

I've heard it said (quite often) over the last few months, "We are living in strange times indeed"...

And of course, this comment has everything to do with Covid 19, and the new rules and regulations, and the new restrictions that we now have to live with... To many of us, it's almost unbelievable how quickly we're willing to give up our freedoms; and then we add into the mix, all of the conspiracy theories... And thus the oft-repeated statement: "We are living in strange times indeed"....

But today, we're going to be considering the **privilege** that we have, to live in the time that we do... Never before, has there been such great access to the Gospel of Jesus Christ... Never before, has the word of God been available for us to read (or to listen to), in so many different languages; And in our own English language, apparently there's more than 450 different translations of the Bible (not all of them are good though, but I'm pretty sure there's enough good ones that we can find one that we can read).; On my own computer, I think I have more than 100 (I don't read them all)...

Even this tiny little church of Bush Disciples (out in the sticks of Qld), every month, there's 100's, sometimes 1000's of downloads of the sermons happening, and not many of them are local – they're being listened to, right across the world... Now, if that's how the word of God is getting out from here, imagine the opportunities that the big churches (that people have actually heard of) have before them....

We live in a privileged time indeed... We live in the time of salvation...

You know, for thousands of years, the prophets of old looked forward to this day... Not even the angels knew when that day would come... And the angels now, are watching intently – it's like they're craning their necks from the grandstands, to get a better view, of:

- who might be saved (this day); and
- how is the Kingdom of God going to unfold today? and
- when will Jesus return? – when will the salvation be complete???

What a privileged time **we** live in... And yet, so many of us, take this time (era) for granted... Some of us might have 4/5 translations of the bible on our bookshelf, and not one of them gets read...

I want to begin today, by taking us to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza... The Apostle Philip is there in the desert on that road between Jerusalem and Gaza. The reason he's there, is because an Angel told him that's where he needed to be.

And Philip noticed (coming down the road), a rather official looking chap (obviously very important because he was riding in a chariot [no less]).. It turns out, he was an Ethiopian eunuch (probably a slave), but a very important person... He

was in charge of the treasury of the Ethiopian Queen (Candace)... (*Cameron Dick – Anastasia*)

Anyway, he'd come to Jerusalem to worship the God of the Jews, and now he was returning to Ethiopia...

And the Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and run beside that chariot for a while." And so he did... And he overheard the man reading to himself, from the Prophet Isaiah...

And Philip knew that God had led him to this conversation, but the conversation's only going to happen if he speaks up, and so he spoke up, "Do you understand what you're reading???"

And this poor old Ethiopian (grand man as he was), said "No". "I need someone to explain it to me..."

And so he invited Philip, up into his chariot with him... And he was reading from the Prophet Isaiah 53:7-8:

Acts 8:

³² "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

And he'd been pondering this, "What does it mean?"

“Who’s the prophet talking about? Is it himself or somebody else?”

And Philip began with that very Scripture, and he told him all about Jesus... And the Ethiopian was saved that day, and he took the Gospel back to Ethiopia with him...

Now, I tell you this story, because it’s a really good demonstration of what Peter’s talking about in today’s Bible reading...

Throughout the whole Old Testament, and even with the preaching of John the Baptist, they were prophesying about the coming of Jesus – they were prophesying about what He would do; about the sufferings; and about the glories that would come after the sufferings,,,,, but none of them had the full picture.

One prophet knew:

- born of a virgin;
- born in Bethlehem;
- come out of Egypt;
- son of God;
- Emmanuel;
- rejected by men;
- suffer greatly;
- be pierced for us;
- hang on a tree;
- Die;

And yet, other prophets talked about:

- A king of the Davidic line;
- Through Him, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all people;
- Open up the Kingdom of God to the Nations (gentiles)
- Come in judgment;
- Kingdom would be eternal...

Throughout the Old Testament, God's word was coming to the Prophets of old,, and oh, how frustrating it must've been for them... - to have the little piece of the jigsaw puzzle, but didn't know where it fit in...

