

# The Benefits of His Resurrection

## 1 Peter 1:3-5

**Series:** Easter 2023: The Benefits of His Passion

**Preaching Date:** April 9, 2023

**Text:** 1 Peter 1:3-5

**Worship:** Our Living Hope

**Key Sentence:** Resurrection Changes Everything

**Outline:**

I. Hope (1 Peter 1:3)

II. Inheritance (1 Peter 1:4)

III. Present Care and Future Promise (1 Peter 5:5)

**1 Peter 1:3–5** 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.

## The Benefits of His Resurrection

### 1 Peter 1:3-5

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! <sup>2</sup>Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” This year for our Easter series we’ve been remembering the benefits of Christ’s kingship, his sacrifice and today, especially, his resurrection. We’ll be looking at a short section of First Peter that reminds us that resurrection changes everything.

But before we do, I want to tell a story. Eugene Michael Lang was born on March 16, 1919, and grew up in a \$12-a-month railroad apartment on East 83rd Street in Manhattan. His father, Daniel Lang, had immigrated from Hungary in 1911 and worked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He taught Eugene how to use tools to make his own toys and urged him to read widely. Tolstoy became a favorite. In elementary school Lang went to P.S. 121, Public School 121 in Harlem and then to Townsend Harris High School, from which he graduated at 14. He received a scholarship to Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania at age 15 and later got degrees from Columbia and the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute. When World War II broke out, Lang was rejected for military service because of his flat feet. He took a job at Heli-Coil, an aircraft parts factory in Queens and rose to a part-owner. It later became a division of Black & Decker. He made his fortune from Refac Technology Development, which he founded in 1952 to specialize in the licensing of patents and financing high-tech ventures.

But Eugene Lang is best remembered for his philanthropy. In his lifetime he gave away over \$150 million dollars, much of it to education. His best known moment came in June 1981, when he was invited to deliver a commencement address to 61 sixth graders at P.S. 121. “I looked out at that audience of almost entirely black and Hispanic students, wondering what to say to them,” he recalled. He had intended to tell them, their families and their teachers that he had attended their school more than a half-century earlier, that he had worked hard and made a lot of money and that if they worked hard, maybe they could be successful, too. But, he said, “it dawned on me that the banalities I planned were completely irrelevant.” These kids mostly had no hope.

“So I began by telling them that one of my most memorable experiences was Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, and that everyone should have a dream,” he said. “Then I decided to tell them I’d give a scholarship to every member of the class admitted to a four-year college.” There was stunned silence, peppered with a few audible gasps. Then students, parents and teachers cheered and mobbed him.

He told them that he would earmark \$2,000 for each of them toward college tuition and would add more money each year that they stayed in school. But he was aware that simply providing students from poor or troubled homes with a scholarship would not ensure success; many would drop out along the way, unable to elude the traps of drugs, jail and untimely pregnancy. “When I made the original promise, the principal told me that maybe one or two students would take advantage of my offer.” So he “adopted” the class, treating them to trips and restaurant meals, counseling them through crisis after crisis. He founded the I Have a Dream Foundation, setting up its office in Manhattan. He hired a project coordinator, established a year-round program of academic support with a mentor and tutoring for each student, and sponsored cultural and recreational outings. Nearly ninety percent of the original 61 6<sup>th</sup> graders graduated from high school and at least half enrolled in public and private colleges. Many of the rest entered trades or other full-time jobs.

What made the difference? Hope, and a promised future, and the day-by-day caring and investment of Eugene Lang. As one student said “I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling.” The promise, backed by the promiser, changed everything.

Later Mr. Lang persuaded a roster of high-profile New Yorkers to sponsor public-school classes by depositing \$300,000 into foundation-operated annuities and personally shepherding the students, just as vigilant parents might do. Wealthy patrons found themselves trooping through seedy housing projects, and impoverished children found themselves sailing on boats in the Hamptons. Since then more than 16000 students have been served by 200 *I Have a Dream* programs around the country and in New Zealand.

