

(1 Peter - Part 10): Grand Mystery of the Bible (Salvation)

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon explores the mysterious nature of salvation, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament prophets, and the importance of the plan of redemption in heaven.

Duration: 34:52

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:9

Topics: "Mystery"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal anecdote about a friend named Everett who had a strong determination to serve God. However, the speaker's quiet friend sitting beside him whispers that Everett is 'screwing his violin strings tight,' implying that he is pushing too hard and may not be able to sustain his efforts. The speaker then discusses how theologians who push too hard often fail to see the point because they lack relaxation. He uses the analogy of a baseball player going into a slump due to tension and emphasizes the importance of being relaxed in one's faith. The sermon concludes by highlighting the significance of Christ Jesus as the one who rescues and the foundation of our faith.

Transcript

In the first chapter of 1 Peter, beginning with verse 9 and reading to verse 12, Receiving, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls, of which salvation the prophets have inquired 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 thing the angels desire to look into. Now, it so happens that there seem to be three major truths here, which will divide themselves up nicely. There is a curious truth, or a singular truth anyway, singular truth, and a rather rare truth, and a remarkably reassuring truth.

The singular truth, singular because it is not much mentioned in the Bible, that salvation is such a heavenly and mysterious thing, that the very prophets who foretold it didn't understand it, and actually searched and inquired diligently concerning the salvation about which they were writing. They knew only that they wrote of some favored people who were to come, who were to receive remarkable, fabulous wealth at the hand of a kind, gracious God. But they didn't understand it much.

And then there is the rare truth that the Old Testament prophets had the Spirit of Christ, I want to mention that later. And then this reassuring truth that our salvation is known and talked about in heaven, and is admired by the unfallen angels, that it is not a recent thing, not even relatively recent, but very, very old, and that it is the theme of all the inspired prophets since the world began. Now let us look at this singular truth about the prophets.

And it says here that the prophets who prophesied unto us of the grace that should come, they searched 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, and that it was revealed unto them, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which we now here preach. Now a lot may be learned about biblical inspiration here. There are many theories of inspiration.

And I suppose that I might as well say that I do not believe that evangelical truth necessarily must accept any one theory of inspiration. So long as we believe that the holy men of God speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that not one jot or tittle of the scripture shall fail until all be fulfilled, though I believe that that fulfilled the requirements for belief concerning inspiration. But some persons believe that the inspired writers wrote only what they knew.

They were simply religious reporters, reporting intelligently and spiritually on what they knew about them, and then that they exhorted and consoled and rebuked, giving application to what they knew to the hearts of the people. Now, that doesn't go far enough, for the fact is that sometimes the prophets were moved to speak of things that they themselves did not understand. They heard the Spirit's voice witnessing within them about wondrous things, and they spoke what they heard, but they did not know of what they spoke.

Now, it was a relatively easy matter for a prophet to understand, say, when God revealed that Babylon should fall, or that Israel should be taken captive, or that Ahab should die and the dogs should lick his blood, or any of the scores of prophecies concerning historic events. That was a relatively easy thing, and I suppose that every prophet understood it, if I had a prophetic foresight that New York was to be destroyed by an atom bomb, and I were to write it down, I could understand my own writing. It would be simply a question of visualizing the destruction of that vast city, so that a great many of the prophecies of the Old Testament were, we'll say, on the rational level.

They could be understood easily by the prophets who prophesied. But when they entered the wondrous golden world of grace and mercy and salvation and incarnation and resurrection and atonement and ascension and the sending of the Holy Ghost and the new birth and the bringing to being of a people made again in the image of God, all this staggered the prophets. They couldn't get it.

It wasn't simply a question of historic fact, it was the question of marvelous spiritual understanding, and they didn't have it. So they prophesied about others. And they were included, of course, but that wasn't what was in their mind at the moment.

