



Well it's finally here...the big day. Anticipation has been building. Everyone has been talking about it. Finally, it's here! College basketball's final four! No, that's not it. Something bigger is here. Even people who aren't basketball fans have been waiting for this. You know what it is. It's the release of the Apple iPad. Thousands are waiting in line to get their hands on this breakthrough tablet.

But there's something more exciting than the Final Four and the launch of a new Apple product. It's Easter! The NCAA has the Final Four, Apple has the iPad, and Christians have Easter. Easter is the most joyous day on the calendar for Christians around the world, but a lot of us are distracted and I think that's because many of us today feel anxious and even hopeless. These are challenging times. Things may be a bit better than last year but we're still worried about our economy, about the war, about natural disasters in places like Haiti, and about terrorist attacks like the one in Moscow.

No one wants to go through times like this but they do have a way of making us ask some key questions: What am I really counting on? Am I building my life on a foundation solid enough that circumstances beyond my control can't take it away?

That's why I've been looking forward to Easter. People haven't gathered for the past 2,000 years to say, "The stock market has risen." Or, "the employment rate has risen." Or "the value of my 401(k) has risen." The one fact that's held up human beings across for 2,000 years in times of poverty, disease, war, and death itself is this: "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed."

I know in difficult times it's hard to bring up the subject of benefits. A lot of Americans have lost their benefits: jobs, homes, health insurance, and retirement. Benefits we thought were guaranteed have declined or disappeared. Retirees are wondering how they will make it and younger workers wonder if there will be anything left for them.

It was in a time not unlike ours that Peter wrote his first letter to believers who were scattered throughout Asia Minor (Turkey). Peter, of course, was one of the original followers of Jesus. He was a strong-willed, impetuous fisherman who never had an unuttered thought. No one felt the death of Jesus more agonizingly than Peter. He boasted, "I'll follow you anywhere, Jesus, even to death." But his courage melted when the heat was on and before the night was over he denied Jesus three times. But Peter is a different man when he writes this letter. He stood boldly for Christ

in the time of Nero's reign. Nero used to light Christians on fire and use them as lampstands for his parties. Within two years of writing this letter, Peter himself was hung upside down on a Roman cross.

In light of all this Peter writes to these early Christians and to people like us about a benefits package that comes as a result of Jesus' resurrection. He wants us to know there is something far more valuable and stable and real than anything this world has to offer. Read along with me from 1 Peter 1:3-9.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

The benefits come through the resurrection of Jesus

The most important words in that paragraph are those which appear at the end of v.3, ***"through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."*** Everything else, Peter says, hinges on that statement. All the benefits Peter goes on to describe only come because this one event has taken place. No resurrection of Jesus, no benefits for us.

Peter himself was an eyewitness to this event. After the resurrection, knowing how utterly defeated he was, Jesus made a special visit just to Peter (Lk 24:34). We don't know exactly where they met or what was said, but Jesus knew how Peter felt after his massive failure. So Jesus sought him out and appeared to him and restored him to faith.

I don't think we understand today what a shock the resurrection of Jesus was to his disciples. We know Jesus predicted it beforehand, so we think they must have just expected it to happen. But the Bible is very clear that this was the last thing they expected. Like almost all Jewish people, they believed in a future resurrection. They believed a day would come when God would collectively raise his people from the dead. But no one ever conceived of the idea that someone, even the Messiah, would be resurrected first. What they did expect was that he would lead them in a successful revolt against Rome. So when Jesus was crucified, their hopes were utterly crushed. They were done! This Jesus-thing was a failed project; they had bet on the wrong horse.

So when Peter speaks here of the resurrection of Jesus, we ought to take this seriously. This wasn't the concoction of a bunch of gullible men predisposed to believe such things. This was the rock solid conviction of utterly defeated men and women who had to be convinced against their better judgment that he was alive, not just in spirit but in a physical way. They touched him. He ate with them. They were so convinced that they were all willing to die to defend it.

And so, with that as a foundation, what's in this benefits package? What is it that the resurrection promises us?

A new life of hope

The first thing is a new life of hope. Peter says *"who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope."* Because of the resurrection we can be born again. Whatever you think about that term, Jesus was the first one to use it and all it means is he gives us new life. It's like we get an advance jolt of the resurrection. Just as we were born physically, we're now born spiritually. We're given a new life with a new birth certificate recorded in heaven.