They prophesied about the Grace of God that we now experience, and we're told here, they **searched and inquired carefully**...

¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

Who are we prophesying about? When will He come???
Why will He suffer? When will He suffer?? And what about the glories that follow His suffering....

The prophets couldn't answer those questions. They longed to know, but they didn't know... Not even John the Baptist knew... John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus, with the question, "Are you the one that we're waiting for???" And

Jesus said, you go back and tell Cousin John what you've seen and heard:

- The blind receive their sight;
- Lame walk;
- Lepers cleansed;
- Deaf hear;
- Dead are raised up;
- Poor have the good news preached to them;
- And blessed is the one who isn't offended by me...

And not even the angels knew....

You know, some people almost border on worshipping angels... And yes, we were created just a little lower than the angels, but they're not the intermediary between us and God... We don't need to pray through angels. Jesus Christ Himself is the intermediary between us and God.

And you and I have a privilege, that the angels never had. Jesus Christ didn't come to save the Angels. Jesus Christ didn't die for the Angels, but He did die for us. His mission was to redeem sinful humanity... Sinful/fallen angels, are doomed to destruction...

We have the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness through faith...

And the angels – they'd heard the prophecies (in fact, sometimes they'd delivered the prophecies)... But until they were told to announce the birth of Jesus, **did they even know** that that was the date of His birthday? – We don't know...

But one thing we **do** know, is that they're just as much in the dark as we are, over when Jesus is going to return again...
We know that Jesus is coming – **they** know that Jesus is coming again, (in all of His glory),,, but they don't know when it's going to be, and neither do we – only God the Father knows... And they eagerly await that day...

Last week, we were talking about how this is the salvation that we're looking forward to – this is the outcome of our faith. Everything about this life, is preparing us for the salvation of our souls – when Jesus is revealed (Tada) – Here He is – in the last time. When is that Michael? I don't know, and neither do the angels.

Righto:

Jesus Christ, reveals Himself, through His servants – it's always been that way...

And in this little 3-verse passage, we catch a little glimpse of the Godhead...

We know, don't we, that when Jesus was ministering, He was filled with the Holy Spirit... The Holy Spirit descended upon Him, like a dove... And we know that Jesus told us, that He was returning to the Father, so that He could send His Holy Spirit back to fill us...

And we also know that the Prophets prophesied through the power of the Holy Spirit... But here (in our reading for today), we discover, that this same Holy Spirit, is the Spirit of

Christ... The Holy Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ, are one and the same..

And so when the prophets prophesied about the coming of Christ; sufferings of Christ; glories of Christ, it was through the Spirit of Christ, and so Christ was revealing Himself...

And isn't that what God does? God reveals Himself... What is God like? Well, God has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ... Jesus said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father" (John 14:9).

But the thing is, all of these prophecies, are like pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, but we just don't get the full picture...

And like that Ethiopian Eunuch, he said, "How am I going to understand it, unless someone explains it to me???"

Well, the prophets of old realised, that they weren't prophesying for themselves – they were prophesying for a later generation... They were prophesying, not for their generation, but for ours...

Let me explain how prophecy works... :

Do you know why we have 2 eyes (instead of just one)? It gives us the third dimension – it helps us to discern how far away something is... And so, when you're looking through a telescope, you're only looking with one eye – you're only getting 2D (not 3D)... And so, you can't really tell how far away something is...

And with a lot of the Old Testament prophecies, it's like they're looking through a telescope... And at the same time, they're prophesying about things that are happening in their generation, but they're also seeing things that were happening at the coming of Christ, and they can see the 2nd coming of Christ, but they don't know how far away any of this is...

And so, for them, they came to the conclusion, that some of their prophecy was for their generation, but when it came to prophesying the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that would follow that, **V¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you ...** They were serving us... We live in a most privileged age...

But here's the thing: if all we had today, were the prophecies, it would still be just like a messed-up jigsaw puzzle today...

Just like that Ethiopian needed somebody to come along and explain it to him, so do we...

