

Faith & Participation In The Life Of Easter Sunday

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[0:00] Let's turn together to 1 Peter and chapter 1 and we're going to read again at verse number 3. 1 Peter 1 at verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And so on. It's always interesting to see the way in which letters and books in the Bible are introduced, and it's always interesting to note the background to why these words were written in the first place.

We write what we write for a purpose. And the Bible writers do exactly the same thing. They have a purpose. And when we read the first two verses of this letter and of this chapter, we notice two particular things.

We notice first of all that these people are referred to as elect exiles. In other words, they are strangers in a place to which they really do not belong.

[1:26] And because they are in that place where they are there as strangers, when things happen around them which they did not expect, then they begin to lose sight of who they belong to and the true land from which they originate and to which they are going.

Exiles always struggle where they are when life gets difficult. And the second thing that we want to notice is that Peter gives to them a heavenly perspective of their salvation.

And that's really important for us as well, that what we are as those who are saved, of course, is important. But as we journey on through life and in the struggles of life, we tend to lose sight of the fact that our salvation is because God has planned to do something and is now doing something in our experience.

And we can live life in a house with just windows in it. So we just see the things around us. And without any kind of skylights in the house, where we can hear and see what God is doing.

And Peter is giving to them that sense of a skylight into their lives, their everyday lives, so that not only will they see what is out there that affects them, but that they see what comes from God that has made them who they are.

[2:52] And this whole section begins with a sense of the need to praise God and to bless God for all that God has now done. And so they are strangers where they are.

They don't really belong there. God has a plan to save them. And they have to understand that what's happening in their lives now, it is because God is working.

And wherever we are tonight, and whatever our experience is, whatever our journey is like, and wherever we are on that journey, these things are important. Just like Abraham and the people of faith in Hebrews 11, strangers and pilgrims looking for a house which has foundation, is builder and maker, is God.

I want to look at these verses that we have right here to think of faith and participation in the life of Easter Sunday.

I want to see, first of all, that there is a reconnection. And I want us to think about reconnection because there is a disconnection. And because of sin, that we are disconnected from God, our relationship with God is broken down, and we are separated from God and under the wrath of God.

[4:14] And we think of the big heavenly picture and the plan of God, and we see at the beginning of the Bible that that's just not how it was meant to be. And where we have arrived at because of sin is something surprising, not to God, but surprising to us as those who were created and made to live in that paradise of God.

That has now been lost. There is a disconnection. And Peter wants them to realize that their participation in the resurrection life of Jesus on Easter Sunday reconnects them to the God from whom they have been disconnected.

And that's how verse 3 reads on. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

He has caused us to be born again. That's the heart of the gospel. Jesus said to Nicodemus, you must be born again.

There must be that sense of new birth. But the word that Peter uses here gives us a greater sense than that itself. It's not simply a new birth.

[5:42] It's a new genesis. It's a new creation. It's a brand new start in life. It is what Paul calls in writing to the Corinthians, it is a new creation.

There is total newness. And if we are the children of God tonight, that's what God has done to reconnect us with Himself.

He has come with us power to make us new people and to become the children of God. We become God's family.

And we have become God's family through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here is God's plan on the one hand.

Here is me and my lostness on the other hand. And something needs to come between God's plan and me and my lostness in order to change, to transform me and my lostness.

[6:45] And what stands between, what comes into that gap that brings about the change is the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why today, as the people of God, we celebrate Easter Sunday.

Because the resurrection of Jesus wasn't simply a one-off historical event with no effects afterwards. It's an event that impacts upon the world and upon the church for every generation of it. And for you and me tonight, as the children of God, that's what God has done. In between His plan and where you are, there is the birth of Jesus, there is the death of Jesus, there is the resurrection of Jesus, and we put all these three things together, and there is no hope.

There is a resurrection in the life of Jesus. There is a resurrection in the life of the children of God. They become new people.

And Paul, in writing to the church in Ephesus, speaks of the way in which it is the power with which God raised Jesus from the dead.

[8:02] It is that same power that is now working in the people of God. Let's pause and think about that. If tonight you are the child of God, it's the power with which the Spirit of God walked Jesus out of the sleep of death in the tomb that now works in your life.

