

Easter Hope: After Pain There Is Gain ~ 1 Peter 1:3-9

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ April 27, 2014

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.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

How many of you are familiar with the “curse of the goat?” Some of you may know it, but for those of you who have never heard of the curse of the goat, I’ll explain one of the most bizarre tales in major league baseball.

It was the fall of 1945. World War 2 had just finished in Japan. And America breathed a sigh of relief and eagerly awaited baseball’s World Series between the Chicago Cubs and the Detroit Tigers. Greek immigrant Vasili Sianis had two box seat tickets for game four. He brought as his companion his pet goat, named Murphy. The Chicago fans loved it. But the owner of the Cubs, the man whose name was on the stadium, Philip Knight Wrigley was not amused. He ordered Sianis and his goat out of the stadium. And while he was unceremoniously ushered out, Vasili Sianis uttered the “curse of the goat,” saying, “The Cubs will lose this game, the series, and they will never win another pennant or go to another World Series as long as they play at Wrigley Field.” That was 69 years ago. A couple of times it sure looked like the curse would be broken, but the Cubs always found a way to fold. But give the Chicago Cubs fans credit, every spring they are filled with hope that this will be the year.

We all have hopes, just like those Cubs fans. Young people hope to be star athletes or famous movie stars. Young men and women hope to find the perfect job, and many hope to find the perfect husband or wife. In middle age, you hope to make your life a little better, you hope your kids will turn out OK. As senior citizens, you hope you’ll continue to be independent as you grow older, or that Alzheimer’s won’t hit you.

These hope that we all have are really dreams. Dreams of what we would ideally like to happen in the future. But these dreams, these hopes don’t always happen, do they? I can say, “I hope to run a four-minute mile,” but there isn’t any way that’s going to happen – not even a five-minute mile, if I’m lucky I could run a six-minute mile, but more than likely a seven-minute mile. That’s the way hopes are in this life – very, very uncertain.

But when the inspired writers of the Bible were writing about how Christians view the future, there was no other word for them to use except the word “hope.” But please understand that although they are the same word, the hope that a Christian has in Jesus Christ is far different than the uncertain hopes that abound in this world. For a Christian’s hopes are not dreams that may or may not come true. A Christian’s hopes are certain. They are going to happen. Nothing can stop them. It is this hope we have in the face of doubt.

It is because the hopes that a believer has in his Savior Jesus Christ are so different than the ordinary hopes that people have that Peter describes a believer’s hope as a *living hope*. Listen to Peter’s words:

“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, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you.”

As we look at Peter’s words more closely we will see that the Christian’s hope can be summed up in the words: AFTER PAIN THERE IS GAIN

1. After pain there was gain for Christ
2. After pain there will be gain for us

(1)

Once again, Peter says that a Christian’s living hope is built on Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. We need to realize that Jesus’ resurrection – undoubtedly the single most glorious event while he was on earth – is not something that is just mentioned over and over again in the New Testament. No, Jesus the Savior’s resurrection was prophesied by the inspired writers of the Old Testament as well. Consider Job’s words, **“I know that my Redeemer lives.”** Or there is King David’s words from Psalm 16, **“[You will not] let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life.”**

Oh, to be sure the Old Testament prophets must have been confused and perplexed with what God the Holy Spirit told them to write. On the one hand, they wrote of the great and glorious things that the coming Savior would do. On the other hand he also led them to write about the horrible and hideous things that he would have to suffer. “How can both be true?” they must have scratched their heads and asked. Peter refers to this perplexity of the prophets when he writes,

“The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and the circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the *sufferings* of Christ and the *glories* that would follow.”

Jesus’ disciples faced the same conundrum. They loved hearing Jesus talk about the glorious kingdom. But they were offended by, and put their hands over their ears, when he spoke of suffering and dying.

We who have the benefit of having all of Holy Scriptures at our fingertips know that it was God’s plan to have his Holy Son suffer the punishment for our sins. The human race, you and me, were so far gone that there was no way that we could do anything to help ourselves. The only way that God’s wrath

could be taken away was for someone to suffer the punishment of our sins in our place. And that Jesus did. He suffered God's wrath as punishment for our sins. His glorious and triumphant resurrection three days later proves to us that: 1) God accepted his sacrifice and therefore our sins are forgiven, and that 2) We too will rise from the dead one day with new and glorious bodies like the one that Jesus had.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans points out that guaranteeing aspect of Christ's resurrection when he writes, "**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.**" Yes, Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate proof of the way our God works – after pain there is gain, great gain. What Peter wants his readers – his readers who were struggling with great pains in their lives – to realize is that what was true for Christ was also true for them.

(2)

I'm sure you have heard of Christian churches out there who preach a "prosperity gospel." The message that is basically summarized as, "If you become a Christian, God will make your life a glorious life." That message has and always will be at best misleading. Christians still get sick, Christians still have trouble finding jobs, losing jobs, and have money difficulties. Christians still have "issues" with other people. And if all of these problems that everyone in this world gets are not enough, we are reminded in the book of Acts that, "**we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.**" In other words, certain hardships will come upon us simply because we are believers.

Now a Christian's living hope – that after pain there is gain – is not just saying, "It'll all work out in the end." No, a Christian's hope, his certainty goes far beyond that. For one thing, Peter says in this text that through faith we are "**shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.**" To ancient warriors, the shield was the most important of their defensive weapons. It kept them from being struck by arrows, swords and spears. Quite obviously when Peter says that God shields us, he does not mean that God keeps all pain away from us. What he does mean is that the Lord does not permit any pain to come into our life that we are unable to bear.

Over all, I've had a reasonably pain-free life, no super difficult hardships to bear. Sometimes I'm tempted to think that my life has been so pain-free because I'm a better Christian than those people who suffer all sorts of troubles in their lives. But Peter's words indicate that the very opposite may be true. Some people may have more problems in their lives because God considers them strong, because they can bear more problems than I can.

But Peter gives us another indication that in the midst of our problems, God is still in control of the situation. He writes, "**In this [your hope] you greatly rejoice, though now for a *little while* you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.**" Yes, the Lord not only keeps trials that are too hard away from us, he promises that these trials will not last too long.

But God is not just in control of the pain that happens in our life, he uses it. He uses it for our good. Again Peter writes, "**[These trials] have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine.**" Gold and other precious metals can only be used after they have been refined at high heat – gold at 1,100 degrees Fahrenheit. And the same is true of our faith. God refines our faith in the furnace of trial and tribulation, in the pain we experience. But when God sees us through the pain, we emerge with an even stronger faith in him.

Think of that great Old Testament man of faith, Job. Think of all that he suffered. What do you think happened to his faith when the Lord saw him through all his trials, when he blessed him with twice as much as he had before? Undoubtedly, his faith was much, much stronger.

On this earth we may never fully understand how exactly the Lord turns our pain into great gain. But we have his promise – his promise that he will do it on this earth, and more importantly one day in heaven he will turn all our earthly pain into great heavenly gain. For this is the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

However, there is one thing that bothers me when I read these verses from the pen of Peter. ***“You greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”*** I don’t rejoice greatly when I suffer grief in all kinds of trials, and I doubt that you do either. But the reason for that is that the trials take our mind off of what is really important, what is proof that God loves us, cares about us, and will always turn pain into gain. That proof is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The point is that Peter and the Lord want us to wake up every morning full of confidence. For although we may not know what will happen, although we may not be able to control what will happen, although we may not know everything that will happen, yet, we know that through the great love and power of our God, after every pain there will be great gain. This is our confidence. This is our living hope. Amen.