

I.N.I.

Third Sunday of Easter
April 10, 2016
I Peter 1:3-7

In Christ Jesus, our resurrected Savior who has given us the inheritance of everlasting life and so much more, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Easter season of the Church Year does not end with Easter Sunday. Officially it continues up until the Sunday after the Ascension, which this year is May 8th. But for the Christian, the Easter season spans the entire year, in fact our entire life. Every Sunday is a mini-Easter celebration as we come to worship, not a dead Jesus, but a living Jesus; for without Christ's victorious resurrection on Easter Sunday morning there would be nothing to come to church for, nothing to sing Hallelujah about. There would be no reason for us to come and worship Christ, if He were still dead in the grave. There would be nothing for us to look forward to, to hope for and there would be no comfort in this life either.

But as Peter writes in the first verse of our text: **BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST:** literally: The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of praise. Why? Because **ACCORDING TO HIS ABUNDANT MERCY (HE) HAS BEGOTTEN US AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD, TO AN INHERITANCE INCORRUPTIBLE AND UNDEFILED AND THAT DOES NOT FADE AWAY, RESERVED IN HEAVEN FOR YOU.**

Our theme from this morning's text is:

CASH IN ON YOUR INHERITANCE BEFORE YOU DIE!

I: DON'T WAIT UNTIL DEATH FOR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

II: DON'T WAIT UNTIL ITS "CONVENIENT" TO PREPARE FOR DEATH.

Peter was writing to people who were going through persecution, yet even in the midst of persecution and suffering Peter doesn't hesitate to encourage his readers to give praise and thanksgiving to God. Why? Because in Jesus' resurrection we have **HOPE!** That is: a confident assurance or expectation. And not just any **HOPE**, but a **LIVING HOPE**. A hope that is alive in us. Is it alive in you as you go about your day by day routine of life? Or is this "**living hope**" only for the life which is to come?

We were all conceived and born dead in sin. We see that clearly not only from God's Word, but also from our sinful thoughts, words and deeds. We didn't need to be taught to gossip, or have lustful thoughts, to lie or be self-centered. We didn't need to be instructed on how to be disobedient, loveless, or conceited. We didn't need to be trained in hatred or greed, in laziness or covetousness. All of that came naturally.

But now the Lord God through the Holy Spirit has regenerated us. Peter describes it in our text as having been "**begotten**"--**born again**, that is converted. This new birth is a result of the Holy Spirit working on our hearts with the Gospel. In chapter 3 Peter says that this "new birth" is the result of baptism, "**which now saves us...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**" It is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that gives power and assurance to baptism and meaning to faith. That fills us with hope!

But how often haven't our hopes been dashed? We hope for events to transpire; for health to improve; for medication to work; for feelings to change; for people to help; for things to arrive; for games to be won; for success. Hope fails and it Hurts!

Peter has piled up word after word to establish for us a solid foundation upon which our faith rests and that points to our living hope, that never fails!

The source of the Christian's hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If He rose, so shall we! If He, the Mediator between God and man entered into His inheritance--as fellow-heirs with Christ, so shall we. As believers in Christ, our hope, our expectation rests upon the solid foundation of accomplished deeds: Jesus' perfect life of obedient love, Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead! We are heirs then of all that Christ has earned for us. We have an inheritance. That inheritance is not just eternal life someday in heaven. It is also the fact

of our forgiveness of sins today and on a daily basis; the fact of our having peace with God everyday of our life; the fact of our new life that has begun in us through the power of the Gospel, the fact that we are now living as children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. That is why we titled our theme:

CASH IN ON YOUR INHERITANCE BEFORE YOU DIE.

Since we have been reborn as members of God's family, **"we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."** An inheritance is one's birthright, or in our case a re-birthright. It is something which we can count on for all eternity.

There are some people today who worry about their inheritance. Will there be anything left, will it all be eaten up in taxes and attorney fees, will it be lost through bad stock market speculations, bad investments, or just be worthless by the time they receive it? We have no such worries--for two reasons.

1) It is ours already. We possess it now through faith. We can and do live as resurrected believers above all of the sorrows, grief, sadness and miseries of life through faith in Jesus Christ. All of our enemies have been conquered in Christ—sin, Satan, death and hell. Paul writes in Romans 8: **WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US.** And in Phil. 4:13 **I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.** Our inheritance as blood-bought redeemed children of God is ours to enjoy in the here and now.

2) The inheritance of our heavenly home is assured and secured. It is indestructible: Peter writes: **INCORRUPTIBLE AND UNDEFILED AND DOES NOT FADE AWAY.** It is also **RESERVED IN HEAVEN FOR US:** meaning it is in God's keeping, completely secure ready and waiting for us. Jesus said in Matt. 6:19-20: **DO NOT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL; BUT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN AND STEAL. FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO.**

Everything in this sinful world changes, eventually for the worse. The second law of thermodynamics states: "everything tends to fall apart and decay." Thy hymn writer puts it this way: **"Swift to its close ebbs out life's passing day; Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away; change and decay in all around I see, O Thou, who changest not, abide with me!"** Change and decay in all around I see. Everything the world offers us for our security, peace, assurance, protection and pleasure all decays, but our inheritance is eternal, not subject to the decaying effects of sin.

Not only is our inheritance reserved and secure, but we, the heirs, the inheritors are also **KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH FOR SALVATION.** The word **"kept"** is a military term meaning keep by guarding; keep under guard with soldiers-not merely to protect, but in custody. We have a personal guardianship, a personal bodyguard! The **"GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES..."** It is through the Gospel that our faith is kept alive, secure and preserved.