They were prophesying for the future, and they died not having received the promise, but the prophecies were perpetuated by divine inspiration and by translation as we have them today in our Bible. Now, they heard the Spirit's voice speaking within them, and they uttered forth what they heard. But as prophets they were able to prophesy, but as individual men they had to examine and search, and I wondered as I read it, what they searched.

Did they search some other prophet's writing, or did they search their own heart, or did they seek in the sense that the scripture says, seek and ye shall find. It doesn't say seek what, and every creature has his own interpretation, and I suppose they're all right. Because that's actually usually the case with the word of God.

It is, what should we say, it has a multitude of applications, so that if one man says it means this, and another says it means that, and three others say it means three other things, they are not contradicting each other, they may easily be complementing each other. I have no objection to various interpretations provided the brother doesn't say, now accept my interpretation or I rule you out. Then I'm sorry for a mind as razor narrow as that, narrow as the razor's edge.

But these prophets prophesied of things to come, and that was a wonderful truth, and a curious one, that prophets reported on things they did not themselves understand. Then here is a rare truth in that there isn't much about it in either Old Testament or New directly. But it is here bluntly stated in unmistakable language, it is that the Old Testament prophets had the spirit of Christ.

But the word had is not good enough here, for it says the spirit of Christ which was in them. The preposition is in. Now this destroys that what some people has called the geographical interpretation of the Holy Ghost.

I would call it the prepositional interpretation of the Holy Ghost. You know that there are those who bear down very heavily on the on and the with and the in. They say about the Holy Spirit that he was on the Old Testament saints, but not in them.

That he was with the apostles before the Pentecost, but not in nor on. That he after Pentecost got in the people. That makes preaching easy because all you have to do is look for prepositions, and that's a relatively easy way to handle the word of God.

Just watch the prepositions and hook your little comment on the preposition. But I've never been able to believe that God was such, that he played in the marketplace, and that he built his truth out of curious little blocks. Now the Bible doesn't tell us only that the Holy Ghost was on, but it says here that he was in.

Now that ruins some people's theology. That little preposition in here in Peter ruins it, because they say the Old Testament prophets and saints never had the Holy Ghost. He was only on them.

He came and rested upon them. The dove lighted on the roof, but never came inside the dwelling place. And you've got to believe that, or else they won't admit you into their little narrow field of thought.

But they say in the New Testament he came with them. And they quote Jesus as saying he is now with you, but shall be in you, meaning himself as of the with. And then when the Spirit came at Pentecost, he filled them, and so the Spirit was in them.

Now I believe the Holy Ghost was on the Old Testament prophets. I also believe the Holy Ghost comes on New Testament Christians. I believe that the Holy Ghost was in the Old Testament prophets, for Peter says so, and I must take Peter's word for it, in spite of the commentators.

Now there's all this confusion here, and I do not want to get ironical about this, though I fear an ironical quality has crept into my voice. But here seems to be the fact that there's all this confusion on this subject, for a number of reasons. One, it results from letting the element of curiosity crowd out the element of

practicality.

If Bible teachers could only remember that the holy men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost and gave us divinely inspired truth never for one remote moment ever meant to give us anything to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. They meant to give us truth to transform us, spirit and soul, and bring us into holy living and holy believing. They never intended that we should have rattles to play with.

I have been to Bible conferences and I have heard teachers of not only one but many schools of religious Christian interpretation that gave me the impression that they were proud of their ability to bring things out both old and new, and particularly new. And when after they had settled a hash of the ordinary simple interpretation of a thing, they gave you some curious interpretation, they had enjoyed the theology from a curious standpoint. And I believe that this will lead us astray just as sure as you live.

Just as soon as I accept the doctrine or the idea that the Bible is a book of theological toys to be played with by tender saintlings, I have missed the purpose of the scripture and I have no proof that I won't be in false doctrine before very long. For the Bible was given us not to satisfy our curiosity but to sanctify our personality. Another thing that has resulted in this confusion about the Holy Spirit being on and in and with and so on, is the kernel urge to rightly divide.

