

1 Peter 1:3-9

Very often **new** Christians express their faith with great **enthusiasm**. They bubble over with joy and excitement. “**It’s Great To Be A Christian**,” they exclaim. Why is it that we **seldom** hear those words from those who have been Christians for many **years**? Don’t they **believe** that being a Christian **is** great? Have they changed their **minds**? I don’t really think so. Perhaps their emotions have just settled down a little, or at least in **some** cases, maybe a **lot**. After all, it’s **natural** that our feelings will be different toward a **newfound** friend than they will be toward a friend we have known for a **lifetime**. But we dare not use that as an **excuse** to put all **emotion** and **action** aside. In reality, our feelings toward a **lifelong** friend should run much **deeper**, because they have had a chance to grow and mature. When that lifelong Friend has been **Jesus**, and we have had the opportunity to experience His **love** for us in providing us with forgiveness and life day after day, year after year, then it will be easy for **us also** to say, “**It’s Great To Be A Christian**.”

Our text leads us in that direction, pointing out five great **blessings** which we have as Christians. We have a living **hope**, a permanent **inheritance**, the shield of God’s **power**, a precious **faith**, and a glorious **joy**. In our text Peter writes, “*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*” Through the free gifts of **Baptism**, the Lord’s **Supper**, and God’s precious **Word**, Jesus has given us a **living hope** - an **active** hope. We certainly don’t **deserve** that hope - not when we consider what our human race has **done** to God’s perfect creation - nor when we consider what **we ourselves** have done in continually breaking God’s commandments. By persisting in sin we have become **dead**, but by believing in **Christ** and His **resurrection** from the dead, we have been brought back to **life** again. It’s a new lease on life - a fresh start - and it’s all ours because of **Jesus**. In that new life, filled with **hope**, we will want to show others that **It’s Great To Be A Christian**, because we have been given a second chance - a chance which we did not **deserve**.

Peter also tells us, “*God has given us a new birth into an **inheritance** that is **undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you**.*” Inheritances are of great interest among people. Generally the reading of a Last Will and Testament will bring out all sorts of **long-lost** relatives. It may also bring out some different **attitudes** among **others** - attitudes of **greed** and **mistrust**. Many people who have received large inheritances are not as **happy** as they **thought** they would be. Now that they have a degree of **wealth**, they spend much of their time **worrying** about how someone might try to take that wealth **away** from them. That’s unfortunate, because

earthly inheritances, **regardless** of their dollar value, are not **worth** all that much. They are not **permanent** - and by spending too much time worrying about **earthly** wealth, we may **neglect** our **permanent** inheritance, just as the rich young fool did in Jesus' parable.

That **permanent** inheritance, eternal life in **heaven**, is a gift of God's **grace**. We have nothing to do with obtaining it. We were simply born into the right family - the family of **believers**. **It's Great To Be A Christian**, because we have an inheritance which we **can** take with us - one which will never perish, or spoil, or fade. That's **real** security, and we are privileged to have it even in a time when many **other** blessings seem so **threatened** and **insecure**.

That leads us to the **third** blessing listed in our text - the shield of God's **power**. Peter writes, *"Through faith you are being **protected** by God's **power** for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time. Because of this you **rejoice** very much, even though now **for a little while**, if necessary, you have been **grieved** by various kinds of **trials**."* **Protection** is a basic human need. We spend a lot of time and money to **provide** it on a large scale, even though we realize our tanks, planes, missiles, submarines, and even "Star Wars" defense systems, will never provide us with **complete** protection. In Peter's day they didn't have all those complex forms of defense - they had **shields**. The shield in the left hand of a soldier was just as important as the **sword** in his right, because without that **shield**, he was **defenseless** against the sword, or spear, or arrows of his **enemy**.

How **wonderful** it is to know that we are protected by **God's power**. With His power as a **shield** in our left hand, we have no need to even carry an **offensive** weapon in our right hand. Through **God's power**, the Christian becomes **invincible**. **It's Great To Be A Christian**, because we don't need to be afraid of anyone or anything. In his great Reformation hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*, Luther wrote, *"This world's prince may still **scowl** fierce as he will. He can **harm** us **none**. He's judged, the deed is **done**."* Satan, death, and any **other** enemies which exist out there, are **powerless** against the Christian - because we are **protected** by the shield of **God's power**.

Oh, it's true God sends suffering, and grief, and trials at times - but not to **harm** us - not to **destroy** us. In our text Peter continues, *"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 **faith** is compared to **gold**, and gold in **any** form is very **valuable**. But **pure** gold - **refined**

gold - is **extremely** valuable. Yet, even pure gold, gold which has been refined by fire, will someday **perish**, while our **faith** will **not**. Our **faith** is more precious than all the gold in Fort Knox, or all the diamonds in South Africa. And our faith keeps getting more and more valuable each time it is **tested**. It gets **stronger**, and **purier**, and more **active**. **It's Great To Be A Christian** because God **gives** us **faith**, and then He keeps that faith **strong**.

That brings us to the closing verses of our text, and to a glorious **joy**. We read, *“Though 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**, because you are receiving the **goal** of your faith, the **salvation** of your souls.”* Did you ever get the feeling that Christians, especially WELS Lutherans, are not supposed to be **joyful**? So many times we walk around with our bottom lips dragging on the ground - moping and moaning, or worrying and complaining about someone or something. But who says we have to develop a permanent case of the “frownies” in order to be a follower of Jesus? Certainly not **God!** He is the one who has **removed** depression from our lives. He has **healed** our wounds, **revived** our broken spirits, and **forgiven** all our sins. And as today's sermon text has shown us, He has provided us with a living **hope**, a permanent **inheritance**, the shield of God's **power**, and a precious **faith**. Certainly, these are **all** things for which we can be **joyful**. So let's **be** joyful, and let's let that joy **show**. If we don't, then others may never even **imagine** how **Great It Is To Be A Christian**. Amen.