

Don't tell me you don't understand what it means to be jealous of the people who were there on Easter morning to see for themselves whether or not Jesus had truly risen from the dead. To have seen the evidence for ourselves, to have witnessed the empty tomb and the resurrected Christ like Thomas and John and Peter—that would have been a special privilege which simply could not be undervalued.

I know the New Testament says, "*blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,*" and that's why we don't usually entertain these thoughts for too long. But today I say go ahead and entertain them! They might just prove helpful at the moment, because today, I pray, you are, indeed, going to **Witness Your Easter**.

Not that I'm talking about witnessing Jesus' resurrection personally, but neither am I talking about the simple act of witnessing about the events of Easter with others. I'm talking about *1. Witnessing the spiritual gifts we have been given* and *2. Witnessing the change that makes in our lives*.

Now's a great time to talk about being a witness to Easter because we have come to the point in our three-year reading cycle when we will be reading selections from the epistles of Peter. The reason we have this series is that Peter was a personal witness to the resurrection of Christ, so hearing from him during Easter seems only appropriate.

That's great, and it only makes sense to hear from an eyewitness at Easter time, but it's still secondhand, isn't it? It's not witnessing the resurrection of Christ for ourselves. It's *hearing* about it.

But look at the way this epistle begins! Peter doesn't start by making a big deal about what he himself had witnessed. Instead, he makes a big deal about *us*, about the resurrection that *we* have witnessed! He writes, "*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 can never perish, spoil or fade—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.*"

Notice that he *mentions* the resurrection of Christ, but that's not the center of his attention. "*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.*"

That's it. That's what he wants to talk about. He wants to talk about *your* Easter, *your* resurrection from spiritual death, *your* new birth into a living hope. Sort of a disappointment coming from a guy who personally witnessed the empty tomb and physically ate meals with Jesus for weeks after he

died and was buried in the tomb, isn't it?

Is it?

I think it's extraordinarily significant that this eyewitness of Jesus' life, death and resurrection begins his epistle in this way. The fact of the matter is that *you* are a miracle! *You* are life from death just as the risen body of our Lord Jesus Christ is. Peter was inspired by the Spirit to write in the way because he wanted you to see the miracle of new life that you represent.

If you can listen to me and look at the text on paper at the same time, then I want you to do that right now. If you have a pen or a pencil handy to emphasize our Easter gifts from God, even better.

Now, just look at the number of special gifts and blessings that Peter, who had personally witnessed Jesus Christ raised from the dead, marveled at as he considered the wondrous work that is *you*, a child of God through the washing of rebirth and renewal (cf. Ephesians 5:25-27).

Unlike the rest of the world, he marveled, you have a "*new birth into a living hope.*" Literally that means that you have a hope that gives life, a hope that raises you from the dead. And here he's not talking about the resurrection that Jesus promised would come on the Last Day, but rather your resurrection from spiritual death in the here and now, so that you have a heart that desires to live for God,

instead of one that boils everything down to your own happiness and advantage.

But that's just gift number one. Look at the other miraculous gifts that are yours in Christ: "*an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—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.*" Wow. That's a bit more long-lasting than the volatile investments we make in the markets, huh? "*...an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade*"—and it's "*kept*" for you, that is, *watched over, guarded and protected* for you, "*in heaven,*" our eternal home.

Still not impressed with your spiritual resurrection, your own personal Easter? Well, Peter's not done with his list of miraculous blessings yet, but I guess now is as good a time as any to stop and ask, "If this is supposed to be as life-changing as Peter's experience on Easter morning, then why isn't my life changed the way that Peter's was?"

In some ways that's a fair question. In some ways, not. We think of Easter and we think of angels, earthquakes, appearances, messages from God and miracles. When we try to picture what it must have been like for the followers of Jesus once they realized that the Lord had come back from the dead, we think of unbridled joy and ecstatic celebrations.

If we're not seeing that in our own lives, well, then, I guess from that perspective, this might seem like a fair question: "Why *hasn't* my life changed as Peter's did? Why am I so much like everyone else?"

On the other hand, that's not truly a fair question at all. Why aren't our lives filled with Easter celebration all the time? We tend to believe it's that we have so many worries, so much money trouble, so many relational problems. But is that a legitimate reason for our lives not to be filled with the joy of Easter, as Peter's was?

Do you actually know that Peter was free of money troubles? Was he well-liked by the people of Jerusalem or largely hated? Oh, and have *you* ever been to prison just for witnessing that Jesus is risen? Have you ever been responsible for a newborn church of thousands of people who are reviled by their own friends and family? Have you ever been persecuted into hiding, as Peter was? Have you ever been on death row?

The problem isn't that God hasn't done anything to change our lives, but that we still base our happiness on the empty things that this world pursues, and that is nothing short of despising the Easter gifts that God bought for us at the price of his own Son's blood. It seems high time that he disowns our generation for such cold discontent.

But that immediately drives us to the greatest and

most miraculous Easter gift of all: his boundless mercy. "*In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope.*" Great mercy. In that mercy he will not disown us, but will forever reach out to us with his words of comfort and forgiveness. That mercy is the heart and source of your personal Easter, announcing personal forgiveness for each of us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, creating in us new hearts that are free of the curses and threats of the law—free to live our new lives to God without fear!

Your joy need be no less than Peter's joy. He got to witness the resurrection of our Lord, but, thanks to that resurrection, you have personally experienced a resurrection of your own. Jesus' resurrection guarantees a new life in him, but you have been raised to that new life: dead to sin through Jesus in your baptism but also alive to God through him!

Does this change your life? Not if you downplay its significance, no. But when you appreciate that even the sin of despising his gifts has been forgiven and eradicated, when you appreciate that God has given you a new life through Christ and faith in his resurrection for us, then yes! It does change your life!

Does it make life perfect? Well, it makes *you* perfect in God's sight for Jesus' sake, but it doesn't mean there will be no significant difficulties while

we await the day of our full salvation. Again, think of all that Peter himself suffered.

At the same time, consider what Peter had to say here about our personal resurrection to life in Christ and how that changes our perspective on suffering. He says of our own personal Easters of the spirit, “*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*”

Now note carefully what he says about the value of those trials to us who have witnessed a personal Easter in Christ: “*These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*”

Our translation makes it sound as though Peter is saying that our *faith* is of greater worth than gold, but the Greek maintains that it is the *testing* of our faith that is more valuable than gold. What a strange way to think about our difficulties! Yet, at the same time, how very fitting for those who have started a new life in Christ entirely unlike the one we left behind. If trials bring us closer in faith to Christ and our eternal inheritance, then those trials truly are precious—much more precious than the worldly treasures for which our sinful natures strain and strive!

Peter writes, “*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 goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*” It’s true that we haven’t seen Jesus with our eyes, as Peter had. It would be nice if we could, I guess, but we can still never say that we have not witnessed him at all.

We have witnessed our own, personal Easters, seen him working life within us. His forgiveness has given us that inexpressible and glorious joy that belongs to Easter witnesses. Even if the resurrection we have witnessed is not the one Peter saw, we have witnessed Easter, nonetheless, because Jesus has raised us to eternal life in him. Amen.