

Easter Brings Us Great Joy

1 Peter 1:3-9

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ⁴ *into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.* ⁵ *Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.* ⁶ *Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials* ⁷ *so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* ⁸ *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,* ⁹ *because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

It's amazing how different the season of Lent is from that of Easter. Obviously, the colors and decorations are different. Certainly, our Good Friday worship had a different mood from Easter Sunday. The hymns we sing are different. The words we use are different. In Lent we focus on sorrow, sadness, suffering and death. In Easter we hear about victory, life, and joy. The season of Easter brings us great joy. The apostle Peter in his first inspired letter, helps us to better understand our Easter joy. He tells us how Jesus' resurrection assures us of a joy that lasts forever. He lets us know how God guarantees that joy will be ours. And he even shows us how the many trials we face in life benefit us and cannot dim the joy that Easter brings us. As we consider this Scripture before us may God the Holy Spirit fill us with Easter joy.

Peter first of all shows how Easter brings us joy that lasts forever. He writes, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”* Each of us born into this world enter life covered with sinful flesh. Sinful flesh leaves us outside the family of God. There isn't an ounce of spiritual life in anyone born in this condition. But God changed all that. On one miraculous night in a little town called Bethlehem a virgin girl named Mary gave birth to a son. That baby was born in the same way that any other baby was born except for one thing. He was born into this world without sin. His entire life was sinless. He was tempted to sin in every way that we are. Yet he never once gave into temptation. He lived an obedient life.

His obedience led to the greatest act of love. He'd give up his innocent life to pay for everyone's sins. He shed his perfect blood. It covered a world of sin. It wasn't just the blood of Mary's Son. He was God's Son. And completely satisfied with his Son's payment for all sin, God raised him back to life on Easter.

Christ's return to life assures us of God's forgiveness. Delivered over to death because of our trespasses, he was raised to life because before God we are now justified (Romans 4:25). Our Savior's empty tomb assures us of everlasting joy. Peter tells us that Christ's resurrection has given us new birth into the family of God. As children of God we have a real future to look forward to. Peter calls it a living hope. And the living hope that we have is for a glorious inheritance that God awards his children. Peter tells us this inheritance can never wear out. Nothing can spoil it. It will never lose its beauty. And that inheritance will last us an eternity. It

will bring us eternal joy. And we know that inheritance is ours by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Yes, Easter brings us joy that lasts forever.

Most of us have been given this new birth through the saving waters of Baptism. Paul told the Romans, *“Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection”* (Romans 6:3-5). As baptized children of God we share in Christ’s death and in his resurrection. His return to life on Easter fills us with joy even when faced with death. Jesus told his disciples, *“Because I live, you also will live”* (John 14:19). As we stand at the graveside of a loved one, we take comfort that they died a baptized and believing child of God. We know that will not be their final resting place. As empty as Jesus’ tomb was that first Easter Sunday, so will our graves be also. The One who conquered death will someday return and raise us from our graves. He will then equip us with glorified bodies that are fit to last an eternity. In heaven we will experience a joy that lasts forever. Knowing that the life to come brings with it lasting joy, fills our hearts with joy right now.

So we never lose that joy, Peter reminds us of the living hope we have of a lasting inheritance. God guarantees that joy will be ours. Peter tells us how God is protecting our inheritance. It’s safely *“kept in heaven for you.”* and *“Through faith you are being protected by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.”* In heaven, God keeps an eye on our inheritance. It’s in a safe place where nothing evil can get to it. Even Satan can’t lay his filthy paws on it. It is safely in heaven and it’s safely ours. We’re assured of that because God keeps his by giving you faith. Faith is knowing that God has heaven ready for you. Faith is knowing that God is watching over you, making sure that you get to heaven at his appointed time. And so that we remain faithful to our God, he supplies the necessary means to keep faith alive in you. With regular use of word and sacrament, God sustains our faith and guarantees that eternal joy will be ours.

The God who gives and sustains life is the same God who takes life. He decides how long we live. He decides what quality of life we have. We may not like to feel misery and pain in our life. It may pain us to watch a loved one suffer. What can we do to ease the pain. One thing we can do is remind them of their Savior’s pain as he died the death deserved for our sin. And also take them to his empty grave that assures us our sins are forgiven. And keep them focused on eternal life where no pain or suffer exists. Only eternal joy awaits all who look to Christ as their only hope, that living hope that his resurrection brings.

And that leads us to the portion of our text where Peter shows us how great our Easter joy is. It’s so great that it cannot be dimmed by the trials we suffer through in life. Peter writes, *“Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* The eternal joy that awaits us in heaven may be expressed here in this life even as we encounter many trials in our daily life. It’s important when facing these trials that we keep the proper perspective. Peter helps us do that. He reminds us that those trials are only happening now. We won’t have them in

heaven. And they only come for a short time compared to the eternal joy we will have in heaven. Paul told the Romans, *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). And these trials come to us only if God allows them.

And Peter helps us see how the trials God allows in our life can only serve our eternal good. *You have been grieved by various kinds of trials so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* People purify gold by using fire. After the gold is melted down, the impurities are removed. Then you have pure gold. Peter shows us a much more valuable testing that God gives our faith. He uses the many trials that we suffer in life. That’s how God fire tests our faith. When the results come in and we pass the test, then we’re sure that God is making our faith pure. And God’s final goal for us will be reached when we’re safely with him in heaven. And those praises will last eternally. That’s the Easter joy we have. And the trials we suffer in life cannot dim this joy.

Christ’s resurrection helps us through the trials we face in life. They may involve finances, our health, our emotions. They may affect parents, our spouse, our children, or our friends. It doesn’t matter what the trial is, how painful it is, or how long it will last. We can face them all knowing God is just giving us more reason to hold tightly to his saving promises. The Apostle Paul had the right attitude when God chose not to remove the “thorn in his flesh.” Paul wrote to the Corinthians, (God) said to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (1 Corinthians 12:9,10). If God can rescue me from my greatest problem of sin, and Christ’s empty tomb proves that he did that. Then he can help me through any trial I face. He’ll use those trials to make faith genuine. Yes, Easter brings us great joy. Even the trials we suffer through in life cannot dim that joy.

Peter has been talking about faith and hope. God has given us faith and a living hope through the redemptive death and the assuring resurrection of his Son. How can we respond except with love for him who first loved us. Peter writes, *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* We don’t have to wait until we pass on to acquire the benefits of Calvary. They are ours now. There are no more payments that need to be made for sin. Our Savior took care of it. We have in our “living hope” that assurance that life is a gift from God which shall not be taken from us. Though Satan may have thought that with Jesus’ death on Good Friday, all souls were now the devils. Christ had the last laugh and now his people are filled with laughter and joy. They have been saved. His death and empty tomb are all we need to assures us of that fact and fill us with joy.

How long does your Easter joy last? Until next Easter? Until the next season of the church year? Thankfully Peter shows us that Easter joy can’t be dimmed by trials in life. It is guaranteed to last an eternity. And it’s all because they found his tomb empty. Since he’s the firstfruits of those who sleep in death, our graves will someday be empty too. And the joy that Easter brings will last forever.