

Easter Makes You Rich!

A sermon based on 1 Peter 1:3-9 – ***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ 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, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”***

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have some good news for you this morning! Easter sales are up this year! This past month, the National Retail Federation estimated that consumers will have spent an average of \$132.41 on Easter food, clothing and other goodies. Compared to only \$119.60 each person spent last year, it could be a sign of an improving economy. It's at least good news for the retailers who have sold an estimated \$14.6 billion dollars for Easter – \$4.5 billion on food, with \$2.4 billion on pressed suits and frilly dresses, and the other \$9.7 billion on other Easter items, like candy, cards, and decorations—just in case you were wondering. It would seem Easter has the potential to make someone rich.

Okay, I admit it. That's not really the good news I have for you this morning. The good news I have for you is Easter has already made you rich. Because of Easter, you have an incredible inheritance you will receive one day very soon. And because of Easter, you have an inexpressible joy right now to carry you through until that day.

Imagine if you were there that first Easter as an eyewitness of the resurrection! Wouldn't that be all you would talk about? But look at the way this epistle begins! Peter doesn't start by making a big deal about what he himself had witnessed. He mentions the resurrection of Jesus, but it's not the center of his attention. Instead, he makes a big deal about us, about the resurrection we've witnessed!

Here it is again: ***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*** That's it. That's what he wants to talk about. Peter, who personally witnessed the empty tomb and physically ate meals with Jesus for weeks after he died and was buried in the tomb, doesn't want to talk about any of that. He wants to talk about your Easter, your resurrection from spiritual death, your new birth into a living hope.

You see, like a child born to a heroin addict is himself a heroin addict, those of us who were born to sinful parents are born spiritually dead in sin. King David wrote in Psalm 51:1, ***“Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”*** And God says through Paul in Ephesians 2:1, ***“As***

for you, you were dead in transgressions and sins." From the time of conception, we were so consumed by sin that left us spiritually lifeless, impoverished, and hopelessly headed for hell.

But God has a lot of mercy! You see we, we who were spiritually dead because of our sin, well, ***"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."*** God caused you and me to be born again. And just as a baby isn't born because he chooses to be conceived and then decides it's time to be born, so too you couldn't choose to ask Jesus to come into your life or decide to give your life over to him. Our spiritual rebirth and resurrection is entirely the work of God the Father. Literally Peter says, "He caused us to be born again."

How? **"through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."** God created the faith in our hearts which trusts in Christ's work for us. We had nothing to do with it. His death on the cross paid for every one of our sins! For every time we've denied our Savior to avoid **"suffer[ing] grief in all kinds of trials,"** for every time we've had misplaced priorities, treating gold as if it was of greater worth than our faith, for every sin we've ever committed, Christ paid. And his resurrection assures us his death accomplished what it was meant to. Our sins are forgiven. And we will receive an eternal inheritance.

Now it's true most religions hold out to their followers the hope of blessings in the hereafter. But the acquisition of such blessings always depends upon whether the individual has earned them or not. Therefore, such a "believer" can never be sure. His hope is tainted. And on the day of judgment every hope which is not founded on Christ's resurrection will prove to be a false, dead hope. But on the last day the Christian who has a living hope in a living Savior who did all that was needed for his or her salvation, will receive the **"inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you."**

Now, maybe you've been on the receiving end of an inheritance and know while an inheritance can bring sudden wealth, sooner or later, the inheritance will be gone just like the person who left it. The things will wear out. The money will be spent. An unforeseen event may tear it all out of your hands even more suddenly than it fell into your lap. After all, in the last decade many a "nest egg" has vanished. And even if you manage to hold onto all of it, you won't have it forever. Sooner or later, like it or not, the time will come for you to give it to someone else.

