

Happy Easter! It snuck up on everyone this year, didn't it? 2021 is a blur for us. First things first, I want to welcome our guests. We are so glad you are here. Let me encourage our members to make it a goal to meet someone you don't know this morning before you leave. I know many of you are not members of a local church so while I have you as a captive audience, let me challenge you to commit to a church this year, and you are already here so might as well plant roots. Let me give you a 4 week challenge. Come here for the next 4 weeks with a prayerful attitude and see what God does.

Because you know half-hearted Christianity is really a dead-end road. Half-hearted Christians are some of the least content people around because they know enough about the Lord to have this sense of low-grade guilt, but they haven't committed their lives to Christ enough to be happy. So be all-in for the Lord! Listen to the dead Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon: "Be half a Christian, and you shall have enough religion to make you miserable; be wholly a Christian, and your joy shall be full."

One of the many reasons I love this church, this people, our ministries, this book, is because I can guarantee you, that if you join this church and plug in fully, your life will be changed. It will probably get harder. Being a Bible-believing Christian today is hard. And that is what we are here. We take this book with utmost seriousness. And life is too short for half-hearted, watered down Christianity. So your life may get more difficult, but it is worth it. Life is short, eternity is long.

There are lots of things that I would want to tell you about this church. You can read our Core Values online or grab a brochure in the welcome center on your way out. But the main thing I would want you to know is that we are ruled by God's Word. Scripture sets the agenda for everything we do here. And because of that, we take the great commission very seriously. We are committed to discipling one another. Our members care about the spiritual growth of one another. Glad you're here!

This morning we are going to be in the book of 1 Peter (p 953). 1 Peter was written by Peter. If you know anything about Peter you know he often put his foot in his mouth. He would have been a good Texan, because he's the guy who invented concealed carry. Peter was often a failure and that's one of the reasons we love him. He reminds us that even when we fail, God will not fail you. Peter is writing to a church that was beginning to experience increased persecution. It was becoming harder and harder to be a Christian. That sound familiar? I mean, sakes alive, there were some saying Oral Roberts shouldn't be allowed to play in the NCAA tournament because they believe what all Christians have believed about sexuality for 2K years. Peter is writing a syllabus for suffering saints. Let's consider four reasons to praise God this morning and every morning: for new birth, for a living hope, for an eternal inheritance, and for preserving grace.

I. Praise God for causing us to be born again 3. Peter is writing to a church having a hard time, and yet, he starts with praise. Hmmm. Things are getting hard. We are being persecuted. Yet Peter tunes our hearts to sing God's praise. He says stop focusing on your current circumstances and look up. Blessed be God. Praise be to God. Verses 3-12 is actually one long sentence and the main point is praise God.

The word for praise is *eulogētos*, from which we get our word "eulogy." We tend to think of funerals when we hear the word "eulogy." Good words are spoken about the deceased. Good, but maybe not true. The worst one I have experienced was the funeral of the town drunk. Everyone knew he was a scoundrel but this Baptist preached him right into heaven. All in the room were like, are we talking about the same guy? Then, this was a first, at his graveside his pall bearers poured Lone Star on his casket. So eulogies are good words but often untrue. But the good words in this passage about God are fitting, true, and right.

And notice doesn't just say praise God, but praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We learn two truths from the way Peter describes God. First, he's a Father. From all eternity there was Father, Son, and Spirit. He is not just the Creator, he is not just the Ruler of the world, but in essence he is Father. He is love. Without being a Father, before creation, he couldn't have been love because there would have been no persons to love. We worship a Triune God: one essence, three persons. Because he is a perfect Father, he overflows with love and kindness. He is by nature, by definition, relational and loving and life-giving.

He's the Father of Jesus Christ. This is a very specific God, the only true God. Jesus even says "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He says "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). There is no other God besides the God and Father of Jesus. And there is no way to God besides through Jesus. Jesus said "No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6).

