

THE EMPTY TOMB & YOU

Series: *Easter & You*

1 Peter 1:3-9

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I came across a comment yesterday that said, “The best thing about getting old is that I can hide my own Easter eggs, and it’s still a challenge to find them.” Well, I hope that’s not your challenge this morning, but I do want to invite you to identify whatever is heavy on your heart and weighing it down. Identify whatever it is that you are facing at this moment in your life. Maybe it’s a spiritual challenge or a physical challenge or relationship challenge. You know what it is if you’ve slowed down enough in life to acknowledge it. Sometimes our high-paced, busy life is a symptom of not wanting to slow down and deal with those things inside us that we know we need to deal with. But identify your challenge with me and ask, “What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for me in this challenge? This difficulty? How does the resurrection change what I’m facing?”

That’s what we’re going to talk about today. That’s essentially what we’ve been talking about in our Easter series: What Easter means for our life today. Even though the events of Easter took place 2,000 years ago, on the other side of the world, in a completely different culture, they still affect the here and now. We still look to them for spiritual life and guidance. They are the waypoints we look back to in our spiritual journey for direction and instruction. So far, we have talked about *The Crown & You*, *The Cross & You*, and the next couple of Sundays we’re talking about the *Empty Tomb & You* or *The Resurrection & You*. We’ll do that from **1 Peter 1:3-9** this morning. If you have a Bible, please turn with me there and let’s read it. This is one of the most mind-blowing doxologies in Scripture. Every time I read it, it nearly takes my breath away. It’s that good.

“3 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, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 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; 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, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

As Peter mentions, the Christians that he is writing to are facing various trials for their faith. They are distressed. Their faith is being tested. Yet here he is talking about life and joy and praise and salvation! If I didn’t know any better, I’d be tempted to think Peter is missing the point—he’s playing *Mr. Blue Sky*—the happiest song ever—on a cloudy, rainy day and pretending like it’s not raining. Is he rejoicing when others are mourning? Actually what Peter is doing is he is trying to remind them of the great hope they have in Jesus that will help get them through the challenges they’re facing—how the resurrection of Jesus gives them hope in the here and the now.

What he's doing kind of reminds me of when I was a child. I got lost in one of the big department stores. I remember I was in the clothing section of a certain store because I was playing between the clothes in the clothing racks like my kids do now. But I got lost. My mom moved on, and or drifted away a bit. It was a terrifying experience! Everywhere I looked, all I could see was obstacles because those stores were made for adults. Children can't see above the clothing racks or read some of the signs that can help direct them. They're not even thinking about that. All they see is obstacle after obstacle between them and their lost parent. But when you grow up and you get a higher perspective, you realize like I do now that I overreacted, right? The store isn't that big. It's not that all that scary after all. But it was at the time.

My point is that Peter's trying to give them some perspective on their challenging situation. He's trying to pick them up a bit; to lift their chin; lift their thoughts. I don't think he's downplaying their hardships. Life is hard at times. And we often downplay our hardships because we know that others have it much harder. You ever done that? We tell ourselves things like, "I'm have to have this surgery and this is hard but so and so has cancer" Or "I'm frustrated that I got hurt and can't play sports anymore but so and so is paralyzed so who am I to complain? They have it so much worse than I do." Well, while that's true, it doesn't take away from the fact that what I'm going through is still hard. No it's not cancer or whatever, but it's still hard and pretending it's not doesn't make it go away or what it's doing in my heart. So I still need to work through it with God and take it to the Gospel for a higher perspective—God's perspective. We don't want to ignore our challenges. We want to walk with Jesus through them. Not numb to them but to acknowledge them and through Jesus find hope, joy, peace, and contentment. So Peter is not belittling their pain or difficulty, telling them to praise God *because of* the circumstances. Nor to praise God because the circumstances just *aren't that bad*. No, he's calling them to praise Him *in the midst of* their circumstances because of the hope of the resurrection that they have.

