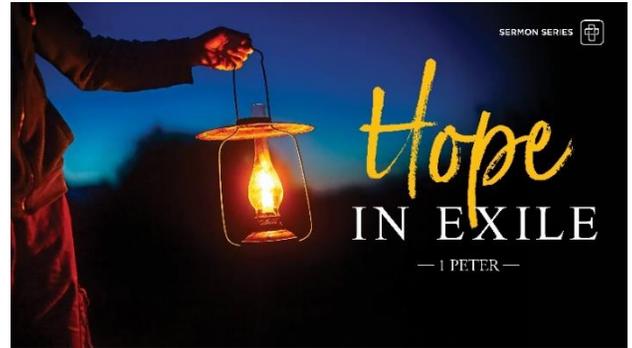


## Angels Long to Catch a Glimpse

### 1 Peter 1:10-12

David Sunday    May 10, 2020



I join with the whole church in wishing all of you moms who labor so sacrificially in discipling your children and caring for your families. I wish you a very happy Mothers Day. We want you to be honored today.

This morning we'll be reading 1 Peter 1:10-12 together, which is the crescendo of the introduction of Peter, telling of the greatness of the gospel and the joy believers can find in the gospel, even in the midst of suffering.

*<sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied about the grace that would come to you, searched and carefully investigated.*

*<sup>11</sup> They inquired into what time or what circumstances the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified in advance to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you. These things have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—angels long to catch a glimpse of these things.*

Please pray with me.

Father, I want to preach the gospel to Your people at New Covenant by the Holy Spirit, so I pray You would empower my words, Your Word through me, and may You open our eyes to behold wonderful things in Your Scriptures today. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ever since H.G. Wells wrote his science fiction novel called The Time Machine back in 1895, people's imaginations have been captivated by wonder at what it would be like to travel back to a different point in time. Maybe you've been feeling a little bit that way lately, as we're now in our ninth Sunday with the stay-at-home order and you're thinking, "I'd like to live in a different time or place."

If you could go back in Bible times, when would you like to live? Maybe you'd like to go back to the Garden of Eden and say to Adam and Eve, "Please, don't take that fruit." Or maybe you'd like to join Abraham as he's coming down off Mount Moriah with his son Isaac, alive from

the dead so to speak. Maybe you'd like to be with Joseph and his brothers, as Joseph reveals himself to them. Or with Moses and Miriam on the other side of the Red Sea, after the Israelites have passed through on dry land and they're seeing Pharaoh's army coming after them with the waters starting to rumble and the waves starting to crash on the whole army, drowning them.

Maybe you'd like to be with David as he takes his slingshot and goes out against Goliath. Or with Elijah in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal. Maybe you'd like to join Isaiah in the temple in the year King Uzziah died and see the Lord seated on His throne, high and lifted up, with His glory filling the temple. Or with Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. I don't think I'd like to be with Daniel in the lions' den.

But if we could talk to all these prophets and tell them how much we long to see their day, I can assure you that they'd look at each one of us and say, "Oh, don't long to come back to us. In fact, we would have given anything if we could have lived in your time." The gospel shines so much brighter now that we can see with greater clarity what they longed to see. Jesus says to His disciples in Matthew 13:16-17:

*Blessed are your eyes because they do see, and your ears because they do hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see but didn't see them, to hear the things you hear but didn't hear them.*

In other words, to be able to see and hear what great, holy and wise people long to see and hear, but couldn't hear—that is a privilege that is inestimable. That's the same logic that's driving Peter in our passage today. He's saying, "We should be filled with joy and gratitude because of what we've been enabled to see in the gospel."

He's writing to Christians who are living on the edge of the Roman Empire. They're not popular in their cities. They're maligned and some of them are suffering in their jobs because of their faith. They're feeling marginalized in their society and starting to wonder, "Is it still worth it to be a Christian?"

Peter wants them to know that what they've been given in Christ is such a precious treasure and they would be fools to let go of it. He reminds them in 1 Peter 1:1-2 of their identity, that they are chosen exiles, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, sanctified in the Spirit and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Then he moves to the great joy they have through the new birth and the inheritance that is theirs, enabling them to rejoice even in the midst of suffering.

But here's the challenge. Peter, being a wise shepherd and teacher, knows how to anticipate the questions those who are hearing him would have. Surely there are some in these congregations in Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, Galatia and Pontus who are reading these words and saying, "Yes, I have received salvation. I know I believe in Jesus. But to be honest, I'm not rejoicing in my trials. I don't rejoice that I'm going through the Refiner's fire. In fact, it's been a long time since I've had inexpressible and glorious joy. So what's wrong with me?"

