

Second Sunday of Easter

April 23, 2017

1 Peter 1:3-9 (EHV) – ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵Through faith you are being protected by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time. ⁶Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials ⁷so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Introduction

It’s a week after the Festival of the Resurrection. Jesus is THE resurrection and THE life. So let me ask... How long did it take until your thoughts drifted back to the subject of death? Did you make a point to check out the obituaries right away on Monday? Have any of your relatives passed away between then and now? Did you maybe even attend a funeral in the past week already?

It’s a common practice at funerals for people to comment on the good memories and positive contributions of the deceased. That practice is called a eulogy. Because our funerals focus on the grace of God instead of the works of people, eulogies are usually absent in our churches. Jesus is the center of attention at all our worship services, weddings and funerals included.

Theme: Eulogize the Living God

The very first word of today’s sermon text happens to be the Greek word from which we get “eulogy,” Εὐλογία. It’s a word that appears 8 times in the New Testament. And not once does it talk about eulogizing the dead. In each and every case, it refers to God. And in today’s text, it’s connected to the resurrection of Jesus. With that in mind, for the next few minutes, let’s **EULOGIZE THE LIVING GOD**. The Apostle Peter gives us two reasons: **He’s given us a new identity. Our destiny is worth the suffering.**

Part I: He’s given us a new identity.

The 7 verses of our text are an English teacher’s nightmare. It’s one huge run-on sentence in the Greek that even includes the 3 verses that follow our text. Just imagine trying to diagram this sentence! But the main clause – the subject and verb – of this monstrosity is short and sweet: **“God be blessed!”** “God be spoken well of!” That’s what it means to eulogize someone – to say a good word about them. All the supporting clauses that follow in the next 9½ verses pile up one reason after another why we can bless, or speak well of, God.

Throughout Lent, we may have placed God the Father on the back burner a little bit, while we focused on the suffering and death of God the Son for our sins. We mentioned him a couple times in connection with Good Friday – he forsook his own Son on the cross by pouring out his wrath on him, and then shortly after, Jesus committed his spirit into his hands, having paid the ultimate penalty of hell. Easter also focused us on the risen and glorious Jesus. Our text today gets us back to thinking about what God the Father accomplished through his Son’s completed mission.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Our new identity for which God is to be eulogized comes by way of the **“new birth he’s given us.”** Early on in his earthly ministry, Jesus had told Nicodemus that a person had to be born again to enter God’s kingdom. Each person undergoes a natural, physical birth, but to become one of God’s children, a person has to be spiritually reborn. Toward the end of the chapter, Peter will say that we’re reborn through the Word of God. Writing to Titus, Paul connects our rebirth to the Holy Spirit’s work in Baptism.

It never ceases to amaze me how some turn Baptism into a human work that needs to be carried out. Baptism is God’s work. And verse 3 of our text backs this up. He gave us a spiritual birth **“by his great mercy.”** Mercy is on the opposite side of the coin from grace. If grace is God’s undeserved love toward sinners, then mercy is God’s withholding of punishment from sinners. Both ultimately lead to the same place – it was a loving and compassionate God who gave us new birth as a completely undeserved gift. To be made spiritually alive, means that we were formerly spiritually dead. And by definition, the dead are incapable of doing anything except being dead. We were born the first time with a future in hell. That was spiritually true of every one of us. But God has made us reborn.

He did that **“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”** There could be no rebirth if Jesus hadn’t risen from the dead. If he hadn’t, Paul says that we’d still be in our sins and our faith would be useless. In the physical resurrection of Jesus, we have the proof and guarantee that his payment for sin was sufficient. We have the guarantee that we’ve been reconciled to God. We’re his beloved children – redeemed, restored, and forgiven.

This merciful new birth through Jesus’ resurrection is **“into a living hope.”** Our bleak future in hell has been replaced with an eternal future in heaven. As we celebrated the resurrection last Sunday, we all felt that hope spring to life once again, didn’t we? I sure did!

