

“Things Announced to You”

Webster’s collegiate dictionary defines the word “secret” as something that’s hidden or kept from the knowledge of others. It refers to something that’s concealed or unexplained, knowledge or information that others are not allowed to possess.

Now be honest. We all like to be in on secrets, don’t we? The fact that we have knowledge that’s not available to others somehow elevates us in our own estimation, does it not? Not only do we like to be in on secrets; some people relish to an even greater degree the divulging of secrets to others. I think we have a built-in mechanism that causes our ears to perk up and stops us in our tracks when we hear the words, “I have to share something with you, but you must promise not to tell anyone else.” We all love that, don’t we?

Conversely, it bothers us when we feel we are on the outside of inside information. We live in a culture where we feel we have the right to know everything about everybody. How dare prominent people feel they have a right to privacy in their personal lives! The news media and tabloid industry make a living out of discovering secrets and spreading them on the television, internet and news magazines. It always catches my attention, as it did last week, to learn on the news of a secret assault on an enemy stronghold in Afghanistan. Goodness, all the enemy needs to do is watch our news to discover our war strategy against them.

Somehow, at least in this country, we’ve developed the mindset that there are no longer secrets, that we have the right to know everything about everybody. How sad. Can I tell you that such a mindset is quite foreign to what the scriptures tell us about the wisdom and purposes of God and his interactions with his creation? As much as God has revealed his purposes and plans to us in an unfolding manner, there is yet an enormous amount that God has chosen not to reveal to us.

We don’t like that, do we? That’s why throughout history men have been drawn to those who claim they’ve received secret information or communication from God. There has been, and are today, those who claim such secret and inside information. We must be very cautious and careful in that regard.

Now, the words “secret,” “hidden” or “unknown” appear approximately 190 times in the Bible. That points out that the concept of things being hidden, in all the various ways the word is used, is not foreign to the scriptures. And further, those who have gone before us sought diligently to discover, through centuries of intense study of the scriptures, the secret and hidden things of God.

One of the prime examples of this is found in the book of Daniel, where we learn that Daniel studied diligently to understand the words of the prophets that had gone before him.

Further, church history is filled with examples of those who devoted their entire lives to gaining an understanding of the secret purposes of God. The quest goes on in our day as well.

In that light, I find it very interesting that the Apostle Peter, in his first letter to the suffering Christians of Asia, made reference to the revelation of God that was previously withheld and kept secret from them, but in their day was made manifest through the process of revelation and of preaching. It's especially significant, I believe, to consider that his reference to this was for a designed purpose, that being to further encourage those who were suffering as they were. It's as if Peter was telling them that they should be encouraged because God had chosen to reveal to them in their day what others, including angels, longed to know, but were not permitted to know. In the midst of their suffering, can you see how this would serve as further encouragement to them?

Well with all of that in mind, our purpose today is to see exactly how Peter further encouraged them in the midst of their suffering. What we'll see is that he did this in part through telling them that they had access, through God's revelation and the process of preaching, to things revealing the mind of God in the plan of salvation; things that none before them had access to.

Follow along with me now as I read and then dissect his words in I Peter 1:10-12. Peter wrote; "Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 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."

Now let me set this passage in its proper context before we examine its full meaning and application. This is our fifth week studying this book. Up to this point, Peter has sought to comfort them in their suffering in several ways. Early on he made it a point to show them that their present circumstances were due to God's election of them, both unto salvation and unto suffering. He spoke to them of the foreknowledge of God as the means whereby God knew of and oversaw the situation they were presently enduring. Further, he told them of the process whereby they came to be elect exiles; that being the role of the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son in bringing them unto salvation.

Peter spent considerable time speaking of the inheritance that awaits them once the fullness of their salvation is completely revealed. He told them that their inheritance, which came to them by faith, was being guarded for them by God for a salvation ready to be revealed. Finally, last week we made it a point to discuss what Peter had to say about the purpose of their suffering from God's perspective. He told them that their suffering was designed to purify their faith, thereby increasing their joy in anticipation of their future

inheritance. Thus far, he has given them a powerful blend of theology and very practical admonition as to how they should frame their current circumstances, difficult as they were.

