

The Privilege and Promise of the Age of Fulfilment

¹⁰ Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, ¹¹ searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10–12)

People have long been fascinated with the day and timing of your birth. Not only because it is the start of our lives, but because there is something quite mysterious in it. We had no say in when we'd be born: the time, the day, the month, the year, even the decade, or century or era. We just find ourselves alive in that moment, with all the advantages of living in this moment, and not some other.

So you have things like astrology, weaving a whole theory of your temperament, and your life's choices based upon what star constellation you were born under, as if your fate is determined by this one thing you had no say in. People are interested in birth order, and all kinds of theories prevail over the temperament of a firstborn child, middle child, third, fourth, youngest. Today, people group the generations of the last few decades as the Great Generation, then the Boomers, the Gen-X, Millennials, Gen-Z, Gen-Alpha.

And there is some significance in it. The time and era in which you were born was chosen for you before you were born. Whereas the world would say it is fate, Bible believers, Christians would say it is God's sovereign will. God chose when you would be born, just as much as he chose what nation you'd be born in, the region, the city, the town, the family. And all of those things afforded you certain privileges, and some disadvantages compared to others. God did not have you born in the Assyrian empire in 700 B.C., or the Aztec empire. He did not have you born in the kraals of Shaka Zulu, or the slums of Victorian England. And He did not have you born in the time when the arrival of the Saviour of the world was still future. God chose for you to live after the time when Messiah Jesus had been born.

Sometimes, God's Word reminds us of the significance of when we have been born, of the fact that we are alive now, when we are. The Bible takes the time to tell us that had we been born in another era, we would have been disadvantaged. But now, we find ourselves, by the sovereign determination of God, having been born not B.C., but A.D. Since Peter's book is all about how true salvation, true grace can go through trials, he first establishes us in all the riches and privileges of being a believer. Knowing who you are in Christ, what God has done for you, gives you this inner hope, this inner joy that can go through trials and suffering.

So he's already shown us the privilege of being born again, of having an untouchable and unfading inheritance in Heaven, of having a faith guarded by God Himself, of having a faith whose wealth and durability shines during trials, and of being able to see and enjoy Christ by faith even now.

And now Peter is going to finish this section on our living hope by reminding us that we are privileged to live in a time when the prophecies have been fulfilled. They should sense the privilege of being in the age of fulfilment, experiencing what prophets wished they could see.

And that privilege comes with a promise. Our living hope is not a fiction, but the Bible has a long track record of people looking to the future for God to fulfil His promises. We now live in the age where these have come true, and should look ahead now to our own future hope, attached to the promises and prophecies that are yet future for us.

Taking privileges for granted eventually eats away at gratitude, which, in turn eats away at humility. Losing humility means you go about life feeling entitled, and often enough, you feel disappointed, cheated, robbed. And that's a really bad combination for a Christian who is about to experience suffering as part of their Christian life.

To sense the deep privilege not only of having been chosen, born again, eternally secure, but of having been chosen to be born in this age where the majority of prophecy has been fulfilled, and some yet remains, is important for your faith, and your hope.

I. The Gospel Was Predicted and Studied by Prophets in the Past

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

A long time ago, Peter says, before you were born, there were men who prophesied of this Gospel, of this grace that would come to you.

Who are these prophets? All the Old Testament prophets, men whom God gave revelation regarding the future in some form or another. It includes the listed prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. It includes some of the men raised up during the period of Israel and Judah's kings, who didn't write books of the Bible, but nonetheless prophesied – Gad, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Iddo, Hanani, Ahikah, Jehu, Shemaiah, Oded and Micaiah. It includes people we don't ordinarily think of as prophets, but which the New Testament calls prophets – Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon.

These people, to smaller and greater degrees, prophesied that one day the Christ, the Messiah would come. They prophesied that the great Saviour of Israel, and the world would suffer, and also be glorified. He would be a servant and a king. He would be a Messiah like Joseph, and a Messiah like David.

To be a prophet is not to experience impressions in your mind, which you take to be from God. To be a prophet is not to have imaginative scenes playing out in your waking hours or your sleep, and then proclaim them to be messages from God. Look at how our text defines a prophet. “ the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow

The Holy Spirit would, in the Old Dispensation come upon people and fill them for specific service. In those moments of filling, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Messiah Jesus, told them of the life and death and glory of the coming Messiah. The Greek word here translated *testified beforehand* means to be a witness of something before it has happened. There is only one Person in the universe who has been a witness to the future, and that is the timeless God. God can write about the future the way human eyewitnesses write about the past. These prophets experienced the Spirit of God testifying about the future. They wrote the history of the future. That's a real prophet.

