

A Glorious Inheritance

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[0 : 0 0] I wonder whether you've ever hoped to come into a large inheritance. And if you did, what you would do with it? Would you travel the world?

Yeah, anyone would do that? No? Would you buy yourself a mansion? Or would you do something really noble, like build a new hospital in Cambodia or something?

Well, I know I'm stating the obvious here, but the only way to come into a large inheritance is actually to have really rich parents. Sometimes a rich auntie might give you something or leave you something.

But either way, inheritances are not something you can earn. You're simply born into it. And tonight, believe it or not, this is also true of our spiritual inheritance.

As Christians, we too have a glorious inheritance, hence the title. But just like earthly inheritances, it also comes by birth.

[1 : 0 6] And Amy and Yuli's baptisms today were a sign of that new birth, where we die to our old life and are born again in Christ. And in tonight's passage, we hear specifically about this inheritance, an inheritance that comes by new birth.

So, if you're already there, look down with me in chapter 1 of 1 Peter. Now, we didn't read this, but in verse 1, Peter was writing to God's chosen people who are scattered across the Roman Empire.

Now, why were they scattered? Because they were being persecuted for their faith. Peter calls them strangers in the world because their true inheritance, their true belonging, did not lie in the world.

And so, Peter begins in verse 3 with these 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 cannot perish, spoil, or fade.

So, there we have it right at the start that our inheritance comes by new birth, which we can take no credit for because, as it says, it has come as a result of God's mercy.

[2 : 2 1] God alone determines who receives this new birth. And like all other inheritances, we didn't do anything for it. And yet, even though we ourselves didn't do anything for it, somebody else did.

And that somebody is Jesus. Because Peter then goes on to say that it's through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that we are born into this inheritance.

Now, you may wonder how there is this connection between Jesus' resurrection and our new birth. Well, Peter doesn't explain it in our passage tonight, but he does so very soon afterwards.

So, in verse 18, if you look down with me, or look up, which I've got on the screen, Peter says that we had to be redeemed or purchased or bought back, our freedom had to be purchased by the precious blood of Jesus shed in his death.

He's the lamb, Peter says, without defect. And that is a reference to the Passover lamb that had to be slaughtered by the Israelites on the night that they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

[3 : 24] And so, through Jesus' death, we too are freed from slavery to sin, which includes, amongst other things, our sin of pride, our selfishness, our wanting to be our own boss, as Yuli shared tonight, instead of having God as our master.

Now, if Jesus' death freed us from the old way of living, then Peter also says that it's in his resurrection that we're given new life, because we are born again to share in his resurrected life.

Now, this analogy is not perfect, but it's a bit like coming to Australia to start a new life. Many people face persecution in their homes or old countries, and they apply to come to Australia.

Let's say a woman succeeds in her application, and she's granted asylum in Australia. She comes and she starts a new life here. After a few years, she takes out Australian citizenship.

And then when she does, normally what they do is then apply to have the rest of the family come through the family reunion program. They come so that on the basis of her citizenship, they too can share in this new life in Australia.

[4 : 45] And so, it's similar with Jesus. Having received this resurrection life first, Jesus now is able to sponsor, as it were, us, so that we too share in this life.

But we learn next that although we now have this life, this new life, the inheritance is not something that we have just yet. Rather, verse 4 and 5, it says, this inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 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.

I think Prince William would probably know how this feels. He knows that one day he'll inherit everything from Grandma. Buckingham Palace will be his.

So will Windsor Castle. Even this golden horse-drawn carriage will be his. Imagine that. But as of now, none of these are his, is it?

Because it's being kept for him until he becomes king. And so it is with us as Christians as well. We know from verse 4 that our inheritance will not fade, perish, or spoil, but it is also being kept for us in heaven.

[6 : 07] But the other thing we want is also the assurance not just that it's there and not fading, but that actually we ourselves will get there one day to inherit it.