Our new identity is made possible through our spiritual rebirth. That new identity brings us into a new relationship with God – not only as his children, but also as his heirs, **“...into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”**

Usually we think of God adopting us and giving us an inheritance. But because of our Baptism, we can also use the picture of being born into an inheritance. Being connected to Jesus in Baptism, heaven is our birthright!

Aren’t you glad you don’t have a physical ticket to heaven that you have to carry around in your pocket? What if you misplaced it? What if you accidentally forgot about it and it went through the laundry and became unrecognizable? What if it slipped out when you pulled out your car keys and was left lying unnoticed on the ground? What if it got wrinkled and holey and unusable over the years like those dollar bills that won’t go into the vending machine if your life depended on it? Aren’t you glad you don’t have to trust yourself with that responsibility? Your ticket is kept safe for you in heaven at the “will call” window, where it won’t ever expire, fade, or fall apart.

And even now, before we’re able to fully enjoy the inheritance kept in heaven for us, we eulogize God for preserving us in our new identity. **“Through faith you are being protected by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.”**

God is our mighty fortress, our refuge, and our strength. We rest secure in his power. He’ll continue to guard us until we reach his goal, our salvation. We can’t see it clearly now, but God has it all ready for us to see it at the appropriate time, at the end of time.

Transition

Our living God has given us a new identity. That’s certainly good reason to eulogize him. Peter goes on and gives us a second reason: our destiny is worth the suffering.

Part II: Our destiny is worth the suffering.

We're God's children. We're heirs of salvation. We're graciously shielded by faith until the inheritance is fully realized. But until that time, we still suffer under the effects of sin. We struggle with doubts. We sometimes question God's love and purpose for our lives. But even in these struggles, we can eulogize – speak well of – God. **“Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials.”**

Most English translations stick an “although” into verse 6: **“You rejoice *although* you have been grieved...”** The Greek simply says that **“you rejoice very much *if* you have been grieved.”** Do you catch the slightly different shade of meaning? Our very struggles – our challenges – are intended to be a source of joy for us, not discouragement! God invites us to praise him rather than doubt him. And that alternate translation is perfectly in keeping with the rest of Scripture. James says, **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”** Later on in this letter, Peter will say, **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”** In our sufferings, we find a connection to Christ. And notice how Peter reassures us by saying that our trials are just little, and just for now.

Peter also provides the purpose for and result of our trials. Sometimes we ask that question “Why...?” Here's the answer. It may not be the answer we're seeking, but it's an answer – and sometimes the only answer – God provides. **“You have been grieved by various kinds of trials so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”** Note that Peter doesn't say that *our faith* is worth more than gold. What's priceless is *the proven character – the genuineness* – of our faith when it passes through the fire of life's trials.

How is that more precious than gold? Simply this: gold is going to perish at the end of the world when Jesus is revealed. The trials we undergo, however, achieve the eternal. They result in never-ending praise and honor and glory to God who delivered us from them all. And they result in praise and honor and glory for us who share in his eternal victory celebration.

Trials make our faith stronger. Trials prove our faith genuine. They keep us focused on our need for and trust in our Savior. They're part of the refining process used by God to remove our doubts. After one of his victories, King David has a 75 pound crown of gold and jewels placed on his head. What a strain in the neck! What an honor! What a wonderful picture of our precious trials that are worth even more!

Is our destiny worth the suffering? Can we possibly survive without visible confirmation? **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,”** Jesus told Thomas and the others. Peter shares that sentiment: **“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”**

You've never seen Jesus. He's never spoken to you in a vision. Yet doesn't the very thought of him, living and ruling, just fill your heart with joy? That joy is beyond expression – but feel free to give it a try! That joy is magnified!

Conclusion

God wants us in heaven even more than we want to be in heaven! So he sends us golden trials to assure that we reach the goal. Even if this makes no sense to us, we can rejoice that it's logical to him. And we will rejoice forever! God be praised! Amen.