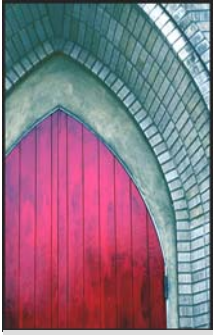


# INEXPRESSIBLE JOY

SCRIPTURE TEXT:

I PETER 1:3-9 (ESV)



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Oak Hills  
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## *True Confessions:*

Recently, we've had a string of messages that were not intended to share a common theme—other than the theme of God's grace revealed on every page of Scripture. We went from Jesus turning water into wine, to Reformation Sunday, to a communion Sunday. Yet a theme has risen so significantly that I've chosen today's text to hopefully tie some of our recent messages together in light of the struggles so many here have been facing. The theme is the hope of Heaven in the midst of present trails. I can think of no greater text to explore this than I Peter.

## *1 Peter 1:3-9*

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

<sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup>obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

## *Living Hope & Losing Baby Teeth: (vs. 3)*

Our son Chris is five and he has his first loose tooth. He came upstairs the other day with a very serious look on his face, saying, "Mom, Dad... look." He was wiggling one of his bottom teeth. To ease his distress, we did what many parents would do. We acted excited and told him that when it fell out, he could put it under his pillow and in the morning where the tooth used to be, there'd be a surprise—probably money!

Watching his little face try and compute what we had just told him was funny, but also a little sobering. What he wanted to know was why his tooth was loose and what would happen to him as the result. We could see that he was interested in the prospect of money under his pillow, but he could not see the connection between his present pain and that future reward? And it strikes me that this is exactly how it can be for us when we think of our future hope as Christians in times of trial.

The promise of Heaven is supposed to make the Christian leap for joy, but does it? If not, why not? One reason is because we often think of Heaven as something almost alien—like another planet so utterly foreign that it defies description. It is as if there will come a day when we'll be picked up from this life and land and plopped down in such a strange place, ourselves so changed by the celestial journey, that we will know neither the place nor ourselves anymore. Its all clouds and harps and angel wings and classical music. Like Chris with the promise of money under his pillow, we value the notion of the glorious outcome, but struggle to see how it relates to our present pain.

With Chris, it is not just that he wants to know, but that something in him **needs** to know how things work. So when the promise of money under the pillow failed to comfort him, we decided to tell him the graphic truth: "Chris, here's the deal. Your tooth is loose because it is a baby tooth, and you're a big boy. Your big person teeth are growing, pushing your baby teeth out. Mommy and Daddy have big person teeth and they don't budge. Here. Pull on mine." He pulled. They didn't move. "This is your first loose tooth. But Chris, every tooth in your mouth right now will eventually be pushed out by your big person teeth. Each one will get loose, a little sore, and will bleed like yours is bleeding now. And when this one falls out, it will probably bleed more because there will be a hole where your tooth used to be. But it will heal and the big person tooth will take its place. If you ate an apple right now, it would probably come out. Want one? Or I could just pull it for you."

He declined my offer, but our explanation calmed him. He wasn't worried about what would happen to his tooth. He was worried about what was happening to him. In the throes of his little boy trauma, all we offered at first is that teeth turn into money. He didn't need that. He needed to understand that promise of reward in the context of his present struggle. He needed the graphic truth. (Having received the graphic truth, and having slept on it, the next morning he asked if I'd pull it for him. I said sure. He said, "Well, not yet. It needs to get a little looser.")

Behind the hope of Heaven is the graphic truth that links our present pain & grief to what Peter calls inexpressible joy. Heaven is more than the removal of suffering. It is the perfection of joy. Peter isn't simply saying, "Life is hard, but when you die you get to go to Heaven," as though Heaven were coins under the pillow you find when you awake in some strange bed from having slept the sleep of death. Peter's words are entirely present tense. This whole passage insists the hope of Heaven is not about the place, but is about the God's call on our lives to Himself in face-to-face intimacy forever... joy!

Peter opens by thanking God. For what? For the salvation of our souls—for causing us to be born again. Born again to what? To a living hope. Believers in Christ do not cling to a dead or fading dream. We have a living hope—a "right here, right now" hope that can only be seen through the graphic truth of Jesus' resurrection from the dead which secures our salvation! How does His resurrection secure our salvation? His death paid the penalty for our sin—the wages of sin is death. By rising He conquered death—death couldn't hold Him! He died in our place, taking our sin upon Himself and placing His righteousness on us, making us heirs with Him—brothers and sisters. **This is our living hope and joy! We are saved as heirs with Christ.**

## *Inheritance: More than a Payday: (vs. 4-5)*

There is a qualitative difference between winning the \$100,000,000 lottery and inheriting the same amount. I would have to assume there is a certain misery that comes from acquiring a fortune that you neither earned nor inherited—that the constant question that would plague a conscience would be, “Why me?” Inheriting money can be equally as dangerous, but not for the same reasons. Inheritances can become corrupted, defiled and devalued through greed and dissention within families. But the idea of the inheritance, in its purest form, is a glorious thing. When the giver is motivated by a pure love for the recipient, inheritances do more than transfer funds—they declare who the recipient is to the giver of the inheritance.

