

TEXT – 1 Peter 1:3-9

Introduction: Almost everyone celebrates Easter in some way, shape, or form. Yet, Easter is celebrated in very different ways. For some Easter means getting together for a family meal and spending time together with all the relatives. There are those who think of Easter as mainly a kid's holiday, an opportunity to hide Easter baskets and eat lots of Easter candy. For still others Easter might just be a relaxing weekend with a little extra time off work or school. For us as Christians, Easter is the highpoint. It is the greatest event in the Christian Church Year, even trumping Christmas and Good Friday in many respects. Easter for those who understand its true meaning is the celebration of the crowning achievement of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for our salvation. Easter is also something very personal for the followers of Christ. The empty tomb gives us a confident and sure hope that in Jesus there is something far greater than this life to look forward to. It is that confident and sure hope for a glorious future that makes Easter so special. This Easter Sunday we reflect on the words of Peter and are reminded that CHRIST'S RESURRECTION GIVES US A LIVING HOPE. It is 1) the living hope of forgiveness for our sins, it is also 2) the living hope of an eternal inheritance, and finally it is 3) the living hope hidden under trials.

I. The living hope of forgiveness for our sins

- The Apostle Peter addresses his epistle to God's elect, to strangers in the world, scattered throughout various parts of Asia Minor. These were most likely Jewish Christians who had been scattered all over the known world because of the persecutions that were taking place at that time. These were Jews living in foreign countries, living as strangers. It was very likely that they would continue to be persecuted.
- To what does Peter direct these uneasy Christians living in a very volatile, unchristian world? He directs them to Jesus and specifically in the body of his letter, to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, a resurrection Peter himself had witnessed. Peter who ran with John on Easter morning to the tomb saw it empty. He also personally witnessed the resurrected Christ himself numerous times.
- Peter wants his readers including us to be filled with praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants us to praise our God, the true God because through Jesus' resurrection we have a living hope. This living hope began with our new birth. Through Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead on Easter morning we have been guaranteed a new spiritual birth or a rebirth. We know that through Jesus we are born again spiritually.
- Jesus told Nicodemus, who had come to him at night with some spiritual questions, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." No matter what man's religion teaches us, God in his Word tells us, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Every single person in this world is born of sinful parents. Although born physically alive, every child is born spiritually dead, inheriting the same sinful nature that the parents have. David says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."
- But Jesus' resurrection guarantees a new spiritual rebirth. Our Savior's empty tomb on Easter morning assures us that the payment of his lifeblood for our sins on the cross was the full payment for sin, for our sin and the sins of the whole world. Christ's resurrection gives every sinner a living hope for spiritual rebirth, to be born again as God's dear children. Through Jesus' death and resurrection our sins and our sinful condition which caused our spiritual death and separation from God is reversed. We are born again or spiritually reborn because that which separated us from God and caused our death is no more. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we have the forgiveness of our sins.
- Paul who called us dead in our sins reminds us, "But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved." Christ's resurrection guarantees our forgiveness and therefore our new spiritual rebirth. With all our sins forgiven and out of the picture we are God's children with every spiritual blessing there is to have. We are holy and blameless, adopted sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ our crucified and risen Savior.

Transition: Christ's resurrection gives us a living hope. It is the living hope of forgiveness for our sins. It is also the living hope, that sure and confident hope of an eternal inheritance in heaven.

II. The living hope of an eternal inheritance

- Peter takes the blessing of Christ's resurrection that living hope in the forgiveness of our sins, our spiritual rebirth one step further. Christ's resurrection guarantees not only our forgiveness but also our own resurrection into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for us. Peter calls it an inheritance, an inheritance that we receive as children of God.
- Maybe as kids we dreamed about receiving a large inheritance. We asked mom or dad if we had any rich relatives. Unfortunately for the vast majority of us, our hopes for a grand inheritance were quickly dashed. What would a large, earthly inheritance gain for us anyway? It would probably make us even more greedy and materialistic. It would alienate us from people because we would be considered snobbish, and maybe we would be. We could even be robbed and lose it all. When we die we can't take it with us. In the end whatever we possess is destroyed on the Last Day.

