



Even to former Gentiles who had no prior acquaintance with the prophets of the Old Testament, Peter speaks of the importance of their work (1 Pet. 1:10-12). He mentions four items in the message of the prophets: salvation, grace, the sufferings of Christ, and the glories to follow.

“WHO PROPHESED OF THE GRACE THAT SHOULD COME TO YOU”

“Grace” is undeserved favor. Here it refers to the blessings that come in this dispensation. It sums up the blessings of God in Christ. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17). Grace refers back to salvation. The message that brought both also told of Christ’s suffering. They all go together. You cannot separate the grace of God from the death of Christ.

Involved in “the grace that should come” was the salvation of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. While the Jews, even some who became Christians, had a hard time accepting the fact. God had told them that Gentiles would be accepted. Paul quotes from Hosea and Isaiah in proof that God had foretold their acceptance by faith (Rom. 9:25, 26; 10:11, 13, 20). Later Peter will refer to Hosea (1 Pet. 2:10).

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST”

The grace of God involves the suffering of Christ. This point was also hard for many Jews to accept because of prior misconceptions. They lost sight of His suffering in their hope for a triumphant, earthly king. Yet the prophets spoke plainly of Christ’s suffering. The most familiar is probably Isaiah 53. Quotations from this chapter are used often in the New Testament (Lk. 22:37; Acts 8:32,

33). It served as the text for Philip’s preaching to the eunuch.

Peter himself was slow to learn the point for he had the typical Jewish ideas. When the Lord began to speak of being killed, Peter rebuked Him (Mk. 8:31-38). Once the apostle learned the reality of His death, it became his theme. “Because Christ suffered for you...” (1 Pet. 2:21; See also 3:18; 4:12-14; 5:1). The Old Testament and the New Testament are a unity. Christ and His cross are the substance and the center of both. The apostles constantly referred to the prophets as their authority and proof. “But the things which God foreshadowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled...Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days” (Acts 3:18, 24).

“THE GLORIES THAT SHOULD FOLLOW”

The glories could not come before the sufferings. The triumph thus came after His sufferings – the resurrection, the ascension, the coronation, and His reign at God’s right hand. These the prophets knew only faintly (Psm. 16:8-11; Isa. 53:11). But there are even greater glories than these in the preaching of the gospel, the establishment of the church, and the saving of souls. The promise of Jesus to the apostles was fulfilled after the sufferings of Christ. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father” (John 14:12). Frequently the sufferings and the glory of Christ are coupled. “But inasmuch that ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:13; see also 3:18 and 5:1). This would be an important thought to suffering Christians facing possible death for their faith.

The prophets were told that their work in regards to the Messiah was for future generations. Yet they were still diligent. They did not selfishly turn away from the work because it was not for them. Furthermore, when God told them that the fulfillment was future, they were satisfied and did not quarrel with God’s decision. Peter seeks to increase the readers’ appreciation for the gospel

Message.....(continued)

and its working for our benefit. This means that a study of the prophets will be to our advantage especially when we can see fulfilled what they could not (Rom. 15:4).

The plan and purpose of God was that Jesus would come to save men. He began revealing His plan in Genesis 3. All the Old Testament was preparation for the gospel which was proclaimed by the apostles.



Articles From the Days Gone By

A LIVING CHURCH IS A GIVING CHURCH

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Once I saw a sign in front of a denominational meetinghouse that read, "A giving church is a living church." At first thought the words impressed me. Then I realized that giving alone would not constitute a church a living church. But, reversed, the sign would be correct, for a living church is indeed a giving church.

How abundantly does the church live in your community? The answer depends on how that church gives. The vigor of living does not exceed the abundance of giving! Furthermore, the joys of having salvation cannot be in excess of the zeal manifested in sharing the gospel with others.

What We Can Give

The church can give money to needy saints (1 Cor. 16:1); to destitute congregations (Ac. 11:29-30) and to preachers of the gospel (2 Cor. 11:8). But many times the church does not have money in the treasury to give in those ways and for such worthy causes because it has not been challenged

to provide such by the elders, preachers and others who lead its activities. Preachers need to teach the Christians about the worldwide needs.

Elders need to lead the flock into more such activity. Whole congregations need to carefully and deliberately plan (purpose—2 Cor. 9:7) to contribute more to help meet the world's spiritual necessities (1 Tim. 3:15). In too many instances the church is completely satisfied because it is able to pay the fuel and light bills and support the local preacher. But the "field is the world" (Matt. 13:38).

The church can also give other things besides money. Distributively, all the Christians can give time, talent, energy and attention (Gal. 6:10; Jas. 1:27; Ac. 9:39).

But it is a pity that some churches seem so unconcerned about anybody except themselves. When there is money in the treasury they often think only of ways of spending it on the meetinghouse, the parking lot, etc. And when there is no money in the treasury they seldom realize it is probably not because they have spent too much, but because

they have not challenged the people to give more. When the church is presented a really worthwhile, justifiable and scriptural opportunity, Christians will almost always enthusiastically respond very generously.

It is gratifying to notice the alertness and zeal that is manifested by some congregations. Such churches usually don't have time to quarrel. Petty differences that divide stagnant churches are cast aside in truly active and living churches. Christians who know the real joy of sharing Christ and His word will hardly allow divisiveness to hinder them.

Remember, the only reason the church has for collecting money is to spend it. Remember also that the amount of money we have in the treasury to spend for the sake of souls will depend upon the quality of our faith, the keenness of our vision, the enthusiasm of our zeal and the completeness of commitment. Indeed, a giving church may yet be dead in sins, but a church that is alive in Christ is surely a giving church in the world.

This article first appeared in THINK, Volume 2, Number 3, dated March, 1971

A little leaguer was playing the outfield in the first game of the season. After chasing a long hit and hustling the ball back into the infield, someone asked him how his team was doing and what the score was. The boy said his team was doing OK, but they were trailing seventeen to zero. The person asked if he was discouraged about being so far behind, and if he was ready to admit defeat. He came back immediately with this retort, "We aren't beaten...we haven't even been up to bat yet!"

"...this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" —1 John 5:4b