

1 Peter 1:3-9: ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time. ⁶Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials ⁷so 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. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Hetty Green. She is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's greatest miser. No, really – it's a real thing! Born into great wealth, Hetty invested into even greater wealth. She became the richest woman in America during what was known as the Gilded Age. Yet she would wear the same old dress every day, and her children were dressed only in clothes that had been thrown away by others. She would eat cold oatmeal almost every day, and never turned on the heat or used hot water. When her son broke his leg, she took him to the free clinic for the poor, and when the doctors demanded payment, she took him home, where later after not healing properly, it had to be amputated. She developed a hernia but wouldn't pay the \$150 for the operation. Instead she taped a stick against it to keep it in place. She died at the age of 81, leaving behind an estimated \$200 million, which would have been 3.8 billion in today's dollars. Klaus Zapf, German multimillionaire, passed away at the age of 62. He lived on less than \$300 a month. He had made a fortune in the moving business, but lived like a bum, scavenging through the trash for bottles every night to reclaim the deposit money in the morning. Anthony Wojtus, priest with no known family or will, found dead in, quote, "appalling conditions and squalor", but left behind assets of \$2 million. John Hughes, Seapoint John, 72, died after living off whatever change he found in vending machines and the street. Lived practically his whole adult life in one suit of clothes. And then died with millions in his bank account. Picking up a pattern here? Here's another one: Michael Foley, 58, recipient of the richest inheritance ever, yet complains and whines and worries almost every day. Often lives as if he had never heard of the riches of his father (who just so happens to be the richest Father in the universe) nor the terms of his inheritance which puts an amazing amount of that inheritance in effect right now. Oh, that's me by the way, if you didn't know. (And even if you did know.) But how about you? Are we among the very rich who live like paupers? Yes, we have become beneficiaries of the biggest inheritance ever. Let's live like it.

You have received a humongous inheritance. A reason to be ecstatic. A reason to rejoice and praise God. Peter can hardly wait to shout it out here. Just after the normal heading and salutation of a letter in his day, he gets right to: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The kind of doxology normally reserved for the end. But he is inspired to do the Grand Finale first. Doesn't want you to waste a second wallowing in despair or doubt. Praise God for this. All the credit, all the glory belongs to him on this one. All out of his mercy, again stressing that is not what we deserved, but a God of love has given to us anyway. An inheritance worth celebrating. And you don't even have to

worry whether the will was valid or if someone is going to contest it. Or that maybe there's some other document somewhere that will supersede or overrule this one. It's absolutely for sure and certain, because it's already been probated. It was done, God says here, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." That's what makes us sure. That's what gives us joy. When Jesus died paying for our sins, he didn't stay dead. That would have meant victory for death and the devil. It would have meant that the wages of sin was still in play. It would have meant, as God had Paul say in the famous resurrection chapter, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

But Jesus did rise. Yes, in spite of being true and very God from all eternity, he had died. God's Word is actually quite graphic and clear on that point. Where in our day it might be kind of fashionable to tip-toe around the grim reality – we talk about "memorial parks" and people simply "pass on" or "pass away." Even in war, there are military terms to try to sanitize the concept; erase some of the ugliness. Enemy soldiers are "neutralized" and areas are "cleansed" of troops. And if we miss, the citizens or non-combatants become "collateral damage." But as much as anyone tries to sugar-coat it or skirt around it, death is a very ugly reality. It is, after all, the just deserts of sin, our rebellion against an almighty and all-holy God. And actually just the tip of the iceberg as far as what our sins have caused and earned. The full payment is damnation. But our Savior came expressly to remedy that awful problem. Not by sweeping sin under the rug or side-stepping the horror of death. No he met those enemies head-on. Felt every bit of their horror. Took all the guilt of all people's sin on himself and faced all the wrath and death and hell they deserved. But Jesus not only ran smack dab into death. He ran through it and over it. And out the other side. Jesus rose.

