

The Abiding Meaning Of Easter.

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Suggested Hymns:

103, 101, 347, 102

1) That we have hope

2) That we must suffer

3) That we shall triumph

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Peter 1:3-9, ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ⁴ *to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,* ⁵ *who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

⁶ *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,* ⁷ *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,* ⁸ *whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,* ⁹ *receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of your souls.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are living in the afterglow of Easter. Our heart still thrills to see the open tomb and hear the angels' glad refrain, "**He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.**"¹ We share the women's joy and the apostles' wonder. With the Emmaus disciples, our hearts burn within us as the Scriptures are fulfilled and the Saviour is revealed.

Easter is not just an annual holiday, to be prepared for, celebrated, and then forgotten. It is not simply an occasion to pay our "*Easter duty*" to the church, which can then be safely neglected for another year. Easter is not simply an event.

Rather, Easter is the foundation of our Christian faith, the dynamic of our Christian life. The meaning of Easter, therefore, is of surpassing importance.

Easter Day has come and gone. But the meaning of Easter abides. Let us, therefore, on the basis of our text, review the abiding meaning of Easter. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Easter Means That We Have Hope

Peter, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, begins this stirring passage with an expression of praise to God, ³ ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** The God of love and mercy — mercy so ***“abundant,”*** says the apostle, that He ***has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.***

We are all spiritually dead by nature. There is within us no spark of spiritual life and certainly no capacity for spiritual growth. But God has had mercy on our wretched, lost estate and has ***“begotten us again,”*** that is, made us new creatures, and given us new life through His Word and Sacrament. We are born again through the Holy Spirit’s work within us. And thus, born again, we have hope — and the source of our hope is the mercy of God.

The apostle describes this hope as a living hope, because it is drawn from a living God. And it has for its guarantee a living Saviour. This hope is based, says our text, on ***“the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”***

Jesus is not a dead hero, a noble martyr, or a living legend. He is the living Lord. As His life is real, so His resurrection is real. And as His resurrection is real, so our hope is real.

Easter means, therefore, that we have hope. We have hope in the abiding power of His resurrection in our lives; hope in the resurrection of our own bodies from the grave; hope in the glad reunion with our loved ones on resurrection day, and hope in the eternal vision of our resurrected Lord.

And this object of our hope the apostle describes as ***an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*** The resurrection hope is our inheritance — bequeathed to us by our gracious Father as the eternal heritage of His children. This inheritance is ***“incorruptible and undefiled”*** — for this is a treasure which neither moth nor rust can corrupt and which robbers cannot steal. And this inheritance is ***“reserved in heaven”*** for us. It is kept in trust for us by the promise and power of God, in the stronghold of His everlasting arms.

And by virtue of that promise and that power, we are ***kept by the power of God through faith for salvation***. Through faith in the atoning merits and victorious resurrection of His Son we cling to the promises of God and make His life our own. And thus God guarantees to us salvation — that salvation which is both our present possession and our future inheritance. That salvation which is the object of our hope and the cause for our rejoicing!

We rejoice in that salvation because we have it already now. We know its power, we feel its joy, and we share its blessings. But we rejoice also because of the full measure of the power and joy and blessing of that salvation will ***be revealed in the last time***. For the Christian the best is yet to come.

But before the best comes, we must experience something of the worst. Christ could not taste the triumph of Easter before He had suffered the ordeal of Good Friday. “*Through the cross to the crown*” was the experience of the Saviour. “*Through the cross to the crown*” is an axiom of the Christian life. Therefore, our text goes on to show:

2. Easter Means That We Must Suffer

God warns in our text that the Christian’s joy of salvation will be tempered with suffering, ***“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.”*** Trials not only includes tests to prove our faith but also temptations.

It is not accidental that our Lord taught His disciples to pray, ***“Lead us not into temptation.”*** Temptations are such an inevitable part of the Christian’s experience that we need a full measure of God’s help to ward them off or to soften their impact. In every stage and circumstance of life temptations beset us: the lure of the world, the pride of life, the concern for things — things of the body, things of the day, things that must surely pass away.