Rightly dividing the word of truth turns out to be vivisectioning it usually and it bleeds to death in the hands of the man who holds it, and then he carries a dead, pale text around with him and rams it down everybody's throat. The kernel urge to rightly divide, I think it arises from intellectual pride. And then there is what we call trying too hard.

I think I might lay this Bible down a minute and make an inane comment or two on that subject. That in trying to understand the scripture we are in grave danger of trying too hard. It is very rarely that we can screw up our belt tight to the last notch, grit our teeth and say, I'm going to get this.

God never has very much place for old Adam. He bade old Adam goodbye and said that the end of all flesh should come before him, and God has never put any confidence in the flesh from that hour down to this hour. Now remember that when the Old Testament priests went in to offer their sacrifices, they did not dare wear wool clothing, because wool made them perspire.

And I suppose that God was saying to the Jewish priesthood, now don't mistake perspiration for inspiration. And your human perspiration will not glorify me, therefore wear linen clothing so you can keep cool. And serve me scripturally and spiritually, but calmly and coolly.

And don't imagine that by trying hard you'll get anywhere. Climbing Jacob's ladder with white knuckles and tired muscles, there's a lot of paganism in that. And the Lord wants to kill all that and let the Holy Ghost take over.

Now when Jesus sweat blood in the garden, that was quite another matter. That was not old Adam trying too hard, that was the Holy Ghost coming upon a man until he nearly burnt him up. That was the prayer spirit laboring on the man until he nearly killed the man.

And I believe in that. But I also believe that theologians who push too hard usually fail to see the point because they're not relaxed. Now Paul used the illustration taken from the arena and boxing and wrestling, and I suppose I can without being unspiritual.

And we might take baseball, which I never see, I've seen one game in seventeen, eighteen years, and probably won't see another one for another eighteen. Maybe never till the Cubs win the pennant again. But we like to say this about baseball, they say that a young man who is a 300, 325 hitter, suddenly goes into a slump, and he couldn't hit a pumpkin when it comes up to the plate.

Well, why? They say often it's because he's got tension pushing too hard, that he goes all tense into the batter's box, but when he gives up and says, I couldn't hit the basketball, then he starts to hit again, because he gets off the tension. He isn't trying too hard. And I've met many Saints who are trying too hard.

I remember one time, I think I told you this before, but it'll bear repeating, and man has been here as long as I have had to do some repeating. But I remember at a watch-night meeting twenty, thirty-some years ago, that we were all around there praying, they were testifying, and one very godly man, now he was all that, he was a very godly man, and I was sitting beside another godly man, a missionary under the Africa Inland Mission, Reverend Mr. Sawoonka, who had just lately gone to heaven. They found him beside his motorcycle out in the bush where he had given his life to the Lord Jesus.

But anyway, Mr. Sawoonka was sitting beside me. And this friend of mine, Everett, he jumped to his feet and he gripped his knuckles together, hands together, and in a spasm of Adamic determination, he told us his plans for the new year, how he was going to serve God. And my quiet saintly friend beside me touched my arm.

He whispered, Brother Everett is screwing his violin string. He said he won't be able to keep it up there for the year. And I was a young fellow then and I remember it, and I think he did.

He screwed it too tight. You can throw your flesh in and with strong religious determination break your teeth and batter your own head black and blue and never get anywhere. You can do that in theology too.

The simplest explanation of any text is just what it says there. Just read it, get on your knees, and as Mark Twain said, the passages he couldn't understand never bothered him, but the ones he could understand made him sweat. And you'll have time enough following the text that you understand without seeking to pry curiously underneath the surface and bring up some esoteric meaning that God never found there.

I spent from Wednesday to Sunday night last week in Dr. Simpson's old church in New York City down off Times Square. And I preached one night and I said merely as a matter of passing, it's good you don't have to believe it or it doesn't mean much, it was just a passing thought. I said, you know the angels are pure spirit and the animals are flesh, but man, this wondrous being, is both spirit and flesh.