So Peter starts his letter with an encouragement to praise the Triune God! Even in hard times. Doxology is the basis of the Christian life. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because he caused us to be born again. The Father begets children. He gives new birth. Our birth is determinative for so many things, isn't it? Birth determines our ethnic identity, our citizenship, our socioeconomic class. Our birth identifies us. Our birth shapes the rest of our lives.¹ Here, Peter praises God for giving us new birth, which reshapes the rest of our lives. New birth is a whole new start. He changes us, and gives us a new nature. See, we didn't just need a facelift apart from Christ, we needed open heart surgery.

We praise him for the new birth, because he did it. We have had a brood of new babies at South Side in that last few months, and more are coming. We take the command to be fruitful and multiply seriously around here. And I love it! Make babies make culture. So we have had a lot of new babies, but you know, not one of them came out and took a bow. They were delivered, they did not deliver themselves. Birth happened to them. And new birth happened to us. We are as responsible for our second birth as we are for our first. Peter says God has caused us to be born again according to his great mercy. Mercy is God withholding from us what we deserve, and we deserve condemnation, but instead he has given us new life. As Thomas Watson said, "Every time you draw your breath you suck in mercy." And his mercy is great. As Richard Sibbes put it, there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.

God caused us to be born again. Jimmy Carter famously referred to himself as a born-again Christian. I appreciate the clarity, but you know, there are only born-again Christians. In other words, you are not a Christian if you have not born again. The word is "to generate again." Theologians call it regeneration.

So how are we born again? If it is God and not our doing, how does God do it? Peter tells us a few verses later: **1:23-25**. The Word goes out and God uses it to bring us from death to life. James says the same thing: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (Ja 1:18). The message of the gospel is shared and it becomes the power of God to salvation – Rom 1:16.

Remember Nicodemus? He was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. **John 3:3-8**. George Whitefield was a famous traveling Calvinistic Methodist who constantly preached about the necessity of the new birth. And one time someone asked why he was always preaching that you must be born again and he said, "because you must be born again." If one must be born again to enter the KoH, the pressing question is have you experienced new birth? How would you know? There are lots of people who say they are Christians but

¹ Juan, 24; Jobes, 81.

are not regenerate, not born again. So how can you know? I know I am alive, not because of some past event, not because my Mom told me I was born, not because I own a birth certificate, but because I am breathing. So don't answer the question, "How do I know I am born again?" by pointing to some past event. Well, I was raised in the church. My grandma was Baptist. I live in Abilene. I signed a card, walked an aisle, was baptized. No, what about today?

The little letter of 1 John was written to answer that question and it shows that a person who is born again is characterized by three main things: believes in Jesus the Son of God, obeys his commands, and loves the church. 3:14: "we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers." In context, that means the brothers and sisters of the local church, the family of faith.

II. Praise God for causing us to be born again to a living hope 3 – Because of mercy, we are born again into a hope that is living. Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Through Easter. We are born into hope. Hope is a confident expectation that God will make good on his promises. Our hope is not a dead hope, not a futile hope, not a wishful thinking but a living hope. Our hope is as certain as the grave is empty. Easter is the basis of hope.

We were once a hopeless people. Outside of Christ, there really is no hope. If you are not a Christian, do you ever think about that? The motto in the 1st C was just eat, be merry, for tomorrow we die. When you really start to think about it, it gets depressing fast. Without Christ, the only logical alternative is Nihilism. Or hedonism. There is no point to life, or just try and squeeze every temporary pleasure you can out of it. Its really a bleak outlook. That was once us as believers. It is no more. Eph 2:12: "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

Easter hope has power to change how we live. Just consider how the resurrection of Christ, which promises our future resurrection changes us: 6 ways:

1) Grief. Easter changes the way we grieve. In 1 Thess 4:13, Paul says we grieve, but not as those who have no hope. Even our grieving is different because of the resurrection. For us, we realize that the loss of loved ones in Christ is just a comma, not a period. We grieve, but we grieve as those who know how the story ends – it doesn't.

