer test, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of"-when he rose up early, and clave the wood, and took his son, and went three days' journey, setting his face like a flint to obey the command of God; and when at last he drew the knife, in faithful obedience to the divine command, then was his faith confessed, commended, and crowned. Then the Lord said, "Now I know"; as if, even to God, the best evidence of Abraham's faith had then been displayed, when he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, reckoning that God could restore Isaac from the dead if need be, but that it was his to obey the supreme command, and trust all consequences with God, who could not lie. Herein his faith won great renown, and he became "the Father of the faithful," because he was the most tried of believers, and yet surpassed them all in childlike belief in his God. If God, then, has given to any one of us a faith which is honorable and precious, it has full surely been submitted to its own due measure of trial; and if it is to be still more precious, it has yet more trials to endure.

We remember also two reasons for the trial of faith. The trial of year faith is sent to prove its sincerity. If it will not stand trial, what is the good of it? That gold which dissolves in the furnace, and disappears amid the flame, is not the gold which shall be current with the merchant; and that faith of thine, which is no sooner tried than straightway it evaporates, art thou not well rid of it? Of what use would it be to thee in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment? No; thou canst not be sure that thy faith is true faith till it is tried faith. Thou canst not be certain that it is worth having till it has been fitly tested, and brought to the touchstone of trial.

It must also be tested to prove its strength. We sometimes fancy that we have strong faith when, indeed, our faith is very weak; and how are we to know whether it be weak or strong till it be tried? A man that should lie in bed week after week, and perhaps get the idle whim into his head that he was very strong, would be pretty certain to be mistaken. It is only when he sets about work requiring muscular strength that he will discover how strong or how weak he is. God would not have us form a wrong estimate of ourselves. He loves not that we should say that we are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, when we are the reverse; and therefore he sends to us the trial of our faith that we may understand how strong or how weak it is.

And besides that, dear friends, the trial of our faith is necessary to remove its dross. There are many accretions of sordid matter about our purest graces. We are apt ourselves to add to the bulk of our graces without adding to the real value of them. We mistake quantity for quality; and a great deal of what we think we have of Christian experience, and Christian knowledge, and Christian zeal, and Christian patience, is only the supposition that we have these graces, and not the real possession of them. So the fire grows fiercer, and the mass grows smaller than it was before. Is there any loss therein? I trow not. The gold loses nothing by the removal of its dross, and our faith loses nothing by the dissipation of its apparent force. Faith may apparently lose, but it actually gains. It may seem to be diminished, but it is not truly diminished. All is there that was worth having. "Why, a week ago," says one, "I used to sing, and think that I had the full assurance of faith; and now I can scarcely tell whether I am one of God's people or not." Now, you know how much faith you really possess. You can now tell how much was solid, and how much was sham; for had that which has failed you been real faith, it would not have been consumed by any trial through which it has passed. You have lost the froth from the top of the cup, but all that was really worth having is still there. It must be so, for as faith is not born of earthly things, neither can earthly things kill it, nor even take from it one true particle.

Understand, then, dear friends, that for many necessary purposes there is a need be for trial. Peter says here, "If need be" that there should be a trial of your faith. You will get that trial, because God, in his wisdom, will give faith what faith needs. Do not be anxious to enter into trial. Do not fret if temptation does not come just now. You will have it time enough. Between the day of our new birth and the day of our entering into our inheritance, we shall have quite sufficient trial of our faith. We need not be uneasy if for a while we are at ease, for there are months enough left to the year to give winter its full measure of frosts and storms.

II. Now, secondly, Your Faith Will Be Tried Variously.

The trial of our faith does not come to all persons in the same way. There are some whose faith is tried each day in their communion with God. They pray this prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting." That prayer is heard constantly; the visitations of the Lord are granted to

them, and as the Lord comes, he tries them; for, believe me, there is no surer trial of our souls than the drawing near of God to our souls. Apart from any outward affliction, that searching thought, that inward feeling, which is somewhat more than thought; that holy, secret trembling, which comes upon our spirit when God draws near, is God's constant trial of our graces. If you walk away from God, and live without fellowship with him, you may retain in your heart much falsehood, and fancy that you are full of spiritual gifts and graces; but if you draw near to God, and walk with him, you will not be able to retain a false opinion of yourself. Remember what the Lord is. Our God is a consuming fire. I have often reminded you of the way in which people try to improve upon the Scripture when they say, "God out of Christ is a consuming fire." The Bible does not so speak. It says, "For our God is a consuming fire." That is, God in Christ, who is our God, is a consuming fire; and when his people live in him, the very presence of God consumes in them their love of sin and all their pretentious graces, and fictitious attainments, so that the false disappears, and only the true survives. The presence of perfect holiness is killing to empty boastings and hollow pretences. You need not ask for any of those various forms of trial which God sends in the order of providence: you may rest quite satisfied with his presence, as the most effectual purgation; for "his fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor." Whenever Jesus abides with us, "he shall sit as a refiner." Whoever he may leave alone in their defilement, "he will purify the sons of Levi." It is the Lord himself that will be as a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. Who may abide the day of his coming? Who that loves holiness would wish to escape it? Our prayer should be—"Refining fire go through my soul." Ay, let the devouring flame go through me, and through me yet again, till this earthly grossness shall begin to disappear. As Moses soon put his shoes off from his feet when he beheld God at the burning bush, so shall we put off the superfluities of our supposed spiritual experience, and come to the real, naked foot of truth, if we are permitted to stand before God in accepted sincerity. Thus you see there is a constant trial of our faith, even in that which is its greatest joy and glory, namely its power to make us see the Lord.

But the Lord uses other methods with his servants. I believe that he frequently tries us by the blessings which he sends us. This is a fact which is too much overlooked. When a man is permitted to grow rich, what a trial of faith is hidden away in that condition! It is one of the severest of providential tests! Where I have known one man fail through poverty, I have known fifty men fail through riches. When our friends get on in the world, and have a long stretch of prosperity, they should invite their brethren to offer special prayer for them, that they may be preserved: for the thick clay is heavy stuff to walk upon, and when the feet slip into it, and it adheres to you, it makes travelling to heaven a very difficult thing. When we do not cling to wealth, it will not harm us; but there is a deal of bird-lime in money. You that have no riches may yet find a test in your daily mercies: your domestic comfort, that loving wife, those dear children—all these may tempt you to walk by sight instead of by faith. Ay, and continued health, the absence of all depression of spirit, and the long abiding of friends and relatives, may all make you self-contented, and keep you away from your God. It is a great trial of faith to have much for sight to rest upon. To be in the dark—together in the dark—is a grand thing for faith; for then you are sure that what you see is not seen of the flesh, but is in very deed a vision of spiritual faith. To be under a cloud is a trial, truly; but not one-half so much a trial as it is to have continually the light of this world. We are so apt to mistake the light of carnal comfort for the light of God, that it is well to see how we fare without it.

One form of this trial is praise. You know how Solomon puts it: "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." A Christian minister may go on preaching very earnestly, and God will help him, though everybody opposes him; but when the world comes and pats him on the back, and pride whispers, "You are a fine fellow; you are a great man!" then comes the test of the man. How few there are that can endure the warm atmosphere of congratulation! It is dangerously relaxing to the spirit. Yea, nobody can keep himself right under it, unless the almighty grace of God shall sustain his faith. When the soft winds blow they bring with them the temptation, "Now preach the doctrines that tickle men's ears!" "Go in to be scientific, and learned, and clever! Get the approbation of the great ones of the world, and the leaders of advanced thought in the church." And unless you say, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God," such a trial of faith may be too much for you. "Oh," says one, "that will not fall to my lot." No, no; you will not be a popular preacher, perhaps; but then, you may be very acceptable in the company wherein you move, and worldly people may flatter you to the verge of ruin. You sing very nicely, do you not? Well, they may want you to sing them a song that is not one of the songs of Zion. Because of your natural attainments, and the amiability of your temper, you may become a great favourite with ungodly people; and that is an intense trial to the faith of a child of God. The friendship of the world is as much enmity with God as it used to be in apostolic times. It is a bad sign when a courtier is in great favor with the king's enemies. Stand up, and stand out, as the servant of God, and in whatever sphere you move, make it your one and only business to serve my God, whether you offend or please. Happy shall you be if you survive the trial of your faith which this will involve!

Another trial of faith is exceedingly common and perilous nowadays, and that is, heretical doctrine and false teaching. There be some who are carried away with this wind of doctrine, and others carried away with the other; and blessed is he who is not offended in Christ; for, naturally, the cross of Christ is offensive to the minds of men. There are temptations that rise out of the gospel itself, yea, out of its very depth and breadth. There is a trial of faith in reading the Scriptures. You come across a doctrine which you cannot understand, and because you cannot understand it, you are tempted not to receive it. Or, when a truth which you have received appears to be hard, and speaks to you in an unlovely fashion, so that your natural feelings are aroused against it; this is a trial of your faith. Remember how our Lord Jesus lost quite a company of disciples on a certain occasion. He had taught a doctrine

about eating his flesh and drinking his blood; and from that hour many went back, and walked no more with him, till the Savior had to say, even to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Truth is not always welcome to our ignorance, or to our prejudice, and herein is a trial of faith. Will we believe ourselves or our God? Do we want to believe God's truth, or do we wish to have the Lord's message flavoured to our taste? Do we expect the preacher to play our chosen tunes, and speak our opinions? Beloved, it does us good to be well rasped sometimes; to have a word come to us, not as a sweet wine, but as a purging medicine, that shall search us through and through, and make us enquire before God, "Are we true men, or are we aliens?" If we run in the same line with God's truth, we are true; but when we run counter to the truth of God, we are ourselves untrue. It is not the Book that is to be altered: our hearts want altering. Happy is that man whose faith can endure the trial of the Book. "Is not the word of the Lord like a fire or a hammer?" This is so even to the Lord's own people.