I found in this passage two ways that the empty tomb, two thousand years ago, brings hope to us in life's challenges in the here and now. Peter says we have been "**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." There is an emphasis on the present and the future because of what happened in the past through Jesus' resurrection. So because of the *past* resurrection, we have hope *now* and *forever*! I like how one paraphrase puts it: "Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now!"

1. The empty tomb means a brand-new life.

That's what he means by being **born again**. We have new life now. If you remember Jesus' late-night conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 (sometimes called Nic at Night), Jesus tells Nicodemus that it's not enough to do religious things or try to be a good person to get to heaven. He said you must be born again. If you're confused by that, don't feel bad... Nicodemus was too! His response was like, "So you want me to enter into my mother's womb again? I'm not really sure I can do that so..." It's kind of funny, actually. Jesus clarified that He's not talking about natural birth but spiritual birth. You must be born spiritually by the Spirit of God through faith in

Jesus. Because here's the deal—the raw fact: as sinners, we're all born spiritually dead and separated from God. We cannot earn our way to God through our good works or religious works. That's why Jesus had to die for our sins so that through faith in what Jesus did for us, we would be born again to a living hope. We could be saved as the Spirit of God baptizes us into Christ and seals us as God's children in an invisible spiritual work the moment we believe (Eph. 1:13). That's why we Christians sometimes say, “Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once.” In an invisible birth. No water required. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”—the body of Christ.

Paul is talking about this in Romans 6 when he says those who have believed in Christ Jesus have also been **united** with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. It's through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This *spiritual baptism* is what is being pictured in *water baptism*. Water baptism is the picture or symbolic of our death, burial and resurrection with Christ to newness of life—a changed life. Let's read that. Romans 6:2-7 says,

“How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.”

What Paul is talking about here is one of the harder concepts to grasp about our spiritual life, but it's one of the most important. Paul wants us to “know” this truth (that's the key word there) because it is critical to understanding and living the new life we've been given through union with Him. It's critical to experiencing some serious victory over the sin nature and walking with God. On Good Friday we talked about the cross and how **when Jesus died, we died**. But it's also true that **when Jesus was raised, we were raised with Him**. It's a co-crucifixion, co-burial, co-resurrection. Our life changes. He gives us resurrection power to live for Him (Rom. 8:11).

I don't know a single Christian who hasn't been challenged with sin in their life. Even the apostles like Paul (as evident from Romans chapter 7) wrestled with their sinful nature—this desire to do what God clearly doesn't want us to do. Maybe that's your challenge this morning. You just feel so out of control. Like you have no self-control. The resurrection speaks to that, saying you can have victory because of who you are in Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control. You were joined to Christ in order that the body of sin might be rendered inoperative and we could be free to live for God!

A lot of times I think Christians stumble by trying to live the Christian life in their own self-effort. They try, and try, and try to be good enough until they're tempted to give up on the Christian life altogether. If that's you, I'm happy for you because you're ready for this truth about our grace-union with Christ. You're ready to start living by the truth of who you are in Christ. I'm convinced that quite often it's not a **behavior problem so much as it is a belief problem**.

For those who are tracking with us through Romans, remember when we talked about Eeyore? Or the Orangutan? Now you're curious, right? The messages are on the website. As long as we walk around like Eeyore, thinking, "I'm just a no-good, dirty-rotten sinner. I'm never going to have any victory over this sin." Well, don't be shouldn't when that's exactly what your life looks like.

Instead of that being your identity, take up the identity God has for you. God calls us justified. Redeemed. Forgiven. Loved. Chosen. Complete. Raised up. Made alive. Given new life. He calls you a saint. We need to know these identity truths if we're going to experience any measure of divine power in our lives. We need to know what God accomplished for us and in us through the resurrection. The resurrection happened 2,000 years ago, but it still says today in you're here and now, "You're dead to sin. You have new spiritual life in Christ. You are freed from sin's dominating power in your life. You can follow Christ. You can have victory." That's essentially what each person getting baptized today is saying, "I have believed. I have died to who I used to be. I am a new creation in Christ, and I want to follow Christ in this newness of life that He has given me. I'm ALL IN on Christ. No half-hearted spiritual games here. Jesus is life for me."