2) Easter hope eradicates fear. There are many phobias in the world, some completely irrational. But behind so many fears is the fear of death. I fear this because it may end in death: snakes, spiders, flying, falling. And death is something to be reckoned with. Death is the great equalizer. How good of a tailback is Walter Peyton? He's not his dead. How pretty is Marilyn Monroe? She's not she is dead. How smart is Albert Einstein? He's not, he's dead. And you and I will die, and the day is coming nearer by the hour. Time flies. Life is short. The passing of time destroys most hopes. **1:24**. Cancer will come, and then maybe remission, and then it often returns. Wrinkles, rickety knees, fading eyesight, diabetes, heart disease – and more. These are all pointers that because of sin, it is appointed for man to die once then comes judgment. The wages of sin is death. We may postpone death, but will not escape death.

But because of Easter, because of the resurrection of Jesus which guarantees the resurrection of believers, death has lost its sting. Death is not the victor. Heb 2:14-15: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has

the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” Jesus has freed us from the fear of death because of his death. So we do not fear. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.

3) Joy. Easter solidifies our joy. Our happiness is not bound up with the here and now but the there and then. Our joy is not dependent on temporary external circumstances, but the unchanging rock that is Jesus Christ. One of my favorite preachers is David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. As he was dying, his doctor came and offered antibiotics and Lloyd-Jones refused. His doctor said, “I want to make you comfortable, more comfortable, it grieves me to see you sitting here weary and worn and sad. Lloyd-Jones who hadn’t been speaking but only nodding his head spoke up: “not sad!” Not sad.² The tomb is empty and the throne is occupied.

4) Materialism: it changes our posture towards stuff. We realize that this world is temporary and so is its stuff. We know that you won’t ever see a horse pulling a U-Haul, so we are going to live as stewards of what God has given us and we are going to heed the teaching of Jesus and store up treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

5) Purpose – Easter gives us a reason to live. Just think of the guy who wrote this. Peter’s life was turned upside down because of the resurrection. He denied his Lord to a teenage girl. He did it three times. Then Mary Magdalene saw that empty tomb and went and told the guys and Peter ran to see it himself. He was never the same. He went from denying the Lord to boldly preaching him, and then even giving his life for the sake of his Lord. He became a martyr. He ended up being crucified but he insisted on being crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner that his Lord did. The empty tomb should cause us to put all our chips in for the Lord. Live for his glory. It is what you were made for. It is why you are here.

6) Easter hope helps us endure earthly suffering. It teaches that this life is largely suffering, but it is followed by glory for the Christian, just like it was for Jesus. Suffering then glory. Outwardly wasting away but inwardly renewed day by day, because this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As the song goes, “Who can mind the journey, when the road leads home?”³ He lays the stumbling blocks and turns them into stepping stone on the journey to glory. Resurrection is coming. As D.A. Carson said “I am not suffering from anything a good resurrection can’t fix.” As Luther put it, we are not experiencing death in the midst of life like so many say, but life in the midst of death. We have a living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus. There is a grave outside of Jerusalem where the body of Jesus was laid. It is not there. Because of that, everything is different. Our hope is as solid as the resurrection body of Jesus. J.I. Packer said, “For the Christian, the best is always yet to be.”

III. Praise God for causing us to be born again to an eternal inheritance – 3-4 – For a Jewish person, when they hear the word “inheritance,” they are thinking of the promise land. But the true inheritance is salvation.”⁴ Peter describes our inheritance in 4 ways: 1) Imperishable. Your true inheritance cannot be ruined or destroyed. 2) undefiled – In the new world, there will be no need for keys, locks, jails, police. It is undefiled. It can never spoil. It cannot be stained or grow old or wear out. Unpolluted. 3) Unfading - it can never fade. Not subject to decay, like everything else. Not this inheritance. It will not disappoint us in any way! The point is this inheritance is eternal! But can we be sure it won’t be taken from us? 4) This inheritance is kept in heaven for

² Murray, 457.