But the trial of our faith usually comes in the form of affliction. Our jealous lover uses tests that it may be seen whether he has our heart. The trial of your faith comes thus:-You say, "Lord Jesus, I love thee. Thou art my best beloved." "Well," says the heavenly Lover, "if it be so, then the child that nestles in thy bosom will sicken and die. What wilt thou say then?" If thou be indeed true in what thou hast stated concerning thy supreme love to Jesus, thou wilt give up thy darling at his call, and say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The Lord is very jealous of our love. I do not mean that he is so towards all of you: I speak of his own people. The more he loves us, the more he tests us. Whatever it may be with us poor creatures, it is always so with Jesus, that his love goes with his jealousy, and his jealousy with his love. Sometimes he says, "Good woman, I shall take away thy husband, on whom thou leanest, that thou mayest lean the more on me." I remember Mr. Rutherford, writing to a lady who had lost five children and her husband, says to her, "Oh, how Christ must love you! He would take every bit of your heart to himself. He would not permit you to reserve any of your soul for any earthly thing." Can we stand that test? Can we let all go for his sake? Do you answer that you can? Time will show.

My Lord sometimes comes to me in this fashion. He says, "I have made thee to trust me these many years. I have supplied the wants of thy work by liberal friends. I am about to remove a generous helper." I go to the grave of my friend, and the suggestion dogs me, "Who is to provide for the Orphanage and the College, after other dear friends are buried? Can you trust God then?" Blessed be the name of the Lord, this fiery trial has never even left the smell of fire upon me; I know whom I have believed. Then a dear brother, our best worker, our heartiest helper, comes to me, and says, "Goodbye, dear Pastor; perhaps I may never see you again on earth." He is very ill, and about to lie under the surgeon's knife, and the fear is that he may not rally. I go home, and say to myself, "What shall I do without this useful man?" And then I have to say, "Why, do? Do what I have done before-trust in the living God." If you once get to walk the walk of faith, the Lord will often try you in this way, to see whether you come up to your own confession-whether you really trust in the Lord, and have your expectation from him alone. Can you truly say,

***"Yea, shouldst thou take them all away,
Yet would I not repine"?***

If every earthly prop were knocked away, could you stand by the lone power of your foundation? God may not send you this or that trial, but he will send you a sufficient amount of trial to let you see whether your faith is truth or talk, whether you have truly entered the spiritual world, or have only dreamed of doing so. Believe me, there is a great difference between a diamond and a paste gem, and the Lord would not have mistaken at the last. So, you see, the trials of faith are very various.

III. In the third place, Your Faith Will Be Tried Individually.

The text says, the trial of your faith. O dear friend, it is an interesting subject, is it not, the trial of faith? It is not quite so pleasant to study alone the trial of your faith. It is stern work when it comes to be your trial, and the trial of your faith. You have not gone much into that particular department, perhaps. Well, I say again, do not wish to do so. Do not ask for trials. Children must not ask to be whipped, nor saints pray to be tested. There is a little book which you will have to eat, and it will be bitter in your mouth, but sweet in your bowels: that book is the trial of your faith. The Lord Jesus Christ has been glorified by the trial of his people's faith. He has to be glorified by the trial of your faith. You are very obscure, perhaps, dear brother. You have but few talents, my dear sister. But, nevertheless, there is a particular shape and form of trial that will have to be exercised upon you rather than upon anyone else. "Oh," say you, "I know it, sir; I know it." Well, then, if you know it, do not complain of it; because, when you have your own trial, and the trial of your own faith, you are only treated like the rest of the family. What son is there whom the father chasteneth not? You are only treated like the Head of the family. You are only treated in the way which the great Father of the family knows is necessary for us all. God had one Son without sin, but he never had a son without trial, and he never will have until he has taken us all home out of this world. Why should we expect that God should deal better with us than he does with the rest of his chosen? Indeed, it would not be better, after all, because these trials are the means of working out our lasting good. But if it were not so, who am I, and who are you, that God should pamper us? Would we have him put us in a glass case and shield us from the trials which are common to all the chosen seed? I ask no such portion. Let me fare as the saints fare. I only wish to have their bread and their water, and love their Father, and follow their Guide, and find their home. We will take our meals with them, whatever God puts upon the table for them, will we not? The trial of our faith will be all our own, and yet it will be in fellowship with all the family of grace.

IV. Your Faith Will Be Tried Searchingly.

It will be no child's play to come under the divine tests. Our faith is not merely jingled on the counter like the shilling which the tradesman suspects, but it is tried with fire; for so it is written, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." The blows of the flail of tribulation are not given in sport, but in awful earnest, as some of us know who have been chastened sore, almost unto death. The Lord tries the very life of our faith; not its beauty and its strength alone, but its very existence. The iron enters into the soul; the sharp medicine searches the inmost parts of the belly; the man's real self is made to endure the trial. It is easy to talk of being tried, but it is by no means so simple a matter to endure the ordeal.

V. Let me yet further observe, that Your Faith Will Be Tried For An Abundantly Useful Purpose.

The trial of your faith will increase, develop, deepen, and strengthen it. "Oh," you have said, "I wish I had more faith." Your prayer will be heard through your having more trial. Often in our prayers we have sought for a stronger faith to look within the veil. The way to stronger faith usually lies along the rough pathway of sorrow. Only as faith is contested will faith be confirmed. I do not know whether my experience is that of all God's people; but I am afraid that all the grace that I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and the anvil, the fire and the file? What do I not owe to the crucible and the furnace, the bellows that have blown up the coals, and the hand which has thrust me into the heat? Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library. We may wisely rejoice in tribulation, because it worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and by that way we are exceedingly enriched, and our faith grows strong.

The trial of our faith is useful, not only because it strengthens it, but because it leads to a discovery of our faith to ourselves. I notice an old Puritan using this illustration. He says, you shall go into a wood when you please, but if you are very quiet, you will not know whether there is a partridge, or a pheasant, or a rabbit in it; but when you begin to move about, or make a noise, you very soon see the living creatures. They rise or they run. So, when affliction comes into the soul, and makes a disturbance and breaks our peace, up rise our graces. Faith comes out of its hiding, and love leaps from its secret place. I remember Mr. William Jay saying that birds' nests are hard to find in summer-time, but anyone could find a bird's nest in winter. When all the leaves are off the trees the nests are visible to all. Often in the days of our prosperity, we fail to find our faith; but when our adversity comes, the winter of our trial bares the boughs, and we see our faith at once. We are sure that we believe now, for we feel the effect of faith upon our character. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," said David, "but now have I kept thy word." He found that his faith was really there by his keeping God's Word in the time of his affliction. It is a great mercy, then, to have your faith tried, that you may be sure beyond all manner of question that you are a true believer.

Besides, when faith is tried it brings God glory. Oh, how it honors God when a man can say with a smiling face in prospect of death, "Good-bye, dear sir, I may never see you here again, but we shall meet above"! We who are in health envy the brother who has such joy amid sharp pain. I went the other day to see a dear brother who has since then gone above. He was swollen with dropsy, and was close to the brink of the grave; but to hear the song of assurance, and the utterances of his joy was most sweet and cheering. It made me feel how good God is to his servants. He never leaves nor forsakes them, when they come to their most painful times.

This trial of our faith does good to our fellow-Christians. They see how we are supported, and they learn to bear their troubles bravely. I do not know anything that is better for making us brave than to see others believe in Christ and bear up manfully. To see that blind saint so happy makes us ashamed to be sad. To see content in an inmate of the workhouse compels us to be thankful. Sufferers are our tutors; they educate us for the skies. When men of God can suffer- when they can bear poverty, bereavement or sickness, and still rejoice in God, we learn the way to live the higher and more Christly life. When Patrick Hamilton had been burned in Scotland, one said to his persecutors, "If you are going to burn any more, you had better do it in a cellar, for the smoke of Hamilton's burning has opened the eyes of hundreds." It was always so. Suffering saints are living seed. Oh, that God might help us to such faith, that when we come to suffer in life, or to expire in death, we may so glorify God that others may believe in him! May we preach sermons by our faith which shall be better than sermons in words.

My time has gone, and I have much to say to you. I wanted to say to you about the trial of your faith, dear friends, that Some Are Tried Very Specially. Some endure many more tests than others, and that is because God has a great favor to them. Many men God does not love well enough to whip them. They are the devil's children, and the heavenly Father does not trouble them. They are none of his, and so he lets them have a happy life, and perhaps an easy death: "there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." But they are to be pitied, and not envied. Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep! Woe unto you who have your portion in this life, for it shall go ill with you in the world to come! God's children are often much chastened because they are much loved. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Men take most trouble with that which is most precious. A common pebble will be let alone, but a diamond must be fretted on the wheel till its brilliance is displayed.

Some persons are also much tried in their faith because they are very fit for it. God has fitted the back for a heavy burden, and the burden will be sent. He has constituted them on purpose that they should be helpful in filling up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, for his body's sake, which is the church." Men build strong columns because they are meant to carry great weights. So God makes great Christians, on purpose that they should bear great afflictions for his glory.

He does this also because he would have some men do him a special service. What an honor it is to do the Lord a special service! When some man in our army behaves himself very grandly, and wins a battle, what will her Majesty do? Why, she will send for him next time a war arises. If any of you are brave in bearing affliction, you shall have the honor of enduring more affliction. Does not every soldier court the opportunity of service? He that looks over his soldiers says of a certain one, "I shall not send him; he is feeble and faint-hearted; yonder veteran is the man for me." Do not think that you would be honored by being allowed to ride to heaven on a feather bed. True honor lies in being permitted to bear and suffer, side by side with him of the bloody sweat and of the five open wounds. This is the guerdon of the saints-that they should on earth be decorated with

"Many a sorrow, many a tear."

They shall walk with their Lord in white, for they are worthy.

Yes, dear friends, the Lord often sends us greater trials than others, because he means to qualify us for greater enjoyments. If you want to make a pool capable of holding more water, you dig it out, do you not? And many a man has been dug and enlarged by affliction. The enlargements of trial enable us to hold more grace and more glory. The more a gracious man suffers, the more he becomes capable of entering into fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and so into fellowship with Christ in his glory by-and-by.

Come, let us be comforted as to the trial of our faith. There is no hurt in it. It is all for good. The trial of our faith is entirely in the hands of God. Nobody can try us without God's permission. He will try us just as much as we ought to be tried, and no more. While he tries us with one hand he will sustain us with the other. If he gives us bitter, he will give us sweets in full proportion. A dear sister said to me this week, "When I used to be in poverty and in trouble, the Word of God was much more sweet to me than it is now that I am prospered." I do not wonder at it. I have made a similar remark when I have been long without an illness. Some of us have cried, "Take me back to my sickness again. Take me back to slander and rebuke again." A Scotch saint said that when they met in the moss, or by the hill-side, and were harried by Claverhouse and his dragoons, Christ was present at the sacraments in the heather much more than he ever was afterwards when they got into the kirk, and sat down quietly. Our worst days are often our best days, and in the dark we see stars that we never saw in the light. So we will not care a pin what it is that may befall us here, so long as God is with us, and our faith in him is genuine. Christian people, I am not going to condole with you, but I congratulate you upon your troubles, for the cross of Christ is precious.

