

Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: Thankfulness

Pray in quietness, pray in the midst of your work;

Pray while you are waiting, pray while you are doing,

Pray while you are thinking, pray while you are conversing

Pray while you are standing back, pray while you are going forward

Pray that God's will is done in every circumstance

Pray that life will be transformed by the very presence of God in His world

For myself

Pray against the temptations you experience, especially the temptation to let go of your faith and forget that your God is there by your side every moment of the day ...

For others

Where are You, Jesus, when children die and parents grieve? Where are You, Jesus, when the poor are downtrodden and the rich take advantage? Where are You, Jesus, when real people are treated as statistics and justice is a lottery? Open our eyes, Lord God, to the way You work through countless millions who are Your church, Your 'body', through people who love You and seek to live not according to the ways of the world, but according to the Gospel priority of love, compassion and care by which You lived. May the practical witness of Your people now change this dark and blighted world for the better. Dear Jesus, reveal Yourself to this world again we pray. AMEN

Meditation

Though the world hosts evil and is pregnant with trouble,
I will give thanks to the Lord forever:

Though my enemies tear me apart, body, soul and spirit,
I will take refuge in the love of my Saviour:

Though I am weary from Satan's harassment and pursuit,
I will find my rest in the Lord my God:

Though what I have done has made me guilty in God's sight,
I will trust my life to His candid judgement:

Though injustices within the world surround all the faithful,
I will work each day with honest intent.

Though the minds and hearts of the righteous are tested,
I will place my faith in Christ Jesus my Lord.

Though the world in its fallen mischief, digs a pit and falls in;
I will give thanks to the Lord and praise His Name!

Bible Passage

1 Peter 1:10-12

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who preached about the grace that was to be yours searched with diligence and great care, ¹¹ trying to find out the circumstances and the time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when revealing beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, informing you about what you now know because of those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which even angels long to see.

Review

The remarkable thing about this letter is that it was written by Peter, a man whose spiritual insight was gained by living and working with Jesus Himself. In these verses, Peter glories in the work of God throughout the centuries to both deliver the Gospel and reveal Himself in Jesus (1:10-12). More than that, he highlights the history of Israel and the work of the prophets (1:10), who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret God's Word to His people.

This passage is fascinating. In a nutshell, Peter shows us how Old Testament Scripture point us directly to Christ. He explains that the salvation so gloriously received by his readers was revealed in scripture through the prophets, who '*searched with diligence and great care*' (1:10) and were led by the Holy Spirit to reveal '*beforehand the sufferings of Christ ...*' (1:11). Their purpose was to serve '*not themselves but you*' (1:12), and to prove God's Word was not just to people of their own times, but to the church, after Jesus had come. His point is simple. The Gospel is not just a new religion concocted to explain Jesus' death and resurrection; it is God's plan revealed consistently in the Old Testament, especially by His servants, the prophets. Therefore, the words of preacher and prophet combine to prove the Gospel message, '*informing you about what you now know because of those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit*' (1:12).

This is a powerful explanation of the eternal truth of the Gospel; it makes sense and it is directly applicable today. But Peter did not just think this up; Jesus made the same connection with the Old Testament prophets in His own teaching. If we examine all Jesus' scriptural quotes, most of them are from the prophets (e.g. Matt 11:10, 12:39, 13:35, Luke 1:46f.), and the majority of these are from Isaiah. (e.g. Matt 4:15, 11:23, 12:18, Luke 2:25f. 3:4,5, 10:15 and many more). Indeed, he said of Himself that he came '*not to abolish but to fulfil ... the law and the prophets*' (Matt 5:17). He frequently referred to the Old Testament

prophets to explain God's Word, and by contrast, the Pharisees were only able to see God's revelation in scripture in terms of 'Law' (Matt 12:1-8).