That is why Peter wrote these powerful words to the suffering Christians of his day. He knew that they needed this powerful Word of God to keep them in those perilous times, to preserve their faith in those times of persecution and suffering. And that is also why we need to keep on hearing and reading God's Word on a daily basis today, so that we are kept--shielded, protected--through faith for salvation. The Lord has told us in His Word how perilous the times will become as we get closer and closer to the last day. Jesus put it this way: **"FOR THEN THERE WILL BE GREAT TRIBULATION, SUCH AS HAS NOT BEEN SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD UNTIL THIS TIME, NO, NOR EVER SHALL BE. AND UNLESS THOSE DAYS WERE SHORTENED, NO FLESH WOULD BE SAVED; BUT FOR THE ELECT'S SAKE THOSE DAYS WILL BE SHORTENED."** We don't need to wait until death for new life in Christ, it is ours now in Christ. Live it everyday victoriously over sin and death, over problems and trials, over troubles and cares, by remaining in the Word and shielded by its power!

II: DON'T WAIT UNTIL ITS "CONVENIENT" TO PREPARE FOR DEATH.

We read verses 6-7: **IN THIS YOU GREATLY REJOICE, THOUGH NOW FOR A LITTLE WHILE, IF NEED BE, YOU HAVE BEEN GRIEVED BY VARIOUS TRIALS,**

THAT THE GENUINENESS OF YOUR FAITH, BEING MUCH MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD THAT PERISHES, THOUGH IT IS TESTED BY FIRE, MAY BE FOUND TO PRAISE, HONOR, AND GLORY AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

What Peter is saying is: “Be glad when you are sad!” Peter does not say, “Be glad because you are sad” or “be glad that you are sad.” There is no such teaching in the Bible. The miseries of sin are real! Sin’s consequences are clearly seen in the Scriptures and never minimized. It brings upon all of us the terrors and torments, trials and temptations, troubles and tribulations of life. But Peter is saying that even in the midst of suffering and sadness we can be glad because the Christian hope is so glorious that when we contrast it with the sufferings that sadden us, we still have reasons for joy and gladness. It’s not that gladness supersedes the sadness, as if the sadness is taken away, but that gladness—the joy we have in Christ—lives side by side with the sadness and sufferings of this life.

So we can rejoice even though we have been grieved by various trials. The Christian who has lost a Christian spouse, grieves greatly—there is sadness—but also rejoices in the assurance that his or her loved one is with the Lord and that someday they shall be resurrected and again see each other face to face with their loving resurrected Savior. The Christian who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness or disease is saddened that he will soon depart from his/her loved ones, but also rejoices that soon he or she will see their Savior face to face and know that their loved ones who also know Jesus by faith will some day be resurrected and be with them forever in heaven. Joy and sadness live side by side. Without Christ, there would only be utter sadness and grief.

So now is the time to prepare for death. Now is the time to allow the sorrows of life, the sufferings in life, the trials of life teach us, purify us, refine us so that our faith grows and is found to be genuine: not just a bunch of words from the mouth, but a living, active faith from the heart. Peter is not teaching us to be stoics, never showing any emotion. That “stiff upper lip” kind of thing!

It is not wrong to express sadness or grief, to shed tears in sorrow. Every emotion God has given us is good and may be properly expressed, even anger. Peter is saying that even in the greatest of sufferings and sorrows, the child of God, the believer in Christ need never despair, but can rejoice in his salvation through Jesus’ resurrection victory! It all comes back to Jesus’ resurrection.

We may not always know the specific reason for a trial or test or suffering that comes our way, but the broad reason for all of them is as Peter says; **THAT THE GENUINENESS OF YOUR FAITH...MAY BE FOUND TO PRAISE, HONOR, AND GLORY AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.** The reason that gold is refined in the fiery furnace at 1,100 degrees Fahrenheit is to burn off the impurities, the dross that clings to it, so that it is pure, genuine gold—so also we go through fiery trials so that our faith is refined, strengthened, purified and proved to be genuine and true.

Peter had tasted the bitterness of failing such a test in the courtyard when he denied knowing his Lord with curses and oaths, but he also knew the sweetness of his Savior’s forgiveness. We also have the assurance from God that no trial will be more than we can bear, for our faith and our eternal salvation are worth far more than perishable gold. And our faith is shown to be genuine by the way the Holy Spirit leads us to handle the burdens and trials, the sorrows and sufferings of life that is laid upon us. The world also watches to see if Christians are truly different. It is often in adversity, sufferings and grief that the difference is the most apparent.

What often makes the worst tragedy bearable is knowing that it is only temporary; it is only for this life, not for eternity. That in turn prepares us for our own passing, our own death. Life here on earth is only temporary. Problems, trials, loneliness, sorrow and sadness also are temporary. But life with Christ is eternal. Now is the time to prepare ourselves for the sufferings to come, for the losses that will take place, for the passing of our loved ones and for our own eventual passing from this life to the next.

We can be glad and rejoice even when we are sad and in grief because of the powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ. That good news lives in us, leads us to rejoice and keeps us safe even in the midst of all adversity. Again it all comes back to Christ’s resurrection.

Our living hope is for this life as well as for the one which is to come, because Jesus has conquered death and is even now giving us our inheritance to enjoy. May our actions then praise, honor and glorify Jesus today, tomorrow and when He comes in His glory on that awesome Day of Judgment to take us to be with Him forever.

Amen.