What does this have to do with Easter? Only everything. I believe the resurrection changes everything. Like Eugene Lang’s program it offers hope, and provision for the impoverished, and day to day caring for those awaiting its fulfillment. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Let’s read this short text and then rejoice in what it tells us. 1 Peter 1:3–5 *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.*

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” We’re only two verses into this letter from Peter to the churches of Asia Minor. Peter has addressed them, by region, and wished that grace and peace be multiplied to them.

Now, in the same way as Paul does in some of his letters, he turns and blesses or praises God. Why not? It's a great place to start because God is ultimately the subject and object of everything Peter has to say. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here Peter makes it clear that God is the Father of Jesus and therefore that the Lord, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Both of them deserve praise for what has been done in our salvation. This salvation, past, present, and future, is really Peter's big topic in the first part of this letter, and it's right to begin with praise to the Father and the Son.

"According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again." Our salvation is entirely dependent on God's mercy. Here it is called his great mercy, or his much mercy. It could also be translated "his great compassion." All of this is another way of talking about his love: his love-in-action.

On the basis of this mercy he has caused us to be born again. Don't miss the fact that the initiative for our new birth comes from him, not from us. It is something he has done. He has caused us to be born again. That word, born again, though relatively rare in the New Testament is used in at least one other key place. When Jesus has that fantastic conversation with Nicodemus, he tells him "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." He goes on to say that to be born again means to be born of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual birth rather than a physical birth. That conversation leads to the comment, either by Jesus or by John, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." To be born again is to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life. Praise God he is the one who sent his son Jesus to enable us to be born again.

This new birth, Peter says, is into a living hope. That's my favorite phrase of this whole text. Like the infinite potential of a newborn baby, we have a future and a hope of infinite potential. It is a living hope. It is not static or contractual. It is not a mere promise written on a piece of paper. It is a dynamic hope that lives within us, that comes alongside us and supports and sustains us in the ebb and flow of daily life. It's like the difference between a pencil sketch of a rose, and the actual rose held in your hand. One is living, fragrant, textured, and colored. The other is only a gray promise. We have a living hope.

There is a famous story of what this hope can do. One school system had a program to help children keep up with schoolwork while in the hospital. A teacher in the program was asked to visit a particular child. She took the name and room number and talked briefly with the child's regular teacher. "We're studying nouns and adverbs in class," the regular teacher said, "and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind."

The hospital teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had mentioned that the boy had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered "I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs" When she left she felt she hadn't accomplished much. But the next day, a nurse asked "What did you do to that boy?" The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. "No, no," said the nurse. "You don't know get it. We've been worried about him, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live." Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"

No. Praise be to God we have a living hope. And what is the foundation of that hope? "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," We have living hope because we have a living Savior. If Jesus had not risen from the dead our hope would be a charade, a folly, a farce. But because Christ has been raised from the dead, we have a living hope that we too will be raised from the dead.

And Jesus has been raised, though you and I do not now see him. We don't have time today to go to 1st Corinthians 15 and look at the reasons Paul gives there for a solid conviction of the resurrection. But he says that if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. He says "if in Christ we have hope in this life only we are of all people most to be pitied." But he shows the historical basis of the resurrection by citing the fact that Jesus appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve disciples, then he appeared to more than 500 believers at one time. And those people are still alive at the time he writes. You could go ask them if they saw Jesus. Historians have said that the resurrection is as solidly attested a fact as anything in history. This is what we celebrate at Easter. This is why we can celebrate Easter. Jesus has been raised from death, and we have a living hope.

That's our first and probably most important point this morning. Like the children in that classroom at P.S. 121, we were without hope. There was no way they could make something of their lives until Eugene Lang came to promise them a future. And there was no way we can make something of our lives apart from the hope of the resurrection, apart from being born again. We are, in the words of a song we sang on Thursday, "fast bound in sin and nature's night." There is nothing we can do to rescue ourselves. But God has caused us to be rescued, to be born again through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and through the gift of faith which we receive from the Holy Spirit. Resurrection changes everything.

