

## Living Hope Gives Light at the End of the Tunnel

### 1 Peter 1:3-9 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Easter Sunday carries with it the euphoria of winning a title bout, as if Queen's "We Are The Champions" was blaring as we celebrated Christ's flawless victory over sin, death, and the devil as also our victory. It was awesome! However, a few days have gone by, and we still have Jesus' flawless victory, but our struggles still continue, don't they?

The Apostles Peter confirms this truth: "You may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." (verse 6) Peter had personal experience of having Jesus' flawless victory and yet still struggling day to day. He was beaten, imprisoned, about to be executed for proclaiming that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead and thus had won us the victory over our sin, over death, and over the devil. He was a focal point in a controversy over the church as to how to handle Gentile, non-Jewish, converts. Then there were the unspoken trials, such as how Peter no doubt wrestled with his sins against God, how he had denied Jesus 3x on Good Friday, how he had made Gentiles feel like they are not good enough to be with Jewish believers.

What trials are you facing right now? Are you plagued with the sins of your past like Peter, that it seems like these sins are not going away, still gnawing at your conscience, still accusing you that you have to do more to truly be saved? Do you doubt whether or not you actually have Jesus' flawless victory since you find yourself committing the same sins over and over again, that you try really hard, have some good days, but then you fall back into it? Are you struggling because your temptations do not seem to be lessening but getting stronger? Are you struggling with whether or not your faith is true, that Bible is true, especially as there are so many people who don't believe, who say that there's evidence to not believe it, that the Bible is corrupted, who have questioned their faith and then walked away from it?

Going through trials like these hurts and drains us. The pain makes us feel like we are not protected, that we are not guarded, that my faith can perish because it isn't shining as brightly today as it was on Easter Sunday. How do we get through these trials?

Knowing that the Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia were going through trials like these, Peter wrote to help get them through, to give them light at the end of the tunnel, just as he himself needed. To do so, he started with what we already have because of Easter: "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." (verse 3)

Just like Jesus explained to Nicodemus, we have a new life because of what God has done for us. Because Christ lived perfectly for us for all the years of his life here on earth and because he offered himself as the sacrifice for all our sins on the cross, we are made new. Our sins are paid for, killed on the cross, the debt is removed from our ledger completely. We are instead clothed with Jesus' perfection, his flawless victory, that our status before God is saint, that we are perfect.

This status is secure for us even through our trials because it's not based on what we do or how strongly we believe it or how many temptations we resist, but it's based on the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. Look again in the tomb. There still are no bones of Jesus in it. You heard again that the disciples, particularly Thomas, saw and touched the resurrected Jesus. His resurrection is the approval of God the Father that Jesus' mission for us was completed perfectly. These eyewitness accounts were recorded and faithfully preserved for us so that we would have certainty to combat our doubts through our trials.

Along with the status of perfection, we also have from what God did for us an "inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade." (verse 4) This inheritance is the riches of heaven: a life without pain or suffering or mourning or death, a life of perfection, a life living forever in the presence of God, a life without any more fear or doubts, a life where the painful, grief-filled trials end, a life of total happiness that never gets old or boring.

Because this inheritance is kept in heaven for you, there is nothing in this world, no trial, no temptation, no question, no doubt that can change the status of our inheritance that God won for us. Our inheritance is impervious and incorruptible because it's based on Jesus' resurrection, his flawless victory. The fact that we own this right now gives us something to look forward to, like light at the end of the tunnel to remind us of what our future is, that it is secure and gives us living hope for the trials of today.

God increases our living hope to get us through the trials of today as we "through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." (verse 5) That same power that was used to create the heavens and the earth, that keeps the sun shining and the earth rotating, that provides all the seasons in their time, that provides clothing and food every day, the power that he used to live perfectly for us in our place and to pay for all our sins, the same power that turned our hearts from unbelief to belief in him, this is the power that also shields us through faith until we live in that inheritance that we have because Jesus gifted it to us. God even promises that his power will keep that imperishable inheritance safe and secure for us all the way through the end of the world. This whole earth can be destroyed, but what God has won for us, what he has in store for us, this he will shield for us with his power until we are enjoying it.

Yet the trials still come, and they still hurt, and the doubts still arise. How do we get through today and tomorrow and the next day? This is why we need living hope, hope that is alive with us day to day.

One aspect of that living hope to get us through today is to realize that the fact that us experiencing trials means that we are still in the fight, that we still have the flawless victory God has given us because of Jesus' resurrection. If there were no trials whatsoever, we would be left wondering if the fight was already over and that we lost, the title from Jesus stripped from us. So, the fact that you are experiencing trials shows that the victory is still yours, that God is still shielding you from losing it.

Another help to get us through the trials that we endure is to remember what the trials are doing for us. God doesn't give them to us to make life miserable and unbearable while it causes all kinds of doubts and questions. Peter tells us that trials "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." (verse 7)

Trials do hurt, but God gives them to us to refine us, to help us get to the light at the end of the tunnel. Gold ore is always found with other elements mixed in with it. So, it has to be smelted at 1100 degrees Fahrenheit to be refined enough to be useful, to purge away the dross, the non-gold, non-precious metal. It's intense, but it's the only way to refine the precious gold. In the same way, we have a lot of garbage, a lot of sin, a lot of doubts, mixed in with us. God gives us trials to purge away that dross, the things in life that hinder your faith in God, that want to strip you of Christ's flawless victory. When the heat is turned up, we stop turning to ourselves and our fixes and instead turn more and more to God, rely on him and his flawless Easter resurrection victory to have him get us through unbearable trials.

Look back on the trials that you have gone through in regards to your faith. As you reflect on them, ask: How did they change you? What did you learn? What did you gain? What did God help you to get rid of? How did these trials make your faith stronger, focus you back on God? Even as you contemplate these questions, remember that God has already gotten you through them. That's his power shielding you and refining you. Remembering that he has gotten you through provides again that living hope to get you through your current trials. If he got you through those in the past, he will get you through your current trial too.

And if you are having trouble seeing how God made your faith stronger through trials, be bold and ask someone else how God got them through one of their trials. Don't hold that struggle in. Don't isolate. That will only make you feel like you are the only one struggling, the only one doubting, the only one about to lose Christ's victory won for you. Instead, increase your living hope by coming alongside someone else like Peter is doing with this letter. Be honest. Say what you wrestle with. Ask what the other person wrestles with. Maybe it's the same as you and you can support and strengthen each other. Maybe it's a trial that you have been through and now you can help them or maybe they can show you that God got them through their trial and so he will for you as well. We are here to help and encourage each other as we go through trials of all kinds.

Brothers and sisters, we don't have a faith meant just to get us through the easy times when we're happy. We have a living hope for the trials of today based on Jesus' resurrection. We have Jesus' flawless victory covering over us. We have an inheritance that cannot perish, spoil, or fade. We have God's almighty power shielding us all the way until the end of time when we will enjoy the full the riches of heaven, of being with God forever. Remember how God has gotten you through the past trials. Know that he will get you through this trial too. Share these trials with one another. Encourage each other with your living hope based on Jesus' resurrection, an unchangeable and inextinguishable light at the end of the tunnel that gets us through our trials today. Amen.