That somehow it wouldn't be taken away from us while we're still on the way there. Well, this assurance is found in verse 5 because God by his power is shielding us or protecting us so that we will be kept until the day of salvation when it will be finally reviewed.

On this day Jesus will come again and bring history to a close. But until that day the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work to sustain us in our new birth.

God's power is helping us to make it to that final day of salvation. Now, how is this power of God at work? What is it doing? Well, is it for example making us physically invincible or giving us success in life in whatever we do?

Or is God's power at work to make us better people so that we'll be morally perfect like Jesus? Well, actually the answer to all that is no actually because if you look carefully at the verse again, there are two words that tell us what the answer is.

[7 : 23] Can you see it? It's the two words that says through faith. God's power is at work in our faith, through our faith so as to sustain us to the end.

Those of us who watch Survivor would know the importance of making fire, right? Each tribe has to light their own fire at some stage in the game and often it's difficult, you know, they don't have the right sort of tools or whatever.

They're out in the elements which is the, I guess, the biggest risk and so for them to actually succeed, they have to, you know, protect the flame at all costs. They have to shield it from the wind and they have to cover it or, you know, not put it exposed to the rain so that it doesn't go out.

And this is sort of the same picture that I get when I read this about God's power. It's acting to shield or protect our faith so that it may grow and become robust. Now, of course, one result of a growing faith is that we will lead godly life.

We will become better people. We'll be more loving and caring, more selfless and sacrificial, more willing to serve the Lord. But we must realize that these things are the product of faith.

[8 : 36] They are not things that precede faith. So we can be the most loving and caring person, the most upright and moral person. You know, we may champion the cause of the poor or the dispossessed, but if it isn't the result of faith in Jesus, then really it's to no avail as far as ensuring us of God's inheritance.

On the other hand, every time we see someone growing in faith or persevering in faith, then we're actually seeing God's power at work in them. That is the key to actually seeing whether God is at work.

And that brings me to my second point in the outline and in the next two verses in our passage, and that is God's glorious inheritance is for those who persevere in faith. Since we know that God's power is working in us through faith, then our main focus in life must be to persevere in faith.

And one of the key challenges to that perseverance comes during times of trial in our life. So listen to what Peter says in verse 6 and 7. He says, In all of this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

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.

[10 : 06] And so, not only are we waiting patiently for this inheritance, what happens as we do is that we might suffer trials and testing as well.

Now, as we read these verses, we likely think that this includes any and all kinds of suffering. But I think we should keep in mind the context of the letter and think that more likely Peter was talking about trials of those kinds that test our faith.

Or for the readers originally, this would have meant opposition as they faced those who are persecuting them. And here too, I think we need to distinguish the opposition we may face because we're nasty, notwithstanding that we're Christian.

You know, if that happens, then in one sense, that kind of opposition is well deserved. But if, however, we suffer as a Christian through no fault of our own, then I think this is the situation that Peter is referring to.

And today, as we look out at our own society, I think this sort of persecution, you know, I hesitate to use that word because I know that our brothers and sisters in countries really put their lives at risk for Jesus, but I think we face this kind of persecution, quote-unquote, in one of two forms.

[11 : 31] So at one level, we face what I call micro-persecution at work and study. Personal opposition, if you like, because colleagues or customers or, you know, fellow students or whatever, make life difficult for us or oppose us because of our faith.

And sometimes, it may even be our own family. We do know of people, don't we, whose families have disowned them or stopped talking to them because they've become Christian. At other times, our colleagues or friends may simply feel threatened by our faith because we live a different set of values.

and the way we live sort of shines a light on their own lives and puts them to shame. And so while we may be gracious and accommodating and we should, they may oppose us anyway.

So that's what I call micro-persecution. But then there's sort of macro-persecution as well, opposition at the societal level where the structures of government and the espoused values of society are actually opposed to the Christian faith.

