

## “So Great a Salvation”

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Scriptural Foundation: 1 Peter 1:6-12, ESV

### **Born Again to a Living Hope**

<sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

<sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, <sup>11</sup> inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. <sup>12</sup> 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.

I am so happy the junior high years have not yet passed the Boerckel family by. We have just one more year with our Jackson in this topsy-turvy, fun, unpredictable, and never boring period of life. One charming aspect about this stage is junior high boys love riddles, brain teasers, and stories which ask the listener to try to solve the puzzle.

A man was trapped inside a doorless, windowless concrete room. Inside the room were a flashlight, a mirror, and a chair. How does this man escape this room? These quizzical stories often frustrate me as I try to figure out the key that unlocks the mystery. One of the riddle tests Jackson’s friend presented to me on a camp out one evening is entitled “Four is the Magic Number.” My job was to figure out why four is the magic number. Jackson’s friend instructed me to name any number: I said “Three.” He said, “Three is five, five is four and four is the magic number.” OK. “How about thirty?” Thirty is six, six is three, three is five, five is four and four is the magic number.” OK. “How about twenty-two?” Twenty-two is nine, nine is four and four is the magic number. This went on and on for about an hour and I was growing frustrated. I loved math in high school, so I was thinking deeply as to how these sequences of numbers connected so four is the magic number. Eventually, after a long duration of time, I came to understand four really is the magic number. What a relief! Do you want to know why four is the magic number? I cannot tell you that! There is a junior high code to be honored here. If you want to know the secret you might find one of the junior highers who know that riddle and ask him or her. Oh, and if you know the secret of “The Wombat Puzzle,” I am in agony right now thinking over it.

We begin this study in 1 Peter 1:10-12 and we discover from this passage God gave the Old Testament prophets a mystery, a puzzle to ponder, and to attempt to solve. This mystery was not fictional or fanciful, but real and profound. This mystery unfolds like a treasure map which leads us to a prize which promises us eternal joy in God Himself. No prize and no treasure is like this one. This Old Testament mystery involved a Savior who was promised to come into this world and suffer in order to bring a salvation offered to all people – Jew and Gentiles alike.

In the first ten verses of this letter, Peter has been celebrating the greatness of this salvation. He encourages believers who are suffering for their faith to rejoice no matter how painful the trial. The basis of our joy is our great salvation, a salvation which is absolutely certain and secure in Christ Jesus. The principle we learned in those ten verses is: “Joy and salvation always walk hand in hand.” In those ten verses Peter is echoing David’s song in Psalm 20,

<sup>5</sup> May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners!

In those ten verses Peter is fulfilling the prophecy Isaiah predicted in Isaiah 12,

<sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

In those ten verses Peter is imitating Habakkuk’s faith as recorded in Habakkuk 3,

<sup>18</sup> ...yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

Joy and salvation always walk hand-in-hand. Nothing can steal the joy from a person who possesses God's salvation and who keeps their mind fixed upon it. Painful circumstances try to wrench joy out of the redeemed hands by distracting our minds away from the greatness of our salvation, but it cannot steal joy from us. Wicked people may attempt to pilfer our joy by focusing our attention upon their evil plans, but they cannot steal our joy. A people who possess God's salvation need never relinquish their joy, regardless of the agony, the hurt, or the difficulty we may be enduring. We always have great reason to celebrate, for we have a great salvation secured for us by God, and God in His salvation binds us to Himself, to His greatness, and to His life forever and ever. Joy and salvation always walk hand in hand. Is it any wonder then, Peter opens his letter to a persecuted, oppressed, downtrodden, and mistreated people by describing in great detail the great salvation?

Peter continues this theme in Verses 10-12, but he takes a bit of a different angle in these three verses. From these verses we will learn five reasons we rejoice in our salvation; a joy which transcends difficult days, painful moments, and wicked people.

The first reason is: The grace of God secures our salvation. Secondly, the prophets yearned to fathom our salvation. Third, the Spirit of Christ predicted our salvation. Fourth, the angels delight to look upon our salvation. Fifth, the Holy Spirit empowers messengers to proclaim our salvation.

The grace of God secures our salvation and we pick up that in Verse 8,

<sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. <sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you.

Peter wants his readers to understand they are not at a disadvantage to the eye witnesses. Peter is an eye witness, but they are not because they have a greater advantage, because all of the things the Apostles were seeing, as they were being played out, were yet incomplete. But, all the work God has accomplished for their salvation is completed and they have a full record. No one had a full record until after the Scriptures were written. The people may have been able to see a miracle or two but they did not see the whole panoply of Jesus' work, as we do who believe in Him but who do not see Him. He is telling them not to be discouraged because they were not an eye witness. They have greater reason to rejoice and that is the same for us today.

Peter goes on to say, "We are obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." This is the ultimate outcome of a faith which has been purified by God.

The word "grace" in Verse 10 is important. Peter uses the word "grace" to describe how this salvation comes to be ours. Peter says the Old Testament prophets spoke of this grace by which we receive God's great salvation. That surprises some people because they assume the Old Testament is all about the Law of God and not about the grace of God. Some even assert the God of the Old Testament is all righteousness and justice and wrath, while the God of the New Testament, in contrary and contradiction, is all love and mercy and tenderness. That thought is totally unworthy of our great and gracious God and one which attempts to rob God of His glory and the glory which is due Him.

The Bible reveals only one God to us, not two – the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament, and the God of the Bible is perfect and therefore is immutable, that is to say He cannot change. If He were to change that would imply He was not perfect in the first place, therefore, He is not perfect ever. If He would change that would change His perfection, so He says, "I am the God who does not change. I am the same yesterday, today, and forever."<sup>1</sup> This eternally unchanging God is the God of grace from beginning to end. As long as God has been God, eternity past, He has been a God full of grace, immeasurable grace, infinite grace, marvelous grace.

Peter declares the Old Testament prophets prophesied about, not the wrath which is to come, but about the grace which is to come. Let us take a very brief and incomplete survey of the Old Testament to observe this.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:8

Noah experienced God's grace in salvation. God determined, in righteousness, to destroy mankind because man was rushing toward sin and rebellion. Genesis 6 tells us,

<sup>5</sup> Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD was...grieved in His heart. <sup>7</sup> So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast...for I am sorry that I have made them."

That could have been the end of the story. God would have been righteous if He would have just acted, but the very next verse says,

<sup>8</sup> But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

It was not that Noah had no sin, but it was that Noah found grace. That is the reason why Noah was saved.

Furthermore, Moses prophesied about God's grace in the first five books of the Bible. Moses cried out to God, in Exodus 33,

<sup>18</sup> "Please show me your glory." <sup>19</sup> And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Joel the prophet warned the rebellious nation of a great and terrible day in which God would sovereignly judge them for their sin. And in the same breath, Joel called the people to repentance on the basis of God's grace, in Joel 2,

<sup>12</sup> "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. <sup>13</sup> So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

This is the basis of our repentance. This is why we repent because we have hope God is the God of grace. If we did not believe God is the God of grace we would never turn, repent of our sin, and come to Him.

Jonah the prophet considered God was too gracious! He fled from his call to preach in Nineveh because he hated the Ninevites. He did not flee from them because he feared a failure of an evangelistic campaign, that no one would come to repentance, but he fled because he was afraid the people would repent if he preached to them. If he preached to them and they repented, God would be gracious to them. After the Ninevites repented and God relented of the destruction He had prophesied regarding Nineveh, Jonah cried out to the LORD, in Jonah 4,

<sup>2</sup> "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm."

Jonah did not want the grace of God to be bestowed upon this people. They were people who harmed his family and his nation, and he wanted them to get what they deserved.

Isaiah the prophet invites us to receive God's grace in Isaiah 55,

<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. <sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

These passages are a mere sampling of the prophets' words regarding God's grace, but I want you to notice Peter understood the prophets of the Old Testament prophesied about grace. I hope these passages I have read confirm forever in your minds the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament is a God of infinite grace. God's grace runs throughout this book like the blood in our veins. There is not a part of this Book in which grace is

not evident, for the whole aim of Scripture is to tear us away from our own self-righteousness, from our own good works, so we might rest humbly upon God's grace alone for our salvation.

Someone may say, "Okay, so the prophets spoke of the grace of God in our salvation. What is Peter's point here?" Remember Peter's audience did not have the New Testament in their hands. This letter would become part of the New Testament canon, but they relied on the Old Testament to understand God and His salvation, and they were relying upon the Apostles teaching as God sent the Apostles after Jesus had come, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven. Peter wanted them to consider from the beginning of God's creation, He secured salvation for a people who would humble themselves before Him on the basis of His grace. Even more, in Jesus, the grace prophesied throughout the Old Testament Scriptures has now arrived! The prophets prophesied about the sufferings of Christ and the glories which would follow. Now, in Jesus Christ, the floodgates are flung wide open and God's grace pours over us like a mighty torrent! Peter is celebrating the grace of God that brings salvation to us!

Why is it we rejoice in our salvation so enthusiastically? It is because God, in grace, paid such a huge price to purchase salvation for us and we were utterly and absolutely undeserving of it. God lavished salvation upon us as an act of absolute, unmerited favor and in a measure which is too extravagant to describe. Our salvation is obtained apart from our own works and apart from our own merit. We have no currency with which to barter with God. We have nothing to offer God when we say, "God, what would you give me in exchange for salvation, for Heaven, for forgiveness, for a life with you? What can I offer you?" We have no currency. The currency of our salvation is not found in our own pockets. The currency of our salvation is found in God showering us with grace. We would have never even tasted this great salvation were it not given freely and fully to us by God through His Son.

In this world, people often take from us temporal joys we deserve to hold onto. That happens and that has probably happened in your life at some point – people taking a temporal joy which you have a right to hold onto. Peter's 1<sup>st</sup> century audience had their freedom, their jobs, their property, and even their lives taken from them. These injustices, when they happen, tempt a people to become embittered. Have you ever been tempted to become embittered about something which was taken from you? Peter says, as believers, when we are tempted by bitterness our line is: "I say 'No' to bitterness and resentment for I am the redeemed of God! God's salvation has been given freely to me, eternal joys I do not deserve and I have not earned and which I could never merit. Joy connected with my salvation is my legacy forever. So what I had a temporal joy removed unjustly. I have been given an eternal joy unearned and that is my focus; that is the setting of my heart."

I love the hymn by Julia Johnston. When I was at Moody Bible Institute I got on an elevator and on that elevator was Donald Hustad, a famous church musician. He asked, "Where are you from?" I replied, "Peoria Illinois." "O," he said, "the home of Julia Johnston. She was a member of Grace Presbyterian Church." That was the church I was a member at the time. He continued, "She wrote the hymn, "Grace that is Greater Than Our Sin". "Oh, I did not know the person who wrote that was from Peoria."

Sin and despair like the sea wave's cold,  
    threaten the soul with infinite loss;  
Grace that is greater—yes, grace untold—  
    points to the refuge the mighty cross.  
Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,  
    Freely bestowed on all who believe!  
You that are longing to see His face,  
    Will you this moment His grace receive.

Grace, grace, God's grace. Grace that will pardon and cleanse within.  
Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin!

That is something to sing about!

The second reason we rejoice in our salvation is: The Old Testament prophets yearned to fathom our salvation, as we read,

<sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, <sup>11</sup> trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them

was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

The words “searched intently” mean a very intense search and inquiry into a matter and is a laser focus into an investigation. The topic of God’s salvation consumed these prophets in their thinking. These were the ones who spoke and wrote about this great salvation. God, by His Holy Spirit, inspired them to write and their writing became sacred Scripture. Yet, as they wrote, and they wrote what they intended to write, but they realized there was more on the page, in the words they were writing, than what they fully understood. It was enough to excite them; to taste of this grace and salvation, but it was enough to say, “There is more here and I want to know more about what I am writing.” Is that not interesting? They read their own writing and they studied their own writing to understand more fully the plan of God and of their salvation. They wanted, specifically, the text tells us to know what person and in what time the Spirit of Christ was indicated when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glory which would follow.

They wanted to know “Who is this Christ” who would come and save the world from sin and when and how would He come? In their search, they searched such as a detective would hunt down a criminal. There was careful inquiry and in their search what was their authority and facts? It was Scripture. That was very important for Scripture to them was the one source of authority God had given and it was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Notice they did not ask God for another dream so they would know more. Instead, they inquired and searched Scripture. They did not ask, in deep meditation, God to transport them to a lofty, spiritual plane where they would understand all things. They did not ask for an “experience”.

They knew if they were to understand more the greatness of God and the greatness of salvation, they had a source to go to and if they thought deeply about that source, as they depended upon the Holy Spirit, God would reveal more of that plan to them. This was not some cold, detached, scholarly study of the Word of God, but it was eager, personal, joyful pursuit to understand and rejoice more.

What is the point? I believe Peter’s point in bringing this up is this: Our salvation is so great even the prophets who prophesied about it became so excited and enthused, as they were writing, they devoted their entire lives to the pursuit of acquiring more understanding, because they knew this is where joy lies and this is what life is all about. This salvation which is ours was a salvation the prophets longed to understand more. They did not fully experience this salvation. In Hebrews 11, we read,

<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

If the prophets found so much joy in God’s salvation, how much more can we who experience salvation this side of the cross and this side of the resurrection find joy! That is the point, regardless of what is happening in our lives! These prophets were suffering and they found joy in it. How much more can we?

Jesus makes this same point in Matthew 13,

<sup>16</sup> *“But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; <sup>17</sup> for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*

How blessed we are to see and hear what the prophets dreamed of seeing and hearing!

The third reason we rejoice in our salvation is: The Spirit of Christ predicted our salvation, and we read,

<sup>11</sup> ... (They were) trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

I believe the term “Spirit of Christ” is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Some commentators believe this is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ. There are legitimate thoughts behind either understanding, but the point is either Christ Himself or the Holy Spirit worked sovereignly in the prophet’s minds and hearts to reveal His salvation. It was first to them and then through them to us. The greatness of God’s salvation is evidenced by the fact salvation is the theme of the Holy Spirit’s message to us. Notice the words “in them”. The Holy Spirit resided inside these prophets as they

were given revelation to write down for us and for our children. Peter explains a bit of a better understanding and picture of what was happening, as they were writing, in 2 Peter 1, when he says,

<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The prophets did not say, “Let me think about what would be some good, religious, spiritual truth to give to people today. I will think about that and come up with a message.” No, they spoke as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit. The prophets did not create this message and dream it up, but God Himself gave this message of salvation directly to them by His Holy Spirit.

Peter observes these predictions from the Spirit of Christ focused upon two specific details. First, the sufferings of Christ and our salvation would involve the suffering of the Messiah. Second, our salvation would involve the glories of Christ, for Jesus, for the Messiah, and for every one who would trust in Him.

Think of the implications of Peter’s statement. Christ would have contemplated hundreds of years before dying upon the cross His death. Because of the Spirit of Christ in them, and Christ certainly understands what the Holy Spirit is doing from the beginning of Creation as salvation is being revealed to the prophets and He understands the sufferings which are going to be His. And it is not just the physical sufferings but the sufferings of bearing sin. Isaiah 53 is one of those prophesies which speaks of the sufferings of Christ, and we read,

<sup>5</sup> He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities...<sup>6</sup> and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

It pleased the LORD to punish Him. That was a part of God’s plan, yet He never backed away from that. Instead, He willingly, in love, moved toward it. In fact, we can say it was not just hundreds of years but in eternity past, in the eternal counsel of God, Jesus the Messiah understood what was to be His and He continued to march toward that. Why did He do that? He did it out of love for you and me, love for the Father, and for the glory He would share. Jesus Christ gave Himself freely for us. His life was not taken by some plot of Judas or the Pharisees and the glories which would follow. Our salvation is so great the Spirit of Christ personally delivered the message to the prophets.

Sometimes the messenger communicates the significance and importance of a message. When my son, Daniel, found out he was nominated to attend the Air Force Academy and he was accepted, Congressman Aaron Schock phoned him personally. This is interesting because Daniel was in school at the time and students were not supposed to have cell phones on. Daniel forgot to turn his off and it rang in class. He opened it and did not recognize the number and then closed it. He hung up on the congressman! Later, Congressman Schock got hold of him personally. When the congressman calls you to give you a message, you will think, “This is a pretty significant message.” He is not going to call to ask about the ingredients in a recipe. This will be an important message. This is a human illustration to understand what Peter is saying: “Do you know the Spirit of Christ personally delivered this message?” How important is that?

The fourth reason we delight in our salvation is: The angels delight to look upon our salvation.

I love this part! We read,

<sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Notice that last phrase: “...even angels long to look into these things.” the word “long to” is the same word the Bible uses when it describes the lust of the flesh. This word is neutral. We often think of lust pertaining to sin, but it is neutral and only means “a strong desire.” The angels lusted to look upon our salvation. They desire with this passionate, strong urge to say, “I do not want to miss this!” It is an inner drive which moves them to see the salvation which is in us.

Angels are created beings who serve God. One third of the angelic realm rebelled against God with Satan and lost their living connection to God. These angels are doomed for destruction, permanently and absolutely. God does not offer even one angel, out of the myriad of angels who rebelled against God, an opportunity for redemption and forgiveness. They sinned and God, in justice, condemned them forever and ever; no hope, no salvation, they only await the final Day of Judgment.

The elect angels, the angels who did not rebel, looked upon Adam and Eve, as they sinned against God, and then they looked upon God pouring out grace upon them, their children, and their children's children, and they marveled. They had not seen this perfection of God in His dealings with them and they marveled God would be gracious. They marveled so much, Jesus would say, in Luke 15,

<sup>10</sup> *"I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

God puts His display of grace and salvation upon one sinner and the angels look every time a sinner repents and they never, ever tire and say, "Oh, yeah, there goes another one." No, they say, "Look at this, this is awesome and amazing. Look at the grace of God poured out upon this sinner who has repented. This sinner deserves Hell forever and ever, but God in His grace gave His Son to die upon the cross so this sinner's sins would be covered forever and ever, and this sinner would receive the inheritance of Heaven itself and will be given a new life to enjoy God forever and ever."

If the angels of Heaven long to gaze upon this great salvation in wonder and joy, these angels who have no part in it, how much more should we, the recipients of this amazing grace?

The last reason we rejoice is: The Holy Spirit empowers messengers to proclaim our salvation.

We find that in the first part of Verse 12,

<sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Salvation comes to us only through the message of the Gospel. Later, in Chapter 1, we read Peter saying,

<sup>23</sup> For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

This Word contains the Gospel and it points us to Jesus, all He is, and all He has done. If you do not have the Gospel, and if you have never heard the message, there is no salvation, for salvation is only found in the name of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> We need to hear the Gospel if we are to trust in Jesus and receive salvation. The only way we are going to hear the Gospel is if someone proclaims it to us, and they only proclaim it to us if the Holy Spirit sends them, because no one does this of their own accord. That is Peter's point!

The agents of God's message are God's redeemed people who, underneath the guidance and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, are sent to preach it and proclaim it. That is you and me. How did you hear the message? I do not know your story, but I do know this, if you are saved, if you have been redeemed, God sent you a messenger by His Holy Spirit.

For me it was my mom and dad and my older brothers. It was my Sunday school teachers. It was several godly pastors and several others. I think of them and I realize this was not "just the way life worked" but it was God sending these people to me to proclaim the message of the Gospel.

Why do we rejoice in our salvation? We rejoice because we have attained it only as God, in His grace, sent people to us to proclaim it, otherwise we would have been lost.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 4:12

The greatness of God's salvation has been the subject of Peter's thoughts. It is our joy in this salvation which sustains us in times of trial and suffering. Peter is saying, "Fix your eyes upon Jesus and His salvation. Do not become distracted by the waves and the storms of this life which are fearful, harmful, hurtful, and painful, or by the people in this world who are wicked and who seek to do you harm. Set your mind upon God's great salvation and think about that always."

Let me ask you a personal question regarding God's salvation: Are you saved? You may say, "Pastor, you are sounding like a Baptist preacher again." I know I do sound like one, but I do so because I care about your soul. Are you saved?

The great Reformer Martin Luther observed, "The life of Christianity consists of possessive pronouns. It is one thing to say, 'Christ is a Saviour'; it is quite another thing to say, 'He is my Saviour and my Lord.'" Are you saved? No possession is more precious than God's salvation!

You may not even realize you need to be saved, but God tells you you do. Your sin has left you in a miserable state which leaves you without God, without hope, and without the inheritance of Heaven. There is no reason why anyone would not be saved if they would humble themselves, for it is accessible to every person, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not of yourselves. It is a gift of God. It is not of works lest anyone should boast.<sup>3</sup>

Won't you look to the Savior who has been provide for you and humble yourself before Him and receive the gift of eternal life.

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5:8-9