Our second point this morning is that this future comes with an inheritance. Verse 4, born again into a living hope and “into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” This continues the thought of new birth. When you are born into a family you become an heir to all the wealth the family has. In the same way when we are born again into the family of God, as guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ, we become heirs of the infinite wealth of his family. Peter, it seems, finds it difficult to find words to do justice to the greatness of this future inheritance. In describing it, he can do no better than use three words that tell us what it is not. It is “imperishable,” which means “not able to be destroyed.” It is “undefiled,” which means “not polluted.” And it is “unfading” which means “not subject to decay.”

We know what it means to be perishable. We see the mortality of humankind and the decay of the fallen world all around us. Even the stars, we’re told will one day burn out. But what we have from God will never perish. Jesus calls this “treasure in heaven” and says “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.” Everything God has in store for us is eternal. Life? Eternal. Our own bodies? Eternal. Relationship with Him and with others? Eternal. The new heavens and the new earth? Eternal. All of this is guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Our inheritance is also undefiled. From our vantage point it is hard to even imagine a world undefiled by sin. A world without locks or alarms. Cities where keys would be unnecessary, for theft is obsolete. A world where every woman sleeps without fear, every man is honorable, and every child is cherished. No jails. No need for police. No sin, none at all. When speaking of the next world, Peter says that it will be without stain or blemish. It will not be morally compromised or sinfully polluted. It will never be defiled.

It will be unlike anything we have ever known! This present world is fallen and defiled. Our hearts are corrupt and deceitful. Our hands are stained with the indelible ink of pride. We are all, to some degree, like Shakespeare’s Macbeth. In the classic midnight scene, Lady Macbeth, who caused the death of Lord Duncan, is found out by the doctor and woman in waiting. They see her rubbing her hands and hear her say “Out, damned spot! Out, I say! Will these hands ne’er be clean?... Here’s the smell of blood still.” This is the defilement our world knows. We know it all too well. Each one of us is contaminated. No one is pure. No one is clean. The world is filled with people who have dirty hands. In contrast, Peter tells us that our inheritance is unlike the world we live in. It is unlike the world we know.

In the book of Revelation we get a glimpse as to why this is and how this can be so. In Revelation 5 John is shown a vision of our future home where no one is worthy to take the scroll of God's good plan and bring it to completion. But when one does at last come forward it is Jesus, the Lamb of God, who comes to the rescue of a polluted, defiled, and unworthy world. He alone is worthy. His character alone is spotless and without blemish. Through him alone are we able to enter into God's presence and receive an "undefiled" inheritance.

Finally, Peter says, this inheritance is unfading. Once again, we are familiar with the world in which things fade. Clothing, and even buildings, exposed to the sun fade in a matter of weeks, or years. Bright colors of spring fade quickly to a dull dark green, and then to the colorlessness of late fall. Even people fade. As we age, we all lose the brightness of our youth, both physically and often emotionally and sometimes even spiritually. We no longer have the energy or enthusiasm we once had. We plod through life. But the day is coming when the living hope that we have within us, the Spirit's life that we have within us, will be fully expressed day by day and hour by hour in the vibrant unfading new world he will provide. This is our inheritance. This is his promise. I believe resurrection occurs in the spring because spring was always intended to be a picture of resurrection, of new life coming back again.

This is our second point. We have an inheritance. Like the children in public school 121, we have been given a future that will not fade away, for it is founded on the fortune and character of Jesus Christ, just as theirs was founded on the fortune and character of Eugene Lang. As the student we quoted earlier said "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me." We do.

Our third point is that we have present care while waiting for that future promise. Verse 5 "who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." What a great image. God is standing guard over us and there is nothing in all creation able to touch us when under his protection. Verse 4 says this inheritance is being kept in heaven for us, but the greater truth is that we also are being kept. As we saw in Romans 8, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." We are guarded this way, Peter says, "through faith." There is no works requirement to stay under the care of the one who raised Jesus from the dead. This is nothing we earn because there is nothing we deserve. We deserve what Jesus received on Good Friday, judgment and death. We receive living hope and an unfading inheritance and the protection of God Almighty as a free gift when, by faith alone we put our trust in Christ alone.