But you that do not love my Lord and Master, if you roll in riches, if your eyes stand out with fatness, I mourn over you. Bullocks fattened for the slaughter, your joys are but the prelude to your woes. Oh, that God would have mercy upon you, and that you would have mercy upon yourselves, and flee at once to Jesus, and put your trust in him! Faith in the work, offices, and person of the Lord Jesus is the way of salvation. May he help you to run in it at this hour, for his name's sake! Amen.

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1 Peter 1:8-9 Salvation As It is Now Received

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"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." —

1 Peter 1:8, 9

We usually speak of the greater benefits of salvation as being in the future. We desire that we may be found in Christ in the day of his appearing, and that we may have a share in his eternal glory. But, beloved, salvation is not another a thing of the future; it is very decidedly a present matter, a blessing to be possessed now, and to be enjoyed now, and our text brings out that idea very clearly. Peter does not write about the elect strangers hoping to receive salvation by-and-by; but putting it all in the present tense, he says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; believing, ye rejoice ... ; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." The perfection of salvation is reserved for the second coming of the Lord; for, at present, the body is mortal because of sin, it is subject

to pain, and it will die, unless the Lord should first come, and it will for a while lie in the grave. But, at his appearing shall be a resurrection of the body, and then body and soul reunited shall experience the fullness of salvation. In that respect, therefore, salvation still remains in part a matter for the future; yet, with the true child of God, the essence of salvation is a thing of to-day. Even now, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

I am going to speak upon this matter in the following way. First, we will enquire, what part of salvation do we receive here and now? Secondly, how do we now receive salvation? And then, thirdly we will make the solemn enquiry for all here, Have we received salvation, and if so, how far have we gone in the reception of it?

I. My first question is, What Part Of Salvation Do We Receive Here And Now?

My first answer to the question is that, in a certain sense, we already possess the whole of it, for all salvation is wrapped up in Christ, and Christ is ours if we are truly believing in him. He is this day our Savior and our All-in-all; and he is already made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." There is nothing of salvation that is outside of Christ; and therefore, since Christ is ours, the whole of salvation is ours. It is ours by the grip of faith, and the grace of hope, — that living hope which is sure of realization, that well-grounded hope, which, cannot be disappointed. Our expectation is of so vivid a character that, it brings, not only near to us, but, into actual present possession, joys which as yet are not revealed; so again I say that, in a sense, it is true for us to say that we have received, in faith and hope, the salvation of our souls if we have truly believed in Jesus; for, —

"The moment a sinner believes,

And trusts in his crucified God,

His pardon at once he receives,

Redemption in full through Christ's blood."

But, secondly, if we are to answer the question distinctly, and in detail, we should say that, if we have really trusted in Jesus, we have so far received the salvation of our souls that we have at this moment, the assurance of the perfect pardon of all our sins. Let me repeat those words: if we have really believed in Jesus, we have, at this moment, the assurance of the perfect pardon of all our sins. And I will venture to put, it as strongly as this, and to say that yonder white-robed spirits before the eternal throne are not more clear of the guilt of sin before the bar of infallible justice than was the dying thief the very moment that he turned his eye in faith to Christ upon the cross of Calvary, or than you are if you are now trusting to the same Savior, or than I am as now depending alone upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. The pardon which God gives to believers in Jesus is not a semi-pardon, it is not a putting away of some of their sins, or a putting them away for a time; but it is a perfect putting away of their sins for ever, a casting of them, once for all, behind God's back, into the depths of the sea, so that they shall never be found again; yea, they shall be so completely put away that they shall cease to be, according to that divine declaration, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none." Oh, what a glorious truth is this, that, although a poor tried child of God may feel the force of his inbred sin, and have continually to struggle with, it; and though he may, from day to day, be conscious of his many imperfections, yet, before those eyes that see everything, there is no spot, to be seen upon the believer in Christ, — I mean, no spot in this respect, that he can ever be condemned or punished for his sin. His sin is finally and for ever pardoned. God has blotted it out, like a cloud that has been blown away and completely dispersed. Therefore let our spirits rejoice if we are truly trusting in Jesus; and oh, that some, who have never done so before, would now look believingly unto him! If they do thus look, this moment, they shall obtain perfect pardon, and so shall receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. I cannot help repeating that sweet verse of Kent's which I have often repeated to you, which sounds so strange, but which is, I believe, absolutely true: —

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,

It matters not how black their cast;

And, O my soul, with wonder view,

For sins to come here's pardon too."

And next, beloved, we have received the salvation of our souls in this sense, that the alienation of our hearts from God is now effectually removed. We are saved from that alienation, and that is a very great part of salvation. Once, our backs were turned towards God; but now, our faces are turned towards him. At one time, we did not admire his character, nor desire, to imitate him, nor wish for his friendship, nor perhaps even so much as think of his existence, much less did we aspire to give him glory. But now, having believed in Jesus, we have undergone a complete change. We are not yet what, we ought to be; we are still a long way off what we expect one day to be, yet we do desire to be what we should be. We admire the character of God, even though we have to prostrate ourselves in the dust when we see how far our own character is from likeness to it, and the whole set and current of our desires is towards purity and holiness. If we could have our way, our way should not be a sinful one. If our will could be gratified, our

will would be that God should have his will with us, and that we should be in all things conformed to the divine will. All true Christians are conscious that, it is so with them, and this is a great part of salvation. Indeed, it is destruction to be alienated from God, and it is salvation to be reconciled to him. It is destruction to anyone to be a lover of sin. The man who loves evil is a destroyed man, a man who is broken in pieces; that which should be the glory of his manhood is absent from him. But when he is brought to love God, the ruins are rebuilt; and though, as yet, every part of the renovated building may not be finished, the divine Architect, who drew the plan of it from eternity, will never leave the work till the last, stroke of the sacred hammer and chisel shall have been given, and the completed structure shall have had the headstone placed upon it amid shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it." Blessed be God that we have this salvation now, in that we are saved from our former alienation of heart from God.

In the next place, we have received the salvation of our souls in the sense that we are saved from the killing power of sin. Before we believed in Jesus, we were not capable of those sacred actions which are now our daily delight. We could not pray. We may have "said our prayers," as so many do, but, the living breath of true God-inspired prayer was not in us. How could it be in us while we were still dead in trespasses and sins? We could not believe. How could we do so, when we had not received the gift of faith from the ever-blessed Spirit? The fact is, we were under a terrible bondage; and just as a corpse, is under bandage to death, and cannot stir hand or foot, lip or eye, so were we under bondage to sin and Satan. But we are under that deadly bondage no longer; for we are living men, and free men in Christ Jesus our Lord, who has overcome that death for us. Now we can pray; now we can praise; — not always as we would like to do so; but, still, the aspiration is there, and the power is there, and when God graciously helps us by his Holy Spirit, we rise to a high degree of vigor in both those sacred exercises. So, when the killing power of sin is gone, what a mercy it is, what a bliss it is; and in this sense also, we receive the salvation of our souls.

More than that, beloved, the reigning power of sin has now gone from every believer. Once, we were slaves to sin, under sin's domination; sin said to us, "Go," and we went, or sin said to us "Stay! Obey not God;" and we stayed, and at sin's bidding disobeyed God; but, now, sin no longer hath dominion over us; for we are not under the law, but under grace; and though we even now sometimes hear sin's mandate, and the flesh inclines us to yield obedience to it, there is a blessed spirit of rebellion against sin within our heart, so that we will not obey sin's commands, but seek after that which is just and holy and right in the sight of God.

Now I am going to take another step, and possibly some of the feebler folk among us may think it is too long a step for them to take; yet I pray God that many of us may practically prove that we have taken it. Beloved brethren, and sisters in Christ, it is possible, and it ought to be the general rule, for Christians to enjoy present salvation, in the sense of being now free, to a very high degree, from sin in their daily life and conduct: nay, more, they ought not to be satisfied without aspiring to be absolutely free from it. It is after this that they should seek, even though they do not attain to it. I am fully persuaded the perfection in the flesh is not attainable here; yet that truth, as I believe it is, has been used by a great many persons as a sort of damper to the sad ambition of renewed spirits. I do not think it ought to be so used, nor that it would legitimately be so used. Suppose I am a sculptor, if it be not possible for me to attain to the perfection of Praxiteles or Phidias, yet I must come as real to them, as I can and I shall not be a master of the sculptor's art unless I seek to imitate those who have been the most proficient in it. Suppose also that through the infirmity of the flesh, I shall never in this life be perfect, like Christ, yet I must have no lower model, nor must I say to myself, "I cannot imitate that perfect model;" but, crying to the Strong One for strength, I must, believe that the omnipotence of God can overcome every sin, and also believe that it is possible for me, by the grace of God, to get every sin beneath my foes; and I must never say to any one sin, "I shall have to spare you, for you are too strong for God to slay." It would be blasphemy to talk like that.

I fear that some brethren think that a quick temper can never be overcome; but, brethren, it must be overcome. The reason why so many professors so often fall into that sin is that they do not believe that it is conquerable, and therefore they do not pray it down. Another person, perhaps, has a sluggish disposition, and he thinks, "I must always be so; it is my nature, and the flesh is weak." It is true that the flesh is weak, but it is equally true that God is almighty; and it is not our own strength but divine strength that is to procure the deliverance of our soul from sluggishness, so we must cry mightily unto the Lord for grace to overcome this or any other sin; to which we are peculiarly prone. God has not put us into Canaan, and said to us, "You may spare some of those Amorites, and Perizzites, and Canaanites, and Hittites, and Girgashites, and Hivites, and Jebusites;" but his command to us is, "Slay them all, let not one of them escape." There must be no sin tolerated in any believer in Christ; and though you are not perfect, you must never say, "Up to this point, I am perfect; and that is as far as God can make me perfect." Dear friends, do you believe in an infinitely powerful God? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit is able to work in you: anything and everything that he wills to work, Then, brethren, stop not short of the highest point that is attainable by mortal men, and seek to be "holy as God is holy." Alas! some professors of religion are hardly even moral; their pretended Christianity is a stench even in the nostrils of worldlings, for they do not conform to the common rules of ordinary decent society but what true Christians long for, is to possess real holiness, to walk with God as Enoch did, to abide in Christ, to shun every false way, to have —

"A heart from sin set free," —

and a conscience tender as the apple of the eye. Oh, that we could all come up to this standard! And we can: it is possible; this is attainable, by the grace of God, through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. I again say that I do not think that absolute

perfection can be reached here, but I cannot tell how near we can come to it. That I would like to prove by happy personal experience; and I beseech every brother and sister in Christ here to join with me in seeking to know how we may, even now, receive the salvation of our souls from the power of sin.

