

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 28, Number 27

July 8, 2012



## Salvation Now

*Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:9–12, KJV 1900)*

Living in our relatively safe cocoon, we can hardly grasp the depth of comfort that Peter's first readers received from these words. Intense persecution, even death, was commonplace in the first century for faithful believers in Christ. Despite the threat of death hanging over their heads, the joyful comfort of these words far outweighed the peril. I pray that we never face persecution for our faith, though I fear that it may be closer than we think. Even if we never face such persecution, we live daily with countless impediments and threats to our faith. We can overcome them by embracing the same truth that Peter wrote to his first readers.

First of all, Peter's readers experienced a real "Salvation" of substance and immeasurable benefit. Secondly, it was a "Now" salvation. Peter uses a present tense verb, "Receiving," and he further emphasizes this point by "...end...." What he describes was not an incremental or side benefit to a still-future "Salvation." They presently received it and rejoiced in its blessings, despite intense persecution. In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter describes a part of this salvation that relates to baptism. He again uses the present tense verb with the added emphasis of the adverb "...now...." Baptism "...now..." saves those who have been baptized and have remained faithful to their baptism and the related commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name they were baptized. If Scripture uses the word "Save" in its various forms to refer to one, and only one salvation, then this verse undeniably associates water baptism with our eternal life. Such a view leads directly to the unbiblical view of salvation by works, and not by grace alone, for none can claim to possess the saving of which Peter writes who have not taken the step of faithful submission to baptism. However, Peter adds an emphatic qualification in the same verse that rejects this notion, "...not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God...." Over the years in discussion with folks who do believe that water baptism is necessary for eternal life, I have heard more than one such person explain "...not the putting away of the filth of the flesh..." as referring to literal dirt on the body.

One person further emphasized his belief that Peter was saying that baptism is not to wash dirt from under your fingernails. If we take a few moments to check the appearance of the word "Filth" in Scripture, we readily discover that Scripture never uses the word to refer to physical dirt on the body. It always refers to a far deeper filth related to one's sinful behavior. Peter's point is clear. Water baptism indisputably "...now saves us..." but the "Now salvation" of which he writes does not refer to one's eternal salvation or deliverance from the damning effects of sin. It saves the faithful believer who is baptized by providing "...the answer of a good conscience toward God." By our being baptized, we identify ourselves with our Lord who suffered, died, and arose from the grave to put away the "...filth of the flesh" that was in us and that held us at a guilty distance from our righteous God. The regenerated conscience seeks to honor God for that work, and baptism answers that longing.

What can we learn of this salvation from Peter's teaching?

1. Old Testament prophets knew of it, but they only knew enough of it to inquire of the Lord about it, to search diligently to learn more about it. In the end, they knew that it was associated with the "...Spirit of Christ..." in them. When the Christ came, this salvation would become a reality for godly believers, not something yet future that those future believers would yet ponder to understand or know more fully.
2. It relates clearly to God and to His grace. Those Old Testament saints enjoyed God's rich grace. They received no less of grace that saved them from their sins and secured their eternity with God than you and I. But they did not receive this grace that came to faithful believers only after Jesus came and finished His work.
3. While this grace enlightened those Old Testament saints to both Jesus' sufferings and glory, its full knowledge and the greater blessings that came with it remained a

matter of inquiry, intense inquiry to be sure, for them.

4. The same grace that those Old Testament prophets sought to know more fully is now freely revealed to the children of God who hear and believe the gospel.
5. This present salvation is uniquely associated with the gospel. It comes from heaven, not from the private opinions or thoughts of those who preach it.
6. It is so unique that angels in heaven observe it and, like those Old Testament prophets, cannot fully grasp it. They "...desire to look..." into it.

*Unto whom it was revealed....* God revealed enough to them that they knew that He had a greater revelation in store for His people who followed the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. Peter further explains this point.

*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* 1 Peter 1:13 (KJV 1900)

When we hear and believe the gospel, we do so based on a present "...revelation of Jesus Christ..." one that completes the partial revelation that caused those Old Testament prophets to seek to understand more of what God revealed to them and directed them to prophesy.

We so easily belittle our present blessings by our failure to grasp what Peter here writes. How many times have we heard sincere believers speak of Old Testament saints such as Noah, Abraham, or David with "Oh, what a blessing it would have been to have lived in their time and to have known them." Others show at least a hint of more preference with "How blessed it would have been to have lived in Jesus' time on earth and to have known Him then." Peter rejects both ideas and reminds his readers that God reserved a far greater blessing for subsequent followers of the Lamb.

*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.* (1 Peter 1:8, KJV 1900)

*...but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.* This present salvation which we receive, which is the end of our faith, is specifically associated with our hearing the gospel. Countless children of God who have not heard the gospel do not know of this joyful truth. Their eternal life is no less secure and certain through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the perfect and effectual work of the Holy Spirit than yours or mine, but their lack of the gospel's bright light leaves them without

this knowledge, without this present salvation. The great blessing of the gospel is described by Scripture as "Light," not "Life." Our new birth, our eternal life, comes directly to us through the work of the Holy Spirit, not through an indirect or intermediate agent. The Holy Spirit indeed brings the light of the knowledge of the gospel and this end-of-your-faith "...now..." salvation to us through the agency of faithful preachers of the gospel. We should avoid confusing the light of gospel knowledge with the eternal life that the Holy Spirit brings to us by His exclusive and sovereign work. John 5:25 speaks of the voice of the Son of God, not merely a preacher's words about Him. Jesus' use of the "...wind..." in John 3:8 is a specific reference to the Holy Spirit's sovereign work in accomplishing the new birth. The natural wind doesn't consult with humans as to when and where it will blow. It doesn't need human approval to blow. It doesn't wait for a human decision to accept its blowing. It blows! We are observers of its blowing, but we are neither causative nor even instrumental in its blowing. So, Jesus says, is the new birth. In fact, He emphasizes that this is the case with "...every one that is born of the Spirit." This method of bringing about the new birth is not true of some who are born again. Jesus tells us that it is the case with "...every one that is born of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit doesn't need multiple intermediate agents or methods to bring about the new birth. He causes it precisely the same way in every one who is born again. And His operation in bringing about the new birth is like the wind blowing. We are observers, but we are neither causers nor agents in the process.

The supremely blessed child of God today who has heard and believed the gospel, though he/she has never seen Jesus in His literal human flesh is, according to Peter, the recipient of the greatest blessing, that unique salvation that Old Testament prophets sensed and sought to understand—that even angels desire to know more fully. And, though we do not now see our Lord in His human form with our eyes, yet, as we believe the truth of the gospel's revelation of Him, we "...rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Peter's readers so rejoiced, even in the heat of persecution.

Peter writes of only one day that shall exceed the day in which we live—the day in which all believers since His resurrection and ascension live—and that day shall be the day when He returns to complete the final chapter of His glorious purpose. (Acts 1:9-11; 2 Peter 3, the whole chapter) When we recall our blessed situation in the light of this revelation, we have the ability to rise above every trial of our faith, be it in the form of persecution, of disease, of loss, or of anything else. (Romans 8:35-39) The next time you face bad news or encounter a fierce temptation from Satan and his minions, run as quickly as you can to these Scriptures and settle your mind in this glorious truth. It shall surely "Save" you from the trail of your faith.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor