

December 14, 2025

## **What Angels Long to See**

### **III. Salvation Lived**

### **I Peter 2:9-12**

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I've told this story a time or two before, so forgive me for repeating myself. It's just that this story takes us to the heart of what Peter has to say to us this morning.

Here it is: Christian writer Max Lucado was seated on a plane next to a rabbi. The rabbi looked over and saw that Lucado was reading his Bible. He then nudged Lucado on the shoulder and said, "*So, you like Jewish authors?*" Lucado says that there was a twinkle in the rabbi's eyes as he said this, and even his chest-length beard couldn't hide his broad smile. And, with that, a conversation began – or, at least, something like a conversation. The rabbi loved to talk, and Lucado could barely get a word in edgewise. Finally, Lucado said he signaled for a time-out, and directed the rabbi's attention to the verse he had been studying. It was a verse from the book of Exodus, from the Ten Commandments: "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*" The rabbi thought for a moment, and then he offered this instruction on how to understand that commandment. He said to Lucado, "*Don't think language; think lifestyle.*" And then he said, "*Let me illustrate.*" And he began to tell a story.

He told Lucado to imagine a Manhattan skyscraper. Everyone in the skyscraper works for the CEO, who has his office on the very top floor. Most of the workers have never seen the CEO, but they have seen his daughter. She works in the building for her father – and she exploits her family connection to her benefit at every possible opportunity.

*One morning she approaches Bert, the guard. "I'm hungry, Bert. Go down the street and buy me a Danish."*

*The demand places Bert in a quandary. He's on duty. Leaving his post puts the building at risk. But his boss's daughter insists, "Come on now; hurry up."*

*What option does he have? As he leaves, he says nothing but thinks something like, "If the daughter is so bossy, what does that say about her father?"*

*She's only getting started. Munching on her muffin, she bumps into a paper-laden secretary. "Where are you going with all those papers?"*

*"To have them bound for an afternoon meeting."*

*"Forget the meeting. Come to my office and vacuum the carpet."*

*“But I was told . . .”*

*“And I am telling you something else.”*

*The woman has no choice. After all, this is the boss's daughter speaking. Which causes the secretary to question the wisdom of the boss.*

*And on the daughter goes. Making demands. Calling shots. Interrupting schedules. Never invoking the name of her dad. Never leveraging her comments with, “My dad said . . .”*

*No need to.*

*Isn't she the boss's child? Doesn't the child speak for the father? And so Bert abandons his post. An assistant fails to finish a task. And more than one employee questions the wisdom of the man upstairs. “Does he really know what he is doing?” they wonder.*

*The rabbi paused here. We both felt the plane nosing downward. His remaining time was short. But his point was clear. The girl dishonored the name of her father; not with vulgar language, but with insensitive living. Keep this up and the whole building will be second-guessing the CEO.*

*But my traveling partner wasn't finished. He scratched his bearded chin and lifted both eyebrows as he proposed, “But what if the daughter acted differently?” and then proceeded to recast the story.*

*Rather than demand a muffin from Bert, she brings a muffin to Bert. “I thought of you this morning,” she explains. “You arrive so early. Do you have time to eat?” And she hands him the gift.*

*En route to the elevator she bumps into a woman with an armful of documents. “My, I'm sorry. Can I help?” the daughter offers. The assistant smiles, and the two carry the stacks down the hallway.*

*And so the daughter engages the people. She asks about their families, offers to bring them coffee. New workers are welcomed, and hard workers are applauded. She, through kindness and concern, raises the happiness level of the entire company.*

*She does so not even mentioning her father's name. Never does she declare, “My father says . . .” There is no need to. Is she not his child? Does she not speak on his behalf? Reflect his heart? When she speaks, they assume she speaks for him. And because they think highly of her, they think highly of her father.*

*They've not seen him.*

*They've not met him.*

*But they know his child, so they know his heart. . .*

*“You know how the story ends?” the rabbi asked as we were taxiing to a stop. Apparently he had a punch line.*

*“No, I don't. How?”*

*“The daughter takes the elevator to the top floor to see her father. When she arrives, he is waiting in the doorway. He’s aware of her good works and has seen her kind acts. People think more highly of him because of her. And he knows it. As she approaches, he greets her with six words.”*

*The rabbi paused and smiled.*

*“What are they?” I urged, never expecting to hear an orthodox Jew quote Jesus.*

*“Well done, good and faithful servant.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”* Last week Peter told us about salvation received: that, in Jesus Christ, we who had not received mercy now have received mercy; and that we who were once not a people now are God’s people. The salvation we have received in Jesus Christ – that is what Peter told us about last Sunday.

What Peter has to tell us this Sunday is that salvation is not just something we receive in Jesus Christ, salvation is also something we are now meant to live in Jesus Christ, and before the watching eyes of the world around us. That because we have now received mercy, because we have now become God’s own people, our relationship to God has not only been changed, but so now must our relationship with the world, the culture around us, be changed. We belong to God now. We are now citizens of the Kingdom of God. We are now, in Christ, the boss’s sons and daughters! Which means that we are now to live out our lives in this world as those who do belong to God, as those whose living reflects something of His divine character. We live out our lives in this world as those who are indeed on their way through this life to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. That is what Peter means when he describes us as having become *“sojourners and exiles”* in the world in which we presently live. We are on our way through this world to our true home – sojourners; and so we are to live in this world by the values and virtues of that true home to which we belong, and not by the values and virtues of the culture around us – exiles.

And of all this is what Peter means when he urges us to *“abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”* What Peter is referring to is not merely “sins of the flesh” the way we often think about such things – drinking, dancing, and whatever else might follow from drinking and dancing. No, when Peter says, *“passions of the flesh,”* he means any and all the ways we can be led astray by the world around us, including “sins of the spirit” like greed and selfishness and snobbery. What Peter is saying is that we can’t receive salvation in Christ and then think it is okay for us to keep on living the way we have always been living. That we can’t receive salvation and then continue to live in conformity to the ways and means, the values and the goals of the culture around us. Salvation received puts us on a different path from the world around us – salvation lived.

For example, a pastor and his wife were called to a conference with the school psychologist because their eleven-year-old son was having difficulties at school. The psychologist said to them, *“Your son is a wonderful kid. Unfortunately, he has an exaggerated sense of empathy for other*

people. He gets distracted from his schoolwork by anyone else in the room who is having difficulty. He is kind, sympathetic, and really concerned about them.” The parents then asked, “Well, what’s wrong with that? All these are esteemed Christian virtues.” To which the psychologist replied, “Congratulations. You have done a good job of raising a Christian. Unfortunately, none of those traits lead to success in a public school.”<sup>2</sup>

Salvation received becomes in us salvation lived – and, before you know it, we are different, truly different from the values and priorities of the world around us. That is what Peter is telling us – that this is what is supposed to happen when we receive salvation in Jesus – that we become odd, or at the very least considered somewhat unusual, in the eyes of the world around us. Because we now belong to a different Kingdom, we are also now being formed by a different set of values than those which are found in the kingdoms of this world.

Which reminds me of one of my favorite Frederick Buechner quotes, which you have also heard many times before:

*The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully – the life you save may be your own – and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, Get, and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the world’s sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under the cross than under a delusion.*<sup>3</sup>

*“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”* Salvation received is meant to become in us salvation lived.

But there is even more to it than that, according to Peter. Because salvation received and lived, which makes us different from the world around us – well, that very difference in us is how God reaches out to others who have not yet received salvation, to get their attention and to call them to Himself: *“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”* God uses our life in this world, as those living out our salvation, to reach out and draw the attention of those not yet saved (which is what Peter means by “the Gentiles”). When the world sees us acting in ways that are not conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewal of our spirits in the salvation of Jesus Christ, they may well turn upon us – *“so that when they speak against you as evildoers”* – but that very opposition may well be the first step by which they come to Christ – *“they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”* That’s what happened in the early church – the Romans sent Christians to the coliseum to be devoured by lions, but the Christians just wouldn’t die the way they were supposed to. Instead of running around in a panic and shrieking in fear, they would hold hands with one another and pray that God would forgive their executioners. These Christians were different – and that difference piqued the

curiosity of the Roman people. And before long, Christianity had swept the through the whole of the Empire.

Or here's a more contemporary example of God using salvation lived in us to reach those who are not yet His people. Bishop Desmond Tutu – one of the great Christians of our age, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and one of the chief architects of the Truth and Reconciliation movement which brought healing to his homeland of South Africa after the end of apartheid, and which has also brought healing to many nations and communities since. Well, Bishop Tutu was once asked how this all began for him, and also how he ended up an Anglican, rather than a Baptist or Methodist like most other black South Africans. And he told a story of something which happened in his childhood – something so surprising, so odd, and so completely contrary to the ways of the world around him, that it left a lasting impression. Now, for background, during the days of apartheid, when a black person met a white person coming from the opposite direction on the sidewalk, the black person was expected to step off the sidewalk into the gutter to allow the white person to pass. This was just how it was in those days. Here's his story:

*One day, when I was just a little boy, my mother and I were walking down the street when a tall white man, dressed in a black suit, came toward us. Before my mother and I could step off the sidewalk, as was expected of us, this man stepped off the sidewalk and, as my mother and I passed, tipped his hat in a gesture of respect to her!*

*I was more than impressed at what had happened and I asked my mother, "Why did that white man do that?" My mother explained, "He's an Anglican priest. He's a man of God, that's why he did it."*

*When she told me that he was an Anglican priest, I decided there and then that I wanted to be an Anglican priest too. And what is more, I wanted to be a man of God.<sup>4</sup>*

In other words, Bishop Desmond Tutu, a man who did so much to hasten the coming of the Kingdom in our day, was set on that path all because an anonymous white Anglican priest chose one day to act, not according to the rules and values of the culture around him, but according to the rules and values of the Kingdom of God. *"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that . . . they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."*

Which, of course, brings us back to where we started with that story of the boss's daughter. Because of salvation received, we now belong to Jesus Christ and to His Kingdom. We are now His people. We are now sons and daughters of the Most High. But this salvation has not just given us a new status – it has also given us a new way of living. And it has also, just as critically, given us a new mission for our living: that we become the means by which people catch a glimpse of our heavenly Boss in action. That we become the means by which God can then draw others into His salvation. If we act no differently from the world around us, if we continue to live by the ugliness and selfishness and greediness and unkindness of the world around us, then how will anyone see Christ in us? Or what will they come to think of Christ because of us? But, if salvation received becomes in us salvation lived, if we truly live as those who are the sons and daughters of the Most High God, then how could anyone not want to come to Christ, to become with us the

sons and daughters of salvation? *“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that . . . they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”*

And how is any of this possible, you ask? How can we pull this off? Well, it all goes back to what Peter said about God’s mercy – that once we were those who had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. You see, God’s mercy isn’t just pardon for our sins, it is also God’s presence with us going forward, it is also God’s power working in us day by day, it is also God’s Holy Spirit enabling us to become what He has already named us to be: God’s own people. The same mercy by which we are saved and made part of God’s people is the very same mercy which enables us to become different – to become more and more like Jesus. And so enable others to see Him through us – to see Him and so to come to His mercy for themselves. All to the glory of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, It’s Not About Me (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2004), pp. 141-146.

<sup>2</sup> William H. Willimon, “Elbowing Our Way to the Top,” in Pulpit Resource, Vol. 31, No. 4 (October, November, December, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Buechner, The Faces of Jesus (New York: Stearn/Harper & Row, 1989), p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Campolo, Let Me Tell You a Story (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), pp. 160-161.