But the inheritance we have in Jesus will last forever! You have been written into God's will. And so, you are rich. Never mind how much money you have or how much debt you have. In the big picture, these things are completely insignificant. You can't take any of it with you. But the inheritance Jesus died to earn you and now lives to give you **"can never perish, spoil, or fade"**! It's kept safe in heaven for you, waiting for you to take possession of it. No taxation can eat it up. No stock market plunge cannot devalue your inheritance. No earthquake, fire, or flood can ever destroy it. The passage of time will never make it obsolete. Our inheritance is something we can always count on because the Lord keeps our inheritance ready and waiting for us in a place untouched by sin and time. How rich we are!

"Now that's good and all for the moment of my death," you might argue, "but that moment might still be a long way off! What about the decades of suffering I might have to face in the meantime?! After all, faith in Jesus' death and resurrection and the forgiveness of sins ...they bring may make me perfect before God, but they sure don't make life on earth much better." Well, no they don't.

The life of the believer is not without challenges. And no one knew that better than Peter. He readily admitted, **"Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."** Make no mistake about it. Trouble will come, trials will infect your life. We will face ridicule from those who find believing in Jesus and his physical resurrection to be a joke – from other pastors even! We won't always have everything we want in life. Sometimes we lose jobs or friends or health or loved ones in death.

Nevertheless, Peter says, **"you greatly rejoice"** even though we will suffer grief in all kinds of trials. He still says, **"you... are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."** How? The first comfort we have is our suffering is temporary. It will soon pass. What makes even the worst tragedy bearable is knowing it is temporary. When a believing spouse dies, a Christian can still feel crushed by the grief, nearly overwhelmed by sorrow. The only thing that may keep him going is being reminded he will see her again. Easter gives us the comfort that death is not the final word!

But perhaps even more comforting is God doesn't stop with the phrase, **"Kept in heaven for you."** He doesn't say, "I wish I could help, but I'm in heaven. You're on earth. You're on your own for now." No! He says this, **"...kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."** Not only does God promise to make you rich in heaven, but he lets you enjoy a part of that inheritance right now. We don't have a dead Savior, but one who is alive... right now! One who promises to shield you with the force field of his power surrounding you and protecting you every step of your walk on earth until you're safe in heaven!

And because we're shielded by God's power, the grief and trials won't win! Your finances may go down the drain, but your life in Jesus won't go with them. Your family may forsake you, but your brother Jesus will stay at your side. Your good works may be ignored, even hated, by people, but they will always be glorious to God. Your body parts may wear out, but Jesus will always be your strength. Your body may go into the grave, but not even the grave can take the life you have in Jesus.

But why, then, do we still face trials and pain at all? If God shields, us why do we hurt at all? Because God uses them to strengthen our faith in him. Peter writes, **"These have come so that your faith... may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."** When you suffer, God isn't leaving you, he's proving your faith. He's proving to you that your living hope isn't in your finances or your family or your own life. Your living hope is in your living Savior. God lets trials come to you with a view toward Judgment Day, so that your faith in Jesus will be alive and well when Jesus returns. And it will all result in eternal, uninterrupted blessings of bliss. View your trials as God does - he's insuring that glorious things will come to you on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And even these make us rich!

You know, Martin Luther once said, **"Everything that is done in the world is done by hope. No farmer would sow one grain of corn if he did not hope it would grow up and become seed; ... no merchant or tradesman would see himself work if he did not hope to reap benefit thereby."** In other words, would you really go in to work this week, if there was no hope of getting paid? But we do know that trust—our living hope—in our risen Savior will pay off! It will give us an indescribable inheritance in glory! And even now it fills us with an inexpressible joy as we're shielded by our Savior and strengthened by him.

There are no more payments which need to be made for sin. The Grim Reaper no longer can touch our joy or our lives with his once-formidable scythe. His power is gone. His threats, empty. His master,

Satan, can now be felled by "one little word." Though he cackled loudly that Good Friday afternoon thinking all souls were now his, the last laugh belongs to Christ and to his people—the pure laughter and inexpressible joy of those who have truly been made rich! Easter has made you rich! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!

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