

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRIVILEGED POSITION

1 PETER 1:10-12

We just got started in the new year in our new series in 1 Peter, we've been in this book for a couple of weeks, and this morning we're going to zoom in on these three verses that we ended the reading with, verses 10-12, so keep your finger there and we're going to dive into the text in just a moment.

But just to review a little bit for us, 1 Peter is a letter written by _____, and it's written to this group of Christians spread across what is sort of the countryside of the Roman Empire, Asia Minor. And Asia Minor is an interesting place. Even though it was fairly rural, it did have several major urban centers, and it lay right on this major overland trade route, so it became a real melting pot of cultures and languages and religions.

And so these Christians in Pontus, and Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, they found themselves in the middle of a predominantly pagan, but also very pluralistic society and culture. A place quite honestly not that much different than the Pacific Northwest. A place where Christian beliefs and worldview and lifestyle were strange and even offensive to a lot of the people. To people these believers worked with, and went to the market with, and live beside in their neighborhoods. And so the church found itself in the midst of a hostile world. It wasn't yet a world where they faced the systemic Roman persecution that the church would see by the end of the first century - where Christians were thrown into prison or killed for their faith, but it was still a world where the Christian story wasn't the favored plot line of culture. A world where these believers were increasingly pushed to the margins of society, alienated in their relationships, a world where they risked economic hardship and social stigma for following Jesus.

Does this sound familiar at all? The reason we're studying 1 Peter, church, the reason we need to hear Peter's message, is that the world we find ourselves in looks more and more like Asia Minor. There was a time when the Christian story held a privileged, central place in American culture and society. It's not that long ago that America in a lot of ways resembled the Christendom that had existed for such a long time in Continental Europe. Where civic life and church life were interconnected. Even people who weren't Christians found themselves wrapped up in the trappings of Christianity. Your average person was at church for some of the most wonderful and most difficult moments of life: weddings, funerals, baptisms, dedications. The church was the counselor of society. But that time is long gone. Christendom, at least as it once existed in America, is dead.

Now we can debate the positives and negatives of that death, but I don't think it's helpful for us to just lament it. I mean, this is just the reality, the story that we find ourselves in in 2016.

Instead of being central now, the Christian story has been pushed out, and Christians have been

relegated to the margins of the cultural narrative. And so as followers of Jesus we can feel marginalized, insignificant, cultural outsiders, and that results in this spectrum of emotions for us, from anger and frustration to timidity and fear.

But this morning in these three verses there is one thing that Peter wants to communicate us - and it's meant to strengthen us, to fill us with confidence and courage in the world we find ourselves in, and what he wants to tell us is this: If you are a Christian here this morning, you are in a privileged position in God's story. You're right in the middle of the drama of redemption. Brothers and sisters, even though from your perspective you feel on the margins of the story our culture is telling, even though you seem insignificant in the narrative going on around you, the way things really are, the true reality of things, is that you have a privileged position, right at the heart of what God is doing in the world.

Peter unpacks that statement in three ways, and we're going to follow Peter's lead. So grab your Bibles and turn back to these verses with me, and I want you to see three things this morning. Three ways that you, as a Christian, are privileged in God's story.

1. You have a privileged position in God's story historically.

Let's start pulling Peter's argument apart a little bit beginning in verse 10.

v. 10: "Concerning this salvation..." Peter says. What salvation is Peter talking about? Well, it's the salvation that he's been painting this beautiful picture of for the first 9 verses of his letter. This is the living hope that he's been laying out for us - the reality that because of the mercy and grace of God, you and I, even though we were dead in sin, unable and unwilling to respond to God, we have been made alive through Jesus, and now have been given an inheritance that's being kept for us, and that we are being kept for. This the salvation that we rejoice in in v. 9, with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

Peter's been pulling out these treasures from his bag, just laying them out on the table one after another. And he's trying to remind these believers of the wonder of what their salvation is, and the glories of what it will be. And you know it is so easy for us in this world to become dulled to these truths of what God has done for us in Jesus.

We were in Seattle the day after Christmas having a family shopping day — it's sort of become a Christmas tradition for us, and as we walked along Pine St. toward Westlake Mall, you know it's a busy Saturday after Christmas so the sidewalks are just packed with people, I mean it's Seattle right, so there are all kinds of crazy things going on. Police stopping to talk to a homeless guy, there's a Caribbean playing Christmas carols on the steel drums, and someone dressed up as a Storm Trooper with a Darth Vader mannequin that you can get a picture with, and there's Jehovah's Witnesses with their rack of literature, and this guy with a huge sign listing every sin people need to repent of, and as we're walking I'm taking in all of this sensory information, and it is passing through my brain, but it's all getting filtered out. I'm not stopping for any of it, because it's not registering as important to what's primary in my mind. I

mean I am focused on getting to Nordstrom Rack their 90% deals.

