Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I was in a seminary class, one of us students talked about a particular verse of a song, and our seminary professor said that poetry has verses and songs have stanzas. And I don’t know if that is technically true but ever since then I have used stanzas and not verses, when referring to a song. And I only mention this because I have called this sermon the third stanza of Peter’s salvation Song. In the first stanza, verses 5-8, the Father is blessed for securing our salvation, in the second stanza, Jesus Christ is praised for enabling us to rejoice, even as we endure various trials. And with this third stanza, the Holy Spirit is **honoured for the wonderfulness of our salvation**.

As we have seen, Peter wrote this letter to encourage discouraged believers, and especially believers suffering persecution. And we saw last week that he did this by putting suffering into perspective – it is for a little while, it is necessary to purify and strengthen our faith, and it will result in us receiving praise and honour when Christ comes again. But in this stanza, Peter wants believers to see that they have a privileged place in the story of salvation. And privilege is a word with a lot of negative baggage today, but privilege is not a bad thing if it leads to humility and thankfulness.

Have you heard a good salvation story? Someone rescued from drowning or from getting lost in the hills or on the ocean? They often turn such stories into movies, because we all love a good salvation story. Well, the greatest salvation story that exists is the one that the Bible tells – the salvation of sinners who deserve to spend eternity in hell. And the wonderful thing about this story is that if you are a believer then it is your story. And as believers on this side of the cross, even though we may suffer persecution, we are in a position of great privilege!

And Peter helps us to see our privileged salvation position from the viewpoint of **four divine agents** (And I am borrowing this outline from John Macarthur’s commentary on this passage): The four divine agents are: **The Old Testament Prophets who Studied** **Our Salvation**, **the Holy Spirit who Inspired the Message of Our Salvation**, the **New testament Apostles who Preached Our salvation**, and **the Angels who Admire Our Salvation**.