I am quite sure that there are many Christians who have been completely delivered from sins into which they readily fell in their early days. You know that infants suffer from a great many diseases; all through the period of babyhood, they are liable to various ailments which no longer afflict us who are grown-up men and women. So it is with some Christians; when they have grown in grace to the stature of men in Christ, they do not have the little complaints of babyhood. I do not say that this is true of all professors of Christianity; for, alas! there are many of them who have to be wheeled about in perambulators although they are fifty or sixty years of age. While they were little children, we had to dandle them, on our knees, and carry them in our arms, and give them milk for babies, and they still want milk, and still want dandling, now that they are getting grey, — gray-bearded babies! But we went to get them out of that state of babyhood, for there is something far better even on earth, than being spiritually mere babes all our lives. May all of us who are in Christ grow to the stature of men in Christ! The more of such men any church shall have among her members, She better will it be for her, and the more will God be glorified. Let us who are the Lord's resolve that everything that is to be had of God this side of heaven, we will have. Let us not be content to get just inside Christ's house, and to sit down there, and say, "Thank God, we are safe; we have got over the threshold," but let us seek to press onward to the chief table of rich refreshment and inner fellowship with Christ, and to know the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear him, that so we may find that "glory begun below" of which Dr. Watts so truly sings, —

"The men of grace have found

Glory begun below;

Celestial fruits on earthly ground

From faith and hope may grow."

II. And now, secondly, (and with greater brevity, not professing to dive into the depths of the text, but, merely skimming its surface, as the swallow touches the brook with its wing,) How Do We Now Receive The Salvation Of Our Souls?

First, it is entirely from Jesus Christ: "Whom having not seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." Everything of salvation that a believer receives, comes to him out of the one storehouse wherein all fullness abides; that is, in Christ Jesus. Never believe Christian, that you will ever get any grace out of yourself. It is a dreary and useless task to send the bucket down into the dry well of our nature in the hope of drawing up a supply of grace. Oh no, beloved, look away from self, and look alone to Jesus, for from him, and from him only, do we receive the salvation of our souls.

Then note that the channels through which we receive salvation from Christ are first, faith: "in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice." None of us have seen Christ, we sometimes foolishly wish that we had; but believing in him is better than merely seeing him; for many saw him when he was upon the earth, and yet perished, but no man ever truly believed in him, and then perished. Faith is that eye which savingly sees Christ on the cross, and it is only as we continue to look to him by faith that we receive the present salvation of our souls from sin. You can never kill any sin, if you turn, your eye away from the cross. There is no stream that can cleanse from inward lusts but the precious blood of Jesus that flowed on Calvary. Whoever has been victorious over any temptation, it may truly be said of him, "He overcame through the blood of the Lamb." So that there is no way of receiving the blessings of a present salvation except through believing in Jesus.

Our text also tells us that another channel of salvation its love: "Whom having not seen, ye love." The love of Christ is the great force that enables grace to kill sin. The love of Christ and sin are like the two balances of a pair of scales; if sin goes up in our esteem, our love to Christ is going down; and whenever our love to Christ goes up, sin must go down in the same proportion. With little love to Christ, you will walk unwarily; but with great love to your Lord, you will walk carefully before him, and your practical holiness will become manifest to all around you. Though we have not seen Christ, we love, him; and through that love we receive a further assurance of the salvation of our souls from inward as well as outward sin. This is the precious golden conduit through which the power of divine grace flows freely into our souls. Oh, for more fervent love to Christ!

Then our text stays that we also receive this present assurance of salvation through joy in the Lord: "In whom ... believing, ye rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory." This joy is a flaming sword like that which the cherubim waved at the gates of the garden of Eden; it blazes, it cuts, it kills. Once let us really rejoice in Christ, as our Savior, and we become guarded from sin immediately. I believe that many sins are hatched beneath the wings of doubt and fear, but when we get away from those ugly things, and live rejoicing in God, then we say "Down with sin! We cannot endure to have it in our lives." He who has sweet flowers in

his hand flings away evil-smelling weeds, and he who has such a diamond of heaven as "joy unspeakable and full of glory" casts away the pebble-stones of earth with which he was pleased before. He who rejoices with joy unspeakable is not likely to be allured by the paltry joys of earth; they have lost all their former charm to him. Their siren songs have no attraction to his ear, for he has heard the celestial note of the harps of heaven. What bliss it is to be able, to rejoice in Christ as our Savior, for this guarantees to us the salvation of our souls, not only now, but to all eternity!

Why does the apostle say that we rejoice with joy unspeakable? Is it not, first, because this joy is too great to be told? He is indeed rich who cannot count his wealth, he has so much that he does not know how much he has, and he is indeed full of joy who has so much joy that he cannot tell anyone how much he has.

I think also that Peter calls our joy "unspeakable" because, if we were to try to explain or describe it to carnal men, they could not understand us. You cannot explain to a person who has never tasted honey, how sweet it is; neither can you explain to a man who knows not the joy of the Lord how joyous a thing it is. He could not comprehend what your words meant; you would be talking to him in an altogether unknown tongue.

Moreover, brethren, you all know the old proverb, "Still waters run deep." The worldly joy barely covers the stones of his daily sorrow, and therefore it babbles like a shallow brook as it, runs along in its narrow bed; but the Christian's joy is broad and deep, and it scarcely makes any sound as it majestically rolls on like some great river on its way to the sea. The Christian's joy is unspeakable, because it is unfathomable, even by those who enjoy it; and wherever this joy comes, it has a purifying effect, delivering us from sin, and making us thus receive the salvation of our souls.

This joy is also said to be "full of glory." Now, the joys of this world have no true glory in them; look at the worldly man who is most joyous and glad, what glory is there about him? Any so-called joy that comes through sin is just the opposite of glorious. The drunkard's joy puts him below the level of beasts; but there is an elevating power about the Christian's joy, — the joy of salvation, the joy of adoration, the joy of gratitude, the joy of love to God, the joy of being made like Christ, the joy of expecting his coming; — all this is glorious joy, and it is full of glory." I saw lately a picture representing the Coming Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. It represented him as having in his hand cannons, triumphant arches, flags, kings, emperors, and all the insignia of royalty, and blowing them away as chaff is driven before the wind. Come, O thou blessed Coming Man; thou knowest how we need thee! Well, he will come at the right time, and all the glory of this world will fly away just like that when he comes. But our joy is full of a glory which the Coming Man, who is "over all, God blessed for ever," will keep on increasing so that it shall be to us the more full of glory for ever and ever. Such joy, as this glorious joy is, makes us look down upon the world's joys and sin's joys as utterly despicable; and so, by lifting us up above them, it further enables us to receive here and now the salvation of our souls.

III. There was much more that I wanted to say, but my time has almost gone. In the good old Puritan times, they had an hour-glass in the pulpit; and when the sands were running out, the minister was warned that it was time to stop, but he often turned it over again, and went on for another hour. I cannot do that, so I must hasten to a close with the solemn enquiry, Have We Received The Salvation Of Our Souls; And If So, How Far Have We Gone In The Reception Of It?

The first and most vital question for you, my hearers, is this, have you received the salvation of your souls? I know that you have heard about salvation, and many of you know what the Bible says about it; but that is not enough. "I know what salvation means," says one; "I know the way." Then take heed that thou dost not perish in the light. If two men have to go out in the dark, which, is the one to whom the darkness is the more dense! Why, the one who has been sitting in the light! If you go out of your brilliantly illuminated room, you realize how dark it is outside where there is no light above or below. Take care, you who are sitting in the light to-day, lest for you there should be "reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" because you shut your eyes to the light, and will not receive the salvation of your souls.

"Ah, but!" say some, "we profess to be saved." I am glad to hear that, and I would not even hint that your profession is not sincere, but I would urge you to hint to yourself that there is a possibility that all may not be well with you. Are there not many who think they have received the salvation of their souls, but who have not really done so? In St. Peter's, at Rome, I saw monuments to James III., Charles III., and Henry IX., kings of England; but these potentates were quite unknown to me. Certainly, they never reigned in this land, so the royal names upon their monuments are only a subject for ridicule and scorn. And you profess and call yourselves Christians, if you really are so, it is well; but if you are not so, I can conceive that, in the next world, there may be spirits that shall say to you, "You professed to be Christians, yet you are in hell! You sat at the Lord's table and ate the bread and drank the wine in memory of his death, — that death in which you had no saving interest, the atonement that never redeemed you!" O nay hearers, may this never be true of any of us; but may God, in his infinite mercy, save us, and so may we really and truly receive, and not merely profess to have received the salvation of our souls! If we have really cast ourselves upon Christ, though we have not seen him, if we do truly love him; and if we have, to some extent at least, the joy unspeakable and full of glory within our hearts, then indeed we have received the salvation of our souls.

Then comes the other question, how far have we received this salvation? If we had a sacred thermometer given to us in order to measure our spiritual heat, what would our temperature be? Are you, brother, above freezing-point? I fear that some here are below zero. Have any of you come up to anything like bloodheat yet? What a wondrous heat of love that must have been when the lifeblood of Jesus flowed from his wounds as he hung upon the cross of Calvary! Oh, that we could always have our religion at such blood-heat. Have we reached that spiritual temperature yet? There have been saints, and there are still saints willing to suffer the loss of all things for Christ's sake. Nothing has been too hot, too hard, or too heavy for them to endure in his blessed service. They have counted shame and loss to be honor and gain if they might but "glorify God, and enjoy him for ever." Have we come anywhere near to them? We do have occasional communion with Christ, but have we abiding fellowship with him? Do we dwell near to Christ?

