

Endless Hope

Isn't Easter the best!!! Think of the message you heard last week, the miracle you witnessed, and the promise you were given:

- Your greatest need has been secured. You are forgiven!
- Your worst fear has been overcome. Death is conquered!
- Your fiercest enemy has been annihilated. The devil is defeated!

Oh, brothers and sisters in Christ, this triumphant exchange cannot be overstated: "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" Amen! Alleluia!

But from the moment you left church on Easter Sunday last week, how long did it take before your Easter high was slapped in the face with life's harsh realities? How long did it take before you were pulled down from that high by the trials and troubles of your life? How long did it take before your shouts of joy turned into groans of grieving?

I imagine it didn't take long at all. For me, I, literally, wasn't home one hour from church, and this is the headline I read on Easter Sunday: *"Trailer with Hundreds of Bibles Intentionally Set on Fire in Wilson County, Tennessee."* Now I know better, and realize that if they burned every Bible in the world, the word of God would remain. God's Word stands forever! But it made me realize, once again, even on Easter, the hate and despising we continue to face as believers in Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior.

Unfortunately, this is nothing new. Our fellow believers in the apostle Peter's day faced similar hate and despising, and because they did, this is why God inspired Peter to write these words:

³ 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.

There are three encouragements to take to heart from these words in I Peter on the Sunday after Easter:

- Hold on to the hope you have in Christ.
- Stand firm in the faith you have in Christ.
- Be motivated by the love you have for Christ.

In our lives we talk a lot about hope. Martin Luther once said, **“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope. No farmer would plant one grain of corn if he did not hope it would grow up and become a plant. No person would work if he did not hope to earn a wage.”** But the reality is that there is no guarantee to any hope we have in life except one: Eternal life in heaven.

Peter calls our hope of eternal life in heaven a “living hope.” It’s a living hope because it comes through faith in our living Lord and Savior. Peter directs our hope to the risen Christ, who rose victoriously from the grave and conquered everything that fills our lives with hopelessness. He rose over everything that opposes God and threatens us. He did away with sin, defied death, and destroyed the devil. And as a result, guilt is gone, fear is forgotten, and the foe is fallen. Because of Christ’s resurrection, we rise victoriously to a hope that guarantees eternal life in heaven.

There is a saying about hope that goes like this: **“Life without Christ is a hopeless end, but life with Christ is an endless hope.”** The encouragement is that whatever difficulty or trial you face and endure in life, face it head on with Christ. The hope you have in him promises an inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Your hope is not subject to the wasting processes of sin, nor the inevitability of death. Rather, your hope transcends all the disappointments of this dying world and promises you glory in eternity. You can be sure of this because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Every human hope is fleeting, but the hope you have in Christ is real and enduring. Hold on to it with the strength of the resurrection. Hold on to it in faith.

Peter says in verses 5-7: **⁵Through faith [you] are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These 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.**

It might seem obvious to say that our faith is more precious than gold. But is it as obvious to us when we find ourselves holding on too tightly to earthly things, like gold? Is it as obvious when we lose our job, our health, or our home? Is it as obvious when we lose a loved one? Is it as obvious when we are being mocked, ridiculed, and hated for our faith in Christ?

Peter makes the point that you can refine gold with fire so that it is as pure as pure can be, but gold still perishes. It is still part of this dying world, which on the last day will be destroyed. But our faith in Christ is far more precious. I cannot proclaim it any more clearly or powerfully than John 3:16 does: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.”** This is why we greatly rejoice, even when we **“suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”** This is what shields us from being overwhelmed and overcome by the harsh realities of life. Our reality is rooted in our risen Savior. Stand firm in the faith!

Now I don’t want to give the impression that anything I have said up to this point is easy. There is nothing easy about “grief” (literally experiencing severe sorrow and pain), and there is nothing easy about “all kinds of trials” (literally being brought to the brink of death). Bluntly put, there is nothing

easy about life. But remember Peter's last words in our text: **"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 end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls"** (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Do you know why you love Jesus? You love him because even though he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for another way to save you from the grief and suffering of your sin, he said to his Father, **"Yet not as I will, but as you will"** (Matthew 26:39c). And what was the Father's will? To sacrifice his only Son and punish him for your sins on the cross. What was the result of Jesus' sacrifice? **"It is finished."** What was the result of **"It is finished"**? ... **"Christ is risen!"** That's why you love him. That's why you are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. You know what you have to look forward to, what you can expect through all the suffering, grief, and trials of life. It's summed up in one word: VICTORY! We are more than conquerors through him who loved us!

Thanks be to God. Amen.