SONGS:
CLOSE:

Better Off Than We Thought

Profiling Christians – Part 6 of 6

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:9-12
AIM: To show that New Testament believers enjoy a place of great privilege as they have received the revelation concerning salvation in Jesus Christ that neither the prophets nor the angels received.

INTRODUCTION:

A. Identity theft is often in the news today.

According to CreditCards.com, data breaches (i.e. the stealing of personal information, bank details and credit card info.) totalled 1,540 incidents in 2014, which led to 1 billion data records being compromised. There were 32 data records lost of stolen every second in 2014.

Identity theft occurs when someone steals your name and other personal information and uses your identity for their own benefit.

It's your identity – and you really don't want anybody else using it for his or her own purposes.

B. When you think about, however, the Christian is, by definition, someone who has taken someone else's identity.

1. The believer has even taken the name of someone else and call themselves by that name – "Christian." And they call themselves by that name because they have taken the identity of someone else—namely, Jesus Christ.
2. If you are a "Christian" not only do you have an identity that you weren't born with and that you didn't earn the right to use, as a Christian you've actually used His identity to get into His checking account, as it were, and you're using all the benefits of His identity – including, in the end, His own eternal inheritance.
3. But in reality though, it wasn't identity theft—it was an identity gift!
   *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and not of yourselves, it is **the GIFT** of God:"*
   a. The believers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia have lost their identity in their community.
   b. They've lost their status … their standing … their earthly benefits, their sense of significance.

C. If anyone at that time was considered the most unfortunate and underprivileged person on the earth it would have had to been the Christian.

1. But Peter feels differently. In fact, he writes to them in **verse 4 of chapter 1** that they have an inheritance by means of their personal salvation in Christ, they can according to **verses 7-8** be joyfully content not matter what.
2. The truth of the matter is, these believers – and Christians to this day – may not feel all that privileged.

And what Peter does next, is pause … as if to say, "And speaking about your position of great privilege in Christ through salvation … let's talk about just how privileged you are."

And he does just that by bringing to our attention <u>THREE KEY THOUGHTS</u> that are easily overlooked.

I. FIRST, OUR PRIVILEGES HAVE BEEN THE FIXATION OF PROPHETS – VS. 10-12

That's a long way of saying that the New Testament Christians, even though they were dispersed and rejected, they were better off than even the Old Testament prophets.

And what Peter takes on at this point is a review for these scattered believers how much greater their advantages were them than the Old Testament prophets.

Basically, he is saying, "You have it better than the prophets!"

Let me unpack that statement by making <u>three observations</u>:

A. For one thing, the prophets examined the Scriptures, which were not completed at that time.

1. While these suffering believers would have easily been tempted to think how great it would be for God to speak out loud to them, like He did to many of His prophets. Peter basically implies that the prophets would love to trade places with them.
2. Notice, **verse 10** again, all they could do was make careful enquiries and diligent searches.
    a. To have *"searched diligently"* comes from a verb that means to mount an intensive investigation, to study diligently and with painstaking effort try and find the answers to riddles.[1]
    b. The second word concerning the prophets who *"have enquired"* is used of a lion following the scent of its prey; in other words, the prophets, with all diligence, spent their lives hunting down the implications of all they had written.[2]
3. From Moses to Malachi, the prophets were given information about a coming age of grace in which they knew that large numbers of Gentiles would be saved.
    a. They had a concept of Calvary and certainly the prophecies related to a final atonement.
    b. But the prophets knew nothing of the symbolisms of the annual Jewish feasts, especially of Passover and Pentecost as it related to the death of Jesus or the establishment of churches.
    c. The truth about Jews and Gentiles being one body in the local church was a hidden mystery in the Old Testament, of which Paul wrote about in Ephesians 3.
        1) The Old Testament prophet looked forward by faith to a sacrifice on Mount Calvary where Messiah would suffer and die (as found in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53)
        2) They also could see the mountain peak just beyond Mount Calvary, called Mount Olivet, where their Messiah would return in glory (Zechariah 14).
        3) But from their vantage point they couldn't see the valley in between those two mountain peaks … a valley, we call the dispensation of grace – or – the church age – that has lasted now for over 2,000 years.
4. So who is better off? The Old Testament prophet who waited on the voice or vision from God – who had scant revelation written down about the future – who awaited a kingdom but knew nothing of the church?
    a. It's as if Peter is reminding the believer that they have been given the completed revelation.

