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How Easter People Are to Live in a Good Friday World

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TEXT: 1 Peter 1:1-9 (ESV)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, 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. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 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. 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, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

I have heard Christians sometimes refer to themselves as “Easter people,” and for a good reason, I suppose. After all, their faith is built upon what happened that first Easter morning. And believing in the risen Christ means the believer shares in his Easter victory. So yes, I guess it does make sense to call ourselves “Easter people.” And I have to admit I kind of like the title. It sounds so positive and joyful and promising, and it really is. But as many of you have already learned, being “Easter people” doesn't make you free of challenging problems and heartaches. For we still live in what some

would call a “Good Friday world” with people who reject Jesus and ridicule and shame those who follow him.

Our own society has lately been labeled by many as post-Christian. In America, believers can sometimes feel a bit of uncomfortableness expressing their faith and living obediently to Christ's ways of doing life. There can be a bit of rejection or pressure when one makes a stand for Jesus and lives according to a biblical world view and refusing to conform to the culture's norms and opinions. It tends to be rather subtle. There might, though, even be some teasing or personal confrontations or being excluded that might come your way. In other parts of the world, Christians are experiencing outright persecution and even executions for their allegiance to Jesus Christ in this day and age. And we also know from personal experience that Easter people are not exempt from tragedies and sickness and suffering and loss. The world is still broken, and those things continue on.

So, all of this can be quite deflating for “Easter people,” for believers in Christ, leaving them despondent and despairing and hopeless. So, the question we need to ask is how are Easter people, followers of the Risen Christ to live joyfully and faithfully for Jesus in a Good Friday world? For the next few weeks of this Easter season, we're going to learn how to do just that from the apostle Peter, who personally followed Jesus as one of his first disciples. He heard Jesus teach about the Kingdom of God and living in the kingdom and the cost of discipleship. And Peter witnessed Christ's amazing miracles. He watched him die on a cross and days later encountered Jesus risen from the dead. You might call Peter an expert on the subject of Jesus. And he was also well acquainted with the challenges and hardships of following Jesus in a Good Friday world, because he experienced those things himself, especially after Easter and the day of Pentecost. When filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter and the disciples went public with the good news of the risen Christ and the salvation that is available through faith in Him. They began facing arrests and jailings and beatings and death threats from the authorities who opposed this new Jesus movement.

So, we'll be examining portions of a letter that he wrote which has served as a helpful manual for believers living in a Good Friday world. The whole purpose of this letter was to speak to that, to encourage and instruct fellow followers of Christ who are second generation Christians in the region we know as modern day Turkey, who are now beginning to hear of and even experience some of what Peter and other disciples

were already encountering from their society. There was already some hostility and ridicule being misunderstood and maligned by those outside of the faith. There were personal confrontations, putdowns and rejection by family members and friends and employers. There were outside pressures to give up this nonsense about Jesus and come to your senses and come back to the culture's gods and mores. Be one of us. So, Peter, as a leader in the Christian church hearing of this, wrote them a letter to encourage and instruct them and us on how to best live for Jesus in a world that can be hostile towards him. A "Good Friday World." The first nine verses which we just read, offer some of the best hope and encouragement believers in Jesus could ever receive. They tell believers three things: who they are, where they're headed, and who's going with them.

First, it begins with Peter reaffirming their identity in Christ, in his opening greeting, he says, Here's who you are. When you trust in Jesus Christ, you are elect exiles, meaning you are chosen people of God, members of His kingdom on your way home to him, set apart by the Holy Spirit for obeying Jesus and for sprinkling with his blood. In other words, you are special in God's sight. You are his beloved people set apart for his purposes. This really is Old Testament language. Peter's words remind us of the old covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, who were also called elect, chosen by God for obedience to God, sprinkled with blood of the covenant. We remember Jesus at the Lord's Supper, talking of the New Covenant in his blood for those who believe in him. Some Bible scholars have pointed out that this passage probably is taken from baptismal liturgy as it reminds Christians that God has made you his people at baptism, set you apart. You're a privileged person in Christ. That's who you are, if you trust in Jesus: special, with citizenship in this world and also citizenship in Heaven, God has plans for you.

But Peter doesn't stop there. He then erupts into great praise for God. "Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And here is why He is worthy of our praise, Peter says, look what God in His mercy has done for us through Jesus. He's given us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Friends, Easter people have been "born again." You've probably heard that term. It means you've been born from above. There's a new birth that's taken place trusting in Jesus. You're a new person, as Paul says, you're a new creation in Christ, cleansed in God's sight by the blood of Jesus and in a new saving relationship with God, with him as our father and we as his children. And so, our lives have taken on a whole new trajectory

because of Jesus – different from the rest of the world, which is yet to come to know Him.