Back to 1 Peter. In verse 4, Peter talks about "*an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God*"

2. The empty tomb means an eternal inheritance.

An **inheritance** is simply something that you expect to receive in the future. A child often expects to receive an inheritance from their parents—maybe some financial sum, some land, possessions, whatever—the things this world values most. Well, a lot of the Christians Peter is writing to had lost their inheritances in this world. They were considered ostracized from their families, fired from their jobs, mistreated by their unbelieving spouses. Peter gives them instructions on how to respond to those situations in this letter. Peter is saying this may be true—you've lost an inheritance in this life—but your greatest inheritance comes in heaven and the resurrection. And that's the inheritance that matters most. This inheritance is protected by the power of God. No man can take that away. It's imperishable. It will never fade away. It is reserved in heaven. Not even inflation can devalue this inheritance!

In verse 7, he uses the picture of a metalworker putting gold through a **refining** process. He puts the gold under the intense heat and pressure and melts it all down, exposing the impurities that rise to the surface so that he can remove them and leave the precious metal pure. Challenges have the same effect on our lives. They purify us and help us to put our hope in Jesus instead of the things of the world. It exposes what we're really relying on for hope and happiness. If we respond in faith, it should show the difference Christ makes: What a light Christians are who when in *anxious* world, exhibit **peace**; who in a *greedy* world, exhibit **generosity**; who in a *fearful* world, exhibit **trust** in Jesus; who in a *searching* world, exhibit **purpose, joy, and contentment**. That's *living hope*. Unexplainable, supernatural, born-of-God hope.

When we go through challenges and things that frighten us—like the frightened me in that department store as a kid—we can get angry with God or seek God. Let it push us away from our

Heavenly Father or draw us closer to our Heavenly Father in love. And there's no question: He wants to be near us just as we want to be near our kids in their doubts, their frustrations, their questions, their victories. He wants a relationship with us and to walk through that with us. I think that's why God so often doesn't give us all the details of life and calling ahead of time. He wants us to remain in a constant, dependent relationship with Him. If He revealed everything at once and life was always a breeze, we wouldn't sense that need to seek Him and spend time with Him.

Just this week in my quiet time I happened across a life-lesson from a Nebraska native named Michele. She wrote,

“When I was little, I was deathly afraid of thunderstorms. Deathly is not an exaggeration. At the first sound of thunder I would run down the stairs and get in bed with mom and dad. As the storm would increase, Dad would want to get up to survey everything. Dad was my protector. So I would get up with him. I would walk behind him, my arms wrapped around his waist, walking step for step with him. Although I was scared to death, I felt safe at the same time. I knew that Dad would not lead me into any sort of danger. When the lightning would flash and the thunder would crash, I would just hold tighter. We would walk from window to window, him watching, me clinging.

Now, ‘my protector’ is gone. But what he taught me through that is invaluable. I am always bent towards fear. I deal with it all of the time, but I have learned to run to my Father [capital “F” kind of father]. I cling to Him. When the lightning of life strikes and thunder of fear rumbles through, I hold tighter. I walk step for step with my Father watching the storm around me, sometimes nearly crippled by fear, but all the while knowing that He will not lead me anywhere where He cannot protect me. He is my safety.”

I like that. I think it's a good picture of what God wants to do in us through the storms of life. Even though we don't see Him, we love Him. We seek Him. He is our safety. We draw close to Him. We walk step for step with Him through the challenges we face in this journey called life. We know that no matter what happens, He's got us and we've got Him. Our future is glorious.

That Father that she knows wants a relationship with you too. You may be a prodigal, a rebel, but if you turn back to Him, He'll run to you with arms wide open. But you must come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only way to the Father and Jesus said no one comes to the Father except through Him. So if you've never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, I would encourage you to call out to Him today. Ask Him to save you. Ask Him to give you this new life. Not because of who you are or what you've done, but because of who He is and what He's done for you through His death, burial and resurrection. Then ask Him to teach you how to follow Him.

We have two individuals this morning who have done just that. They have found that new life in Christ and want to follow Jesus in baptism as He commanded. They're saying, “Yes, I'm all in on Jesus.”