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[1] John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of Peter* (Kregel, 2005), p. 55
[2] Ibid

b. By the time this New Testament is completed, the believer will know the next events in the prophetic line-up include:

- The rapturing of believers,
- The coming tribulation as God judges the world and prepares Israel for restoration;
- The coming millennial kingdom where we will reign with Christ on earth;
- The battle against Christ where He will be victorious
- The destruction of the earth and all creation being dissolved in a fire ball of judgment
- The final judgment of the unbelieving world
- The eternal glory for the believer as they enter new heavens and a new earth forever.

5. The prophets were trying to put together the puzzle of human history, but they were missing so many pieces.
   a. Have you ever put a puzzle together and you got near the end and you were missing some critical pieces … the picture just wouldn't come together … the puzzle couldn't be completed.
   b. Beloved – what an advantage … you have the incredible privilege of having been given all the pieces to the puzzle … you have God's sufficient and completed Word.

Peter first tells us, the prophets examined the Scriptures, which were not completed, concerning our salvation.

B. Secondly, the prophets pointed to the Saviour whose name they didn't know.

Notice verse 11 again, *"Searching what* [i.e. they were seeking what person – it is an interrogative pronoun that can mean who or which one], *or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify* [indicate], *when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."*

1. In other words, the prophets knew the Messiah was coming – they looked forward by faith in the coming of the Messiah to die in full and final payment for their sin, and this belief gave them salvation, just as we are saved by looking backward at the Messiah who came.
   a. But they were trying to put the clues together to find out when He would come. And just who He would be.
   b. They foresaw the Christ – the Christos – the anointed One, but they didn't know His name would be Jesus.
   c. No one knew His name, until the angel announced to Joseph, name Him *"Jesus"* – Yeshua – transliterated *"Joshua"* 216 times (in Hebrew) because that name meaning Jehovah is salvation, i.e. the Saviour – *"for he shall save his people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21). The final pieces began to fall into place.
2. The prophets had wondered when Messiah would come, *"what manner of time"* –
   a. This phrase, in Greek would properly relate, not to the exact time when these things would occur, but to the *character or condition* of the age when they would take place; perhaps referring to the state of the world at that period, the preparation to receive the gospel, and the probable manner in which the great message would be received.

b. Perhaps, however, the inquiry in their minds pertained to the time when the predictions would be fulfilled, as well as to the condition of the world when the event takes place.

c. Peter writes here asking what would be the distinctives of the Messiah's ministry?

1) Who precisely would be this person who would come as Saviour, Judge, Prophet, Priest and King.

2) The prophets searched the Scriptures to find out all they could about who Jesus was and when He would come.

3) And get this – the Old Testament prophets couldn't unravel the differences between Christ's two comings.

a) The one coming to **Redeem** and then later coming to **Reign**

b) In fact, Jewish commentators postulate two different Messiahs, one as **Suffering** Messiah and the second as **Sovereign** Messiah.[3]

3. Notice how Peter ties them together in one Messiah in **verse 11** where he connects to the same Christ, both *"the sufferings"* and after *"the glory that should follow";* both the **Cross** and the coming **Crown**.

Yes, He would suffer and die, but after that the glory:

- The glory of the resurrection in Matthew 28
- And His ascension in Acts 1
- And His resumption to the throne of Glory in John 17, Hebrews 1 and Revelation 3
- The glory of His return for believers in 1 Thessalonians 4
- The glory of His recreation of the heavens and the earth in 2 Peter 4;
- The glory of His final and eternal glorious reign as Judge and King over all in Colossians 3 & Revelation 20[4]

a. Which is another way of saying, even though we in this New Testament dispensation have seen a lot, we haven't seen anything yet!

b. But what a privilege to have received the information in this completed Revelation—our Received Bible

c. There may be experiences yet ahead, but thank the Lord there are no missing pieces in the puzzle of God's redemptive and glorious plan.

The prophets examined the Scriptures which were not completed;
The prophets pointed to the Saviour whose name they didn't know.

C. Third, the prophets understood their service was for a future generation.

Notice now verse 12 – *"Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves* [i.e. the OT prophets] *but unto* ***US*** *they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you …"*

1. In other word, the fulfillment of their prophecies were not for them to witness but for future generations.

2. The verb here that refers to them ***"ministering"*** – it paints a picture of someone who spreads the table, who sets the table, but only for someone else to come and eat the meal—he is the waiter. It is the same word for deacons in Acts 6 who served the tables.