And I went on to something else. It was just a little bracketed saying I gave and it's true. Afterwards a man with a face like a mask, thin lips and cold thin eyes and a completely expressionless face said, what did you say about the beast not having a spirit? And he looked down, he'd been, I could just see him.

He had taken that argument to all the preachers to visit New York since May of 97. And he said, did God not make his covenant with all flesh? And he looked down, much as to say, I won't hit him again. He's wounded.

And I saw what I was into. At first I treated him as a brother and tried to reason with him. Suddenly I saw there was no use.

And I said, I perceive, sir, that you are a theological mechanic. You're more concerned with the letter than with the spirit. I worship the most high God.

And I left him. He came back all many, but he never bothered me anymore. Now this fellow had gotten from somewhere, I don't know where, the idea that, and that when God made a covenant with Adam, he included the dog and the dog knew it, I guess, and probably signed the covenant.

But it's all very silly. And if it's true, it doesn't mean anything. Why do I care about horses and sheep and dogs and mountain lions? God never said go into all the world and preach the gospel to my horses.

He died for people. He came to seek that which was lost, and we're the lost ones. Lo and behold, when he came and considered being with God not to be hung on to, but lowered himself and took flesh, it was not the flesh of the beast, but the flesh of the man.

And it was a man that went out to Calvary, not a dog or a bear. So if there's some hope for the beast, let there be hope. I think John Wesley thought there was.

But if there is, that's not within my field of interest at all. I can't know everything. I can only know a fraction of anything.

So why not stay by the truth as it affects me? I could spend my life attacking creatures on whether an animal has a spirit or not, and never read the Sermon on the Mount once. But it's infinitely more important that I read the Sermon on the Mount and yield my heart to obey it, than it is that I settle curious things concerning prophecy or concerning any other phase of Christian truth. Now, the simple truth is that the Old Testament prophets had the spirit of Jesus.

And that's here as a very rare truth. The spirit of Christ which was in them is here in the Bible. And they prepared the world for the advent of the Savior, because it was the Savior himself in them, the spirit of the Savior, in them prophesying.

And they witnessed the Christ in type and symbol and historic situation, and in the writings of the prophets. And this explains why Christians love the Old Testament. That's why you may have wondered why you like the Old Testament so, and you can read it and mark it and love it, and yet you know it belonged to an ancient dispensation.

And the New Testament is your book? No, the New Testament isn't your book any more than the Old Testament. You cannot separate the one from the other. They are an organic whole.

And the spirit of Christ was in the Old Testament, and Christ is in the New Testament. And you have one and the same thing. There are passages that don't refer to you, and yet you feel an affinity for them.

You'll read the book of Deuteronomy, which has to do almost wholly with Israel. And yet your heart warms and leaps and rejoices, and you mark passages and you say, I wonder why? Why do I love the Old Testament? Ah, it's because the spirit of Christ which is in them did testify. And you who are born again recognize the same spirit that dwells in your breast, in some measure at least, and there is an affinity there.

And that's why the Old Testament should be read, and that's why we should preach from the Old Testament. Now the reassuring truth, that redemption is famous in heaven and was famous in ancient

times, and that the plan of God to redeem the fallen race excited wonder and admiration among the very angels, which things angels desire to look into. I don't know how much they ever found out, but the angels were stirred to desire to know this wondrous redemption.

Now why were the angels so admired, admiring so greatly this truth? I believe it's for three reasons. Because of the being that is to be redeemed. If we could ever make people see two things about themselves, or three things about themselves.

One is what wonderful creatures they are. And the second is what hopelessly sinful creatures they are. And the third is what great hope there is in Christ.