Now as if that's not enough, there is one additional measure of encouragement Peter brings to them in the opening segment of his letter. He wants them to know that they are quite favored by God; favored in this sense. All of what he's told them represents things never fully revealed to their forefathers; things their forefathers did not understand and never saw come to pass. Even more, it represents information that was kept secret from the angels. So, in that light, our task now is to understand what he meant; and further, to apply his words to our present circumstances two thousand plus years later.

The first thing I want us to be aware of is that this idea of our possessing knowledge previously kept secret from the prophets is something mentioned in various scriptures. In Matthew 13, Jesus said this to the disciples: "Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and did not see it, and to hear what you hear and did not hear it."

Further, in Romans 16:25, Paul wrote, "Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed and made known to all the nations, which is according to the eternal command of God."

Both Jesus and Paul made reference to revelation that had been revealed and made known in their day, but was previously hidden, secret and unrevealed. But note especially Paul's words, "according to the command of the eternal God." In other words, it was part of God's plan to keep certain things secret, unrevealed until the right time. This is what Peter had in mind when he spoke of "the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit." His point in these two verses is to communicate to them, and to us, that we should be amazed at the greatness of our salvation; and that this greatness is magnified by the fact that the prophets of God and the angels of heaven longed to understand it, but never did.

Now I want you to follow along in the text with me as we seek to identify how Peter amplified the greatness of their salvation as a means of encouraging their spirits. First, Peter made reference to the fact that hundreds of years before his birth, Christ himself predicted his own death and resurrection. Look at the middle portion of verse eleven, where he made reference to the Spirit of Christ indicating to the prophets the sufferings of Christ and subsequent glories to follow. Peter is telling us that Christ predicted the sufferings of Christ. That was indeed something not fully revealed, something kept secret from the prophets.

There's something important in that. What that means is that Christ has been aware of and contemplating his suffering and his death for all eternity, as far back as the plan of

salvation reaches into the mind of God. There is a measure of comfort to be derived from that, because it tells us that God's love for us is not something that was manifested only at the cross, but has been in operation from eternity past. These elect exiles, indeed all who know Christ as Savior, have been loved by God for endless ages. This love was made effective in the eternal plan of the Father and the Son to save those who place their trust in Christ as their Savior.

But note as well the words Peter used to describe how highly the prophets valued the revelation they had, incomplete as it was to them. He highlighted the worth of salvation by telling them the prophets longed to be a part of it. Note the phrase in verse 10: "The prophets searched and inquired diligently." What did they search? Well for one thing, they searched to understand what the Holy Spirit meant when he inspired Isaiah to write in Isaiah 53:5-6: "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The Jewish religious establishment of the day spent hundreds of years seeking to understand those words. Their expectation of a coming messiah was based, at least in part, on that prophesy; a prophesy they studied for centuries, but never fully understood. It was kept secret from them. Even during Jesus' life, they were not able to comprehend the fulfillment of Isaiah's words in the person of Christ. You see, Peter wanted them to know that their fathers searched and inquired diligently, and that their effort in this regard is reflective of the tremendous worth of salvation in the hearts of the holy men of old; and further that these truths have now been revealed to them.

But there's more to this as well. The next thing Peter said to highlight the value of their salvation is that it represents something even the angels long to understand and look into. Note the phrase "things into which angels long to look" at the end of verse twelve. This is the only place in the entire Bible where this phrase is used. What's that all about? Why would angels, beings uniquely created by God, long to look into the things that God had kept secret for so many centuries?

Well, there is a sense in which angels are outsiders to the drama of sin and redemption. They have never sinned and are not in need of redemption. But think with me now on this. Angels thrive in being part of the display of God's glory. Salvation, as you know, is the greatest demonstration of the glory of God; thus angels love to observe the glory of God at work in the redemption of men. Peter's point is this. If angels get excited about our salvation, how much more should we? If angels love to look at the work of God in saving sinners like us, how much more should we, who are the very beneficiaries of that salvation?

