

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 28, 375:5, 290, 408:1-3, 408:4.
Lessons: Psalm 9, 2 Corinthians 7:4-10, John 17:1-16.
Sermon Text: I Peter 1:10-16
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Friends in Christ our Salvation:

What is the most precious thing in the world? Is it perhaps money, or the material possessions money can buy? The Bible answers: ***"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** (Matthew 16:26) Is your reputation or the fame you might achieve the most precious thing? The Bible indeed says of our reputation: ***"A good name is better than fine perfume."*** (Ecclesiastes 7:1) But however precious fame is, it can be tarnished or easily lost through slander.

That which is most precious in the world is something we as believers in Christ have and we sing of it every Sunday: ***"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation."*** (Psalm 51:12) Our salvation in Christ is spoken of in the Bible in so many Bible passages that we would not like the task of counting them all. The very word "salvation" is used in about 125 Bible passages. Our salvation is so precious because it saves us from everlasting damnation in hell. Unlike anything else in this world, it will last forever. Isaiah says: ***"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail."*** (Isaiah 51:6)

What we learn from our text today is:

HOW PRECIOUS IS OUR SALVATION IN CHRIST!

1. We learn this from the prophets who foretold it by the Holy Spirit; and,
2. We show that we believe it by a holy life as obedient children.

Peter writes: ***"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."*** Moses and all the prophets who wrote the Old Testament Scriptures foretold of the salvation which was to come in Christ Jesus. For example, Moses recorded this promise to Abraham: ***"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*** (Genesis 12:3) All people on earth would be blessed through Abraham because Jesus as a descendant of Abraham was born to redeem the whole sinful world. The prophet Isaiah foretold the virgin birth of Jesus: ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*** (Isaiah 7:14) The prophet Micah foretold the place of Jesus' birth: ***"You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*** (Micah 5:2) The Passion History reveals that the prophet Zechariah foretold of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, 5 days before He died. (Zechariah 9:9) The psalmist foretold that one of Jesus' close friends would betray Him. (Psalm 41:9) Zechariah foretold that when Jesus was taken captive, His disciples would be offended and forsake Him, (Zechariah 13:7). Psalms 22, 31, and 69 mention the things that happened to Jesus on the cross and the words that Jesus spoke when crucified. Especially in the writings of the prophet Isaiah we have a detailed prophecy of Jesus' sufferings and death and this precious truth:

"The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) Also Jesus' burial, resurrection and ascension were foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament.

What we have mentioned is only a portion of the testimony of the prophets foretelling the salvation we have in Christ. Our text now teaches how precious this salvation in Christ is by pointing out that the prophets **"searched intently and with the greatest care"** their own writings. They were intensely interested in learning more about the promised Christ, **"trying to find out,"** our text says, **"the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."** They wondered when all this would come to pass, and the circumstances or conditions on earth when this would happen.

Their curiosity was not satisfied. Jesus said to His disciples: **"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."** (Matthew 13:17) But the prophets did know they were serving future generations. Our text says: **"It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven."**

We also have in the words of our text the proof that the Scriptures were written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It says that the prophets of old had **"the Spirit of Christ in them,"** and it says that those who proclaimed the Gospel after the ascension of Christ did so **"by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven."** In the Old Testament David said: **"The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue."** (2 Samuel 23:2) Paul told Timothy: **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..."** (2 Timothy 3:16) And Peter in his second letter writes: **"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Not only should this fact increase our respect for the Holy Scriptures, knowing that it is God's Holy Word and not the mere message of a man, but it should also cause us to realize how precious our salvation in Christ is. Our salvation is so precious that God caused holy men of God in both the Old and the New Testament times to record in exact word and thought what we need to know to be saved. And in addition to this, our text mentions: **"Even angels long to look into these things."** The salvation of sinners does not immediately concern the holy angels, for they are not lost in sin and need no Savior. But the salvation of sinners is so precious that even the holy angels are interested in it since it is a gracious act of God by which He saves poor sinners.

Surely, then, we should have the same attitude as Isaiah when he foretold of our salvation: **"Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."** (Isaiah 25:9) And if this is our attitude, we will show that we believe our salvation is most precious by living a holy life as obedient children of God.

2.

"Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." As believers in Christ we have the sure hope of eternal salvation. Peter also calls it **"a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."** (1 Peter 1:3) As we trust in God who raised up Jesus from the dead for our justification, so we have hope of eternal life. It is a hope we have by faith in Jesus. And in Christ Jesus it is a sure thing, not merely something that might be, or something we are not quite sure of. Paul says **"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."** (Romans 5:2) We can rejoice in this hope of salvation because it is a sure thing in Christ. Peter speaks of it just before our text. **"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."** (1 Peter 1:8-9) The hope of the grace to be given to us when Christ appears on the Last Day is the hope of the **"inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you."** (1 Peter 1:4) On this we are to set our hope completely.

Just because we have such a wonderful salvation to look forward to, our text exhorts us: **"Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled. ... As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"** We as believers in Christ are **"aliens and strangers in the world,"** Peter says in this

Epistle. (1 Peter 2:11) We are not of this world. This is something we have to always keep in mind. We need to be reminded of it, for the devil wants us to forget it and live as the unbelievers do. ***"Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled,"*** Peter exhorts. Our minds ought to be occupied with the business of our Master Christ. We ought to be concerned about His Holy Word for our own spiritual welfare and we ought to be busy in spreading the good news to others. The business of our Master is so important that we can't afford to let worldly affairs or the pleasures of this sinful world interfere with it. We have to exercise self-control over our sinful lusts and desires with the spiritual strength the Gospel gives us. We should always keep our thoughts centered on the precious salvation which we have awaiting us in heaven. Paul says it in this way: ***"The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."*** (Titus 2:11-13)

There is a big difference between the holy life we are to live as obedient children of God and the life people live in the ignorance of sin. Our text admonishes us: ***"Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance."*** Paul says: ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."*** (Romans 12:2) The pattern of this world is what people follow when they indulge in such things as Paul mentions: ***"sexual immorality, impurity ... hatred ... drunkenness ... and the like."*** (Galatians 5:19-21) For our day we must include in this list all abuse and misuse of any drugs. The life which a holy and obedient child of God is to live as the result of the Holy Spirit's work in his heart has to do with such things as these: ***"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*** Galatians 5:22-23

These things do not come automatically. They will not be the characteristics of our life if we spend all our time on earthly affairs. There has to be more than working to make a living, or being busy with school affairs, or recreation. There has to be time set aside for the Word of God, for reading it, studying its teachings, and hearing the Gospel of Christ. If we do that we will not only have the conviction that our salvation in Christ is precious, but we will also have this conviction:

"How precious is the Book Divine,
By inspiration giv'n!
Bright as a lamp its doctrines shine
To guide our souls to heav'n." Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 285:1)

(This sermon has been edited and reprinted from the April 1, 1984, Ministry By Mail.)