But what about these who have not yet believed in him, I heard an evangelist say, one night in this Tabernacle, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. H — A — T — H, — that spells got it." That is an odd way of spelling, but it is sound divinity. The Lord enable you all to believe in Jesus! Then you will have got it, as our friend said; or, as Peter, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, "Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

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1 Peter 1:12 Angelic Interest in the Gospel

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Which things the angels desire to look into — 1 Peter 1:12

The apostle Peter wrote his first Epistle to a persecuted people, many of whom were in great heaviness through manifold trials.

The sufferings of the early Christians are something terrible even to think upon; the World has scarcely ever beheld more relentless cruelty than that which pursued the first servants of our Divine Lord and Master. Peter, therefore, when he wrote to these tried saints, sought to cheer and encourage them. What, then, did he write about? Why, about the gospel; for there is nothing like the simple doctrine of salvation by redemption to comfort the most distressed spirits.

The chapter from which our text is taken is just as plain as the gospel itself is. Peter here tells the elect strangers that they were "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" and he also reminds them that they "were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold;" "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." In this chapter we have all the great central truths of the gospel, — election, redemption, regeneration, effectual calling, sanctification, and final perseverance. Brothers and sisters, whenever we want consolation, let us never go away from the gospel to find it. The child of God always finds his best comfort in the thiner of God. If your comforts can only come to you from worldly society, it is quite clear that you belong to the world; but if you are one of God's true children, all that you want to cheer you under the heaviest trial is already provided for you in the gospel of Christ, and will speedily be applied to you by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, if you only seek it at his hands. Peter here prescribes a remedy for lowness of spirits and for general depression. That remedy is, to take a deeper interest in the things of God, to give ourselves more intensely to the consideration and contemplation of them. They are well worthy of all the thought that we can give to them; for if the prophets, those men with the grandest of roman minds, divinely inspired, yet had to search deeply to understand God's Word as revealed to them, there must be something in it that we shall do well to search out; and if the holy angels, those mighty intelligences, do not so much see, as "desire to look into," the things of God, there must be some very deep things hidden with a the simplicities of the gospel which you and I ought to search out. If we did search them out, we should be greatly cheered and comforted. Our minds would be taken off those trials which now so often vex us; we should be lifted high above them, we should not travel slowly and painfully over this rough road, and have our feet cut with every sharp flint, and our spirit pierced with every Sore trial; but we should rise, as on eagle's wings, and ride on the high places of the earth, and rejoice in the Savior who has done such great things for us. We should eat the fat things full of marrow which God has provided for those who diligently study his Word, and prize it above all earthly treasures.

I am not going to say anything at this time about the high interest which the ancient prophets took in God's Word; but I shall confine myself very much to the interest which angels take in it, in order that I may stir you up to imitate their example. I want, first, to remind you that angels take an active interest in the gospel of our salvation; and, secondly, to show you that angels are eager students of it:

“which things the angels desire to look into.”

I. First, I want to remind you that angels take an active interest in the gospel of our salvation.

It is true that they are not interested in it for themselves. They have never sinned; and, consequently, they need no atonement, and no forgiveness. Doubtless, they have some sort of indirect interest in it which I will not attempt to explain just now; but, certainly, as far as the gospel brings salvation, healing, pardon, justification, cleansing, angels do not need it. Never having been defiled, they need not to be washed; and being perfect in their obedience, they need not to be forgiven for any shortcomings. And yet they take a deep interest in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; what, then, Shall I say of the madness of those who are defiled by sin, and yet have no interest in the fountain where they can be washed whiter than snow? What shall I say of the fatal folly of those who are guilty, and yet take no thought about the method of pardon, which God has provided in Christ Jesus his Son, and our only Savior?

The angels are not even interested in the gospel because of its relation to any of their fellows, for fallen angels have no part nor lot in its provisions. When they fell from their first estate, God left them without hope for ever; and they abide in their rebellion against him, waiting for the awful day when they shall receive the full recompense of their infamous revolt. There is no mercy for fallen spirits. I see how God exercises his sovereignty; when men and angels had both sinned, he passed by the greater sinners, and took up the lesser ones. The fallen spirits “he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” Yet he looked on men, the creatures of a day, with eyes of pity and compassion, and sent his Son to earth, in our nature, that he might redeem us from the wrath which was justly our due. The angels have no direct interest in the death of Christ, and the blood of Christ, because of any blessing which will come through him to any of their former angelic companions; yet they desire to look into these things. What, then, shall I think of myself, and of you, my brother, if, being saved ourselves, we take little or no interest in the gospel as the One means of saving our fellow-men? Shame upon us if we have less pity for mankind than angels have, for men are our brothers, and nothing can save them but the gospel of Jesus; and, therefore, our common humanity ought to make us seek their welfare, and we ought to take the deepest imaginable interest in the things which make for the peace of their immortal souls.

Angels take a deep interest in the gospel because they observe God's interest in it. That for which God cares, angels care for at once. That which grieves the Holy Spirit, must be grievous to holy angels, too; and that which gladdens the heart of God must also make glad the spirits that bow adoringly around his throne. The holy ones cry, cinch one to his fellow, “God is glorified in saving sinful men. Our blessed Lord and Leader went down to earth to accomplish the redemption of the fallen; therefore, let us learn all we can concerning his wondrous work; and wherever there is anything that we can do to help it on, let us stand, with outspread wings, eager to fly at the command of God.”

Doubtless, the angels also take an interest in the gospel, because they are full of love. Those pure spirits love as surely as they live; and not only do they love their God, and love one another, but they also love us who were made a little lower than the angels. They have a great affection for us, — very much more, I imagine, than we have for them. We are their younger brothers, as it were, and we are, by reason of our flesh and blood, linked to materialism, while they are pure spirits; yet they do not envy us the love of God, neither do they despise us on account of our faults and follies; though, methinks, they must often wonder at us. They must sometimes be ready to ask questions concerning our strange behavior, just as two of them did when Christ had risen from the dead, and Mary Magdalene was weeping. Those angels were full of joy because Christ had risen, so they said to her, “Woman, why weepest thou?” What could there be to weep about when Jesus had risen from the dead? Ah, beloved! the angels must often be astonished at us, and think we are the strangest creatures that well can be; yet they love us, and therefore they take a great interest in that gospel which promotes our highest good. They know what we too frequently forget, that nothing can make us so happy as for us to be holy, and that nothing can make us holy but being washed in the blood of Jesus, and being renewed by the Holy Spirit. Out of their homage to God, and their brotherhood to man, comes that interest which makes them desire to look into the deep things of God and his gospel.

The angels have always taken an interest in all that concerns men. Some of them stood at the gate of Eden, with a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep our first father out, should he attempt to force his way back when he had lost his right to all its joy, even as the most loving spirit in the world is still upon the side of justice, and believes that God is righteous, even though paradise be lost, and man be doomed to eat bread in the sweat of his face. We are on man's side, but much more on God's; and we say, “Let God, the ever Just One, be glorified, whatever becomes of the sons of men.”

After that fatal day of the Fall, the angels constantly watched over men here below, and frequently spake with one and another of them as God sent them with messages of mercy to Abraham, or to Isaac, or to Lot, or to Jacob, or to others of the human race. But there was a great day when, in solemn pomp, the chariots of God, which are “twenty thousand, even thousands of angels,” came down to Mount Sinai, when the law was proclaimed. The angels were there as the courtiers of the great King, to give additional solemnity to the declaration of the law of God. That they should have been present on that august occasion, shows their interest in the sons of men.

But I like better to speak to you of their coming to announce the birth of him of whom we sing, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." When that birth, which they had announced, took place, how gladly did they come and hover over Bethlehem's fields, and sing the grand chorale, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." It was their intense interest in us that made them glad that our Redeemer was born.

Then, as we sang at the commencement of this service, —

**"In all his toils and dangerous paths
They did his steps attend,
Oft paused, and wonder'd how at last
The scene of love would end."**

At that notable time when he was tempted in the wilderness, and was with the wild beasts, when the devil had left him, angels came and ministered unto him. They were ever near him while he was here, always invisibly attendant upon his footsteps. You remember how there appeared unto him an angel strengthening him when he was in his agony in the garden of Gethsemane; it was a wondrous thing that, the Son of God should have strength infused into him by an angelic messenger. With what awestruck interest the angels must have Watched our Lord upon the cross!

"As on the tottering tree he hung,

And darkness veil'd the sky,

They saw, aghast, that awful sight,

The Lord of Glory die!"

But glad were they to descend to his empty sepulcher, and to enter it, and guard the place where for a while the sacred casket of his body had lain. They spake to his disciples, and comforted them by telling them that he had risen from the dead; and, all along, they took such interest in everything relating to him because they recognized in him the Savior of sinful men.

They brought his chariot from above,

To bear him to his throne;

Clapp'd their triumphant wings, and cried,

'The glorious work is done.'

Nor is this all. We know, from Scripture, that they not only watched over the Savior, but they rejoice over penitents. The Lord Jesus has told us that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;" that is to say, there is joy in God's heart, and the angels can see it. They stand in God's presence, and they can see that God is glad; and we know that they also share that gladness. In the parable of the lost sheep, our Savior represents the shepherd calling together his friends and his neighbors, and saying to them, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." So they do, I am sure; they rejoice over every rescued one that is brought home upon the shoulders of the good Shepherd.

And, beloved, they watch over every believing soul. This is one of their chief offices, for "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" That promise which Satan misquoted is true to every child of God: "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." From what spiritual evils they guard us, it is not for me to attempt to tell; nor to try to describe how, often, in mid-air, there are fierce fights between the demons: from hell and the good spirits from heaven; or how the prince of the power of the air is baffled and driven back by Michael the archangel as he comes to invisible agents of the ever-blessed God. They are deeply interested in all his children. The parable tells us that Lazarus died, "and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." What that expression means, I shall not attempt to explain; but I am quite sure that when we who love the Lord die, angels will have something to do with our departure, and with our introduction into the world of happy spirits, and into the presence-chamber of the Lord our God. I like Bunyan's account of the pilgrims passing through the river, and the shining ones meeting them on the other side, and leading them up the steep ascent into the Celestial City where they see their Master's face with joy, and go no more out for ever.