And this new birth, Peter goes on to say, gives us a living hope. We have a living hope. A new, promising future is ahead of us that gives us hope. And when I'm talking hope, I'm talking about deep-seated confidence looking into the future. I'm going to Heaven someday to live with him eternally because of what God in Christ did for me at the cross and grave. Things may look tough at the present, but I know where I'm going. This confidence is not based upon anything that I have done with my life, but it's based upon the resurrection of Jesus himself. Believers in him also shall be resurrected and live with Jesus forever. And because he lives, we'll live also. We're Easter people then, with this wonderful promise. This world is not the last word over us. This is just a chapter. There's a new chapter ahead. The resurrection of Jesus is God's guarantee that Heaven is a sure thing for believers in Christ, that one can count on no matter what may happen to them.

Easter people also have an inheritance that is kept safe for them in Heaven, Peter says. I'm moving towards this inheritance as I live out my days in this world, trusting in Jesus and this inheritance, this heavenly inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Meaning it's eternal, it's perfect, it's glorious beyond anything in this world I've ever seen or experienced. Death is not the last word over me. I'm going to be with Jesus in his glorious presence forever, it says. The early Christian songwriter Honeytree says in her song, "Heaven's gonna be a blast." And knowing that enables us to endure and persevere, even though even through the worst of circumstances, as we focus on the big picture, the long campaign. I know where this world is headed and I know where I'm headed. God's in charge.

And Easter people, by the way, Peter goes on to say, are not alone, as we head on through this life towards Heaven. By God's power, he says, we are being guarded – other versions of Scripture say shielded through faith – for that salvation to be revealed at the last time Judgment day. We can rest securely in that. And there's an illustration I came across from Pastor Colin Smith that I think is helpful. He says,

Christ is keeping an inheritance for you and he is keeping you for the inheritance. Try to picture the outstretched hands of Jesus. In the one He holds the inheritance that's yours. In the other, he holds you, and both are safe in his

hands. And when he comes, he will bring the two together and the inheritance will be yours to enjoy.

And in this truth, Peter says, we rejoice even through Good Friday experiences. It's a hymn says Christians are on our way, rejoicing and we know where we're going. We know that though we as believers may face some hardships and grief in this life which tests the genuineness of our faith, God is with us, caring for us, working in us, using even using these things to strengthen us in faith. And it'll all result in a great reward of being part of that host that will give God praise and glory and honor when Jesus returns in power and majesty.

We're also told here there are other blessings from God for Easter people to enjoy. Peter points out to their present ongoing relationship with the Risen Jesus, for instance. He says, he says even though you can't see him, he's been with you and you have come to love him. There's a relationship there and you believe in him and rejoice with joy. Even in the midst of life's Good Friday experiences, you yourselves are experiencing the blessing of his salvation working in your life right now as you follow him. He's faithful. I'm reminded of the chorus of my favorite Easter hymn:

He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today.

He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives! He lives, salvation to impart.

You ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart.

Yeah. Perhaps Peter wrote these words, remembering Jesus' statement to Thomas, who, after seeing Jesus alive, professed faith in him and called him his Lord and God. And what did Jesus say? He said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We're blessed with his presence.

So these are a lot of things, positive things, encouraging things to consider when you're going through Good Friday experiences. I know it's a lot to swallow, but let me sum all that Peter has said up in this way. Peter's saying, yes, your life will still have its Good Friday experiences and trials, but here's how you best deal with them. You keep reminding yourself who you are in Christ, where you are headed, and who is going with you along the way.

I want to finish with the story of a favorite of mine about Dr. Billy Graham. In January 2000, leaders of Charlotte, North Carolina, invited Billy Graham to a luncheon to honor

him. After wonderful things were said about him, he stepped up to the podium, looked at the crowd and said,

I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by *Time* magazine as the "Man of the Century." Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle punching the tickets of each passenger. And when he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his other pocket. It wasn't there either. So, he looked in the briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat by him and he couldn't find it. And the conductor finally said, "Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. I'm sure you bought the ticket. Don't worry about it." Einstein nodded appreciatively.

While the conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets as he was ready to move to the next car. He turned around and saw Einstein down on his hands and knees, looking under his seat for the ticket, and the conductor rushed back and said, "Dr. Einstein, don't worry, I know who you are, No problem. You don't need the ticket."

Einstein looked up at him and said, "Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."

And Billy Graham continued.

See the suit I'm wearing? It's new. I bought it for this luncheon and for one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear that I'm dead, I don't want you to immediately remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am, I also know where I'm going.

Trusting in Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have the undeserved privilege of saying the same thing, friend. Amen.