And we can see this clearly in communist countries and Islamic societies. There, severe restrictions may be put on churches on their ability to meet together publicly or restrictions on being able to share their faith.

[12 : 52] They may also try and control what gets taught in churches. And if you're a Christian in these countries, you may be barred from certain jobs or public office.

So one recent example is the mayor or in the mayoral race of Jakarta where there was a Christian candidate, Ahok, who was given a hard time because of his faith.

Now as for us in Australia, we still enjoy relatively great freedoms of religion, but increasingly our society is becoming more secular, which actually doesn't mean it's becoming values neutral or belief neutral because every society, even those that don't say they don't believe in God or even where there is no single dominant religion, still have values and beliefs.

And in Australia, I believe, the dominant belief system right now is tolerance, diversity, and free sexual expression, which means it's actually becoming very difficult to proclaim, to share the gospel in the public square.

So try, for example, to talk about sin or our rebellion against God on TV. It's hard because sin is now a bad word.

[14 : 09] The whole idea of asking people to repent, to turn away from their sin is seen to be judgmental or bigoted or narrow-minded. Even when you say that no, we ourselves have to repent, people don't like it because you're not being tolerant.

you're judging people. But the point is that if we can't talk about these things without being accused as intolerant, then really, we can't share the good news of Jesus, can we?

Because that lies at the heart of the gospel. That's what it means to be a Christian. Likewise, we see more and more laws like that of same-sex marriage and maybe the proposed euthanasia bill that are being passed here in Victoria.

we see that they are beginning to reflect more and more the values of our society and those values are not aligned to the Bible. And we will keep seeing laws that no longer reflect God's good will for this world just because more and more people are no longer Christian.

Now, as these laws change, they will put us as Christians to the test. Will we simply just go along with these changes or will the lives we live put us in opposition to these laws?

[15 : 27] Well, Peter says in verse 6 that when we persevere in our faith, we will suffer grief from these many trials. Yes, it will not be easy or pleasant. That's not God's promise.

Yes, it will break our hearts to see what's happening to our world. And yet, paradoxically, Peter also says that we can praise God, we can give thanks, we can rejoice.

Not for the trials themselves, but for the testing of our faith that comes from it, which will allow its genuineness to be proven. It's funny, isn't it?

But we can suffer grief and rejoice both at the same time. But often, that's not our reaction, is it? That's not our first reaction. We don't think trials are good at all.

You know, we groan when we are being tested. But let me encourage you, as you've heard these words tonight, that the next time you face a trial, next time you're being tested for your faith, tell yourself this.

[16 : 31] This is actually a good thing because my faith is going to be refined by it. God is doing a good work in me. God is at, God's power is at work in me.

Tell yourself that the testing of your faith is actually part of a normal Christian life. That God does it so that our faith may grow strong. Yes, these times will be painful, but they are necessary.

I know many of us do these things. We visit the dentist, we go for life-saving surgery, we even train as an athlete, or go through all these physically painful and sometimes unbearable things.

We do this because we know it's good for us. And so, it's the same thing with testing of our faith. Let us receive it willingly because we know that God is doing it for our good.

And so, for Amy and Yuli tonight, I want to specifically encourage you, given it's your baptism as well, don't be surprised if there are trials in your life. Don't think when it happens, something must be going wrong or God doesn't care for me anymore.

[17 : 39] We often get a great positive feeling after our baptism and then we think it's onwards and upwards in a victory life. And yes, it is, but there will be testing and trials and those are good things and those are normal things.

And when it happens, it's because God loves you. Your faith is so precious to Him that He wants to test it and refine it. Peter says it's more precious than gold.

And just like the impurities in gold, faith is made purer through refining. You see, a lot of times our faith is genuine when we first become Christians, but often it's also filled with impurities, just like a lump of gold taken out from the ground.

We may, for example, still have divided loyalties. We may think, we may care more about what our friends think of us than what God's Word says. Or we may still have desires that tempt us away from God.