They prophesied of the coming Messiah.

The Bible is from cover to cover, a messianic religion. It is not merely a collection of laws and commands. Only later Judaism thought of the Bible in those terms. Primarily the Bible is grand story of God creating man, man falling from God, God sending His Son as the Chosen One, the Anointed One through the nation Israel as their and our great Prophet, Priest and King, and then

how that story, through tragedy and triumph comes to completion. Along the way, God's people are given laws, wisdom, songs and psalms and letters to instruct, exhort, warn, and comfort. And one of the other things God's people are given is prophecy. J. Barton Payne in *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* says that 27% of the Bible is predictive prophecy. In its broadest form, there are over 300 prophecies of the coming of the Messiah. Again, J. Barton Payne (*Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*) identified 191 prophecies that he believed were specifically fulfilled in Christ's first coming. To be very strict, the most conservative interpreters recognise 60-70 incredibly specific prophecies about the coming Messiah. That's a huge amount of material. And actually, the more prophecies there are, the harder it becomes for one man to fulfil them all – proving them to be inspired Scripture, and proving Him to be the true Messiah.

Now not only did they prophesy when the Spirit of God would fill them and give them direct revelation, but the prophets themselves were fascinated by their own prophecies. Peter tells us they inquired and searched diligently into the prophecies of salvation to come through Messiah. The word *inquired* means scrutinised sought diligently; it even carries the idea of craving after this knowledge.

By the way, this is an indirect proof of the inspiration of the Bible. Prophets would not inquire and search into their own prophecies if they had invented them in their own minds. But when you study what has come out of your own mouth, from your own pen, it is proof that the source of your prophecy was Divine.

So what were they trying to find out? Verse 11 tells us – they were searching or investigating what time, or what manner of time was spoken about regarding the sufferings of Messiah and the glory that should follow. They wanted to know when Messiah would come, and what the times would be like when He came. This was their eschatology! They looked ahead, and wondered and prayed and enquired diligently.

So picture for a moment Isaiah coming in to his home, probably in Jerusalem, as he was often before the king of Judah. During the time of Hezekiah, spiritually things are better than they have been for some time in Judah. Isaiah's son is 30 years old, and possibly has children himself. Isaiah may be a grandfather by this time. And picture him after speaking with his wife for a few moments going to that little room with its hole in the wall window to let the light in, and Isaiah's eyes sparkle for a moment as he reaches for the scroll. He closes his eyes for a few moments and whispers a prayer, and then he gently unrolls the scroll – his scroll. He rolls it to the part about the suffering servant of Jehovah – clearly the Messiah. And he reads, and reads about Messiah bearing the sins of his people, and dying. And then again, he stares to make sure he didn't make a mistake – but no, there it is again – he shall see his seed and prolong his days. And Isaiah, perhaps strokes his beard and peers out the opening in the wall, and prays, 'When Lord? What situation would bring about the king suffering for His people. What does it mean?' The desire to know burns inside him, and he pours over the scroll, examining the words that he had written under inspiration.

Until eventually, he resigns himself to saying, "Ah, Lord – this must truly be for your people in years to come to understand, for me, it is hidden'.

Now Peter says to his first readers and to us, do you see that this Gospel which you've received has an ancient pedigree? Christianity is not some new kid on the block religion. We are participants in a gospel that fulfils God's mysterious plan, something revealed and predicted by ancient Hebrew prophets 3000 years ago. We've been included in the grand story. And holy, pious men, the very ones who wrote portions of the Bible searched and studied to know when this would be fulfilled. Peter says, you're living in the times they longed to see.

Maybe you've never felt the privilege of having indoor plumbing, hot water, shops laden with a variety of foods, multiple changes of clothes, technologies our ancestors never dreamed of. Maybe

you felt a little more grateful when learning about how people lived in the past. In a similar way, we imagine our spiritual ancestors living in times when Messiah is still future. They don't yet have his name, or know what He will say, what exactly He will do. Their whole posture is hope, longing, waiting.