1. So, the first divine agent is **the Old Testament** **Prophets Who Studied Our Salvation**.
   1. And perhaps you are wondering why Peter goes all the way back to the Old Testament prophets? Well, the reason he did this is because a common accusation levelled against Christians in Peter’s day, especially from Jewish people, was that Christianity was new. So, this was Peter saying, No, Christianity is not new; it is, in fact, the same salvation that was spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. But he also wanted his readers to see that while it is the *same* salvation it is also a *greater* salvation – what New Testament believers have experienced in terms of salvation is greater than any of the Old Testament prophets could ever have imagined.
      1. Now, if I were to ask you how Old Testament believers were saved, what would you say? I hope your answer would be – faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation has always been, whether it was in Adam’s time, Abraham’s time, Moses’ time, or David’s time, about faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The difference between them and us is direction – they looked *forward* in faith to a coming Messiah, and we look *back* to the Christ who has come. But this difference is huge! You see, they had the shadow, but we have the substance. They had the promises, we have the fulfilment. They had One who will come, we have Jesus, the One who has come. And it is because Jesus *has* come that our salvation is greater. It is why it is called the “new covenant,” and described as “better” in the Book of Hebrews.
      2. And to help us see this, Peter describes what the OT prophets did with their prophecies. He tells us in **verses 10 & 11** that they “*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*.”
         1. And the expression Peter uses suggest ‘passionate inquiry.’ This was a diligent, methodical, and purposeful examination. They really wanted to understand the things they were writing about Messiah.
            1. We saw a little of this in our earlier reading from **Daniel 9**. Daniel had studied the prophecies of Jeremiah because he wanted to know the times and circumstances of their fulfilment.
            2. And you will remember that when the **Wise men** came to King Herod to ask him about the one born king of the Jews, he asked the chief priests and scribes “*where the Christ was to be born*.” And “*They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet [Micah]*.”
            3. And David was promised that one of his sons would reign as Israel’s eternal king. And in his Psalms David spoke about one who would have His hands and feet pierced, and no bones broken, and people casting lots for his clothes – all clear messianic prophecies. And Isaiah spoke about a virgin birth and a suffering servant.
            4. So, we can imagine these Old Testament prophets asking the Lord when would these things be? How will these things be? Who will be this Messiah? When will He come?
            5. Jesus spoke about this in our earlier reading in **Matthew 13:17**: “*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*.”
      3. So, do you see what Peter is saying? What you know about salvation in Jesus, and have experienced, is something that the Old Testament prophets longed to know and understand, but didn’t.
         1. You read about the virgin birth and Bethlehem and the crucifixion, and you can tick all of the Old Testament connections, as though they are as plain as the nose on anyone’s face!
         2. It is like the difference between a person who just has a codebook that leads to treasure, and a person who has the codebook and the code key and has found the treasure! The first person might trust the codebook and believe that one day someone will use it to find the treasure, but the second person has the key, so the code is no longer mysterious and hidden; it is made plain! And they have found the treasure.
         3. And the coming of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit to give us the New Testament is the key that unlocks the Old Testament message of salvation.
         4. What a privilege! What a great confirmation of salvation!
2. But we see more of this with the second divine agent that Peter speaks of – **the Holy Spirit who Inspired the Message of Our Salvation**.
   1. And Peter’s point here is that when the prophets wrote what they wrote, it was ultimately the Holy Spirit who through them “*was predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories*.”
      1. In **2 Sam 23:2**, David said, “*The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; His word is on my tongue*.”
      2. In **Jeremiah 1:9** we read, “*Then the LORD put out His hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth*.”
      3. **2 Peter 1:20-21** says, “*No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*.”
      4. So, the words that Moses and David and Jeremiah wrote were given to them by the Holy Spirit; He supervised every word that they wrote down, so that we would have the story of our salvation in Jesus Christ.
   2. From time to time, I have mentioned webpages or charts that give every Old Testament prophecy about Jesus Christ that is fulfilled in the New Testament. Some of them say there are 55 such prophecies, but they are just the more obvious ones. Many list well over 300 prophecies and their fulfilments! And these were written 400, 700, 1000, or even 1500 years before Jesus was born!
      1. Now, if you had a few people who lived at the same time and in the same city, maybe they could cook something up together. But to have 30+ authors, who lived in different countries, over a period of 1500 years, make many prophecies about Jesus Christ, which all came true? That can only be the work of the Holy Spirit! There is no book like this book!
   3. And so, it was the Holy Spirit who caused Moses and David and Isaiah, and all the other prophets, to write what they wrote about the Messiah to come. But even though they longed to know what they were writing about, “*It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you*.”
      1. And we saw an example of this a little earlier when we read from **Daniel 12**. There Daniel was given a vision of the end of the days. Having heard the words of the one speaking in the vision, Daniel said, “*I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end."*”
      2. Do you understand what this means? What Daniel wrote was more for the benefit of those Peter originally wrote to, and for you, than it was for himself! Indeed, all of the Old Testament authors were agents of the Holy Spirit to strengthen *your* faith! This is your privileged position in God’s grand plan of salvation!
3. And this leads us to the next divine agent that Peter speaks of, which is **the Apostles who Preached Our Salvation**.
   1. And here our focus is the middle part of **verse 12**, where we read: “*In the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you, by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven*.”
