A Study in 1 Peter 1:6–12

Trial of Your Faith — Joy Unspeakable — The Prophets Inquired — Angels Desire to Look In — January 13, 2008

We are reading 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 6.

> *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 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: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."*
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> *"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired 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."*

Revelation, Appearing, Manifestation — and the Rapture

Everything Peter sets before these saints is connected with the revelation of Jesus Christ — His appearing in glory, His unveiling. The word revelation is the same

word behind the title of the last book of the Bible — apocalypse, unveiling. The rapture is not an unveiling. The rapture is not the moment when the Lord Jesus is made visible to the world; it is when He comes for His own in grace. The public manifestation of Christ — the appearing, the revelation, the unveiling — is a distinct event, the second stage of His coming, when He appears in glory to judge the nations and establish His kingdom.

There are three Greek words in the New Testament that bear on this: parousia (presence or coming), apokalupsis (unveiling or revelation), and epiphaneia (appearing or manifestation). The parousia is the general word for His coming, which includes both the rapture and the appearing. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 speaks of the appearing of his coming — that phrase itself shows that the coming is not necessarily visible, since it must be specified that it is the appearing of it. The apokalupsis and the epiphaneia are both public, visible, glorious — they refer to the same event: the Lord coming out of heaven where He has been hidden, to be seen by all and to judge and reign.

Peter is consistently presenting to these Jewish believers that the goal of their wilderness journey is the appearing — the revelation of Jesus Christ. Their hope is the deferred kingdom hope, now elevated and purified, to be manifested when He appears. That is when their faithfulness in the wilderness will be publicly displayed. That is the time of praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (verse 7). The rapture makes no such distinction — it is entirely of grace, applying equally to all who are Christ's.

The Parenthesis of Verses 6–9

Verses 6 through 9 appear to be a parenthesis. Read verse 5 directly into verse 10: we are kept through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, of which salvation the prophets enquired and searched diligently. That connection makes excellent sense — the salvation ready to be revealed in the last

time is exactly the subject of Old Testament prophecy. The prophets searched into the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. They spoke of a coming kingdom and of what would precede it.

If, on the other hand, verses 6 through 9 are not parenthetical and verse 10 connects directly to verse 9 (receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls — of which salvation the prophets enquired), then we are saying that the prophets were searching into things like joy unspeakable and full of glory, and into the matter of whom having not seen ye love. That seems to reach further than the Old Testament prophecy actually goes, and it creates some awkwardness with the secrecy of the mystery. Treating verses 6 through 9 as a parenthetical expansion of verse 5 resolves those difficulties neatly.

Rejoicing and Heaviness Simultaneously

Wherein ye greatly rejoice — wherein refers to the inheritance described in verses 3 through 5, above all to its being reserved in heaven for those who are kept by God's power. They rejoice in that. And simultaneously, they may be in heaviness through manifold temptations. These are not contradictory. Two things can genuinely coexist: rejoicing in what is secured in heaven, and grief over what is being endured below. Peter does not offer the one as a cure that eliminates the other. He presents the positive reality of verses 3 through 5 first — laying the ground before speaking of the trial — because the joy in the inheritance is what gives the trial its proper perspective.

The trials are called manifold temptations — Kelly helpfully distinguished these as holy trials: testings that come from without through suffering, not internal temptations to sin. As the Lord's trials in the wilderness were holy — no tug in His heart responding to what came suggestively from outside — so these trials are from without. They prove the faith without necessarily involving the saints in sin. James 1:13 makes the complementary point: let no man say when he is

tempted, I am tempted of God — that is the other kind, the unholy trial where an internal pull is present, and that is not from God. These are holy trials, and their purpose is the proving of faith.

Faith More Precious Than Gold — and Why

The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire. The faith being proved is more precious than the gold that is the comparison — and the gold itself perishes. That is the implication: gold has a reputation for enduring, for not corroding, for lasting. But it perishes. Faith does not. Faith is a divine implantation (Ephesians 2:8 — and that is the gift of God), and what God has implanted is imperishable. Gold has had its great days — the gold rush of 1849, prospectors finding a vein — and then the vein runs dry. But faith endures. It is more precious than the most enduring earthly thing, precisely because the most enduring earthly thing still perishes and faith does not.

The goal of the proving is: might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The word appearing here is again the revelation — the unveiling. So trials have in view a goal: the manifestation of the saints with Christ in glory when He is revealed. Some of these saints died in fire — proved with fire in a literal sense, as martyrs at the stake in Spain and at Smithfield under Bloody Mary. Yet their faith could not be destroyed by fire. What came out of it was their faith shining brightly, impervious to what destroyed everything around it.