That's why Peter doesn't stop at verse nine and go straight to verse 13. He's a good pastor. He knows what we're struggling with. He knows there can be a big gap between our identity and our experience. He knows there can be a blockage that prevents gospel truth from sinking in and permeating our lives, so he wants to show us how this gospel truth starts to do that and how we can experience the gospel penetrating our hearts and minds in a way that transforms our attitudes and our behaviors.

So he starts with these words in verse ten: "*Concerning this salvation...*" He's showing us that if we're struggling to rejoice in our trials, there's a way we need to interact with this salvation we've been given that goes beyond just hearing about it and believing it. The way we need to interact with the great salvation is modeled for us by two different exemplars Peter brings forth.

- First, the example of the prophets of the Old Testament. What did they do with the good news of salvation that the Spirit of Christ was indicating within them? Look at the end of verse ten and the beginning of verse 11: "...*searched and carefully investigated. They inquired...*" They're probing into it. They're expending active effort to find this treasure, which is what we need to do with the gospel.
- Then the second group of examples Peter brings before our eyes is in verse 12. I find this to be one of the most fascinating phrases in the whole New Testament: "...*angels long to catch a glimpse of these things,*" Peter says. The angels! These are things into which even angels long to look. Here are these heavenly beings who have never experienced what we've experienced: new birth, forgiveness, salvation. When some of the angels fell and rebelled against God, they were cast into the utter darkness. They were consigned to eternal torment. They're known today as demons and there's no opportunity for salvation for them.

We're getting an insight here into what's going on in the minds of the holy angels, who the Bible tells us are ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are to inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). These angels have been involved in the whole unfolding of God's redemptive plan. They announced the Messiah to the virgin Mary and Joseph, then they joined the heavenly

chorus over Bethlehem when He was born. They ministered to Jesus during His temptations and announced His resurrection at the empty tomb.

Their interest and attention throughout all the ages is focused on God and what He is doing—much more so than our attention is. We get weary and distracted, but not the angels. There's nothing that fascinates them more than the gospel. In fact, there's an interesting detail in Exodus 25:20 where we read about the angelic figures that were to be formed above the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle. It says, "*The faces of the cherubim should be toward the mercy seat.*" In other words, this is an Old Testament picture of the interest angels take in the work of redemption. Peter tells us that of course they long to know more.

That word "long" he uses in 1 Peter 1:12 speaks of a passion, an obsession. They are obsessed with continually gazing upon the gospel. They want to catch a glimpse wherever and whenever God is carrying out His redeeming work in the lives of people. Jesus tells us that whenever one sinner repents, there is rejoicing among the angels in heaven (Luke 15:10). They celebrate over the salvation of people. They are entranced with this gospel of salvation. It's holding their gaze. It's in the present tense, here and now. They continually long to look into it. They love to gaze on the gospel the way you and I love to gaze at a campfire or at fireworks.

The point Peter is making is that we should follow their example. If the prophets searched and investigated and inquired into this great salvation, longing to see what we see, longing to hear what we hear, then shouldn't we take an even greater interest in the gospel, because we've been given more light than they were? Think of the angels, who have served before God's throne day and night from all eternity, having been serving God's people from the beginning and gazing upon this great salvation—if they long to catch a glimpse to see more, if they're obsessed with the gospel, shouldn't we take more than a passing interest or give it more than an hour's attention on Sunday morning?

Here's the thing. It's not that the angels don't know anything about the gospel. Like I said, they've been watching this gospel unfold from the beginning. They know a lot. But consider this thought that I got from Tim Keller. The gospel must be much more than just a body of information. If it was just a bunch of truths you need to kind of master, surely by now the angels would have learned it all. They would have known it all.

It's kind of like when I was teaching a freshman Bible class at the Christian school my kids were attending. Most of my students thought they knew it all. I couldn't tell them anything they hadn't already heard. But then came a time of testing. I'd give them what's called an exam.

More often than not, they did not know nearly as much as they thought they knew. That's what times of testing reveal about us.

We think we know the gospel, but if we know it so well, why do our trials and troubles overwhelm us and smother our joy? If we know the gospel so well, why do we base our identity on what other people say about us instead of what God says? "I've chosen you. I've cleansed you with the blood of My Son. I've sanctified you by My Spirit."

If we know the gospel so well, why do we find that our identity is so often wrapped up in what we accomplish, how we compare to other people, what size our waistline is, what our grades are or what our financial status is? You see, none of us have gotten to the bottom of the gospel, because the gospel is bottomless. We sing:

O the deep, deep love of Jesus  
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free  
Rolling as a mighty ocean  
In its fullness over me

[From "O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus!" by S. Trevor Francis]

The gospel is a kaleidoscope of boundless brilliance. It's revealing the multi-dimensional richness of God's redemption where the gospel is like a multi-sided diamond. Wherever you hold it up to the light, new hues of beauty break through. The gospel is not just a body of information we master, so we never get beyond our need for the gospel. We can only go into a deeper understanding of it.