³ Wiersbe, 33.

⁴ Grudem writes, “The ‘inheritance’ of the New Covenant Christian is thus shown to be far superior to the earthly inheritance of the people of Israel in the land of Canaan. That earthly land was not ‘kept’ for them, but was *taken from them* in exile, and later by Roman occupation. Even while they possessed the land, it produced rewards that *decayed*, rewards whose glory *faded* away. The beauty of the land’s holiness before God was repeatedly *defiled* by sin, 1 Peter, 1988, 58.

you. Praise God because he has caused us to be born again through the resurrection to an eternal inheritance. It is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and kept. It is permanent, pure, powerful, and preserved.

IV. Praise God for preserving grace. He guards us. 5 – You ever wonder How can we make it? Life is hard. Temptations abound. The HS through Peter says we are guarded for glory. This word for “guard” is a military word for guarded, shielded. We and our inheritance are under protective custody and the chief guard is God himself (2 Cor 11:32). We gon’ be alright. God is for you in Christ and if God is for you none can be against you. Come what may, your inheritance is secure. The kingdom is kept for us. We are guarded for glory. It won’t be easy but God’s power has us. He will hold us fast. I love the lyrics of a modern-day hymn: “When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast, When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast, I could never keep my hold, Through life’s fearful path, For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast.” And hold us fast he does. The road is tough but he will keep us. Jude 24-25 - “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

In Eph 1, Paul prays that we would have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (1:18-20). God wants us to know the riches of this glorious inheritance that is guarded for us and to know his power. The immeasurable greatness of his power. You can’t measure it. It can’t be quantified. And this power is for us! Toward us who believe. And it is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and installed him as King.

We are in good hands. God will preserve us. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). Notice the confidence of Jesus. All that the Father gives to me *will* come to me, and whoever comes to me *I will* never cast out. You know, some Christians believe that you can lose your salvation. If it was up to you, you would. Salvation is not ours to lose. If he did not spare his own son, he will not withhold anything from us. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

You are not guarded by your own power. **5a.** God will preserve his people. He promises to finish the work he started. And how are we guarded? Peter says through faith – Keep believing. Stay plugged in. And what are we guarded for? For a salvation ready to be revealed. There are three tenses to salvation: we have been saved, are being saved, and will be fully saved at the resurrection. Christianity is a forward-looking faith. Even if the Lord gives us 100 years (like sweet Tex Jackson), at the end of the day, that is a blip on the radar. We believe in eternal life! We get so focused on today and this month and don’t spend near enough time thinking about the next millennium. This world is not all there is. We are aliens and pilgrims here. 1:1 says elect exiles here.

Praise God for preserving grace. Grace won for us on that good Friday. On that Friday, it seemed like defeat, but on Sunday morning, defeat turned to victory. On that Friday, Rome thought they stomped out another rebel, but on Sunday morning Caesar realized the limits of their power. On that Friday, darkness rejoiced as though heaven had lost, but on Sunday morning, Jesus arose with our freedom in hand. On that Friday, the disciples drooped their heads, but on Sunday morning the clouds dispelled, gloom turned to bright hope. On that Friday, it seemed the Son was damned, but on Sunday morning we learned he was damning damnation. On that Friday, mortality seemed inevitable, but on Sunday morning mortality was made immortal. On that Friday, Jesus seemed destroyed, but on Sunday morning he destroyed destruction, he cursed cursedness, he

broke brokenness. On that Friday, the church seemed like a false start, but on Sunday morning, resurrection power was unleashed. On that Friday, the fear of death seemed legitimate, but on Sunday morning death lost its sting. On that Friday, hope had died, but on Sunday morning, death died. On that Sunday morning, we were given living hope.