Whom Having Not Seen, Ye Love — Faith in the Unseen Christ

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. This is the wonder of

it. The faith of these saints rests on an unseen Christ. Not Christ seen in the flesh, not Christ physically present — the ascended, glorified Christ, hidden in the glory of the Father, not visible to the naked eye. The mocking of 2 Peter 3 — Where is the promise of his coming? — is aimed precisely at this: an unseen Christ, a hope deferred, no visible evidence. And yet these saints love Him whom they have not seen, and they rejoice with unspeakable joy in Him whom they now do not behold.

The eye of divinely implanted faith is fixed on Him. That is what carries the saints of God through this world. No visible Christ, no miraculous signs, no spectacular demonstrations — simply faith, the divine implantation, directed upward toward the glorified Lord. That is why it is so precious. And why what carries the saints is so entirely distinct from what carries the world.

The praise and honor and glory at the appearing — is that for Christ or for the saints? The answer is both. They are so closely identified with Him that His manifestation is their manifestation. When Christ who is our life is manifested in glory, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory (Colossians 3:4). He is manifested and they are manifested — coupled together. He is worthy in Himself; they because of their identification with Him.

The Prophets Inquired — What They Searched and What They Did Not Find

Of which salvation the prophets enquired and searched diligently. The salvation in view — connected to the last time and the revelation of Jesus Christ — is the subject of Old Testament prophecy. The prophets spoke of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. The glories that follow are not manifested at the rapture — they are manifested at the appearing. That is what the prophets searched into: what manner of time, what the Spirit of Christ in them was signifying when He testified beforehand to the sufferings and the

subsequent glory. The sufferings they spoke of clearly — Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Zechariah 12. The glory that follows — the kingdom established, the nations subject to the Messiah, Israel restored, the Gentiles blessed — all of that is the subject of the prophets' searching.

The prophets did not find the rapture. They knew nothing of it. The Lord Himself said to His disciples: I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you unto myself — and that is a very different thing from the appearing in glory. It is an intimate, private, gracious receiving — not a public unveiling. The rapture is the mystery hid from ages and generations. The prophets were searching into what they had been given to speak of, and they found the sufferings and the glory. They knew that a period existed between the two — Psalm 110 (sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool) establishes an interval — but they did not know what filled it. What fills it is the mystery: the church, the body of Christ, formed by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven on the day of Pentecost.

It was revealed to them that not unto themselves but unto us they did minister. They knew this, at least in some measure — Daniel, for one, understood that much of what he was given was sealed until the latter times. But the higher aspects of what was ministered through them they could not have seen. The grace that came to these Jewish believers through the gospel — and in a higher way than even the Old Testament promises had described — is something that builds upon and elevates what the prophets foretold, without replacing or cancelling it.

Angels Desire to Look Into These Things

Which things the angels desire to look into. There is no corresponding verse about the angels desiring to look into the giving of the law. These things — the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, and the grace that comes through the gospel — attract the wonder and desire of angelic beings. They

cannot possess these things as we do. They have never sinned and never been redeemed; they do not know from the inside what it is to be objects of sovereign saving grace. But they look at God taking up sinners on a perfectly just basis — not as a corrupt judge overlooking what should be judged, but as one whose own Son bore the judgment — and they desire to look into that. The glory of Christ, the wonder of the gospel, the grace that reaches sinners: these are things that draw angelic attention precisely because they are things that exceed even what the angels themselves have known.

Partial Rapture Theories — and What Is Wrong with Them

Partial rapture theories arise from confusing the rapture with the appearing. The appearing is the time of manifestation of the saints' faithfulness — and that is true. But the rapture is not that time. When the partial rapture teacher takes the language of manifestation and applies it to the rapture, making the rapture a discriminatory event (faithful saints caught up, unfaithful left behind), several serious errors follow.

First, it rends the body of Christ. If some members of the body are caught up and others left behind, the body is divided — which is impossible. Second, it is presumptuous. Those who write such theories inevitably place themselves among those who will qualify. Third, it is a do something and get something scheme — entirely pre-cross in its basic logic. The new nature only knows how to please God; the old nature only knows how to do wrong. What the new nature needs is not a threat held over it but an object before it. Pointing the soul to Christ and filling it with the enjoyment of Him — that produces the fruit of obedience. A stick never does. The basis of all Christian motivation is the enjoyment of the Lord, not the fear of missing the rapture.

The rapture is entirely of grace, applying to all who are Christ's. The distinction among believers comes at the appearing, when faithfulness in the wilderness

journey is manifested. That is Peter's consistent teaching throughout the first epistle. And it is entirely consistent with the righteousness of God: the rapture is grace, the appearing is government.

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.