In fact, the more we realize that salvation isn't just a point in time in our lives, then we move on and kind of forget about it, but daily we need the deliverance of God in our lives, the more we realize and treasure the richness of the gospel. It's like a hymn written by Jeremy Walker that says this:

In dark of night when hell comes knocking  
And demons all around are flocking  
And every sin and fear is mocking  
Lord, save me then, I pray

At break of day when tears are flowing  
And every fear and doubt is growing  
And there seems neither faith nor knowing  
Lord, save me then, I pray

At every hour with sin assailing  
When every tempting thought is wailing

And every hope is quickly failing,  
Lord, save me then, I pray

In that great day with angels soaring  
When praise from every saint is pouring  
I'll look to Christ and cry, adoring,  
Lord, save me now, I pray

That's the gospel. We never go beyond it, only into a deeper understanding of it. So gaze with me a few more minutes on this great salvation. Let's try to catch a few glimpses of what the angels long to see.

### **1. If you had to describe the gospel in one word, choose GRACE.**

Look at 1 Peter 1:10: *"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied about the grace that would come to you..."* The word "grace" is easier to describe than it is to define. I like the acronym: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Or the definition "unmerited favor." It's God freely giving us what we don't deserve. It's God pouring out His kindness on us, cleansing us, then transforming us.

Now, if you're wondering what differentiates Christianity from all the other religions of the world, it's this one word: grace. *"For by grace are you saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV). In fact, if you're wondering, "How do I choose which religion is true out of all the religion of this world?" think about these words from Harry Ironside who says there are really only two religions in the world:

There are not thousands of religions. There are not even hundreds of religions. There are only two: one which tells you that salvation comes as a reward for what you have done and one which tells you that salvation comes by what somebody else does for you. That's Christianity. All the rest fit under the other. And if you think you can get your salvation by your own efforts, then Christianity has nothing to say to you. But if you know you need to be saved, then you are a candidate.

So the focus of the prophets was on the grace that was to be revealed to us who know we need salvation. This grace has appeared in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. That brings me to the second point I want us to gaze on for a few moments.

## **2. If you want to know what the gospel is, look at WHO Jesus is and WHAT Jesus has done.**

If you want to know what the gospel is, look at Who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, because the gospel is a report of something that has happened. We see that in 1 Peter 1:11: *“They inquired into what time or what circumstances...”* Some versions say, “What person or time” that the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating what He was going to come and do.

That in itself is fascinating. Don’t think of the prophets as giving Jesus a job description that He needed to come and fulfill. No, think of Christ Himself telling the prophets long in advance what He was going to come and do. Then in the fullness of time, He came and did it. The One Who was in charge of all this was Christ Himself, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The Creator of the universe had been thinking all this time about how He was going to come to save you and me.

Then in verse 12, *“These things have now been announced—reported or heralded— “to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven...”* So the same Spirit Who revealed God’s redemptive plan to the prophets was at work in those who preached the gospel to these early Christians in Asia Minor, and that same Holy Spirit is at work in those who preach the gospel to us today. I believe He’s working through me right now as I preach the gospel to you.

Here’s the point. This gospel is about a time, a place and a Person. It’s the reporting of something that has happened, the announcing, the heralding of good news. It’s not a philosophy. It’s not an ethical system. It’s not words of wisdom. All of that—philosophy, ethics, wisdom—flows out of the gospel, but the gospel is the good news of what God has accomplished for us in the Person of Jesus Christ. It’s the report of what God has done for you, not a workbook with what you’re supposed to do for Him.

- Islam is not like this. Islam does not depend on what Mohammad did or accomplished on behalf of his followers.
- Buddhism is a system of living that really doesn’t even require that Buddha actually lived.
- Hinduism is not the heralding of real-life events that took place in history that transformed the lives of those who believe.

But Christianity is completely rooted and grounded in history. It’s about the real life of a real Savior Who lived the righteousness we did not live and Who died as a Substitute in our place, sacrificing Himself so that we could be cleansed from our sin, then rising again so He

could give us new life. That's the gospel. That's what sets Christianity apart. It focuses on Who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

### **3. If you want to know where to gaze on the gospel, open the BIBLE.**

Read the Bible. We see in verse 11 that the Spirit of Christ was working within the prophets of the Old Testament, testifying to them about what He was going to do for us. They were very much involved in this process. They weren't in a trance being dictated to; they were engaging their minds. They were searching and investigating. It was like they were a piece in the jigsaw puzzle. They could see a few pieces, but they were searching, investigating and inquiring how this was all going to fit together, how it was all going to come about.