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[3] John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of Peter* (Kregel, 2005), p. 58
[4] Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (BMH, 1984), p. 79

3. The amazing thing is that these prophets knew it … notice again how **verse 12** opens – *"Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves but unto **us** they did minister…"*
   a. It was revealed to them that they'd never eat at the banquet personally – they wouldn't live long enough to see the table filled with the words and works of their Messiah—Jesus Christ. The meal would come later.
   b. And Peter is reminding these New Testament believers, listen, what an advantage you have, living in these days – no matter how troubled and how difficult they may be. You're able to pull up a chair to a table that was spread by the prophets … you able to feast on the revelation and knowledge of Jesus Christ.
4. The prophets dedicated their lives to setting the table in anticipation and faith and faithfulness with us in mind.
5. What an example, by the way.
   a. Imagine never tasting any fruit.
      1) You've only heard about fruit; you've only heard brief descriptions of how sweet and crisp and juicy and bursting with flavourful it is … but you're told that you'll never taste it during your lifetime.
      2) However, your life's work is to plant orchards so that the generations ahead will be able to enjoy it.
   b. And then imagine, giving your life, faithfully – passionately – to that task.
6. Let's stop long enough to tip our hats to the prophets. What a faithful task … what an unrewarding struggle they engaged in – only to be rewarded, for the most part, after their lives ended.
   a. What a testimony the prophets deliver to every one of us.
      1) There is no telling how far the ripple effects of your life will go.
      2) There is no telling how many people you will influence by the mere faithfulness you demonstrate at your job – to your family – to your Lord – to your calling to make disciples – to your investment in ministry and missions – you have no idea how far the ripples of your life will reach.
   b. What you're doing, even now, is perhaps setting the table of influence, for generations to come.

There is a story told of one watching one evening at dusk a blind lamplighter lighting the lamps. He tapped his way from lamp-post to lamp-post bringing to others a light which he himself would never experience.

***Imagine that!* What a privilege is ours. We have, according to this text, privileges that have been the fixation of prophets.**

Peter goes on to remind them and us…

II. SECONDLY, YOUR PRIVILEGES ARE THE FOCAL POINT FOR PREACHERS

Notice verse 12 again –the middle part – *"…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…"*

A. Peter now brings our privileged status into the New Testament dispensation of the church age.

1. He writes here that the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven.

a. We know from ***Acts 2*** that Holy Spirit's descent from heaven occurred on the Day of Pentecost;

b. We know that His coming was the fulfillment of Christ's own promise, that when Christ ascended back to the Father, He promised to send the Spirit as our companion (John 16).

2. Peter also makes very clear here that preaching the gospel is enabled – empowered – by the Holy Spirit at work in and through the preacher – the messenger.

   a. Just as the prophet's message didn't originate with him, the preacher's message isn't from himself either. ***Neither Prophets nor preachers are original!***

   b. The preacher then must be like the prophet in that he studies the Scriptures – ransacking the word for clues – mining the gems from the depths of scriptural caverns – the preacher is going to have to study and learn and then – after all of that – he is to depend upon the Holy Spirit to enable Him and enflame the message so that it brings transformation and spiritual fruit.

3. I once read where Charles Spurgeon (the renowned Baptist preacher who would preach to 6,000 every Sunday for years) would repeat, in the 1800's as he climbed the stairway to his platform from which he preached – with every step he uttered under his breath, ***"I believe in the Holy Spirit … I believe in the Holy Spirit … I believe in the Holy Spirit."***

4. Even though Spurgeon was incredibly eloquent and interesting, he realized that no matter how capable; how reasonable; how skillful he was – without the Holy Spirit, he and every preacher will do nothing more than blow dust onto parched and dry ground.

5. **BUT** Peter adds this caveat of encouragement – notice how both the Spirit and the message the Spirit enables us from where? —From heaven!

   - Listen, beloved, ***whenever*** you study the prophets
   - ***Whenever*** you study the word of God on your own
   - ***Whenever*** you hear true Bible exposition, you are actually receiving a message directly from heaven.

   a. Think of these scattered believers to whom Peter was originally writing; they were thinking no doubt that heaven had forgotten them. BUT heaven had NOT forgotten them!

   b. Every sermon was a reminder; every message was a message from heaven; which means it never goes out of date – it is always current – it is always relevant; it always matters – it is always worth hearing.