I think we could settle a lot of our problems. But we either take the attitude that we're sinful and then begin to tramp ourselves down to the level of the gopher and the rat, or else we take the idea that we're not sinful and deny that we've sinned and push ourselves up. Both are true, brethren.

We were made in the image of God, and were made only a little lower than the angels, and are to be higher than the angels. That's what we were, and that's what we potentially are. But without the new birth and redemption and forgiveness and cleansing, we'll find our place to that hell that's reserved for the devil and his fallen angels.

Those two truths are not self-contradictory. They are two sides of the same truth. But man was made in God's image, and God for that reason sent his son to die for them.

Therefore nobody ever ought to think low of himself, though he ought to remember how humble and little and sinful and hopeless and broken he's been before his God. So we keep these two thoughts in suspension, that though we were originally in the image of God, we stained our souls and ruined us and brought judgment and hell and death upon us. But then that God for Christ's sake saves us, redeems us for another's worth and merit, and restores us again to the image of God, and we shall someday stand a little higher than we anciently stood in the loins of our forefather Adam.

Those are wonderful truths, and they're reassuring truths. This wonderful being man whom angels are interested in. And then their second reason is that the astonishing mercy of God.

If God gave us our deserts, brethren, there wouldn't be one of us here this morning. Not one, not one! You kind-faced old lady that has spent your lifetime looking after children and then looking after grandchildren and living the best you know how, you wouldn't be here, you'd be in hell too. And you honest businessmen that never cheated in your life and that were upright and good and honest and a worthy, exemplary citizen, you'd be in hell too.

And everybody that is above the age of responsibility belongs there. And whoever denies that he does will go there. And oh, the astonishing mercy of God, that he should come to us who, because of what we were in Adam, made in the image of God, we went down lower and further than we would have gone in the Henry plays by Shakespeare.

There was a prince called Prince Hal, I think it was Prince Henry IV, if I remember correctly. But Prince Hal, Harry they called him, was of course a noble prince, son of a king and heir apparent to the throne. And he was therefore under the law of noblesse oblige.

He must live like the noble man that he was. But instead of that, he forgot his noble standing and went and frequented the pubs and drank sack, whatever that is, ice-cold English beer, along with Falstaff and the other bloated, big-bellied, beer-drinking, liquor-consuming crowds. Nobody minded to see fat old Falstaff there.

He had not come down to go to the salute. But the royal prince had come down, and so therefore he was infinitely more to blame, because he had come down so far. And so if we had never been anything, our sin might be forgiven or overlooked or excused.

But as men made in the image of God with moral perception and conscience and ability to grasp spiritual truth, for us to go down where we've gone, oh, the grace and mercy of God that we should be saved. And that's why the angel stood with open eyes and said, How can it be that such creatures as they should be treated as they are by the great God? And the third is, and this is most important, because of the one who would rescue us, the one Christ Jesus our Lord. Now, as we see these angels looking with reverent wonder and these prophets who prophesied since the world began, wondering what it was all about, and dreaming and hoping they might know, we can only say that our foundations stand sure.

Not a new religion, not Mrs. Eddie in a fit, not Father Divine with his old bald head, and these angels, concubines, not Joseph A. Smith and his curious plates dug up under an apple tree, but before the world began. This was in the mind of God. Ancient is the sun, and before the sun burned in the heavens, to redeem you and me was in the mind of God.

Angels desired to look into it. You know, I heard about an old gentleman, dear old Saint of God, who was realistic, and he didn't say a lot to Christians, too, they never have a doubt. No, I never have a doubt.

They do have a doubt, and they won't admit it. But this old fellow was a realist, and he testified, he said, I admit I have doubts sometimes. He said, I'll hear an argument or somebody will advance an idea, and it'll stun me for a little.

And he said, when I have such doubts, I always dive down to the bottom and examine the foundations of my faith. And he said, every time I've done it yet, I've always come to the surface singing how firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent work. So that's all I meant to do this morning, was to remind you and examine the foundations a little.

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