And once again, Jesus Christ reveals Himself... How does Jesus Christ reveal Himself today – How does He put all of those pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together for us??? He reveals Himself by His Holy Spirit, through His Word (the Bible), and through preachers of His word...

And so, speaking about the Prophets, Peter says:

V¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, 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, things into which angels long to look.

At the risk of sounding a little bit self-promoting it is my duty, to declare to you today, the importance of preaching...

You know what??? Some people think preaching – that’s all very ho-hum – that’s not so exciting... We want to see signs and wonders – we want to hear some fresh prophecies – essentially what they are saying, is “We want it to be about us”... But do you understand that the primary role for us – the Christian church, is to preach Christ. – it’s to put the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together, so that people can understand:

- Why Jesus came;
- Why Jesus suffered;
- Jesus is coming again in glory;
- There is a day of judgment;
- And to plead with our generation, to repent, and to turn their hearts to Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins;
- And to declare the demand that God makes of obedience to Him and His word... (next week’s topic)... Today’s reading leads straight into a “therefore”, and a message on obedience to God and how we conduct of our lives...

The primary role of the Christian church, is to preach the Gospel – to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ.... If overall, my teaching isn’t focused on Christ and Salvation, I’ve lost the plot... Everything else is just a side issue...

Righto, so we've talked about:

- Prophecy, and the prophecy of the coming of Jesus, and how that was for our age;
- How it was the Spirit of Christ, who revealed the coming of Christ;
- Holy Spirit who works through preachers, to proclaim the salvation of our souls today

And the final thing, (that's very important, we talk about today), is that glory follows suffering....

Now, if you're someone who likes to enjoy the easy life, well you're probably not going to like this part of the message... But if you're someone who's actually suffering some pretty horrible things at the moment, and are going through some testing times, this is the good news that's going to make your day... Glory follows suffering...

The way that Peter structures one particular sentence, makes a very strong point:

Once again, talking about the Prophets, he says:

the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

The glories came after the sufferings... But this isn't just a matter of chronology – it's not just a matter of timing... One is dependent upon the other – one followed the other... The sufferings of Christ are followed / they result in, the glories of Christ...

And oh, what an inept/empty/weak/shallow/worldly abomination of the Gospel, when we seek the glory, and deny the sufferings... The way of Christ, is the way of the disciples of Christ...

Do you remember from our introduction, Peter is writing to a church who are suffering – they're suffering terribly under the persecutions of Nero...

And last week, we read how our present suffering, is a testing of our faith, and we stand strong in our faith, knowing that after the suffering, comes the glory. Suffering, is a normal part of the Christian life... And he's specifically talking about when Jesus returns – that's when the glory comes. And we obtain the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls...

Glory follows suffering...

So, let's not seek glory now... Some people have a whole theology of glory – we just want to experience glory now... The glory comes with the return of Jesus. Up until then, life can be jolly tough...

But if you're experiencing suffering in your life, I want to encourage you "Don't despair." Keep strong in your faith. The day of the Lord is coming, And the Lord will come in His glory, and faithful disciples of Jesus, will share in His glory...

We live, in a privileged age... The prophets longed to see the salvation that we experience... The angels longed to see it

revealed... Let's be a people who continue to keep the main thing, the main thing.

And so, let's continue to preach salvation in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
We thank You, for the privileged time in which we live.
Not only has Jesus Christ been revealed through the Prophets,
But He's been proclaimed through Your preachers.

And Lord, we want to thank You,
For the preachers, through whom we heard, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lord, help us to never take this special privilege for granted,
But to hold firm in our faith,
Proclaiming the good news of Jesus, for another generation to hear.

And Lord, we thank You for the glory of the resurrection of Jesus,
And we look forward to the future glory,
Of when Jesus returns.

When He who suffered for our sake,
Will be glorified ,
And every knee will bow and every tongue confess,
That Jesus is Lord...

And Lord, we thank you,
That on that day, we also will share in that glory,
In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.