B. *In light of this text, let me read some of the headlines of years gone by*

1. At the time, these headlines were earth shattering, life changing, alarming, mesmerizing, and interesting headlines.

2. And 80-100 years later, they have little meaning today, even though they were very significant back then.

   ✓ In 1914 the Washington Times had in bold front-page news, "Serb Student Assassinates Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and His Duchess." That was the captivating news for days.

   Other headlines from that front page in 1914 included;

- ✓ Captain Sherburne Hopkins (mixed up in the Mexican Revolution) charges letters were stolen as part of conspiracy and bomb hurled into carriage fails to explode.
- ✓ Fifteen years later, in 1929, the headlines around the world read, "Wall Street in Panic As Stocks Crash." And of course, the Depression followed.
- ✓ A year later, in 1930, the Dust Bowl was making headlines around the world

And on and on and on … what were the headlines last year – five years ago – last week?

3. The message from heaven – and the message of the gospel will always be worthy and relevant – today, tomorrow – **FOREVER**.

Your privileges were the fixation of the prophets
Your privileges are the focal point for true preaching and finally …

III. YOUR PRIVILEGES ARE THE FASCINATION OF ANGELS

Notice the end of verse 12 – *"which things the angels desire to look into."*

A. These things related to the gospel – to salvation – to the privileged position of the believer – the angle longed to look into.

1. You see, an angel never experienced salvation. Christ didn't die for the angels.
   a. The angels who did not participate in Satan's rebellion remained holy – and were confirmed in their holiness unto God—and the angels who rebelled are confirmed in their wicked state and will one day be cast into an eternal Hell (James 2:19 and Matthew 25:41).
   b. **Hebrews 2:16** clearly says that Christ did not die for angels but for mankind. In other words, only mankind was designed to experience salvation through the grace of God in Christ Jesus.
2. So angels don't know what it means to experience the relief, the joy, the liberation and the wonder of being a saved sinner.
   But nonetheless, Peter writes, it is their fascination.
3. The expression he uses for them having a *"desire to look into"* is a continual inner yearning to comprehend.
   a. It doesn't mean that they cannot understand the plan of redemption; it only refers to their holy curiosity.
   b. They have a holy curiosity to watch and delight in the glories of Christ's plan in and through the Christians.
   c. They have an incurable fascination in watching the glory of God unfold throughout human history.

B. Some might say or think…

1. **<u>These scattered and suffering</u>** had it better than us! OH NO they didn't – they were trying to put together a puzzle with some of the pieces missing.
2. Well, **<u>preachers like Paul and Silas and Timothy</u>** – they have an advantage over us – they have it better than us. No they did not! – They depended entirely on the Holy Spirit just as much as you and I do.
3. Well then … I know … **<u>the angels</u>** have it so much better than us! No they don't either.
4. You are the recipients of grace that the angels never cease to watch with wonder and curious longing.

The hymn writer put it pretty well when he wrote that gospel song in the late 1800's (one that we haven't sung) – the refrain goes…

Holy, holy, is what the angels sing,
And I expect to help them make the courts of heaven ring;
But when I sing redemption's story, they will fold their wings,
For angels never felt the joys that our salvation brings.

5. Even the angels would trade places in a heartbeat.
    a. They are watching you and me with the growing realization and thrill that we, happen to be participating in the final chapter of redemptive history
    b. They are in wonder and holy curiosity as they see the Christian participating in nothing less than the greatest drama every played out in human history.
    c. And they know the glory that awaits us … and it's as if they love to cheer us on.

Think of it – the angels have always been used by God to do His bidding and forward His agenda … and they seem to be, in Scripture, always ready to jump at the chance to serve Him.