Here is a straightforward message for us to take to heart if we wish to understand Scripture in the same way as Jesus and Peter. Whilst the whole Old Testament is Scripture, if we wish to understand what God is saying through it, then we must focus on the prophets. Not every prophet speaks about the Messiah, and Isaiah is certainly a major source of inspiration about God's desire to save His people through His 'Suffering Servant' (see Isaiah 40-55); but the principle is simple enough. The Christian will find God's will in the Old Testament by looking at it through the eyes of the prophets.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V10 'the prophets who preached'

Other translations:

'the prophets who spoke' (NIV)

'the prophets who prophesied' (NRSV)

In Greek this phrase is 'the prophets who prophesied', however, the verb 'to prophesy' does indeed also mean 'to preach', 'to predict', or 'to declare God's message'. I have translated this 'preached' here because I feel that the church today has forgotten the fact that preaching and prophecy are extremely closely related in the Bible, and it helps to be reminded of this.

V12 'It was revealed to them ...'

Verse 12 is a complicated verse to translate, and I have simplified it for clarity. A literal translation would go something like this; 'It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you in respect of those things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you the Good News by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven - things into which angels long to look!' My translation above simplifies each phrase in order to bring out the meaning of each part of the verse.

Further Comments

History, salvation, and the grace of God

Peter's message was that the Gospel of salvation was not something dreamt up by the disciples to keep the memory of Jesus alive. It was crucial for the early Christians to make a direct connection between the message of salvation and Old Testament scripture, so that they could prove that God was entirely consistent throughout history. In the first century AD new religions were far more common than even today, and claims about the nature of God were regarded as academic and philosophical. In that sense, the social landscape of the Roman Empire was as much a mixture as ours today.

Some will complain that Peter's picture is too optimistic, and many of the Old Testament prophets do not speak about the Messiah at all; but this exposes a limited and over-literal approach to God's Word. For example, Jonah and Amos do not mention the Messiah at all, while others mention the Messiah through the use of imagery, for example, Isaiah's description of the '*suffering servant*' (Isaiah 53). However, the whole Old Testament is

nothing if it is not a 'salvation history' of God's people leading to the coming of salvation through God's Messiah, and it anticipates this from beginning to end.

The testimony of Scripture

The Old Testament is a long story stretching back to the very beginnings of time (Genesis 1-11), but its main theme is the gradual self-revelation of God through history and through His relationship with people, especially the people of Israel. It does not take much to discover that the main plot of this story is that God seeks to bridge the gap between Himself and the whole world, a gap created by the Fall (Gen 3). God firstly chose to establish a relationship with people through the descendants of Abraham; the Israelites. Throughout the story of this relationship, God continued to 'save' the Israelites and give his gracious love to them, despite their sins, but the Old Testament draws to a conclusion with an amazing dramatic tension created by the expectation of the Messiah (Malachi 4). On the one hand, reconciliation between people and God remains incomplete, but on the other hand, the prophets say that God will not give up on His people, and some of them speak specifically of the coming of God's Messiah who will complete God's work on earth!

The sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow

So when Peter says '*the prophets who preached about the grace that was to be yours searched with diligence ... revealing beforehand the sufferings of Christ ...*' (1:10,11), he is not misunderstanding the particular themes of the individual prophets (such as Amos, who never mentions the Messiah). Rather, he perceives the whole picture of the Old Testament to which the individual prophets contribute; for example, Amos illustrates the idea of the justice of God at His coming. So although Isaiah is the only prophet who speaks about the sufferings of God's servant to win salvation, this prophecy is built on the Old Testament truth that God uses the suffering of His people to achieve their salvation.

Prophecy and looking into the future

Some have difficulty with the idea that the prophets could see into the future, because many of them clearly spoke about the consequences of what was going on in their own times. How then can Peter possibly say that these prophets '*spoke beforehand about ... the glories that would follow?*' Taking the example of Amos again, his prophecies seem to be strongly located in his own days, and he clearly had a message of justice and liberation for the people of his day (e.g. see Amos 7). However, Amos' message about the '*Day of the Lord*' (see Amos 2:6f, 5:18, 5:21f) is vital to the developing understanding in Israel and later at the time of Christ, of the end of time and the return of the Saviour in glory. We do not have space to go through every prophet to justify Peter's general comments here, but all of them have a message that keys into God's eternal plan of salvation.