We sit here, with the date being Year of our Lord 2025. Four Gospels record Messiah's life, and 2000 years of church history is behind us. Privilege.

So that leads us to the next point. It's not just that the times we're living in were predicted and scrutinised by ancient prophets. No, this comes into the present.

II. The Gospel Is Fulfilled and Proclaimed by Preachers in the Present

¹² To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven

As these prophets studied their own prophecies and the prophecies of others, they tried to find out when it would happen. The book of Daniel records Daniel trying to understand the prophecy in Jeremiah. But as they studied it seems either by direct revelation, or by logical deduction, they saw that their prophecies were for a future time, not the time they were in. Daniel was told that in the last verse of his book: ¹³ “But you, go *your way* till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days. (Daniel 12:13)

They saw that they were actually ministering, serving a future generation. People yet to be born would really be blessed by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Micah, and so on. Why? Because for that future generation, they would have two things: they would have the original prophecy, written in the past, and they would have the fulfilment now already taken place in their lifetime or before.

But see the words of verse 12 which brings the past prophecy into the present. Look for the word “now”. they were ministering the things which *now* have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven

The same Holy Spirit who spoke to and through the prophets is now empowering Gospel preachers to declare the things which have now happened. Old Testament prophets have now been replaced by New Testament apostles, prophets, and then evangelists and pastor-teachers. Prophecy has turned into history. Jesus of Nazareth has come, born when He was predicted to, born how He was predicted (of a virgin), born where He was predicted (Bethlehem), and many more. Fulfilment.

In one scientific study done by Peter Stoner in his book *Science Speaks*, he selected just eight prophecies about Messiah. 1) Born in Bethlehem 2) Preceded by a messenger 3) Enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey 4) Betrayed by a Friend and have hands and feet pierced 5) Sold for thirty pieces of silver 6) Betrayal money thrown into the house of God and the price then given for a potter's field 7) Silent before accusers 8) Hands and feet pierced and killed among criminals. He then used the modern science of probability to figure how likely it is that one man could have lived hundreds of years after the prophecies and fulfilled them.

We find that the chance that any man might have fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10¹⁷ [(10 to the 17th power). That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (17 zeros after the one). In order to help us comprehend this staggering probability, we take 10¹⁷ R5 coins and lay them on the face of the whole country of South Africa. They will cover all of the country to a height of 13cm. Now mark one of these R5 coins with a red X and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the country. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must, on his first try pick

up one R5 and it must be the one marked with a red X.

What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the time of fulfilment. That's just eight prophecies. Once you get to 48 prophecies, the chances are 1 in 10^{157} . There are only 10^{78} atoms in the whole universe. Shall we just call it impossible, if this were pure chance, pure coincidence, pure accident?

Peter's point is, it has happened! You've been born in the time when the prophecies have gone from being hope to being fulfilment. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? (Romans 8:24)

You have the privilege of not waiting, but of looking back, smiling and saying, it took place. What a privilege, to be part of the faith long predicted and then fulfilled.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:16-17. "Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it"

Think how that affects Christians going through suffering. Peter says we have this living hope. You have this inheritance: unaging, unspoiling, unfading, but it is all future. In your present you are experiencing trials and pain, and the Bible tells you to look up and forward, for the joy set before you. But what guarantee do I have that this future will be mine?

Well, ask yourself, how has the Bible done so far when it comes to predicting the future? Some suggest of all that prophecy, 65% is past event, already fulfilled. None of that 65% did not come true or failed to come to pass. That's a 100% accuracy rate with everything up to now. Thirty-five percent deals with events still to come: the coming of Christ, the Tribulation, the Millennial kingdom, the final judgement, and inheriting our reward in Heaven. So, if two-thirds of the Bible's prophecy has already been fulfilled exactly as it said it would, overcoming astronomical odds against it being fulfilled, how should I regard its statements about the future: that Jesus will certainly return and catch His people up? That the earth will undergo seven years of terrible judgement? That Jesus will return and judge the nations and set up His kingdom, and fulfil His covenants with Abraham and David and Israel? That believers will be rewarded for their tribulations, that we will rule and reign with Him on the earth, that there will be victor's crowns for those who overcome? Do I file that under wishful thinking? Under maybe? Or do I file that under future events on the calendar, I simply know not when.