But as our faith is tested and we persevere in it, then our desires and motivations are actually purified, they're put under the fire, and our trust in God is strengthened.

[18 : 47] We become less easily swayed by fear or temptation. As I think I've said before in previous times, our faith is like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets.

The more we trust God in every aspect of our lives, the less we will be disturbed by the trials of our life, and the more we can live joyfully in the midst of testing. But you know what?

God is so wonderful that He promises that He will be with us even through the fiery furnace of our trials. That was actually our reading from the Old Testament tonight in Isaiah 43.

That was His promise, which I put on the slide. He says, the Lord says, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, like when Israel crossed the Red Sea, I will be with you.

When you pass through the rivers, like at Jordan, before they entered the Promised Land, they will not sweep you over. And when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. Why? Because God is with us.

[19 : 51] In other words, God's power is shielding us, sustaining our faith, so that we will persevere and grow in our trust for Him. Friends, God has given us new birth into His glorious inheritance.

It is made possible by Jesus' death, but it's our faith in Him and the hope that comes from it, that is, if you like, the lifeline to that inheritance.

And faith, by its definition, is trusting what we do not yet see. It's knowing that something is real even when we haven't seen it with our physical eyes. And so that's why Peter then says in our final verses, 8 and 9, he commends the readers like this, 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, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

We don't have to see Jesus physically to know that His death for us is real and that God's love for us is true. God gives and sustains our faith so that we can trust in His word and promises.

[21 : 02] And we can live it out for Him. When He tests our faith, it's simply to make it stronger so that even if the trials get fiercer, we can still be filled with inexpressible and glorious joy.

What a wonderful inexpressible and glorious joy. What a wonderful thing to have in the midst of trials. faith. And we can have that because we see more clearly that if we persevere in our faith, the outcome of our faith is the salvation of our souls and the receiving of this glorious inheritance that's kept for us in heaven.

Friends, I just want to say a word about the result of the postal survey. Many of you will know it's a no. all, and I think we respect the country, the democratic process.

But I have to say that if you read the papers this week or looked on the TV or whatever, you would have heard, if you're a Christian, being told many times if you voted no that you were on the wrong side of history.

And that what you needed to do is to get with the times because the times, they are changing. But friends, let me encourage you not to look at the things in this world, but instead to look at the cross and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[22 : 29] Because I tell you what, in the days leading up to Jesus' death, many would have told you that Jesus was on the wrong side of history, that you need to get with the times and follow someone who was not going to be humiliated.

But we know that the exact opposite was true. that contrary to what everyone in power, Romans, Jews, contrary to what they thought, Jesus was actually on the right side of history, securing for us a glorious inheritance.

Christians. And tonight, by confessing Jesus, Amy and Yuli, and the rest of us who've done the same, we're actually on the right side of history. And friends, if there's anyone here who does not yet know Jesus, then let me urge you to put your trust in Jesus.

Come and find out more about him. Come and talk to me. Come to the front after the service so that someone can pray with you to help you to understand Jesus. But as for me, as I've looked at what's happened this week, I have to say that even though this is something that grieves me, yet for me, there was also inexpressible and glorious joy.

Because for me, I saw my inheritance in heaven come into clearer focus. That hope of finally meeting Jesus just became a little brighter for me.

[23 : 59] And it made me want to hang on to him and persevere in my faith. Friends, is that the same with you as well? Do you now want more than ever to receive the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls?

I pray that you do. Let's pray. Father, we thank and praise you for giving us new birth through faith in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Lord, thank you that a glorious inheritance awaits us in heaven and that by your power you are shielding our precious but sometimes fragile faith.

Help us to stay strong in trials and to joyfully accept the testing of our faith. Keep us so that we may persevere until the end and come into the joy of your glorious presence with your son Jesus to enjoy the inheritance that is laid up for us.

Help us, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.