The eternal Gospel

In verse 12, Peter says of the prophets; '*It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, informing you about what you now know*'. In other words, Peter believed that the prophets knew full well that their messages were for others and for future times. In the same way as we have done above, we could look back at individual prophets to see whether their words show evidence for this, but that would be to miss the point. The prophets all had their place in speaking to God's people in such a way as to bring salvation to the whole world. God's plan spans history and has been put into effect by means of His Holy Spirit, and it is a plan which continues to this day. Peter tells us that the prophets were key people caught up in this great plan, and even though some may not have known this, others such as Isaiah certainly did. Ezekiel, for example, was caught up by God's Spirit both physically and in visions, and was shown things about the future for which he needed an explanation before he could pass it on (Ezekiel 2f. etc.)!

Peter's point is that God is at work by His Holy Spirit, unveiling His plan for the salvation of people and eventually the salvation of the world. It has been revealed firstly through the people of Israel and their leaders and kings, then through prophets. In due time it was revealed completely through Jesus, and after this through the apostles and preachers of the Gospel. It has now become available to all people who have been touched by the grace of God for salvation by faith (Romans 1:16,17). It is an incredible fact that each of us has a glimpse of God's eternal plan of salvation through the grace of Jesus that has been given to us and the power of the Holy Spirit that has come to rest on us. As Peter says here (1:12); we know of no evidence that even angels know the full glory of salvation! After all, godly angels do not know what it is like to be 'saved', and we see things '*which even angels long to see!*' (1:12).

Discipleship

Application

Understanding Scripture, and God's message of salvation

These few verses of Peter are extremely important both as part of a letter which tells us much about the Gospel, but also because what Peter says here is no casual remark about the prophets. Peter reveals here one of the most important and fundamental things about understanding the Old Testament as the Word of God. If we are to understand how the Old Testament connects with the New and tells us about God's eternal plan of salvation, then we will find this by studying the prophets. Let me be clear; the Old Testament has many treasures which teach us many things, indeed the laws of Moses tell us about the moral nature of God's universe, for example. However, for an understanding of the essential message of God for the salvation of our souls and the eternal Kingdom of God, it is to the prophets we must go, for all the reasons I have given in this study.

Being careful about using the Old Testament

I fear that too many people use the Old Testament in a rather 'pick and mix' manner, but that is unhelpful, and sometimes dangerous. There are good reasons why Christians today do not use Levitical law for worship, for example, and it is because the prophets themselves tell us that this old system of worship is dead without the re-created heart to be found through God's Messiah. The sooner we realise that the Holy Spirit used the prophets to explain the human experience of tragedy and failure amongst God's people, and through this reveal the salvation of our God, the better. Then we will use the Old Testament properly, and look in the right places for what it has to teach us. We can thank Peter for drawing this to our attention!

Ideas for what to do

- Turn back in your Bible to some passage of the Old Testament prophets with which you are familiar. Read them again in the light of this study and see whether it makes a difference!
- Find a friend with whom you can talk about the blessings of God's grace and the privilege of your faith. All of us need to do this from time to time to refresh our faith and our confidence in the Lord.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Does this scripture challenge your understanding of the work of the Old Testament Prophets? In what ways, and how do you think they worked?
2. Is it important to you to know how the message of the Gospel has been handed down to you?
3. How do you propose to hand the message of the Gospel on to others who come after you, or is it your responsibility? Whose responsibility is it?

Final Prayer

Great and Mighty Lord; fix my heart on You with such intensity that no temptations of the evil one can shake me. Keep my feet firmly on Your pathway, guide me securely through my troubles, and bring me safely into Your complete salvation and my journey's end. I ask this through Jesus Christ my Lord; AMEN