And you know, our salvation can easily become just like all that activity on the streets of Seattle. The gospel can become just this white noise around us that we start to filter out because it doesn't register as relevant to what is primary in our minds — getting that next promotion, managing these little rebels that have taken up residence in my house called children, owning your own home, having a comfortable retirement.

But the gospel isn't background noise for Peter. To Peter, what Jesus has done and will do in us is the most relevant thing there is. This is what he leads with. He's trying to tell us that of all things this is the one thing we can't miss, the one thing we can't afford to just walk past, we need to know and cherish in our deepest parts what God has done in saving us.

And so Peter is mounting up statement after statement at the beginning of Chapter 1 about the wonder of salvation. And then in v. 10 Peter comes to his *climactic* and summary statement on God's saving work. "Concerning this salvation..." he says, "the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories."

OK, there is a ton going on here, but what's at the heart of what Peter is saying? What he's saying to these believers, and to us, is this - he's saying, be encouraged, be strengthened, because even though you seem insignificant in the culture's story that isn't ultimate reality. What is real truth is that in the history of God's story you have a privileged position. In fact, you are living in the very time and age that the prophets prophesied about. All of God's story from creation to Christ has been the prologue, the introduction to, this grace that you have now received through the gospel.

This grace goes all the way back to the garden. We see it in the *proto-evangelion*, the first gospel in Genesis 3, when God promises a deliverer. One of Eve's offspring who through his suffering will crush the serpent. It goes back to the flood when God delivered Noah and his family from his wrath through the ark. We see this grace in God's calling and promise through Abraham, that there would be one of his offspring who would bring God's blessing to the whole world. This grace is visible in God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, in his provision of the tabernacle and the sacrificial system as a means for him to be present with his people. We see this grace in God's steadfast love, his *hesed*, his covenant faithfulness toward his people in spite of their sin and rebellion and idolatry. This grace is on display in God's promises to David of a son who would be King forever. And this is the grace predicted the Psalmists and by Isaiah and Jeremiah and Zechariah and Malachi, a grace that would come through the suffering of God's servant, a grace that would give new hearts to God's people, a new covenant where God would cleanse his people and write his law on their hearts. The grace that comes to us through the person and work of Jesus is the great hope and expectation of the Old Testament.

When Peter says the prophets prophesied about this grace, he's not just talking about the books of

the Bible we think of as prophets, he's talking about the entire Hebrew Bible. And what Peter is saying is that now, what God demonstrated in the Old Testament and what the prophets declared has now been made fully known to us. What was then concealed has now been revealed. What was only seen then in shadows and types now has form and substance. What the Old Testament saints only saw from a distance, what they only grabbed hold of through the eyes of faith, we are privileged to have tasted and seen.

Peter is trying to teach us what Jesus' taught him. In Matt. 13, Jesus says to his disciples, "For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." What's Jesus saying? He's saying you are in a privileged position! You have heard and seen what they only longed for.

Paul says something similar in 1 Cor. 10. "Now these things that happened to them (he's been talking all about the exodus and the wilderness experience of God's people in the Old Testament), happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

Look back at our text, v. 12: "It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you..." There were serving you...

You know, it's so easy for us to begin to think of salvation merely as a means to personal happiness and fulfillment. I'm not a philosophy expert, but I know that from the time of the enlightenment in western thought the individual has become a higher and higher value in the way we think. And that isn't all bad, but as that has progressed we've moved through modernism and the highly individualized values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness we moved into what some call post-modernism, but what it really is is modernism on steroids where the volume is just turned up on modernism's individualistic values. And so now it's not merely the pursuit of happiness that is most important, but authenticity to the personal self is valued above everything.

And the reason I share this, is that I want us to recognize that unless we let the Bible shape our thinking, this individualistic cultural story will inevitably shape us. And so if that's what happens, salvation becomes simply an experience of personal authenticity. This is what works for me. Faith becomes only about existential fulfillment - personal contentment and peace and hope for the afterlife rather than something greater. And really what we're saying is that God exists to complete my story.

And what Peter is saying to is that salvation brings all of those things for us, but it is about a story much bigger than ourselves. If *all* you see in salvation is personal fulfillment you won't be able to bear the margins of the cultural story, because what happens when you don't quite feel fulfilled? You need to see that God's is the true story of history. This is a story that has been going on since before the world began about how God is rescuing his broken creation and his broken people. And within the history of that story, by God's grace, we have a privileged place. Peter's saying, "see your life from history's

perspective.” Let that strengthen your heart this morning.

But brothers and sisters, beyond having a privileged place in God’s story historically, we also have a privileged place in God’s story cosmically.

2. We have a privileged place in God’s story cosmically.

I’m sure you caught this last little phrase in the text, because it grabs our attention doesn’t it? “things into which angels long to look.”

Well, first of all, what are these things into which angels long to look? Well, they’re the things we’ve been talking about, the wonders of our salvation, the incredible plan that God is carrying out to save sinners like you and me.