- The inheritance we receive from God as his children through Christ our resurrected Lord is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Our eternal inheritance in heaven will be as shiny, new and exciting on the 565 millionth day as it was the very first day we arrived in heaven. Nothing breaks in heaven. Nothing gets old or boring. Besides, we will experience something we have never experienced here on earth – living in the presence of God, seeing God face to face.
- Christ’s resurrection gives us a living hope, a sure and confident hope that we will be in heaven with God forever. No one can rob us of this blessing, not even Satan himself, though he keeps trying. As long as we hold the ticket for our entrance into heaven we cannot be denied. That ticket is faith in our crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ. Peter says that we are shielded, that is, guarded and protected through faith until that salvation in heaven is finally revealed when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead.
- That really speaks to the importance of strengthening our faith in the risen Lord so that we never lose it. Faith in Jesus can be lost. By losing our faith we reject Jesus as our Savior and our eternal inheritance is lost too. Jesus said, “Whoever believes in him (God’s Son) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”
- So our faith in Jesus needs strengthening. Jesus has given us his Word and sacraments to do just that. Our walk with Jesus becomes a much closer walk and more satisfying walk when we take to heart his encouraging word and when we relive our baptisms every day by repenting of our sins and trusting his forgiveness. We also walk much, much closer to Jesus when we receive his body and blood together with the bread and wine in his holy supper to assure us that our sins are completely forgiven and that the heavenly table around the throne of God has a place set for us.

Transition: Christ’s resurrection gives us a living hope. It is the living hope of forgiveness for our sins and therefore the living hope of an eternal inheritance in heaven. But it is also the living hope hidden under trials.

III. The living hope hidden under trials

- Peter recognizes that as great as this living hope is in the forgiveness of our sins and the eternal inheritance that awaits us in heaven, we really have some difficulties in this life. Peter calls it grief in all kinds of trials, although it is only for a little while. What is our lifespan in comparison with an eternity in heaven? It’s just a tiny blip in the timeline of our eternal existence. But it’s where we are at right now. Where is our living hope?
- In a sense our living hope is hidden under all the trials we are going through. But as Peter reminds us this is not a bad thing. He compares it to the refining process of gold. In the fire the gold is melted and all the dirt and other materials are burned away so that only the gold remains. In the same way our faith like gold is tested and tried in the fires of our day to day suffering. But in the end through all the trials our faith is purified.
- You know exactly how that works. Your health deteriorates, your relationships become strained, your money is gone or become very sparse all of a sudden, or you’re just too overwhelmed with life’s daily stresses. You have nothing left of your own strength and no where else to turn, so you look to Jesus. That’s where we should have looked all along, but sometimes it takes a little fire of suffering to turn us back to Jesus.
- But there he is, right where we left him as we went our own merry little way. Jesus is still there with arms wide open to give us a big hug. We see his hands with the nail prints to remind us of what he suffered for us. But he’s alive, not dead. Death could not hold him. Jesus rose from the dead. The empty tomb is proof. That means just what God’s Word says it means – that our sins are forgiven. Paul writes, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification.”
- Jesus’ resurrection means that our bodies too will rise and be glorified just like Jesus’ resurrected body. It means after this life there will be no more pain or suffering, no more sorrow or tears. John tells us in Revelation in his vision of heaven, “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”
- So even in the difficulties of living in this sinful world, there is our living hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, though it is hidden under trials. So, in all reality nothing can dampen or diminish in the least our living hope because of Christ’s resurrection. Peter concludes, “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, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Conclusion: It’s Easter time again. Families are getting together. Kids are hunting for Easter baskets. A few people may even be enjoying a little extra time off work or school. What does Easter mean to you? To Peter and for us as Christians, Easter is Christ’s resurrection from the dead. And that becomes very personal as it gives us a living hope. This is the living hope of forgiveness for our sins, the living hope of an eternal inheritance in heaven, and at least for now the living hope that is hidden under trials, which in all reality only serves to increase our hope and purify our faith in Christ. Christ’s resurrection is our greatest joy. Jesus said, “Because I live, you also will live.” Amen.