

ALL WILL BE WELL

1 PETER 1:3-9

When you face the finality of death, your convictions about life and eternity can be challenged. Dr. John Dewey didn't believe there was a God. A philosopher and professor, he's considered by some to be the father of the whole modern system of American education. What he believed and didn't believe has seeped down into every one of our minds through public and private education. "It's wonderful for a man to have at least a religious outlook," he liked to say, "because it causes him to look upward and to be a better man for having looked upward." When Dr. Dewey's beloved wife died, however, he went to a pastor in New York City unannounced. "Sir, I would like you to bury my wife," he said. "Your name, sir?" "John Dewey." "Dr. John Dewey?" the pastor asked. "Yes, sir." "The educator?" "Yes, sir." "Sir, you don't understand the kind of funeral service I would conduct," said the pastor. "I would talk about Jesus as the Son of God having come from heaven and having become a human being." "I know." "No, I don't think you realize what I'm talking about, Dr. Dewey. You see, I never conduct a funeral without talking about life and death. The reason you wouldn't want me is because I believe in the resurrection of the body by the power of Christ." "I know," Dr. Dewey quietly replied. "But you wouldn't want me to conduct that kind of funeral for your wife, would you?" the pastor asked. "Yes, sir. That's why I came to you." Many people give lip service to God only to realize that whatever they've placed their hope in for this life and the next is terribly inadequate.

I want to talk to you about hope this Easter morning. All of us hope. Hope is part of being a human being. But both life and death have a way of revealing the worthiness of what you hope for and what you hope in. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, wrote a letter to a group of fairly new Christians some thirty years after the resurrection of Jesus. Persecution was breaking out all over the Roman Empire against followers of Jesus. It was a dark and discouraging time. These people badly needed some hope. That's why Peter mentions hope so early in his letter to them. Let's read now what he wrote then. I'm intrigued by that phrase in v. 3 – "a living hope." What's a "living hope"? Peter tells us a great deal about this living hope in the verses we just read. In fact, he describes what it means to live in Easter hope and, also, what it means to live out Easter hope. Think with me just now about...

LIVING IN EASTER HOPE

What's the opposite of a "living hope"? Perhaps we'd call it a "dead hope." What are some differences, then, between a living hope and a dead hope? I suggest that a living hope is based in or on something that is certain and substantial while a dead hope is based on something that is uncertain or so much wishful thinking. Now, a living hope, according to Peter here, is the same thing as Easter hope. What does that mean? There's a kind of hope that's built and based upon the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection. That's Easter hope. Easter hope is a living hope because it's based on God and what He's done through a man named Jesus. It's not based on you at all. Most people today hope in themselves – their intelligence, their hard work and effort, their good deeds, their ambition or their sincerity. I say to you on this Easter morning

that any hope that's built on yourself is ultimately a dead hope. Easter hope is built on Jesus rising from the dead on Easter Day. If God truly did that, He can do anything. If God is really like that, it means all will be well. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but ultimately and forever, all will be well. A living hope is an Easter hope.

How do you get an Easter hope – a living hope? It doesn't just happen automatically. Living in Easter hope requires a new life. You must get a whole new life inside of you. The Bible says you must be born again – a kind of profound, life-changing spiritual transformation. Whatever you might think about that phrase – “born again” – and how people today tend to ridicule it, deny it or attempt to re-define it, there's no escaping the fact that the Bible teaches it. If you are ever to possess a substantial, worthwhile, certain living hope – Easter hope – you must have a whole new life.

The Bible says that you start out spiritually dead towards God. Your personal sin produced spiritual deadness. We're all sinners; therefore, we all start out our physical lives spiritually dead. Dead people can do nothing. Physically dead people do nothing physical. Spiritually dead people do nothing spiritual. So God stepped in and provided the means to become spiritually alive. That's why Peter says here, “...It is by his great mercy that we have been born again...” (1 Peter 1:3 NLT) God sent His Son, Jesus, into this world for the purpose of dying on the cross in order to pay the penalty for your sins and mine. Your response is simple but necessary. You must repent of your sins, recognize and receive Jesus as your personal Savior. You must surrender every claim upon your own life to Jesus as your Lord or your Boss. You must stop trusting in yourself to somehow earn or deserve eternal life and, instead, transfer that trust to Jesus and what He's already done for you.