Nor will they have done with us even then; for when we shall be with God eternally shut in, and safe from all danger of falling and sinning, the angels will swell the music of our continual song, for they shall sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength; and honor, and glory, and blessing." Yet we shall be able to sing what they cannot, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

Further, these dear attendants: of our wandering footsteps here below, these patient guardians of our nightly hours, these angel guides, who shall be our companions in death when wife and child and friend can go no farther with us, these glorious beings shall learn, from our lips in heaven the manifold wisdom of God. They will cluster around us amazed and gladdened as, one by one, we stand upon the sea of glass; and they will ask us to rehearse again and again the wonders of redeeming love, and to tell them what conversion meant, and what sanctification meant, and how the power and wisdom and grace and patience of God were seen in the experience of each one of us; and we shall be their joyful teachers, world without end.

Have I not proved to you that angels take an active interest in the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? And may I not come back to this practical point, — do you also take an active interest in the gospel, — you in whose nature Christ appeared, — you sons of men, — you who must be for ever lost unless the precious blood of the bleeding Lamb be sprinkled upon you?

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by,

Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?”

It was for such as you that he died, even for the guilty sons and daughters of men, “for verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.” He took up men, not angels; shall they, then, be interested in the gospel, and shall not you, whom it specially concerns, also be interested in it? I have already reminded you that they have no brother-angels to be converted by the gospel; they have no sister-angels to be turned to God by the story of Calvary; yet they are deeply interested in the gospel and also in us; and will not you, my fellow-Christians, take a deeper interest in the work of God, and in the propagation of the gospel, when your own flesh and blood must be converted by it, or else must die eternally? Our sisters and brothers, our sons and daughters, our wives and husbands, possibly even our parents, will perish for ever unless Jesus Christ is brought to them, and they are brought to him. What are you at, you careless professors, you who can go calmly to sleep while men and women are being damned? What are you thinking of, you who eat the fat, and drink the sweet in the courts of the Lord’s house, and yet never show to the prisoners this way to liberty, nor tell to the dying the good news that “there is life for a look at the Crucified One,” nor say to the perishing that there is salvation even for them in Christ Jesus your Lord? Up, up! I charge you, by every swift-winged angel who takes an interest in the cross of Christ, and in the salvation of men, arouse ye, sons of men; if ye may, anyhow, be the means of saving some, be active in the service of that Savior who gave his all for you. God. bless that exhortation to all whom it concerns!

II. Now we turn its the second point, which is this, — that angels are eager students of the gospel, and of all the truths connected with it: “Which things the angels desire to look into.”

It is quite certain, then, that angels do not know all that is in the gospel, for they desire to look into it. All the gospel is not known to them, and I do not think that it is all known to any of us. I have occasionally met with certain brethren, who have professed to have the whole of the gospel condensed into five points of doctrine, so that they could put it all into their waistcoat pocket, and carry it there; and they seemed to think that they had not anything more to learn. If one tried to teach them any other truth beside what they already knew, they were angry, for they did not want to know any more. They are not like the holy angels, for they desire to look into these things. Dr. John Owen was, perhaps, the most profound divine who ever lived; yet Dr. John Owen could not know, on earth, as much about certain things as angels did; and I should say that, this very day, he desires still to look into the mystery of redeeming love and the glory of Christ of which he wrote with such wonderful power. The apostle Paul had been converted many years when he wrote the Epistle to the Philippians, yet in it he expressed the longing of his heart that he might know Christ. But did he not know him? And if he did not, who did? No doubt, he felt that there was so much of Christ that he had not known that what he did know amounted to very little. I have heard the word perfection used very glibly by some who seemed to me to know little of its meaning; but will any sane man claim that he has attained to perfection in knowledge? To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” The mystery of redemption was hidden in Christ from eternity, and it was only made known to the Church or even to the angels gradually. They do not yet know everything. Concerning his second coming, our Lord said to his disciples, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

The devil also does not know everything. I am sure that Satan did not know that Christ came into the world to redeem men by dying for them, or else he would never have stirred them up to put him to death. He would have been far too cunning for that; he would have tried, if possible, to keep Christ alive so that we might not have been redeemed by him. The devil does not know as much as he thinks he knows, even now; and, often, he is outwitted by a simple-hearted child of God, who knows how to believe in God, and is brave enough to do the right. Neither men, nor prophets, nor angels, nor devils, know all about the gospel yet. They need still to go on studying, and meditating, and contemplating, as the holy beings before the throne of God are doing: ‘ which things the angels desire to look into.’”

But, brethren, though they do not yet know all about Christ and his gospel, they want to know all they can. They have many other subjects to study. There are all the worlds that God has made, and possibly they have liberty to range over them all; yet I do not read

with reference to the marvels of astronomy, "which things the angels desire to look into." Angels doubtless know much more than all our scientific men do concerning the former ages of this world; they could tell much about the various formations and strata of which geologists talk, yet I do not find it recorded that the angels have any particular desire to look into those things. When God created the world, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." They have oftentimes admired the providential arrangements of God, and praised the wise Ruler who guideth all things with infinite wisdom. But now their chief contemplations seem to be fixed on Christ and his gospel.

Just notice two or three passages of Scripture. Turn first to Exodus 25:20, where we read concerning the cherubim, who belong to one order of angels: "The cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be;" — "toward the mercy seat," as if their eyes were continually fixed upon the redemption of Christ, the propitiation wrought out by his sacrifice. In Daniel's day, these blessed spirits took the greatest conceivable interest in knowing all they could about our redemption. If you turn to (Daniel 8:13), you can read what that man of God wrote: "Then I heard one saint — 'one holy one' — speaking, and another holy one said unto that certain holy one which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation?" "How long?" — that was the question which the holy ones asked long before Christ descended to earth. Read also (Daniel 12:5): "Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" They asked again and again, "How long?" All their thoughts were concentrated upon the things of God, and they desired to look into them.

Now I want you to remember, in order that it may humble us, that angels have very keen intellects. I believe that they far excel us in their prayers of thought; and yet, though they have learned so much about the gospel, they do not pretend to have come any further than this, they desire to look into it. You and I, perhaps, suppose that we know all about the gospel; and that we do not need to have hours of study, and thought, and prayer, and the unction of the Holy Spirit. Poor miserable fools! Angels, who are vastly superior to us in intelligence, have gone no further than to have the desire to learn and to know; I am afraid that many of you have not got as far as that. It is a grand thing to desire to look into these things; it proves that we already know something of their worth when we desire to know more.

Recollect, also, that the intellects of angels have never been warped by prejudice. There is not a man amongst us who is not prejudiced to some extent. Our parents warped us in one direction, and our companions have warped us another way, and we have all of us the propensity to take a one-sided view of things, even though we may be perfectly ignorant of the bias; and, sometimes, this prejudice of ours prevents us from seeing clearly; but it is not so with the angels. There is no beam, nor even a mote, in their eye; their knowledge is not infinite, but it is wonderful knowledge as far as it goes; yet even they see not all that there is in the gospel, for, of it, as of the love of God, it can truly be said, —

"The firstborn sons of light

Desire in vain its depths to see;

They cannot reach the mystery,

The length, and breadth, and height?

Then, again, the angels have been long looking into these things. I know not what the age of the angels may be; we know nothing of any creation of angels since the creation of the world. In the long ages ere man trod this earth, angels had begun to think of looking into the wonders of God's grace; yet, after thousands of years, they do not fully comprehend the mysteries of redeeming love. Ah, my brothers and sisters, the gospel is a boundless thing, even as your ruin was infinite and horrible beyond conception; and woe to the man who tries to make out that there is but a little hell, and a little God, and but little wrath of God! As surely as your overthrow was inconceivably terrible, so the designs of God for your redemption, and your exaltation in Christ, are inconceivably magnificent. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Some of us have very large, expectations of what God means to make even of his creatures who are now cooped up in flesh and blood; but our highest anticipations will probably be far exceeded by the glorious reality. Even angels do not yet fully know, after all their study, what the mighty love of God has done and will yet do for us.

Do not forget, too, dear friends, that angels are not subject to such infirmities as we are. I know that! have forgotten a great deal more than I know, and I suppose that most, of you have done the same; and when we have learnt a thing, we are often like people who take up a handful of water; it is soon all gone. What leaky sieves our memories are! Angels, however, have no such failure of mind. They have never sinned; and, therefore, from much of our infirmity, they must be altogether free. Yet; though far superior to us in this respect, this is the position they have reached, they stand over the mercy seat, with wings outstretched, and with their eyes continually fixed upon that token of the propitiation, desiring to look into it. That is where you and I also stand; if we are truly humble, we feel that this is as far as we have come as yet.

Now, let us enquire, — What are the things which the angels desire to look into? I can only refer very briefly to them.

They are, first, the incarnation, life, and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; the way in which God could be just, and yet justify the ungodly; that sacred art by which the suffering of the Law-giver made a sufficient recompense to the offended law; the wondrous power of those sufferings Godward and manward; how these sufferings have broken men's hearts, and separated them from their sins; how they have given them joy and peace, and united them for ever to their God. You and I have only seen the sparkle on the surface of the crimson sea of redemption; we cannot understand the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ our Lord; so let us still desire to look into it, as the angels do.

Next, they desire to know something concerning the resurrection of Christ. "How do you know that?" you ask. Why, the verse before the one containing our text speaks of "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." So angels love to think of Christ as risen from the dead, of Christ ascended, and of Christ yet to come in his glory. They desire to gaze into that mystery, and to learn how the glorious God can become yet more glorious by taking upon himself our nature, and so magnifying his grace above all his name, by redeeming fallen men, and by lifting them up into communion with God.

Angels desire to look into all the mystery of human hearts, — how they are fallen, how they are regenerated, how they are preserved, how they are sanctified, how they are strengthened, how they are taught, how they are perfected. There is a wonderful field for their inspection there, in the work of the Holy Ghost upon the sons and daughters of Adam, by virtue of the death of Christ.

And angels want also to know what God is going to do with this poor world. It is an awful problem to us; and so it is to them, I expect. Can you make this world out? Did you ever try to understand it? It is a dreadful nut for anyone to crack, — all these millions of men continually dying without God, and without Christ, and without hope. What are to be the eternal issues of it all? How will it come out that God is glorified at the last when such multitudes perish? There are some brethren who think they know all about this mystery; they have a philosophy which explains it all. I have no such philosophy; nor do I wish to have. I sometimes found, when I was a child, that it was a pleasant thing for me to be with my father, and to hear him talk even when I did not fully understand what he was talking about; so I find it a blessed thing to get near to God, and to see what he is doing, even when I do not know what he is doing, for I am perfectly satisfied that he cannot do anything that is wrong. Still, angels and men may join in the common desire to look into the wonderful working of God's providence and grace.