And notice how this happens. It doesn't happen by us trying to turn over a new leaf, or by us getting a new start like with a new job or a new relationship. It's not anything we do; it's something that's done to us. It's something that happens to us from the outside. It's something only God can do. And we don't earn it; it happens to us because of *"his great mercy."*

This new life is a life of hope. It's a living hope. It's not dead. A dead hope has no substance. This hope is real; it's genuine. I asked a bunch of people on Facebook this week what hope means to them. I got some great answers. Here are a few of my favorites: "Hope is the thing that motivates us to get out of bed in the morning." "Hope is trusting in what God has shown us about himself more than what the world tries to convince us is real." "Hope is knowing that Larry Ellison will buy the Warriors." "Hope is the belief that a deep-seated, sometimes subconscious, longing for something better will be filled in the foreseeable future. This can all be symbolically represented by a large bowl of Hagan Daaz ice cream."

One thing I know about hope is you can't live without it. Without hope we sink into depression. Proverbs 13:12 says *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is the tree of life."* Without hope we die. Here is what I think Peter meant by hope: Hope is a confident, eager, life-changing expectation that the good things God promised through Christ will indeed become ours. Hope isn't wishful thinking; its confidence is based on the bedrock of God's promises.

An inheritance that will never perish

This leads me to the second part of this benefits package: an inheritance that will never perish. He says, *"to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."* We all know what an inheritance is. Some people are on the giving end of an inheritance and others are on the receiving end. It's not very good manners these days to talk about your inheritance. It's usually seen as a kind of money-grubbing thing to do. "Hey, Dad, how's my inheritance doing? Can we hurry it up a little?" That's not a real cool thing to say! Once in a while we joke about it, like the bumper sticker that says, "I'm spending my kid's inheritance." But we need to understand that God's perspective on our inheritance is different than ours. As our Father, he's happy to talk about it with us. He wants us to look forward to our inheritance. He doesn't want us to worry about losing out on it. He won't spend it and we can't be disqualified from it. He says it's *"reserved in heaven for you."*

The whole idea of inheritance was very different in Peter's day than in ours. We use the word to refer to something a child receives when his parents die, unless a parent chooses to spend it all. But it's not something that's legally the child's until the parent dies. But in Peter's day the heir had a legal claim to the inheritance even before the father died. He wasn't supposed to use it until then, but it belonged to him. Remember what the younger son in the Prodigal Son story asked his father? He said, *"Father, give me my share of the estate"* (Lk 15:12). In other words, it belongs to me. That's how certain your inheritance is. It already has your name on it.

Peter also emphasizes here that our inheritance will last forever; it's *"imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away."* Are you looking forward to your inheritance? Paul said, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him..."* (2 Cor 2:9). Our inheritance will include eternity in his glorious presence. Scripture says, *"In his presence is fullness of joy."*

It will also include new bodies, just like the new body that Jesus got when he was raised up. Thank God we won't be a bunch of ghosts floating around scaring each other! We'll have bodies we recognize. I can hardly wait. I've been trying so hard to take care of my body. But every once in a while I realize I'm fighting

a losing battle. But one day I'll get a new body and it will never get old.

Our inheritance will also include a new heaven and a new earth. Later, Peter wrote, *"according to his promise we're looking forward to a new heavens and a new earth."* (2 Pet. 3:13). We too often think of heaven as a place we go when we die. But we ought to think of it like this: God will bring not just heaven but a new earth to us; a renewed creation. I can't wait!

A salvation ready to be revealed

The third part of this benefits package is a salvation ready to be revealed. In v.5 he points to *"a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* Salvation means rescue. What are we rescued from? Three enemies: sin, death and the devil. Notice salvation here isn't seen as something that happened to us in the past but something that will be revealed to us in the future. When he says *"the last time"* he's talking about the return of Jesus. But it's also something that's happening to us now. Down in v.9 he talks about *"obtaining...the salvation of your souls."* He uses the present tense. Salvation is also happening in the present. Did you know there are three tenses of salvation? The past tense means we've been saved from the penalty of sin. The present tense means we're being saved from the power of sin. The future tense means we will be saved from the presence of sin.

Picture it like a new car. Suppose you went to a showroom and saw a brand new model of a car, and you test drove it, and you loved it so you paid for it. But the model is so new the dealers only have that one car in the showroom and you have to wait for them to get the rest of the cars in so you can drive your car home. That's like salvation. Your salvation has been bought by Christ on the cross. That's salvation in the past tense. But you also get to enjoy test drives. That's the present aspect of salvation; it's something you experience now. But the final delivery won't come until later. That's the future part of salvation, which is where our hope is.