Have you been born again? Do you know that if you died tonight you'd be in heaven forever? Are you certain? Do you have this new life from God within you that allows you to live in Easter hope? In order to have Easter hope – to live in it, experience it, know it – you must be born again. You must have a new life! We hear a lot today about illegal immigration. Some people take incredible and dangerous risks to enter this country. Some years ago, customs officials at the Los Angeles International Airport noticed a large, unmarked and unclaimed suitcase. When they opened the suitcase, they found the curled up body of an unidentified young woman. The county coroner determined she had been dead for a few days. The investigation revealed that she was the wife of a young Iranian living in America. Unable to obtain a visa, she took matters into her own hands and attempted to smuggle herself into our country via an airplane's cargo bay. The plan tragically failed. Heaven is a very real place, but there are no illegal immigrants. You can't get there on your own terms – being a good person, going to church, believing in your own sincerity. Your own plans and methods will tragically fail. Jesus provides the only visa and you either enter His way or you don't enter at all. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” (John 3:3 NLT)

Living in Easter hope requires a new life. Secondly, living in Easter hope results in a noble life. What does that mean – a noble life? If you are born again, you start out as a

child – spiritually speaking. You're born into God's family. Now children inherit whatever their parents leave to them. They become heirs. When you become a child of God, you became an heir of His estate. Even though He will never die, God still puts you in the will. There's nothing more noble, dignified and special in all the universe than to be an heir of the living God! Why? Because God gives you everything that matters for this life and, also, for the next.

What do people inherit in this life from their parents? Money, property, investments, possessions. Every one of those things can be lost, stolen, damaged or squandered. In addition, any inheritance will seem less special with each passing day. You might even start taking it for granted. Whatever is new or unique today will seem less so tomorrow. How does Peter describe the inheritance that your heavenly Father has given you – His child? "... and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay." (1 Peter 1:4 NLT) You've been given something – an inheritance – that can never be taken away, that you can never lose, that can never be damaged or lost, that can never fade and that will actually become more wonderful tomorrow than it is today.

So what is it – this inheritance that belongs to all of God's children? It's stuff that this world considers of little importance, but which is, in reality, of eternal value. There's the gift of a personal relationship with the God who created the universe and crafted you in your mother's womb. There's the gift of being loved forever and completely by that same God who wants to relate to you as a kind, gracious, protecting Father. There's the gift of having your mistakes forgiven and forgotten. There's the gift of God's peace in life's heartaches, the gift of God's joy in life's losses, the gift of God's strength to surmount life's obstacles. There's the gift of knowing that the moment your eyes close in death they will open again in the eternal presence of Jesus. This is an inheritance that makes life wonderfully and powerfully livable right now. It is God's promise that all will be well. It may not be well today or tomorrow, but it will be well. All will be well. That means a child of God who is living in Easter hope has a kind of nobility and dignity about his or her life that's observable. But there's more to an Easter hope than simply living in it. You also need to live out an Easter hope. Let's think about that just now.

LIVING OUT EASTER HOPE

First of all, living out an Easter hope means that you will gain a divine perspective. Again, Peter was writing this letter to Christians living in a portion of the Romans Empire that we now call the country of Turkey. Persecution had broken out against Christians in various places. Sometimes it involved discrimination in the workplace or social rejection. On other occasions it became violent and deadly for followers of Jesus. These folk needed some hope.

