

Glorious Easter

- † living hope (vv.3-5)
- † purified faith (vv.6-7)
- † inexpressible joy (vv.8-9)

In the name of Jesus our **living Hope**, dearly redeemed children of God:

Will we ever learn? How can we learn to take life seriously and deal with uncertainty? Oh, there's an old Buddhist idea that was turned into an app for your phone. Editor John Braun wrote about it in the April issue of *Forward on Christ*. Hard to believe, over 100,000 subscribers, most under the age of 44. How would you like this app to send you five reminders a day: "Don't forget, you're going to die"? Good name for the app: WeCroak.¹ Would it change behavior to face the reality of death?

As usual, Satan is God's ape. Whatever God has already said in the Holy Scriptures of the Bible, some guru will pick up and claim as his own. Psalm 90 is better than any app: "**Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**" (v.12 NIV84) And in the companion Psalm 91 this assurance from God our refuge in whom we trust: "**His truth will be your shield and armor. ⁵You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶nor the plague that prowls in the darkness, nor the pestilence that destroys at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe it with your eyes. You will see the punishment of the wicked.**" (vv.4-8 EHV²) From grace to glory God guards our hearts and lives with His Word even "**through the valley of the shadow of death.**" (Psalm 23:4) Better than any app, the Holy Spirit keeps focusing, enlightening, encouraging us with **Glorious Easter**. Can you believe our....?

† living hope (vv.3-5)

Back in the day when we could still visit relatives, it was a beautiful evening for a walk. Our eldest grandson, then about 2nd or 3rd grade says, "Grandpa, Grandma, I want to tell you something." "Go ahead, Dane, we're listening." He starts, "**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...**" (NIV84) He went on and on until he had recited all seven verses of this text! "Dane, how did you memorize so much?" "Our teacher thought it would be good to learn longer Bible passages." Indeed! You want your kids to have **living hope**? Teach them God's Word, and you'll learn too.

Peter had to learn the hard way. We're so much like him, relying on our own intelligence, commitment, faith! Then heartache happens, and we quickly crumble. Peter remembered Jesus' warning after the rooster crowed the second time. Three times he denied knowing Jesus. On trial He turned to look at Peter cursing and swearing. Peter wept bitterly, remember? But he kept hoping in God's mercy which he received from Jesus after Easter in Galilee when Jesus restored Peter's **living hope**!

When God's forgiveness comes through Christ-crucified and risen, you too have "**new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**" We turn our backs on death and live forward in Christ for an **inheritance...undyling, undefiled, and unfading.**" God guards it in heaven and protects us by His power so that someday we will enjoy the full flower of life eternal that never fades, never fouls with angry words, never dies in fear and anxiety. Focus: Jesus lives! Our **hope** lives in Him.

¹ "Outing death," by John Braun. *Forward in Christ*, April 2020, p. 30.

² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

† purified faith (vv.6-7)

When Jesus reinstated Peter, He also told him in front of the other disciples that he would die a martyr's death. As Peter preached in northern Asia Minor, now Turkey, he always knew the authorities would eventually execute him. How could he press on at all, much less feel any joy in life? In **Glorious Easter** power Peter describes God's overflowing joy for you and me, not in absence, but right in trials.

Because of this [salvation] you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Peter too had been *grieved* when Jesus asked three times: *“Do you love me?...Do you love me?...Do you care about me?”* *“Lord, you know all things. You know that I care about you.”* *“Feed my lambs...be a shepherd for my sheep...feed my sheep,”* Jesus said. (John 21:15-19 EHV) Through that trial and many to follow, surrounded and sheltered by God's Word, Peter kept growing in his faith. In the last verse of his Second Epistle Peter encourages us to grow too: *“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know these things, be on your guard so that you do not fall from your own firm position by being led astray through the error of the wicked. Instead grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory, both now and forever. Amen.”* (3:17f EHV)

That's the *glory* in which we will share when Jesus the righteous Judge says to all who trusted in Him, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* (Matthew 25:34 EHV) Throughout your lifetime in viruses too God tests your faith like a gold smith firing it in a crucible and skimming the dross off the top, leaving behind pure gold. And when eternity dawns, it will be clear to all that our Christian faith in God's own Son as Lord and Savior is the only faith that can withstand the fires of the Last Day. Trials for a little while, **Glorious Easter** with **purified faith** for all eternity in *praise, glory and honor* shared with Christ and God!

† inexpressible joy (vv.8-9)

How great is your **joy** in that? **Inexpressible**? God is not telling us to manufacture fake happiness nor to wait until the economy turns around. It happened in 1929, and several times in my life already that pundits and politicians said the Stock Market had nowhere to go but up. After the “Crash” stocks and bonds were used for wallpaper in farm houses as millionaires suddenly had no money. Such a lousy idol can't even guard himself! So God tells pastors, *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”* (1 Timothy 6:17–19 NIV84) God loves to give us a priceless gifts that money cannot buy.

You don't see Him, but you love Him. *“By believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* *When change and tears are past, All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.* (CW 415:4)

Like Peter we learn best in hard times. “It's in the valleys that I grow.” Our Synod incurred huge debt in the “Roaring 20's” and paid it off during the Great Depression. After the “Crash of '08,” we paid off another debt. It's not about budgets; it's all about your **joy** in Jesus. An African American sister in Christ spoke of liberation from fear that God accomplished in her. “By giving first to Jesus, I'm set free to enjoy God's other gifts more fully.” She had learned the secret of heaven-bound investing. Even if you're not a member of a church, you are surrounded by needs for encouragement and support. Give firstfruits to God through them! God, increase **inexpressible joy** through Jesus' **Glorious Easter**. Amen.