We're in the same position as those prophets. We know these things will happen. We're trying to puzzle out when, and in what way. But we know they will happen.

Knowing we are living the age of fulfilment fills us not only with privilege, but with confidence. Our living hope is not a tenuous wish, but a confidence, a certitude, a profound conviction of what the future will be. But Peter has one more thing to say about the Gospel. It was predicted, it is preached, and now it will continue to be peered into.

III. The Gospel Is Observed and Peered Into by Angels Into the Future

things which angels desire to look into.

Here is one of those lines in the Bible that if you read too quickly, you'd miss how marvelous it is. Almost an afterthought, almost a throwaway line, Peter says that angels desire, strongly desire to look into this Gospel, our salvation, the whole matter of people being redeemed. The Greek word

for look is the same word used when the apostles got to the empty tomb and peered in. It means to stretch the neck, to stoop down and peer into. The angels have more than a passing interest, they have a burning curiosity as to our salvation.

We as believers are often fascinated with the experience of angels: we try to imagine being able to go from place to place immediately, having great power, being able to enter the very presence of God. But the amazing thought is that angels are fascinated with us: with our experience as believers – being recipients of salvations.

Why? Well, consider, they are not uninvolved in the Gospel story. They announced the birth of our Lord, were with Him throughout His ministry, informed the people at the tomb of His resurrection. They rejoice, we are told in Luke 15:7 and 10, when a sinner comes to faith. Even now, Hebrews 1:14 tells us they are ministering spirits to believers. Revelation records that during the Tribulation an angel will preach the Gospel to the whole world.

But perhaps the reason they are fascinated with our salvation is because they will never experience it. Fallen angels cannot be saved, and the holy angels do not need to be. So they are greatly intrigued by the concept of a sinner being regenerated, having God's very Spirit within them, and slowly transforming them. They know many of their former holy angels that chose to sin who are now fallen and wicked, and they know they are doomed. But here they behold a spiritual being, like themselves, depraved and sinful, like a fallen angel, but then declared righteous in God's sight because of Calvary, and lo and behold, a metamorphosis is in progress. That selfish, dirty, ugly heart is increasingly taking in the shape and form of God's own heart.

As the angels watch people being saved, people being sanctified, and even the moment of death, and a believer being glorified, they are marvelling at this incredible work called salvation. It shows them sides of God which they otherwise would not see, His mighty grace, His mercy, His wisdom and plan. It is an ongoing drama for them, the amazing story of redemption. The Bible tells us in Job 38:4 that the angels sang for joy when God created the earth. I believe God's angels are possibly more amazed and sing praise when they see God's other great work – the work of redemption. Indeed, Revelation 5 tells us they praise Him for it: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." (Rev 5:11-12)

And it is an ongoing classroom for them: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God," (Eph 3:10)

And all of this again speaks of privilege. Mighty angelic beings stare at you if you are a believer, fascinated by the grace of God in you. You took your salvation for granted this last week, but unseen beings didn't. You have sometimes become bored with the old, old story of the Gospel, but these glorious, super-intelligent beings find it endlessly interesting, and evidently find more and more truth in it all. F. B. Meyer commented, "If the angels, with their opportunities of knowledge, find ever fresh fields of interest and investigation in the sufferings of Christ and the glories that are to follow, how little do the wisest of us know of them! We are but ankle-deep at the furthest in this fathomless ocean. We are still at the alphabet--the primer of knowledge."

But surely enough has been said to invest the Saviour's sufferings with new interest, as we turn to

And whereas the prophets did their work in the past, and the preachers now proclaim the fulfilment in the present, it seems the angels will keep being fascinated with our salvation into the future. They will never cease to be amazed at the grace of God in us.

So why does Peter mention this? Why does he tell us about the enquiring of ancient prophets and

the interest of angels? The answer is that Peter is saying: just look at the calibre of beings interested in understanding your experience. Ancient, earthly messengers called prophets inquired and searched and longed to see what you have seen. Even more ancient heavenly messengers called angels long to peer into and study what it is you have experienced.

So, as many a teenager has said, "I didn't choose to be born!" No, you didn't and you couldn't. You didn't choose the fact of your birth, and you didn't choose the time, the era of your birth. God did. And He chose you'd be born not B. C., but A. D. And that fact says: you're blessed. You're supremely privileged. You've got more reason than ever to hope and trust in God's promises for the future.