      1. And Peter is talking here about himself and the other Apostles.
         1. Their task was to tell people all that they had seen and heard in relation to Jesus, as eye-witnesses. John talks about this in **1 John 1**: “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life … we proclaim also to you*.”
         2. And they were to do this knowing that the Holy Spirit would use the good news about Jesus to bring people to faith. As Paul said in **Romans 1:16**, the gospel *“is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*.”
      2. And the link between the preaching of the Apostles and the writing of the Old Testament prophets is **the Holy Spirit**. As the Apostles preached the passages of the Old Testament that prophesied Messiah, and demonstrated how they were fulfilled in Jesus, the Holy Spirit convinced their hearers that these things were true! We see this over and over again in the Book of Acts. 3000 on the Day of Pentecost. The Philippian jailer. The Ethiopian Eunuch. Many of the priests. The Thessalonians and the Bereans and the Corinthians and the Ephesians. What was shadowy and unclear in the Old Testament was made crystal clear through the preaching of the Apostles “*by the Holy Spirit from heaven*.” And the church began to grow, explosively, and spread out around the world.
      3. And in **Ephesians 2**, Paul speaks about this as the wonderful “mystery” of salvation, which he now understood. Like the other Old Testament Jews, Paul thought that when Messiah came, He would rule in Jerusalem, from the temple, and people from all over the world would come there and become Jewish. But now Paul understand that God’s plan was the church of Christ that would spread out over the world to involve people of every tribe and nation and language.
      4. And if you are a believer, you are a part of this wonderful mystery! We don’t have the Apostles to preach to us today, but we do have their testimony in the New Testament. And what they wrote was inspired by the same Holy Spirit. So, we too can hear the gospel and be saved into the church of Jesus Christ! And this church will continue to grow until Jesus comes again to bring with Him the new heavens and the new earth.
      5. And we know all this, because we live on this side of the cross and we have the New Testament and the Holy Spirit! Again, we are most privileged!
4. And if you are not excited and humbled and thankful yet, the fourth and final divine agent that Peter refers to to help us see our privileged salvation position is **the Angels who Admire Our Salvation**. And we see this in the last part of **verse 12** where having talked about the grand sweep of salvation history that has now moved into the era of the church of Jesus Christ, Peter says these are “*things into which angels long to look*.”
   1. Now, the Jews were absolutely fascinated with angels. And the Romans and Greeks of Bible times were also fascinated with angels. And people are still fascinated with angels today! And I am sure if we are honest, we have all given some thought to angels and been fascinated with what they look like and how amazing it must be to be able to fly… Angels are fascinating creatures! But Peter tuns that all on its head here by revealing that the angels are fascinated with us! This phrase literally translates as ‘things into which angels gaze at **with outstretched necks**.’
      1. Boys and girls, when something amazing happens, we push our heads forward so we can see what is happening. I am sure you can remember many times when you had to poke your head threw a gap or you jumped up to see what the fuss is all about?
      2. Well, we can imagine angels in heaven or down here as they do the Lord’s bidding, watching us with outstretched necks. They are fascinated with or admiring our salvation.
      3. And this is because the angels do not know everything. They simply have to watch and see God’s salvation plan unfold in history. So, they saw some of their own number fall from grace and be cast out of heaven. Oh! They saw Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when they fell into sin, they would have been deeply saddened. But when they saw God go to Adam and give the promise of Messiah, and Adam believed! They would have been gladdened. And they saw Noah and Abraham and Moses and Samuel and David and the exile and the restoration, and wondered how and when Messiah would come. And then Gabriel was told to go and tell Mary that she was to give birth to Jesus! Wow! But then Jesus was crucified. Oh! But then He arose! Wow! And then the Holy Spirit was poured out and the Peter preached and 3000 people were saved! And in **Luke 15:7** we read: “*There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance*.” So, when 3000 repented on one day, there must have been a huge angel party!
      4. You see, the angels have a holy curiosity about the salvation that you and I have experienced. They have no need to repent and be forgiven. So, when they see a sinner come to Christ in faith, they rejoice! When they see a new church being planted or a new missionary arriving on the field or reformation in an existing church, they celebrate God’s amazing plan of salvation! This is why Peter described the angels as gazing at our salvation with outstretch necks!
      5. And the key point here is that because you have experienced salvation and because you have the Old and New Testaments, you know more about salvation than the angels!

Can you see then why we have a very privileged salvation position? We know more than the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament Apostles, and even the angels! And we know this not because we are so clever that we have worked it all out, but because it has been **revealed to us by the Holy Spirit**! It is He that deserves our praise for opening our eyes and heart to salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ!

And the reason Peter sets this privileged salvation position before the Lord’s people is to encourage them, especially when they face persecution and opposition.

In the final days of World War II, the news that the allied forces had secured victory started to reach prisoners in concentration camps. So, even though they were desperately hungry and still being mistreated, they now had hope and even joy because they knew that liberation or salvation was close!

And that is the major point of this salvation song. When you are being persecuted, or in the grip of one trial or another, you know that your salvation is secure, you know that Jesus Christ is the King who has conquered death and Satan, and you know how the story of the world will end. Persecutors or cancer may have the upper hand for a moment, but Jesus will build His church, and He will come again to bring judgment and condemnation on His enemies and to receive you into eternal life. This is your privileged salvation position. Praise God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the wonderfulness of our salvation! Amen.