The devil is full of ideas as to how he may bring about our spiritual ruin. The Bible we neglect to read, the hands that we forget to fold, the love that we fail to show; the hasty word, the jealous thought, the vain ambition — these all are the devil’s devices. In these ways the devil wants to tempt us away from God. And of all the temptations to which we are exposed, the worst is this, that we feel immune to temptation.

The Christian who is honest with himself, however, feels the Tempter's thrusts every step of the way through life. *"I walk in danger all the way,"*² the hymnist writes, and the Christian knows those words are true. The pressure of temptation has ***grieved*** the Christian. This is what the apostle speaks of in our text.

But the Christian is "***grieved***" not only because the devil tempts him to sin, but also because his patience and hope are so often tested. Sickness in the home, problems in his work, anxiety about the future, the unfaithfulness of friends, financial reversals, the intrusion of death into the family circle — all these are difficult trials indeed for even the best of Christians. These are part of the heavy load he must bear as he makes his way through life.

But these trials and temptations, grievous as they are, are part of God's design for our life. The apostle says that God regards them as "***precious,***" and he compares them to gold. The comparison is apt.

As gold must be treated in the hot fire, thence to emerge bright and pure, so the Christian must be tried in the furnace of affliction, to purge away the dross of sin and cleanse him from the alloy of unbelief.

And, the apostle argues, if this purging process is necessary in the case of perishable gold, how much more important it is for the imperishable soul of man! Truly, *"In the furnace God may prove thee, thence to bring thee forth more bright!"*³

But, even while he indicates that trouble is the Christian's inevitable lot, the apostle sounds a note of optimism. These troubles, he assures us, will only be "***a little while.***" They will last only so long as God thinks that they will benefit us. And these troubles will befall us, the text declares, only "***if need be.***"

God's aim is not to punish, but to bless. For, after all, the promise of God holds good as written in 1 Corinthians 10:13, ¹³***No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.***

God's purpose in sending us the cross is not to make us suffer and squirm. He does not enjoy our misery. He intends only our good — that we may love Him more and serve Him better; that our lives may be more useful to our neighbour and more in harmony with His will. Our text puts it this way, ⁷***that the genuineness of***

your faith, ... may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, at His coming, will dry our tears and bind up our wounds and calm our troubled hearts. Then there will be gladness instead of mourning, songs instead of sighs, and peace instead of strife. Then at last we shall see how our faithfulness in trials, our resistance to temptation, and our hope amid afflictions have all combined to glorify God's name and prove Him to be our faithful and unfailing God. And that God, we shall see and serve and worship "*at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" on the Last Day.

This sure and dauntless hope is ours in a special measure again this Eastertide. For in the victory of our resurrected Lord we see the full and final meaning of Easter for ourselves.

3. Easter Means That We Shall Triumph

Peter assures us that, come trial and temptation and all the assaults of hell, we shall nevertheless "*be kept by the power of God.*" And this safekeeping will continue until "*the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

And of this Christ the apostle says, ⁸ *whom having not seen you love.* In human relationships it is unthinkable that we should love someone whom we have never seen.

But our fellowship with Christ is of a higher order. He who died for our sins — shall we not love Him? He who has made us His own — shall we not love Him? He who cleanses our heart — shall we not love Him? Indeed, "*We love Him because He first loved us.*"⁴

And this is a kind of love that does not depend on sight. Our union with Christ is not a sight-relationship, but a faith-relationship. Our text makes this plain, ⁸ *whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.* Our fellowship with Christ brings present joy and future glory.

This glory will be the consummation of our faith and our eternal salvation. Our text concludes, ⁹ *receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of your souls.*

This, then, is the meaning of Easter for us: Because Christ rose, we, too, shall rise. Because Christ conquered the evil Foe, we shall eternally share in His

triumph. Because Christ lives, we, too, shall live. No, but rather, because He lives, eternal life is ours already here and now!

Easter means that *“life is hope.”* Easter means that we have passed through suffering. Easter means that our victory is sure. Easter means that all through life God will, as the Psalmist says, *“guide us with His counsel and afterward receive us into glory.”*⁵ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 28:6

² Hymn “I walk in danger all the way,” Hans A Brorson

³ Hymn “Zion stands by hills surrounded,” Thomas Kelly

⁴ 1 John 4:19

⁵ Psalm 73:24