As they were listening to God's word, preaching the word and then recording the word, they were comparing what they were writing with what had been previously written through prophets like Moses. They were standing in God's council and receiving God's words, not only for the people of their generation, but look at verse 12: *"It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you..."*

They were doing all of this for us, so that future generations could gaze on this beautiful panorama—on this jigsaw puzzle in which all the pieces have come together—and see the fulfillment of all they recorded in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Christ was working through these prophets to ensure that the words they have left for us to read are the very words of God. When we gaze upon these words, carefully investigate, ask questions and search for answers in these words, we find that the light of the gospel shines brighter and brighter into our hearts.

Dear friends, if you want to see the gospel in such a way that your suffering is transformed into joy, you need to read the Bible. You need to pay attention to the Scriptures. You need to hear the Word of God. If you're suffering, your Bible is closed and you're staying away from hearing the words of God, don't expect to find joy. But if, when you suffer, you're being driven deeper and deeper into Scripture, your suffering is like the drill that taps into the everlasting wells of salvation and joy that are found in Jesus.

### **4. If you want to understand and find joy in the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see the SUFFERINGS and GLORY of CHRIST.**

When you read this Bible, you need to read it with a certain lens. If you want to understand the Bible and be filled with joy when you read it, ask the Holy Spirit to open your

eyes to see the suffering and glory of Christ, because that's what this Book is all about. The Bible is a gospel-saturated book, not just John 3:16 and a few other gospel texts. No, the whole Book. That's what the Spirit of Christ was testifying in advance to the prophets about. Do you see it at the end of verse 11? *"He testified in advance to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."*

I wish I had more time to take you through all the Scriptures and show you places like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 where you see both the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. You can find passages in Daniel, Zachariah, Micah and many other places that speak of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. We could go through all 150 Psalms and over and over again we'd see the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

But I most want to show you that this theme of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow is not just here and there; it's everywhere in the Bible. It's not just in specific prophecies. It's in the sacrificial system. It's in the tabernacle and all the objects in the tabernacle. It's in the ceremonies. It's in the laws. It's in the wisdom portions of the Bible. None of it will make sense and none of it will transform you unless you learn to read it through the lens of Christ—His sufferings and the glories that would follow.

Even the history of the nation of Israel is pointing to Christ. Think about it. Israel was the one nation God chose to obey His commandments and keep His covenant so they would be the light to all the other nations on earth, drawing the nations to Himself, but they failed. It was all whittled down to one little tribe, the tribe of Judah, but finally they failed too. They were carried off into exile. Then there's a remnant that returns, with people like Simeon and Anna, who are longingly waiting, with the angels gazing intently, for the birth of the one Person Who would be faithful to the commandments, Who would keep the covenant and Who would ensure that the blessings promised to Abraham would come to all the nations of the earth.

Through His sufferings, through His life and death on the cross and because He now is the risen, ascended Lord Who has triumphed over sin and Satan and death—because of the glories that now belong to Him—Jesus alone inherits the promises made to Israel. And all who trust in Jesus get to share in this inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and will not fade away, kept in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4). So whenever you read the Bible through this lens, you see more and more clearly. But when you take away this lens, your eyesight gets blurry. You can become discouraged and weary with what you're reading in Scripture if you do not see it through the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Just think of those disciples on the Emmaus road in Luke 24 right after Jesus had risen from the dead. They were actually walking with Jesus, but they didn't realize Who He was because their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. They said something very ironic to Jesus. They said, "We thought the Messiah would redeem us, but instead He died on a cross." Jesus looked at them and said:

*<sup>25</sup> "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Wasn't it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" <sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.*

First suffering, then glory. That's what all the Scriptures are pointing toward and that's what trips us up. We get stuck in our sufferings and lose the joy because we forget the pattern of our Savior's life. Just like Peter, when Jesus told him it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer, to go to the cross and die, what did Peter say? He said, "Far be it from you, Lord. That shall never happen to you." Peter wanted a glorious Messiah, but not a suffering Messiah. Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man" (Mark 8:31-33).

Now Peter gets it. Now he understands. And he's telling these suffering Christians in Asia Minor—and he's preaching to us as well—that suffering in the way of Christ is the pathway to glory. The cross precedes the crown and this is what the whole Bible is about. This is what the prophets longed to see. This is what the angels longed to gaze into. And this gospel is what has been revealed to us through the Spirit.

Peter is saying, "Gaze on this gospel. Be obsessed with this gospel. Let your heart be permeated with this gospel, then you will find that you are being filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, even while you suffer." Amen.

---

## New Covenant Bible Church

[4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175](https://www.newcbc.org)

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](https://www.newcbc.org)

*All Scriptures quoted directly from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.*

Text provided by [sermontranscribers.com](https://www.sermontranscribers.com) ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.com](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.com)