And we wait, Peter says, “for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Peter is talking about our future salvation, the culmination of all God’s promises in the new heavens and the new earth. As we’ve often said, salvation is a past, present and future reality. Those who are in Christ have already been saved. Ephesians 2:8-9 reads “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” As Christians we have assurance that we have already been saved. This past salvation involves two great acts of God – our justification and subsequent adoption into His family. In justifying us, God declares that the requirements of holiness required by the law have been satisfied on our behalf. The righteousness of Jesus is imputed to us so that God declares we are innocent. Adoption is the declaration of God that those who have been justified are His children. They are adopted in His family and become heirs to the riches Christ gained for us through his death and resurrection.

Salvation is also a present experience. In 1 Corinthians 1 we read “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The process of salvation is ongoing. Is a present reality as much as it is a past reality. We call this present reality sanctification. The Holy Spirit indwells us at the moment of salvation and begins to affect change in our lives so that we become more and more conformed to the image of Christ. As we allow the Spirit to lead and guide us, we grow in grace.

But there is a future aspect and a marvelous culmination to salvation. Romans 5:9 tells us that “having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” More than just the past and present, salvation points to the future. We call this last stage glorification. It is our living hope guaranteed by Christ’s resurrection. We too will be raised and in new bodies will be ushered finally into the kingdom of heaven. Having been delivered from the guilt of our sin and having progressively been delivered from sin’s power, we can look forward with great anticipation to the elimination of sin’s presence.

In this last point we’ve seen that we are guarded now for a future final and full salvation. again, thinking about the students in public school 121, it's very profound to me that Eugene Lang did not simply leave these students to fend for themselves between 6th grade and high school graduation. He showed up for them. He intervened for them. He rescued them from various crises. Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers at the time, says: “Lang put up a lot more than money. He put himself on the line, too.” That’s what God does for us. He doesn't trust pay the price of our sin and then go off to the side of the stage to watch us stumble through the rest of our lives. He actively guards us.



He causes us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection. He provides us with an imperishable inheritance through the resurrection. And he guards us from the moment of our salvation to the fulfillment of our salvation.

The resurrection, according to J. R. R. Tolkien is the eucatastrophe of history. A eucatastrophe is sudden turnaround for good when a situation appears to be irredeemably lost. In the Lord of the Rings the eucatastrophe occurs at the cracks of doom in the land of Mordor. As Aragorn's army flounders in a sea of enemies at the gate, Frodo and Sam, with their last impossible effort, reach Mount Doom where the enemy's ring can be finally be destroyed. But Frodo can't do it. He chooses not to. He puts on the ring and claims it for his own. Then, eucatastrophically, the miserable creature Gollum whom Frodo and Sam had spared reappears. He wrestles Frodo for the ring and bites off the finger that bears it. In his joy at the recovery of his precious he dances back, topples, wavers on the brink and falls into the fire of Mount Doom. Gollum and the ring are gone, the evil of Sauron is destroyed and the quest is complete.

Satan, our enemy, is the Sauron of the Gospel story, but he is also the Gollum. Just when he thought he had won the victory over Christ, and manipulated him to his death, the resurrection turned it all around. As one of my favorite songs says "the sky turned black, but darkness had not won."

The resurrection is the eucatastrophe of history and the eucatastrophe of our lives. It is everything sad coming untrue.

In the Lord of the Rings, after Mount Doom, Sam finds himself waking in green sunlight in the fair land of Ithilien. Then he sees Gandalf who asks how he is feeling. "Sam lay back, and started with open mouth, and for a moment, between bewilderment and great joy, he could not answer. At last he gasped: 'Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?'

'A great shadow has departed,' said Gandalf, and then he laughed and the sound was like music, or water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known. But he himself burst into tears. Then as sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from his bed.

Resurrection changes everything. We are eucatastrophied into a living and a joyous hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.