Now when we see the word “angels” here we have to be careful of picture that we get in our minds. This is not Roma Downey moving through small town America helping people, it isn’t Nicolas Cage falling in love with Meg Ryan (if you’ve seen *City of Angels*), this isn’t Clarence getting his wings. these angels are glorious heavenly beings that would cause you to fall down in fear if you saw them. And the picture that Peter is giving us is that these angels are standing and staring.... they are amazed at what God is doing in saving a sinful people. in fact the word here for “longing” gives us the sense that they are envious (not in a sinful way), but they are captivated with God’s work in saving us. You see, this salvation is something that isn’t given to them. Jesus didn’t die for angels. God isn’t redeeming heavenly beings. Humans are the created order that God has determined to set his love on, and the angels wonder at it!

God’s saving work captivates cosmic attention. This is what Paul says in Ephesians 3 (3:8-10). What’s Paul saying? He’s saying that God’s plan to rescue a sinful people somehow puts on display his glory to the heavenly realms!

So what’s Peter’s point in telling us this? Why would he bring the activity of the angels into this passage? Well, just as he’s already reminded us to see our lives from *history’s* perspective, I think he wants to say here, “see your life from heaven’s perspective.” You know there is this temptation — and our current political climate doesn’t help much — for Christians to be angry or frustrated, or to start to mope or feel sorry for ourselves. And to be honest we do that whether we’re suffering systemic hardship from being Christians in culture, or we do it if we’re facing the hardship of being home with the flu. And the same is true of these believers Peter was writing to. I mean, they were getting their property taken from them, they were being slandered and ostracized, and daily, just like us, they were facing the average everyday hardship of living in a broken world. And Peter is saying that even in the hardships they are facing, they are in a position the angels envy.

So brothers and sisters, you are in a privileged position in God’s story historically, you are in a privileged position cosmically, and I think lastly Peter would say to you, you are in a privileged position Christologically.

What do I mean by that? Well look at the text for a moment, and I want you to listen to how saturated this passage is with the work of Jesus. Do you see what's going on here? Peter is saying that when the writers of the Old Testament wrote about the grace of God, when they saw the grace of God at work, when they predicted Jesus' arrival and all that would mean for God's people, it was Jesus himself who was revealing these realities to them!

Jesus doesn't just suddenly show up on the scene when we open up the book of Matthew, he's been at work as the second member of the Trinity throughout the Old Testament, pointing to himself as the centerpiece of God's story. You see, we have a privileged position in God's story, but Jesus is at its center.

After his resurrection, on the Emmaus Road, Jesus reminded two of his disciples of this in Luke 24. (Luke 24:25-26). Do you hear how Jesus' words rhyme with Peter's? The prophets spoke of Jesus, and what did they speak of? His suffering and his glory.

You see God has determined to save his people in an utterly unexpected way. He sent his King not to come and conquer, at least initially, he sent him to suffer and die. To live as a human like us in every way, to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. To be stricken and afflicted. To bear in his body the curse of sin that we deserve, in order to bring us home. But the story doesn't end there, does it? This Jesus who spends his last breath on the cross, three days later has new life breathed into him, and through that new life, he is able to breathe life into us. And after spending 40 days preaching and teaching his disciples, Jesus ascended into heaven where he sits as our mediator - waiting for the time he'll return in glory and reign as King forever.

And this is salvation. It's that we are united to Jesus in his perfect life, and in his death, and one day we will be united with him in his glory forever. We are in a privileged position in God's story primarily because we are in Christ. And Peter is constantly reminding us of our connection to Jesus in his suffering and in his glory. And the testimony of God's work in Peter's life is that this was the very Peter who, when Jesus foretold his suffering, rebuked him! He refused to recognize the arrival of a suffering Messiah. And yet this same Peter, as the Holy Spirit has changed and transformed him, calls us in this letter to be like Jesus, suffering as he did. Rejoice as you share in Christ's sufferings he says in 4:13 - that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Suffering and glory - this is what we are called to. But the only way we can live that out is to see our lives in light of God's story.

There's a scene in Tolkien's book the Return of the King, Sam and Frodo have just left the Fellowship of the Ring to go on their own into Mordor, into the heart of Mt. Doom to throw this ring of power into the fire and destroy it forever. And ahead of them on this journey they know they will almost daily face death and despair, but the mission has to be finished. And as they sit around the fire on one of their first nights in Mordor Sam is keep the night watch, and he's lying awake pondering what's ahead, thinking of his love for Frodo and his commitment to protect him, and he looks up into the dark night sky

and even in the blackness of Mordor, for a moment he sees peeking through the clouds the beauty of a twinkling white star.

And Tolkien writes: As he looked up out of the forsaken land, the beauty of it smote his heart,, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach."

Brothers and sisters, the story of the world, the story of our culture, hardship, trial, suffering - these are only a passing thing. There is a light and beauty beyond its reach. You see, we are part of a much longer, much deeper story beyond the reach of the shadow. And if you've tasted of God's salvation, you will one day taste of that glory.

let's pray.