A joy that's bigger than circumstances

The last thing that's part of this benefits package is a joy that's bigger than circumstances. Look at verses 6-7, *"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials..."* Now we're getting to where you and I live. This isn't just some kind of Pollyanna religion we have. We need something that acknowledges the hard realities of life and can carry us through the toughest blows life can offer. He talks here about being *"distressed by various trials."* That can refer to all kinds of things. You fill in the blank: The loss of a job or home or relationship, a stubborn or unfaithful spouse, a rebellious child, a selfish neighbor, a scary spot on an MRI.

Peter says a few important things about these trials. He says they're only *"for a little while."* I know it doesn't seem that way; it seems like it goes on forever, but compared to eternity that's

true. Then he adds those words, *"if necessary."* The idea is that sometimes they **are** necessary because through them we learn things we never could have learned otherwise. We learn to let go; we learn to surrender our agenda to God's perfect plan; our life is refined and purified in ways that just don't happen when things go our way.

And because of all that, we can have joy. We can have joy right in the middle of the worst trial. We can be *"greatly distressed"* and still have joy spilling over. I know Ed and Nicci are grieving the loss of their son, and are concerned about the health of their son who still lives, but I've seen them through this process and I also know they *"greatly rejoice."* I've seen their joy. Because of the resurrection their son is with His Savior and one day they'll see him again with an awesome, healthy, strong body. I talked to a young man this week who's been out of work for several months. He's distressed about that, but I saw joy. I also listened to a man whose plan for retirement has been massively adjusted because of the need to take care of his mother who has Alzheimer's. He's greatly distressed over this, but he's surrendered his plan to God's and I see joy in him.

One of the things that fuels this joy is love. Peter says in v.8, *"and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory..."* What a tender thing to say. It's like a soldier thousands of miles away from his girlfriend at home. He misses her so much. Every once in a while he pulls out her picture and stares at it. He writes her letters and dreams about her. He loves her even though he can't see her. We don't see him now, but we love him. And this love relationship we enjoy with him doubles and even triples our joy!

This is quite a benefits package! And the great thing about this is nothing can take it away from us. All of this is possible because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Faith is required to acquire this benefits package

But there is one thing you must know. This benefits package doesn't come automatically. It's like in the business world if you want the benefits package you have to stay with the company. Well, there is something you and I have to have in order to get hold of God's benefits package. Do you know what it is? It's faith. Faith is mentioned over and over again in this passage. In v.5 he says *"we are protected by the power of God through faith."* In v.7 he talks about *"the proof of your faith"* and how he refines it through testing. Finally in v.9 he says the *"outcome of your faith is the salvation of your souls."* It's very clear that if you take faith out of the equation, this benefits package falls apart. It goes up in smoke.

What is faith? It's not a blind leap out into the dark. It's not just being optimistic. Faith is trusting in what God has promised in his word. Faith is a gift of God, but it's not like we sit down and

just wait for faith to smack us in the head. Food is a gift, too, but you have to eat it. Water is a gift but you have to drink it. Faith comes when we take God at his word.

Imagine a fire in the second story of home. As the people gather below, they see a little girl at the window of the second story. The fire trucks are still on their way so her father stands below and shouts to his daughter, "Jump into my arms. Don't be afraid. I'll catch you." Faith isn't just believing he's there. Faith is believing as he says that he's strong enough and reliable enough to catch her and then to go ahead and jump.

Our Father God has invited us in his word to jump into the arms of Jesus Christ for salvation and all of the benefits we've looked at this morning. The question is, will you jump? Will you take God at his word and put your full weight on Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

If the resurrection is true, then he's strong enough to catch you. If it's true, then it makes sense for you to build your whole life around it. Wolfgart Pannenberg was right when he said, "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

It's like if you're given a beautiful painting worth millions of dollars. But it's so big you have nowhere to put it in your house. What would you do? Get rid of the painting? No! You'd tear down your house and build a new one that could feature that priceless painting! If the resurrection is true, and if all these priceless benefits are yours as a result of it, don't you think you should be willing to take that step of faith and tear everything else down and build your life around this one reality?

Some of you have taken that step of faith but you're not living your faith out. You've been consumed by your problems—issues at work, concerns in your marriage, troubles with your children. You've forgotten this great benefits package you have in Christ. You've lost your joy and your hope and even your love for Jesus has grown cold. Today is a day for you to refocus on what's really important.

Others of you have never made that jump of faith into the arms of Jesus Christ. I want you to know that's the most important decision you'll ever make. It will determine not only the direction of your life on earth but where you spend eternity. So I implore you to take that step today. Put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. He died for you. He was raised for you. He'll come back for you.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.