Peter writes a lot about suffering in this letter precisely because the people to whom he was writing were suffering. He wanted to give them a divine perspective on what was happening to them. There's a godly perspective on life's heartaches and hardships you need to get acquainted with here. It's a perspective based on the resurrection of Jesus

on Easter Day. It's based on God being for you and not against you. It maintains that come what may in life, ultimately, all will be well for the child of God. Peter never says followers of Jesus are entitled to live lives free of suffering or that God is punishing you if you are struggling. In fact, he just assumes that suffering is a part of the universal human experience. Yes, certainly, some problems you bring upon yourself. But you know as well as I do that many kinds of hard times come to people who didn't bring it upon themselves. It's just an inescapable part of life.

It's very important that you have a godly perspective on tough times if you're going to live out this Easter hope. Godly people can have great pain in their marriages. People who love Jesus can experience tremendous tensions with their kids. Committed Jesus followers lose loved ones to death like everyone else and are assaulted by grief. Godly people are often afflicted with chronic or deadly diseases. People who love Jesus experience loneliness. Committed Jesus followers get confused by the future and what direction to go. Christians face work situations that are unfair and exasperating. Godly people face the pressures of wondering how to make ends meet. People who love Jesus get disappointed, rejected, slighted and abused. But a child of God who is living out Easter hope develops a different and divine perspective on life's heartaches.

It is a perspective based on hope. For the child of God, all of this life is a prelude to heaven. It's in heaven God promises you no pain, no tears and no grief – not here! Because of what you know will happen in the future, you're able to put up with a whole lot in the present. No matter how tough your life experience is today or tomorrow, you know all will be well. For the child of God, all hurt put into God's hands serves a good purpose. Suffering and adversity are a fact of life, but only to the follower of Jesus does God make this promise. What promise? Your suffering is not meaningless. Your struggles are not senseless. There is more about life's hurts that I don't understand than I do. But I do know this: God's mercy is able to take any kind of tough time in your life and cause something spiritually good, profitable and eternal to come out of it. All will be well! If I didn't believe that – more importantly, if I hadn't experienced that in my own life and witnessed it in the lives of others – I'd leave this job tomorrow.

Hear again what God's Word says: "...you have to put up with every kind of aggravation in the meantime. Pure gold put in the fire comes out of it proved pure; genuine faith put through this suffering comes out proved genuine. When Jesus wraps this all up, it's your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of his victory." (1 Peter 1:6-7 MSG) Gold was considered to be the most valuable entity back in Peter's day. But even gold has to be purified. You purify gold by exposing it to fire so that everything that isn't gold gets burned away. God values human beings and faith in Him far more highly than gold. But just like gold, faith has to be improved, cleansed, strengthened by fire – the fire of pain, the fire of adversity, the fire of hardship. Tough times never destroy true faith; tough times just prove faith's authenticity. Living out Easter hope means your life is gaining a divine perspective. God is in control. God is working it out. You realize God is indeed for you even when, at times, it seems like life is against you. All will be well!

Living out Easter hope also means your life will be divinely positive. I'm not talking about the cheap, "just think good, sweet thoughts and all will be well" brand of positive thinking so prevalent in our culture. Did you notice what Peter said about joy in the passage we read? Here it is: "You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy." (1 Peter 1:8 NLT) That's Easter hope flowing out and becoming Easter joy! If your hope is in yourself, or other people or some kind of nameless, collective good will sort of floating around out there, you are destined for disappointment. But if your hope is in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who raised Him up from the dead on Easter Day, you are destined for fulfillment.

I like how one person put it. Listen! "Human happiness too often depends on happenings. If the happenings don't happen we are unhappy. There is, therefore, a great emphasis on the control of your environment, the solving of problems, and the manipulation of circumstances with a view to making sure that all the happenings happen to happen the way we happen to want them to happen on the understanding that we will then be happy." That's not how it works with God. Easter hope – and Easter joy – is based on God's goodness not "happy happenings."