There is now one final thing Peter made reference to. Peter made it a point to tell us that the Holy Spirit himself has brought to us the news of our salvation through those who

preached the good news by the Holy Spirit. Note the wording in verse twelve; “Announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.” There is a profound truth contained in those words. And let me mention that Peter said the same thing later in chapter one. In verse 25 he said, “And this word is the good news that was preached to you.” We see the word “preached” twice in this chapter.

Peter’s point is that the Holy Spirit is the one who inspired all prophesy dealing with the coming messiah, that which the prophets wrote of but never fully understood. And further, it’s the Holy Spirit who is sent from heaven for the express purpose of using the activity of preaching to make known to us the fulfillment of the plan of redemption.

I must tell you; as a preacher, that statement is incredible to me. It makes the role of the preacher crystal clear. The role of the preacher is to announce to the people the wonder of redemption. In doing so, the preacher must understand that this activity is empowered by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven for that very purpose.

In that light, I must ask you; how do you think preachers are doing in that regard in our day? Would you agree with me that the answer to that question is apparent in the health of our churches? I am firmly convinced that the faithfulness of the pulpit to what Peter described in this verse is clearly reflected by the health of the pew. Let me say that in a different manner. The history of the church since its inception is unmistakable in demonstrating that as the preaching goes, so goes the pew; so go God’s people.

God’s people will never rise above the degree to which the pulpit embraces the reality that what is spoken from the pulpit, what is purposed by God to be the good news of redemption revealed by the Holy Spirit, that which the prophets and angels longed to understand. That statement has incredible implications for our day, does it not? Friends, we have weak churches today for one reason alone. It’s not because we don’t understand the culture or don’t have adequate facilities, or don’t use modern technology, or any such thing. We have weak churches because we have preachers who have substituted what God has purposed for them to do for a host of other things. In God’s economy, preachers are called to serve as the mechanism whereby the plan of redemption in all its fullness is preached. Any divergence from that demeans what the Holy Spirit announced in revealing the secret of God’s plan of redemption to us.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Ephesians chapter three: “Of this gospel I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to full light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known. This is according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Do you hear the power of that passage, both for the preacher and the people? Can I ask you to listen carefully now to what I am about to say? Preaching is God’s designated activity, and the church is God’s chosen instrument whereby the manifold wisdom of God is to be made known. Preachers who abandon that and people who don’t participate in God’s church will be held accountable by God. Why? They are ignoring and demeaning the hidden secrets of God revealed by the Holy Spirit, that which the prophets sought to understand and the angels longed to see. The value of the plan of redemption is reflected in God’s high calling for preachers to preach and the pew to heed the fullness of God’s plan for his people.

My prayer is that my fellow preachers would come to see that preaching the manifold wisdom of God in all its fullness, in combination with God’s people sitting under such teaching, is the most urgent need in the church today. I am totally biased in this regard. God did not institute the office of preacher so that it might morph into anything other than the voice of the Holy Spirit through a preacher proclaiming that which was hidden from the prophets and is now revealed to God’s people. God did not call preachers to be visionaries, CEO’s, pop psychology proponents, politicians, television personalities, industry consultants, or any such thing.

Look again at the text. “This salvation has now been revealed to us through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.” Friends, on this side of the cross, Peter’s words are meant to bring us a measure of comfort and encouragement, because we are now able to understand the mystery of redemption brought to us at the cross of Jesus Christ. It’s as if Peter is saying to us, “I’ve got a divine mystery, a secret to reveal to you. Those who came before you were not permitted to understand this mystery, but now it’s for you and for all who hear the preaching of the gospel of Christ.” Can you see, on top of everything he’s already told them, how this would serve as a further means of strengthening their hearts in the midst of trials?

Over the past five weeks, we’ve taken our time in working through Peter’s introduction to this marvelous book. In these first twelve verses, we’ve worked our way through some significant theology, while at the same time observed the heart of an apostle expressed in his desire to lift them above the suffering they were experiencing. In the weeks ahead, we will examine in detail a number of very practical things Peter had to say to his readers. But we should not forget these words. “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.”

Aren’t you blessed to know that you are alive in this day, able to hear and respond to the things the Holy Spirit has revealed to us?