But the angels also desire to look into the glory that shall follow. What is the glory that is yet to come to those spirits of just men made perfect who, as yet, have not their glorified bodies, but are waiting for them until the resurrection trumpet shall sound? What will be the glory of that moment when, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living shall be changed? And what will be the glory of that dread hour when heaven and earth shall gather before the last tribunal, and on the great white throne the Judge shall sit, and all of woman born shall be gathered before him, to give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil? And what glory it will be, ere that day has closed, when over all the world of sinners the waves of God's infinite wrath shall roll, and they shall sink to the bottom like a stone, never to taint the earth again! And what a glory it will be when all those on the King's right hand, all the blood-washed, all the redeemed, shall stream up to their everlasting thrones to sit for ever with their conquering Leader, and reign eternally, peers in the palace of the King, for ever adoring, for ever blessing his holy name! Oh, what glory will be there! I will not attempt to describe it, for even the angels, who axe in heaven, desire to look into this mystery, for even they scarcely know what will be the glory of "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."

You know that the Greeks had, every now and then, a great gathering of all the nation in what they called their general assembly. Everyone Was represented there, — poet and philosopher, tragedian and military man. All the glories of Greece were there. Well, there is to come a general assembly, an ecumenical council of the entire Church of God; and when they shall all be there on the plains of heaven, — prophets, confessors, apostles, martyrs, humble men and women from every part of the world, — not one of the redeemed absent; but all there with their King in the midst of them, what a shout of victory, what hallelujahs, what songs of joy, what triumphant jubilates, shall welcome that glad day! By God's grace, I shall be there. My hearer, will you be there? Are you sure of it? If so, let the glad anticipation of it rejoice your heart even now; though you do not know what the full realization of it will be, for even angels, who have seen the lesser gatherings of the saints, have not yet seen the one universal assembly, the gathering of all the clans, the coronation of the Prince, the marriage of the bride, the Lamb's wife, and all the glory of God, and the splendor of the infinite meridian brilliance that will be displayed before the wondering eyes of God's elect saints and God's elect angels. They do not know what it is to be, nor do you; but we as well as they desire to look into it, and I hope we all desire to be there.

Now let me close by saying that, as the angels are such deep students of the things of God, let us try to be the same. I wish that I could stir up all my dear friends who are saved to try to look more closely into the things of God. I am afraid that we are going to have a greater proportion of superficial believers than we have had in the past, for We have so many people who axe always hallooing about their religion. God bless them, and let them halloo as loudly as they like; but I wish that they had something more to halloo about. There a::e some who are always crying, "Believe, believe, believe;" but, for the life of them, they could not tell you what

it is that you have to believe. And many shout, “Hallelujah!” who do not know what “Hallelujah!” means, or they would be far more reverent towards that blessed word, “Praise to Jehovah!” We want brethren and sisters, that you who are saved should seek to know how and why you were saved. You who have a hope of salvation should know the reason for the hope that is in you. Study the Scriptures much. In the Puritan days, there used to be a number of contemplative Christians, who shut themselves up to study the Word of the Lord, and so became masters of theology, perhaps some were not so practical in winning souls as they ought to have been; but now we are getting to the opposite pole of the compass. We have many who are rushing about, and professing to feed the people; but what do they give them? Where is your bread, sir? “Oh, I could not let these poor people wait.” But why do you not go and fill your basket? You have nothing in it. “Oh! I had not time to do that; I wanted to go and give them” — Give them what? Give them half of the nothing that you have brought? That will do them no good at all. There is nothing like having good seed in the basket when you go out to sow; and when you go to feed the hungry, there is nothing like having good bread to give them; and that cannot be the case spiritually, unless we are diligent students of the Word, unless we search the deep things of God! By all means let us advance our forces into the recesses of the enemy’s country, but let us secure our communications, and let us have a good firm basis of Scriptural knowledge, otherwise mischief will come to our scattered powers. By all means be enthusiastic, by all means be intense; but you cannot keep a fire burning without fuel, and you cannot keep up real intensity and enthusiasm without a knowledge of Christ and an understanding of the things of God, “which things the angels desire to look into.”

Now, dear friends, those of you who have nothing to do with this matter, would like you to go away thinking that, if an angel cares about these things, and if an angel studies them, it is time that you did the same. I know that you are going to take your degree at the University, good sir, and I am very glad that you are likely to secure a good position in life; but I hope that you are not so foolish as to think that you know more than the angels; and if they desire to look into these things, permit me to ask you to study your Bible as well as all the other classics, for this is the best classic after all. I know, dear sir, that you are a masterly thinker; you can make a great many hypotheses, and pull them to pieces again; but I wish, for once, that you would consider this hypothesis — that, perhaps, you are not as wise as the angels. I should not wonder if that hypothesis should prove to be true. I have often noticed that people who rail at the gospel do not know what it is. Many speak against the Bible; but if they were asked, “Did you ever read it?” they would have to answer, “No.” He who studies God’s Word is usually conquered by it; he falls in love with it, and feels the power of it. So, as the holy angels desire to look into it, pray look into it yourself, good sir; and, on your looking there, may God give you to see Jesus, for all who look unto him shall be saved for ever. May you be one of that blessed company, for his dear name’s sake! Amen.

LOVE AND SERVE ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 4:3–11

Ron Teed

We would like to begin this section by repeating the closing verses of 1 Peter 3 that we studied earlier. We would like to then add to that the first two verses from 1 Peter 4 that we just looked at. This should give us a solid background to go forward in 1 Peter 4. Let us go back and read 1 Peter 3:19–22 NLT and then see if we can expand on these verses as we move forward into chapter 4.

19 So he (Jesus) went and preached to the spirits in prison—

20 those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood.

21 And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

22 Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept his authority.

So, what does it mean for a believer, like Noah, to be kept safe through the waters of judgment and find themselves living in a completely new situation? It means we no longer desire to live the rest of our earthly lives satisfying only the things we want for ourselves. We no longer want to give in to the things that we know are wrong. It means that we now live to satisfy the will of God. We will see this here in verses 1–6 of 1 Peter 4. Because the end may come at any time, which includes our death, verses 7–11 instruct us that we are to commit ourselves to loving and serving one another, following the example of God’s grace toward us. Now let us recall how Peter began this chapter in verses 1 and 2.

1 Peter 4:1, 2NLT:

1 So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin.

2 You won’t spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God. Peter had a great deal to say about time. Certainly the awareness of his own impending martyrdom had something to do with this

emphasis.¹⁵⁶ If a person really believes in eternity they should want to make the best use of their time. If we are convinced that Jesus is coming, it should be our desire to prepare ourselves to meet Him and be able to give a favorable account for our lives. Whether Jesus comes first, or death comes first, we want to make the rest of the time count for eternity, because our rewards in eternity will be based on how we live here. Peter described four attitudes that a Christian can develop in his/her lifetime if he/she desires to make their life all that God wants it to be.¹⁵⁸

Christians who have put into practice those things Christ taught have regarded themselves dead to sin. They live the rest of their lives not for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

If we do the will of God, we will be spending the time we have left in doing those things which please and satisfy God and thus finding happiness in life as well. But if we give in to the world around us, we will waste the rest of the time we have left and regret it when we stand before Jesus. The will of God is not a burden that He places on us. Rather it is the divine pleasure and provision that makes all our burdens light. The will of God comes from the heart of God (Psalm 33:11) and therefore is an expression of the love of God. We may not always understand what He is doing, but we know that He is doing what is best for us.

We also learned from verse 2 of 1 Peter that those who died with Christ through faith, according to 1 Peter 2:24, are genuinely prepared to suffer with him in any number of ways, including death.

1 Peter 4:3NLT:

3 You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols.

Christians were encouraged to live for the present in God's will because old habits were a thing of the past. In blunt language Peter emphasized that there must be a definite break from what unbelievers choose to do. Here he lists immorality and lust, feasting and drunkenness, wild parties, and the worship of idols. But that is not the end of it. If you turn to Galatians 5:19–21, you will find a lot more:

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,

21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

There are times when looking back at your past life is not a good thing to do because Satan could be using those memories to discourage you. But Jesus urged Paul to remember that he had been a persecutor of believers (1 Timothy 1:12ff), and this encouraged him to do even more for Christ.

Lost sinners imitate each other as they conform to the fashions of this world as Paul tells us in Romans 12:2NLT:

2 Do not copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

1 Peter 4:4NLT:

4 Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you.

Christians are to live in the present for the will of God because their old friends, and I use that word loosely, are now their self-appointed critics. Godless men and women are genuinely surprised by the changed lives of those who once were like them. A changed life often generates ridicule from those who reject the teachings of Christ.

Unsaved people do not understand the radical change that their friends experience when they trust Christ and become children of God. They do not think it strange when people wreck their bodies, destroy their homes, and ruin their lives by running from one sin to another. But let a drunkard become sober, or an immoral person become moral, and their friends and family think they have lost their mind.

We must be patient with these unbelievers even though we do not agree with their lifestyles or participate in their sins. After all, unsaved people are blind to spiritual truth (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4) and dead to spiritual enjoyment (Ephesians 2:1). In fact, although they would not admit it, our contact with unbelievers is important to them because we are the ones who carry the message of the truth that they need. When unsaved friends attack us, this is our opportunity to tell them about the truth of Jesus. You may remember what Peter said earlier in 1 Peter 3:15 ESV:

In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

1 Peter 4:5NLT:

5 But remember that they will have to face God, who will judge everyone, both the living and the dead.

Those who have spent their lives indulging themselves in personal pleasures and in idolatry will someday have to stand before God and be judged for their behavior. Jesus Himself confirmed this any number of times. In Matthew 12:36 He says: "I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak."

Peter warned that these people must one day face the One "who will judge everyone." No one will escape this final judgment of the words and works of their earthly life, when Christ will judge both the living and the dead according to Acts 10:42NLT: "And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead." It is the unbeliever, not the believer, who will have to defend themselves at their final trial. The believer will one day stand before God to

account for his/her life, but that will be to receive their rewards. This is of course because of our faith in Jesus as Savior which erases all of our sins in the sight of God. God looks on the believer after death as one who has never sinned. Revelation 11:18 tells us:

18 The nations were filled with wrath, but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants the prophets, as well as your holy people, and all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest. It is time to destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth.”