And that is proof positive that our inheritance is genuine. It proved he had been right all along. He is true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He had offered himself as the perfect replacement for all of us. He had lived a life without any complaining or worrying or any other sin. And what he finished that Friday afternoon was enough. It was sufficient payment for the sins of the world. When he said, "it is finished" it really was. And since sin was paid for, death, the wages of sin, no longer held sway. It had no more authority, no power, no sting. Sin can't damn us. Satan can't accuse us or control us. Death can't contain us. Jesus "was handed over to death because of our trespasses and was raised to life because of our justification." His resurrection was the proof that the switch of Jesus for us was completely accepted by God. So his inheritance really is ours. We are rich. Children of God. "Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ." That's why Peter can't contain his joy, but blurts out right away, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" He had hit the jackpot. And so have we. Life and peace and sure hope forever. A new birth that gives assurance to our baptism. Meaning to our faith. Right now to our eternal life.

As Jesus had stated clearly on more than one occasion: "Whoever believes *has* eternal life." It has already started. What a waste if we aren't using it now. It's something that can't perish, spoil or fade. We can't run out of it. We can't wear it out. Sure it will be gloriously perfect and unspoiled by pain or frustration or sin in heaven. But it's pretty great to use now, too. The new birth in which we are reborn, that "image of God" lost in the fall into sin, restored in us believers. God sees us as perfect through the righteousness of Jesus and that same righteousness lets us act like it. That makes it so the new self can take the wheel. The old sinful nature can be thrown in the back. And this is like a cop car. Says here, "Through

faith you are being protected by God's power." That screen in between our new reborn self in the front and that evil old man in the back. Yeah he might yell and kick and scream, distract us, make us swerve once in a while. But he can't take control unless we get out and give him the keys. What a great blessing. And reason for joy.

And here's another one: "...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." Our condition is so wealthy and our eternal goal so guaranteed, that it changes even the difficulties and sufferings we experience as we wait the full enjoyment of our eternal life. As Peter writes here, he has witnessed the persecutions of the Christians emanating from Rome outward. He will soon be coming out of the great tribulation, thanks to said persecution. So now he sends encouragement to the rest of the Christians who were also facing persecution or would be soon. See it took a while, but Peter had learned not to look at the high waves all around him, but at the Jesus who could walk on water, and who could hold him up. Who had conquered sin and hell and death and Satan that one special Friday afternoon. And proved it for everyone a couple mornings later. Giving us the riches and joy and attitude that can't be taken away by persecution or difficulties or hardships or grief or pain. No trial will be more than we can bear, as God himself promises. And those things can actually show how special our faith is and praise God more and serve our best. Like gold refined by fire. The fire doesn't lessen the gold; it only makes it purer. We can't lose. We are God's children and we have all his care and guidance and treasures.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross and because of his escape from the grave, we are extremely rich, right now. In fact, Jesus tells us in John chapter 10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." As Christians with no fear of what the hereafter will bring, we can enjoy this life like no one else can. Jesus' resurrection proves he paid enough for our sins. It's how we know we are free from its control and consequences. It's why we don't have to be afraid of God. Or anything else for that matter. We have a Savior and a Friend who is in charge of everything. Who holds all power, and uses it all to our advantage. Making every situation in our life turn into a blessing. Making everything point us toward our final goal of eternal joy.

You know, when we hear of some old miser who lived like a pauper, leaving millions behind when he dies – we question his sanity or we feel sorry for him living like that when he didn't have to. Well, it's even crazier and sadder when Christians forget about all the riches at their fingertips and live in spiritual poverty. Once when Martin Luther had been down and depressed for a week or more, his wife, Katarina, Katie, got dressed up in her black mourning clothes and dared to enter her husband's study. He looked at her and asked, "Who died?" "God," she answered. "God must be dead, or you wouldn't be moping around like that." Well, apparently that was enough to teach the great reformer and theologian a lesson. He realized he wasn't using the treasures and riches he had. As God's children, with an inheritance we can use right now, we can be constantly enjoying the presence of God as he comes to us in Word and Sacrament. Constantly casting all our worries and cares on him as he tells us. Living in the constant joy and peace the Savior has purchased for us. Jesus has given us an incredible inheritance, proven by his resurrection and meant to be used right now. He's alive forever and so are we. We are the richest of the rich. Let's live like it. Amen.