Now, brothers and sisters, I love you folks a lot, but I got to tell you something from the heart. Sometimes you can appear to be a tad gloomy. Maybe it's just me, but we could ratchet it up in the joy department just a bit! And I don't know a better day to be authentically joyful than Easter Day, do you? And I can't think of a better reason to be genuinely joyful than what happened on Easter Day, can you? I'd like to do a kind of a call and response thing with you today and perhaps the Holy Spirit will use it to increase our joy. All... will... be... well! Do you see that up on the screen? Now if Jesus really rose from the dead, is that statement true? Then, let it be your Easter confession today. I'm not asking you to say that all is well today or even that everything will be well tomorrow. I'm simply asking you to confess that because Jesus got up from the grave on Easter Day, all will be well. So I'm going to make a series of statements and I want you to respond in a loud, joyful voice - "All will be well!" - after each statement. As you make that Easter confession today, may Easter joy seep into your heart, mind and spirit. God's called you to be divinely positive and Easter gives you every reason to be it!

Enough of being drab and gloomy!

Enough of being perpetually sad and defeated!

Enough of being miserable and whiny!

You've been given the greatest treasure in all of the universe – Christ Himself!

Your past is forgiven because of the blood of Christ!

Your present is protected by the limitless power of God!

Your future is secure, certain and eternal in heaven with God Himself!

If God is for you, what does it matter who might be against you!

You can cast all your cares upon Jesus, because He cares for you!

You have been made more than a conqueror through Jesus who loves you and gave Himself for you!

You can even go through the valley of the shadow of death, because even there the

Shepherd's rod and staff will comfort you!
Because Jesus lives, you can face tomorrow!
Now, look up, child of God, and tell your Father in heaven what you know about Him
and what you know about life because of Easter Day!

Let me tell you about Jarrett Lane. His teachers at Narrows High School in Narrows, Virginia speak of him in glowing terms. They remember him as a talented student, four-sport athlete and valedictorian. The school's principal says he was an exceptional young man: quiet, humble and popular. Jarrett was the kind of kid who said to his basketball coach after having played a good game, "Coach, what do I have to work on so that we can be better?" On Sunday morning, April 15th of last year – the Sunday after Easter actually - Jarrett Lane was attending services at the First Baptist Church of Narrows, Virginia. It might have been a Sunday service like any other Sunday morning service: a Sunday School class... then the opening comments as the service started... followed by singing... the Sunday sermon... an altar call... the benediction. But on that particular Sunday, during the altar call Jarrett Lane responded to a spiritual stirring. There was a still small voice in his heart telling him to go forward. He stepped out of his seat, walked down the aisle to the front of that small church and prayed with the pastor to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Undoubtedly, Jarrett Lane had heard several times before the admonition that this might be his last opportunity to receive the gift of eternal life. It might have been easy to override that still small voice and leave for Sunday lunch. But, instead, he listened. He heard. He heeded. As a result, he received forgiveness... eternal life... God's grace, love and peace. It was a fantastic day for Jarrett Lane. Less than 24 hours later, Jarrett Lane was shot and killed along with 31 other students by a depraved and angry gunman in a civil engineering classroom on the campus of Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia. He had just celebrated his 22nd birthday a month before the shootings.

I can't explain that to you this Easter Day. I can't give you a satisfying answer to the question, "Why?" any more than I can give answers to all the other unspeakable tragedies that we hear about day after day. What I can say is this: Because of Easter Day, all will be well. I didn't say all is well today or even that all will be tomorrow. But one day all will be well. Because of Easter Day, all is and all will be well for Jarrett Lane. Eternity began for him last year as it will begin for each of us one day very soon. No, maybe not tomorrow, but soon. How is it with you, my friend? Do you live in Easter hope? It requires a new life. It results in a noble life. Are you living out Easter hope? It means you have a divine perspective and that your life is divinely positive. On the authority of God's Word today and on the basis of the mighty resurrection of Jesus from the dead, I have the great joy of declaring unto you: all will be well!