For the Christian, we are born again to a living hope that is an inheritance that is perfect. Peter says it is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. In other words, it is permanent, morally and religiously pure and it does not weaken or lessen or decay with the passing of time. It is perfect in **every** respect. And it is being kept, Peter says, in Heaven for **us**. So we can know for sure that the inheritance itself is secure. But what can we know about God’s view of the recipients? Is God sitting on a fortune looking to reduce a tax penalty? Is this why He calls us heirs?

No. Look at what Peter says in vs. 5—His inheritance is being kept in Heaven for you—**who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**. The emphasis of God’s intent is on the **heir**, not the fortune. God is not merely guarding the inheritance. God Himself is guarding His heirs. And what is the inheritance? Salvation—a perfectly restored, face-to-face relationship with the Maker, Knower and Lover of our souls! We are not lottery winners, but princes and princesses of the King—sons and daughters of the Almighty, wholly and dearly loved. Our inheritance **is** eternity with Him. This is what He longs to give. Heaven is the vehicle for this reunion. His call is to Himself, and unto that end, He Himself is guarding us for that day. Nothing can change your status because both you and the inheritance of your salvation are being kept and guarded by God. So no matter what trials we face, we know that there is a future hope that is secure. This is our living hope right now!

## *Standing in the Midst of Trials: (vs. 6-7)*

Peter moves on then to address the trials his readers are facing and tells them not only are we kept by God during times of trial, but that **we should rejoice in them** because they are used for His purposes. In fact, he tells them that trials test the genuineness of faith, and in turn result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. We run a certain risk with topics like this, because it can be easy for Christians to offer glib or hollow words when others are suffering.

But the other side of the error is to offer no encouragement when we clearly have encouragement from God’s word. Peter tells his friends, “*Press on and rejoice in the face of your trials because though they grieve you, the strength of your faith in this time of testing is bringing praise and glory and honor to the One you love.*” This is an important concept. When in times of trials our faith in Christ prevails against what opposes us, we tell the world something about the preciousness of Jesus. We tell the world, as Peter puts it in vs. 7, that our faith in Him is more precious than the most purely refined gold. We live as heirs with Christ.

We may be tempted to think that those who offer this kind of encouragement in the midst of trial are those who don’t understand the depth of the trial. Sensitivity equals silence. But Peter knew the graphic truth of what his readers were experiencing. He calls them the “*elect exiles of the dispersion*”—Christians enduring or fleeing persecution. He writes of their trials, which include insults<sup>(4:4)</sup>, slanderous accusations of wrongdoing<sup>(2:12)</sup>, physical abuse and social ostracism<sup>(2:20)</sup>.

Peter knew what they had endured, and he knew first hand that hollow words of encouragement could not inspire lasting hope in these people. When he tells them to rejoice in their suffering, though it grieves them, he does so as a man who has known full well his own share of grief over trials. So he does one better, and tells them, “*Look, your trials are on account of your love for Jesus. When you stand up under the testing of your faith, you testify that His love is stronger than your weakness, and in doing so bring honor and glory and praise to His name.*” God uses “*various and necessary trials*” in our lives for the glory of His Son.

## *The Joy of Experiencing Christ: (vs. 8-9)*

What specifically has their witness been? Peter tells us in vs. 8-9. They love Jesus Christ. They believe in Him. They rejoice in Him and are seeing the fulfillment of the salvation to which they were first called, and all of this while, like us, they have never seen Christ in person. Who better to affirm them in this than Peter who not only had seen Christ in person, but was one of Jesus’ three closest disciples. Peter is describing for them what true Christianity is—the joy of experiencing a relationship with the living Christ where our love for Him is so real that the echo of that love is joy—inexpressible but visible to the naked eye!

So many requests for prayer have come in recent days from those who are experiencing trials and grief. And I believe it is by providence of God that the central theme of the past month of sermons has been knowing the joy of our salvation in Christ—whether by the abundant wine of gladness Jesus made for that wedding in Cana, or by Luther’s epiphany as he studied Romans 1 that God was not angry with him or by last week’s examination of Peter’s call from this very letter to keep on loving one another earnestly, seeking to uncover where we’re clinging to our right to hurt so that we might surrender our right to ourselves and get up off the mat and let love cover a multitude of sin. Grace means we were meant to live free.

The theme of joy came through last week in Peter’s reason for why we should let love cover a multitude of sin—a reason found in this text as well. Life is meant to be rich as we live to make known God’s glory, because as John Piper said so well, “*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.*” There is more than a vague link between our present suffering and the hope of Heaven. The link is a person—Jesus Christ. For the believer, Heaven is not the call. God’s call on the lives of His people is to Himself. And He does not call us as strangers, but as heirs—as sons and daughters of the King.

Beloved, life is meant to be rich, and it is. It can be so rich in times of grief and sorrow simply because we can know that no matter what comes our way, if our faith is in Christ, nothing can snatch us from God’s hand. We are not mere lottery winners. We are heirs with Christ. And the whole, graphic truth is that He came and laid down His life to secure the salvation of our souls. And because He lives, our hope is a living hope, right here, right now. We are not alone. May this bring the kind of comfort to your soul that can only be called inexpressible joy.