It's that wonderful connection. The power of God, the power of the Spirit of God, that same power works in you. And that's why Paul says time after time that we are with Christ, that we are in Christ. All of these things remind us that it is the power of Christ that dwells in us. And when God does that, we read that according to His great mercy, He has done this.

In other words, your new birth and my new birth and us becoming the children of God, it's not haphazard, something that happens without any organization behind it.

God doesn't come into the congregation of Carly and just pick one or two people here and there and they become the children of God. No, God has a plan.

[9:20] And the great mercy of God in this passage speaks of the way in which God is committed to His plan. And so tonight, if I am the child of God, I am that because first of all, in God's plan for this world, He chose me before the world was to be one of His own children, to inhabit His kingdom, to belong to Himself.

And in accordance with that plan and because of that plan, Jesus did all that He did. And tonight, I am the child of God. It's God's steadfast love which is His mercy. It is His commitment to His covenant purposes to save. And that's why they should be encouraged. And that's why tonight, you and I should be encouraged. God has a plan for your life. God spoke to the people of God through Jeremiah in chapter 29 with something like that. I know the plans I have for you. Plans to give you a future and a hope. I'm going to change your fortunes. The exile is going to come to an end. I'm going to bring you back to myself. And we have the greater blessing than God taking His people from Babylon.

[10:39] We have the greater blessing of God taking us from our exile, from our disconnection because of our sin to be reconnected with Him as our Father in Heaven.

And we being there as those who are the children of God. by nature, says Paul in Ephesians, children of wrath.

But now we have been brought near because of His mercy and because of His the great love with which God has loved us. The reconnection.

We rejoice tonight in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We rejoice because that resurrection has brought out such a great change in our own lives and given to us once more to be in that place where God is our God, God is our Father, the Lord Jesus is our Savior, and they should be encouraged and so are we.

No matter what else is happening in life, this is the heavenly perspective on what we are as the children of God. Secondly, I want us to see that following that reconnection, there is a realignment.

[11:57] In other words, God brings everything to line up with His own purpose for those whom He is going to save. And we see that brought to our attention in that same verse, verse number four, to an inheritance that is imperishable and so on.

And the to an inheritance speaks to us of the purpose of God, of the direction which God is bringing our lives and of the way in which we now have a new destiny.

It's to an inheritance that is imperishable and defiled and fading in heaven that is kept for you and causing us as well to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

It's so much about the future. He has caused us to be born again so that we have a living hope. And tonight if we are the children of God, we cannot be the children of God without having a different perspective on life.

Without realizing that life where I am tonight and where I am today is not the way I am going to know life in the future. There is a change going to take place and that changes in accordance with the promise of God to make things different and to realign everything with His own purpose for a new creation, for a new heavens and a new earth.

[13:35] And those who are so aligned they have this living hope through the same resurrection. It is a hope that stirs up in their hearts a sense of life and a sense of expectation.

It's a living hope. The children of God who are not dead in our emotions or in our intellects or in our affections.

we are changed so that we love the Lord Jesus. We are changed so that we have the hope of everlasting life in our hearts and it is a living hope.

It's the power of Christ, the heartbeat of that power in our lives so that throbbing in my Christian experience is the sense of it's not always going to be like this.

With a sense of it is going to be so much better than this. And with a sense of no matter how bad things might be now, things are going to be better in the future beyond my imagination and all because of the promises of God.

[14:57] And at this time of year we plant our seed in the ground. We wait for it to grow. We expect what it's going to be like but we can't really picture it until it actually grows and it buds and it blossoms.

So are the promises of God. God has given to us special promises with regard to our future with Him. And there is so little of these promises that we understand and know at this stage.

But because they are the promises of God we have that expectation. We're watching the seed growing. We're watching the way in which these promises are going to be fulfilled. And they will be partly fulfilled in our journey in this world but only completely fulfilled in the world that lies beyond a living hope.

that is to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you.

If we read the Old Testament history of the people of God we see the way in which God promised His covenant people the people of Israel He promised them the promised land the land of Canaan as their inheritance.