The unsaved may judge us, but one day, God will judge them. Instead of arguing with them, we should pray for them, knowing that the final judgment is with God. This was the attitude that Jesus took, as Peter described for us in 1 Peter 2:23: “He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly”. And also the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:24–26NLT:

24 A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.

25 Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth.

26 Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil’s trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.

1 Peter 4:6NLT:

6 That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit.

In verse 6 Peter, in contrast with verse 5, encouraged his readers with the fact that rather than facing judgment for their sins, those who had heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ faced an altogether different future. The penalty for their sin has been paid by Christ on the cross. The last earthly encounter with sin is physical death. Believers still die physically, but for Christians physical death does not lead to judgment but to eternal life. “They now live forever with God in the Spirit.” Those armed with a Christ-like attitude will live forever in God’s presence.

Peter was reminding his readers of the Christians who had been martyred for their faith. They had been falsely judged by men, but now, in the presence of God, they received their true judgment. “Those who are now dead” means those who are now dead at the time Peter was writing this letter. The Gospel is preached only to the living because there is no opportunity for salvation after death. Hebrews 9:27 tells us: “And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.”

Peter has described the unbeliever’s choice as a drive to satisfy their human desires. He now describes the lifestyle that unbelievers can make no sense of, but which reflects the will of God for His people. This includes: self-control, prayer, mutual love, hospitality, using spiritual gifts for the benefit of others, serving wholeheartedly and “with the strength God provides,” seeking in all things to win praise for God through Jesus. Not focusing on oneself makes no sense to selfish people. But to those of us who have been taught to love by Christ, it is the only way to live.

1 Peter 4:7NLT:

7 The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers.

In many Jewish scriptures (including Daniel 12:1–2), the end of the age would be preceded by a period of great suffering.

Daniel 12:1–2NRSV:

1 “At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.

2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Can you imagine the horror of living forever with a constant sense of shame and contempt? That alone would make Hell unbearable. “The end of the world is coming soon” (ēngiken) is the same form of the verb used in James 5:8 to refer to the Second Coming of Christ. After mentioning Christians who had died in 1 Peter 4:6, Peter then referred to the imminent return of Christ for His Church. The shortness of the time remaining is motivation to live for and serve Jesus Christ (verse 2). As a result, Christians are to be clear-minded (Mark 5:15) and self-controlled (1 Peter 1:13; 5:8) so that they are able to pray (Ephesians 6:18). Prayer, which is a high priority during times of persecution, is to be clear, reasonable, earnest communication with God.

Christians in the early church expected Jesus to return in their lifetime. No matter what interpretation we give to the prophetic Scriptures, we must all live in expectancy. The important thing is that we shall see the Lord one day and stand before Him. How we live and serve today will determine how we are judged and rewarded on that day.

The phrase “be earnest” means to be sober-minded, keep your mind steady and clear. Perhaps a modern equivalent of the term would be “keep cool.” This was a warning against wild thinking about prophecy that could lead to an unbalanced life and ministry. Often we hear of sincere people who allow themselves to go outside the guidelines of Scripture when interpreting prophecy. There are people who set dates for Christ’s return, contrary to Christ’s warning in Matthew 25:13, which says: “So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return.” And Acts 1:6–8 NLT tells us:

6 So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

7 He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know."

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The opposite of "being earnest" or sober-minded is "frenzy or madness." It is the Greek word mania, which has come into our English vocabulary by way of psychology. If we are sober-minded, we will be intellectually sound and not inclined to go off in all different directions because of some "new" interpretation of the Scriptures. We will also face things realistically and be free from denial which is a state of not being willing to recognize the truth. The sober-minded believer will have a purpose filled life and not be drifting. He/she will exercise restraint and not be impulsive. They will exercise "sound judgment" not only in interpreting Scripture, but also concerning the practical affairs of life.

Ten times in his Pastoral Epistles, Paul challenged people to "be sober-minded." It is one of the qualifications for pastors (1 Timothy 3:2) and for the members of the church (Titus 2:1–6). In a world that is susceptible to all kinds of wild and crazy thinking, the Church must be sober-minded.

There is a practical application to the prophetic Scriptures. Peter's emphasis on hope and the glory of God ought to encourage us to be faithful today in whatever work God has given us to do. We should try to practice what Luke emphasizes in Luke 12:29–48NLT:

29 "And do not be concerned about what to eat and what to drink, do not worry about such things.

30 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs.

31 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.

32 "So do not be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

33 "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it.

34 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

35 "Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning,

36 as though you were waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks.

37 The servants who are ready and waiting for his return will be rewarded. I tell you the truth, he himself will seat them, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat!

38 He may come in the middle of the night or just before dawn. But whenever he comes, he will reward the servants who are ready.

39 "Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would not permit his house to be broken into.

40 You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected."

41 Peter asked, "Lord, is that illustration just for us or for everyone?"

42 And the Lord replied, "A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them.

43 If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward.

44 I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns.

45 But what if the servant thinks, 'My master won't be back for a while,' and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk?

46 The master will return unannounced and unexpected, and he will cut the servant in pieces and banish him with the unfaithful.

47 "And a servant who knows what the master wants, but is not prepared and Does not carry out those instructions, will be severely punished.

48 But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.

If you want to make the best use of the rest of the time you have here on earth, live in the light of the return of Jesus Christ for we shall one day stand before Him. Romans 14:10–13NLT:

10 So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

11 For the Scriptures say, " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.' "

12 Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.

13 So let us stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.

2 Corinthians 5:1–11; 14–21NLT:

1 For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

2 We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing.

3 For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.

4 While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it is not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe

us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life.

5 God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.

6 So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord.

7 For we live by believing and not by seeing.

8 Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

9 So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.

10 For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.

11 Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too.

14 Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life.

15 He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

16 So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now!

17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.

19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. So 1 Peter 4:7 is simply telling us that if we are sober-minded, "we will be earnest in our prayers." If our prayer life is confused, it is because our mind is confused. Dr. Kenneth Wuest, in his translation, shows the important relationship between the two: "Be calm and collected in spirit with a view to giving yourself to prayer." The word "watch" carries with it the idea of alertness and self-control. It is the opposite of being drunk or asleep (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8). This command had special meaning to Peter, because he went to sleep when he should have been "watching unto prayer" (Mark 14:37–40).

You find the phrase "watch and pray" often in the Authorized Version of the New Testament. It simply means to "be alert in our praying, to be controlled." There is no place in the Christian life for lazy, listless routine praying. We must have an alert attitude and be on guard.

An expectant attitude toward Christ's return involves a serious, balanced mind and an alert prayer life. The test of our commitment to the doctrine of Christ's return is not our ability to draw charts or discern signs, but our thinking and praying. If our thinking and praying are right, our living should be right.

1 Peter 4:8, 9NLT:

8 Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

9 Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.

Love covers sins not in the sense of winning forgiveness for them, but in that our love for others keeps us from either broadcasting other's faults, or being so angry with others that we refuse to accept or forgive them. Proverbs 10:12 seems to prohibit gossiping about one another's sins or slandering one another (James 5:20). The implication here may be that love overlooks one another's faults, although some scholars have suggested that it means that those who love will themselves find grace in the day of judgment (1 Peter 4:5–6).

Hospitality in those days involved receiving others, especially taking in travelers of the same faith who needed a place to stay. Lodging and provisions were to be provided generously, not grudgingly. A Christian's unselfish love and concern for others should be demonstrated to the point of sacrificially giving for the welfare of others.

1 Peter 4:10NLT:

10 God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

Believers should be faithful in using their spiritual gifts. Each gift (charisma) is to be used to serve or minister to others. The "gift" stems from God's grace. His grace is made evident in His church as believers exercise their spiritual gifts in service to each other.

1 Peter 4:11NLT:

11 Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

Like Paul in Romans 12:4–8, Peter emphasized the diversity of gifts in the church and the need for all of them until the end when Jesus returns. If we really look for the return of Christ, then we shall think of others and properly relate to them. Love for fellow believers is important. Love is the badge of a believer in this world (John 13:34–35). Especially in times of testing and persecution. Christians need to love one another and be united in their hearts.

This love should be “fervent,” which is the word used in the NAS translation in verse 8. This is the same kind of effort an athlete demonstrates in straining to reach the goal. It speaks of eagerness and intensity. Christian love is something we have to work at, just the way an athlete works on his skills. It is not a matter of emotional feeling, though that is included, but of dedicated will. Christian love means that we treat others the way God treats us, obeying His commandments in the Word. It is even possible to love people that we do not like.

Christian love is also forgiving and that kind of love covers sin. Where there is hatred, there is malice; and malice causes a person to want to tear down the reputation of their enemy. This leads to gossip and slander.

Our Christian love should not only be fervent and forgiving, but it should also be practical. We should share our homes with others in generous hospitality, and we should use our spiritual gifts in ministry to one another. In New Testament times hospitality was an important thing, because there were few inns and poor Christians could not afford to stay at them anyway. Persecuted saints in particular would need places to stay where they could be helped and encouraged.

Hospitality is a virtue that is commanded and commended throughout the Scriptures. Moses included it in the Law. Jesus enjoyed hospitality when He was on earth, and so did the Apostles in their ministry.¹⁷⁴ Human hospitality is a reflection of God's hospitality to us (Luke 14:16ff). Christian leaders in particular should be “given to hospitality”.

Abraham was hospitable to three strangers, and discovered that he had entertained the Lord and two angels. We help to promote the truth when we open our homes to God's servants (3 John 5–8).

Finally, Christian love must result in service. Each Christian has at least one spiritual gift that he must use to the glory of God and the building up of the church. We are stewards. God has entrusted these gifts to us that we might use them for the good of His Church. He even gives us the spiritual ability to develop our gifts and be faithful servants of the Church. There are speaking gifts and there are serving gifts, and both are important to the Church. Not everybody is a teacher or preacher, though all can be witnesses for Christ. There are those “behind-the-scenes” ministries that help to make the public ministries possible.

How long do you have left on this earth to serve God? Only God knows that. Whatever time is left, do not waste it. Invest it by doing the will of God.