- In **Job 38:7** when God the Son spoke the worlds into existence, the angels shouted for joy and sang at the dawning of creation.
- In **Isa. 14** they saw the fall of mighty Lucifer along with multitudes of their own kind, into eternal rebellion and despair.
- Some of them were assigned to guard the gates of Eden, to keep fallen Adam and Eve from re-entering and eating from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22)
- In **Genesis 18** along with the Lord angels visited Abraham and announced the miraculous birth of a son was soon coming.
- Jacob saw angels ascending and descending a ladder that reached from earth to heaven (Genesis 28)
- Angels were present at the giving of the Mosaic Law (Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2)
- Angels were active during the period of the Judges (Judges 13)
- Angels ministered to Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 19)
- Angels protected Elisha (2 Kings 6:17)
- And angel was sent to bind the lions and protect Daniel in the lions den (Daniel 6)
- Zechariah the prophet saw angels active in end-time events (Zechariah 1)
- An angel announced the birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1)
- An angel told Joseph to go ahead with his wedding plans with Mary (Matthew 1)
- An angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds and a multitude of angels burst into song to welcome His birth in **Luke 2.**
- Angels ministered to Jesus after His temptation (Matthew 4:11) and after His agony in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22).
- Jesus announced that more than twelve legions of angels stood ready to rescue Him if He but gave the command (Matthew 25:31) – and by the way, 12 legions of angels would have been at the minimum 72,000 angels … more than enough.
- Angels were active at Christ's resurrection (Luke 24)

- In **Acts 12** an angel rescued Peter miraculously from prison – without a word or motion, he made his chains fall off and all the prison doors open.
- If I could fast forward the tape, angels appear in almost every chapter of the Book of Revelation. I mean it's an angel convention in that Book.
  - ⇒ Chap. 7 – They hold back the wind
  - ⇒ Chap. 7 – They seal the 144,000 Jewish evangelists against death
  - ⇒ Chap. 8-11 – They blow the trumpets of judgment
  - ⇒ 14:6-7 – They preach the gospel
  - ⇒ Chap. 14 – They announce the fall of Babylon
  - ⇒ Chap. 14 – They warn the human race not to follow antichrist
  - ⇒ Chap. 15-16 – They pour out the vials of God's wrath
  - ⇒ Chap. 20 – They imprison Satan in the Abyss during the millennial reign
  - ⇒ Chap. 21-22 – They show John the Apostle the Celestial City
  - ⇒ And they adamantly refuse John's misplaced worship – in other words, the angel guiding him was so magnificent and so glorious in appearance, that John fell down, thinking he must be God **– Rev. 22**.

6. That's a long way of saying the angels are amazing creatures and the angels have seen it all!
   a. But Peter informs us, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that the angels' greatest captivation and their deepest joyful fascination is what God is doing … with you … and me.
   b. Peter is saying this to them – and to you too – the world considers you insignificant and worthy of pity – you are actually the honoured participants in the greatest drama unfolding in universal history.
   c. You have been given an identity gift from God.
   d. I can picture angels as hardly being able to contain themselves with joy – not only over every sinner who repents (Luke 15:10), but also in the coming glory when the believer joins His Lord and Saviour and is rewarded and enthroned with Him in splendour.
   e. We are so much better off than we thought.
7. There is a coming day when the believer will receive from Christ Himself the rewards for fighting the good fight … for running the race!
   SO, whatever the race is that God has given you – run it.

The angels will, I'm sure, crowd around and watch with holy curiosity all of us who are such privileged recipients of grace.

So while you go about doing what you do – no matter how mundane or how important – it's not a bad idea to remember you are incredibly privileged … you're so much better off than you thought … ***AND you're being watched***.

Not in a bad way … but with curiosity and interest … with a measure of amazement and wonder at us … for we have received this unique identity gift from their Creator and their God – who is our personal Redeemer and Saviour and Lord.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Gospel Connection:

The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been progressively revealed throughout the history of mankind. This revelation began in the Garden of Eden when man was promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the tempter. This revelation culminated with the final and ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ being the Son of God.

As New Testament believers we have received this ultimate and final revelation in Jesus Christ. We are no longer in the dark concerning God's plan of redemption and restoration for His creation. This is a privileged position and one that should not be taken lightly.

B. Practical Implications:

1. Our thoughts and perspectives concerning God's revelation to us should be challenged by the truth of this passage.
    a. We have the very words of God delivered to us by the Spirit of God concerning the ultimate revelation found in the Son of God.
    b. This should challenge the way we think about listening to the Word of God and reading the Word of God and presenting the Word of God to this world.
2. Ask the Spirit of God to work in your heart to accomplish two goals:
    a. To create in you an affection and desire for the Word of God and…
    b. To renew the joy and awe of your salvation

We experience a place of great privilege as recipients of God's revelation concerning the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ.

This week invite someone over for a meal to share the truth of salvation found in Jesus Christ with him or her. To be such privileged recipients of such glorious truth should drive us to share it those who have not heard.

30 July `17 – River Valley BC – Maynooth, Co. Kildare