[16:27] And they went through these 40 years in the wilderness and Moses died and Joshua had to go from Moses and he led them triumphantly through the promised land and then he shared out the land with them as their inheritance.

And they had their portion and they had their lot in the promised land. The generation that heard the promises first never saw the promised land but now they are settled under Joshua according to the inheritance that God had separated and set out for them.

And if we don't know it locally or personally sometimes we read in the press and hear of it in the media that people have changed their minds on an inheritance and families who are expecting to gain a lot from an inheritance suddenly for perhaps no explained reason that the will is changed and the inheritance does not go to those who are expected to gain from it.

And that creates its own chaos in families and even wider than that perhaps in communities. But this inheritance is reserved in heaven for you kept in heaven for you.

It's there secure. Nobody can touch it. Nobody can change it. It's kept protected by God for us when we arrive there.

[18:15] and what is being kept by God is so very different to the life and the experience that we have in this world. It is an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and fading.

It's an inheritance that's free from death and decay. death and all that is around me.

That I have this inheritance secure by God where death and decay will be left behind. It is an inheritance that is also defiled.

It is free from any sense of uncleanness or any sense of moral impurity. It's a place, an inheritance where sin is no more and where nothing enters that will disconnect me from God and that will bring me to lose the inheritance that God has kept for me.

It is unfading. It is free from the ravages of time. It doesn't wrinkle. It doesn't rust. It doesn't rot.

[19:31] It doesn't vanish away. It is secure. It is saved. It is kept in heaven for us. In Rome, and Paul speaks to the church in Rome with reference to Abraham, the friend of God, the man of faith, and he speaks in chapter 4 of the way in which God promised Abraham the world as his inheritance.

We read in 2 Peter that Peter speaks of a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. We read the book of Revelation and it's full of images that remind us of how special this place is, that there is no sin and no pain and no crying and no tears.

It is the place which is the paradise of God and where those who enter into the kingdom of God have the right to the tree of life and are led by their Savior, the Lord Jesus, into fountains of living water and God wipes away every tear from their eyes.

And the Bible reminds us repeatedly that we will receive that inheritance when Jesus returns.

We have the promise of it because Jesus came and Jesus died and Jesus rose again by the power of God and on this return to this world, that on the last day he will stand on the earth.

[21:16] And as he said to his disciples in John chapter 14, don't be troubled, believe in God, believe in me. I'm going to prepare a place for you and if I go because I am going, I will come again and receive you to be with me so that where I am, there you may be also.

And we read on this chapter itself and it speaks of the way in which the children of God love the Lord Jesus even though they have not yet seen him. In verse number 8, though you have not seen him, you love him, though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

There is a realignment. We belong to God and as those who belong to God, we are firmly at the center of God's plan for humankind, a plan that will bring us at last through this world and from this world and through the darkness and the decomposition of the grave itself and will bring us at last to stand before him pure and perfect to enjoy our eternal inheritance.

And thirdly, we want to think of the reassurance. It's good to think of what God has planned to do. It's good to think of the new birth, but here are people who are living in the world. So what's the reassurance for them as they hear these great truths about their future?

[23:00] In verse number five, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

By God's power are being guarded. The power through which God has caused us to be born again. The power of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit of God, which does not simply dwell around us, but now which dwells within us.

And that power of the Spirit of God, the deposit of our eternal inheritance, is the power that will guard us and that will keep us as we journey along life's way.

It is the Spirit of God that has the ability and the power, the skill to achieve everything that God has set out to do and to ensure that we are kept safely on the way.

[24:04] God has to God's love. And we read through our Bibles and time after time we come across even the psalmist crying out to God and reaching out to God, have you forgotten to be gracious?

Have you forgotten me as the Lord shut up in His wrath to leave me alone? That sense of lostness. But Peter wants his readers, his hearers to understand that it is the power of God that guards and keeps them, that no one can harm them, that no one can touch the Lord's anointed children. And Jesus himself when he was speaking to the disciples and the crowds in John chapter 10, that great chapter of him being the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, is the Jesus who goes on later on in that chapter to speak of himself that no one can take the disciples out of his hands.

And then he goes on to say, the Father is greater than I, and no one can take them out of my Father's hand.

Secure and safe in the hands of the Lord Jesus. God is a qualifier along with that. There's something else that goes along with that.

[25:35] We are being guarded through faith. That means this protection doesn't happen and I'm passive at the same time.

It's a protection that takes place when I'm being very practical and when I'm living out of my faith in this world. And it's the faith that is persuaded every day to rise in the morning and to follow the Lord Jesus and to be committed to him.

And we sometimes make the mistake that our faith is something that's external to us and we pick it up in the morning and we exercise it and sometimes we don't use it.

Faith is not like that. Faith is who I am. Faith is what I am. And faith is the thing that I do.

It's my whole being. And that's what new birth is. It's the whole of my new nature belongs to God.

It's filled with the life of God and the life of faith is one that is constant and continuous in such a way as to take over the whole of my life.

[26:55] And we know that as we have physical illnesses and things that affect the way in which we are able to carry out the everyday activities of life, we recognize that in the Bible itself and that in Christian experience, our faith may sometimes fail.

We allow other things to distract us from the object of our faith, from the person of the resurrected and crucified Lord Jesus. And we go down a path, we begin a conversation, we do certain things that lead us to forget the voice of God, the work of God and the work of grace.

And so in a sense Peter is saying to them and God is saying, to us tonight, that I will guard you and keep you and protect you.

As long as you look after your faith, as long as you guard yourself against this world in which there are all the testings, as long as you guard yourself, you have my promise that I will not let you down.

And of course that doesn't mean that my salvation is dependent on what I do, but I have to live out who I am as the child of God. I have to let my faith take over my life so that my life is given over to God.

[28:28] and the more my faith lays hold of the hope that we have noticed earlier on, the more my faith is energized, the more the promises of God fuel my faith every day so that it goes more and more beyond what I could ever imagine.

And we are the middle of such a crisis in the world where there are increasing costs and everything, including the increased cost of fuel itself.

And we will read down through the rest of this chapter and there is that sense of crisis in the world. There is that sense in which my faith is going to cost me to live.

But it's through that, through paying that cost, that my faith is fueled with the energy that enables me to carry on to continue on my journey through this world.

And once more, it's a journey that has purpose. Through faith, for a salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

[29:46] And once more, the whole idea of for a salvation is for the purpose of entering into a salvation salvation, the more we read about salvation in the New Testament, the more we recognize that salvation is not just about what happens when I'm born again.

In fact, the majority of users of the verb to save in the New Testament, they are about my journey of faith and who God saves me along my journey.

salvation. And that's so important. That's how we are guarded. We go through cycle after cycle of going into a crisis, of going into a time of distress.

We go into the spaces in life where our faith is really tested and there God rescues us once more.

Where God just to save me tonight and make me His child and just leave me to get on living my faith, then I wouldn't go too far.

But God is repeatedly rescuing me from times of danger. And sometimes I'm aware of these times of danger, other times I'm not aware of them. But God is faithful.

[31:07] And when I enter into the arena of testing in the world, the arena of the pressure of the world, of the challenges to my faith, I continue in faith and God comes to rescue, to ensure that His plan of salvation remains on Cush and that He will bring us at last safely home to the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And as we close, I think it's fair to say that that salvation is even greater than the one we experience tonight, because that final salvation is the reversal of death.

It's the opening of our graves. It's as being raised from our graves. It's as being changed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. It has been welcomed by God into His heavenly kingdom and gathered around the throne of God, where our Savior, who was crucified on Good Friday, who rose again on Easter Sunday, where our Savior will say, in the presence of all and around the throne of God, behold me and the children that God has given to me.

Will you be in that number? Will we gather together on that greatest event of all time? And will we join the innumerable gathering of people that will go to inhabit the new heavens and the new earth?

Will Jesus going before them and leading them in service and in worship throughout the endless ages of eternity? We pray that we will be there and that tonight God will touch your hearts and ensure that we are stirred up to think of what He is doing and that He will keep us on Cush so that we will not fail to enter that safe haven and that harbour that is set before us in the gospel.

[33:15] May God bless His word to slivers free.