

**Introduction:**

- A. Love starts its journey from different places. There’s love that springs from attraction, like “love at first sight.” There’s love that begins with common interests, like two Cubs fans who find they have much more in common.

**Then there’s the love that starts in gratitude.**

*Illus.:* Near the end of *Les Miserables* Marius, young and dashing, falls in love at first sight with the lovely Cosette. Since she was a little girl Jean Valjean has cared for her as his own daughter but he has cloistered her away with him lest his identity as a former criminal be discovered and she left with no one to take care of her.

In a climactic battle, Marius is wounded but is mysteriously carried to safety where he recovers, and finally Marius and Cosette are married.

It’s then that Jean Valjean, now on his death bed, quietly tells Marius of his past as an ex-con on the run. Marius wants to keep Cosette away from him but Marius doesn’t know it was Valjean who saved his life at the barricades, carrying him through the sewers of Paris to safety. He doesn’t know how Valjean rescued the young Cosette from unscrupulous innkeepers when her impoverished mother died. And then it all comes out and Marius realizes his debt and his love for this man. He sings:

*It’s you who must forgive a thoughtless fool*

*It’s you who must forgive a thankless man*

*It’s thanks to you that I am living*

*And again I lay down my life at your feet*

*Cosette, your father is a saint*

*When they wounded me*

*He took me from the barricade*

*Carried like a babe  
And brought me home  
To you.*

Once Marius knew how Jean Valjean had saved his life and brought him back to the love of Cosette, he was a changed man. **His deep gratitude gave rise to great love.**

- B. Our love for Christ is like that. Turn to **1 Peter 1**. During Lent our focus is on loving the LORD Jesus. You've heard the verse that caught my attention as I planned these sermons. It's **v.8**, "*Though you have not seen him [Jesus], you love him.*" **That might not be true for us unless, like Marius, we know just how much we have to be thankful to Jesus for.** **Vv.3-9** are like that lyric we just heard.

**Vv.3-4a...**

**I. WE LOVE THE LORD BECAUSE HE HAS GIVEN US NEW BIRTH**

- A. Jesus told Nicodemus, "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." We use the word *regenerated*. A kind of down-deep-do-over. Paul said in 2 Cor 5:17, "*If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*" When the Bible talks of new birth it isn't a metaphor. We are literally *born again* in spirit. *Regenerated*. This is truly astonishing!

Of course, we had no more to do with our new birth than our old one. **God in his mercy gave it to us.** A free gift of new life—a new *kind* of life—springing up from the mercy of God for people condemned to die forever.

- B. Peter says that this new birth is into two things. That is, we are *regenerated* with these two inborn traits.
- C. The first is, "he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." That phrase, "*a living hope,*" is different than other kinds

of hope because it comes through Christ's resurrection and because it is *inborn* in us. *Illus.*: Over here is a woman who hopes to have a baby. And over here is another woman who hopes to have a baby. The difference is the first woman is pregnant and the second isn't. The one woman, you might say, has a *living hope*. She can feel the child living within her. Her hope has come to life. So it is with Christians, only more so! When you were born again, the very resurrection power and life of Christ was implanted within you. **You are pregnant with the hope of life.** And you know it! You feel it! You actually sense the Holy Spirit within—Christ's own life, and you can see that life within you is changing you outwardly. **Let's stop for a moment and thank God!**

- D. There's a second benefit of your new birth: "into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade" (v.4). The word *inheritance* also connects back to new birth because an **inheritance is a privilege of birth**. We say, "*She was born into money.*" The Bible says we were born into an indestructible inheritance. Befitting a people who cannot die, we have been given an inheritance that can't be lost.

This promise has a history, a background. In the OT Israel's inheritance was the Promised Land and the peace to live there undisturbed and God-blessed. But as great an inheritance as that was, it was ravaged and ruined when God withdrew his blessing because of Israel's sin.

So God offers a new inheritance "kept in heaven for you." Our inheritance, to begin with, is a wonderful land and way of life, populated by sinless, God-adoring people, who never again weep or mourn. We are citizens of a land more lovely than Eden, where enemies never come and Satan cannot reach, where life grows on trees and runs in the river, and where God and the Lamb actually live with us. A land with no more tears or fears, where work is sweet and worship a true delight. **And nothing here can ruin it!**

Our inheritance is untouchable—it can “*never perish, spoil or fade.*” **Or as one writer put it, “*the inheritance is untouched by death, unstained by evil, unimpaired by time*”** [F. W. Beare, in Scott McKnight, *NIV Application Commentary*].

The world says, “*Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.*” Jesus says his resurrection has given us a living hope that we will never die. The world says of its treasures, “*You can’t take it with you,*” but God says of our priceless inheritance “*is kept safely in heaven for you.*”

**Let’s stop and thank God for that, too.**

- E. “*That sounds great,*” you think, “*but I’m not sure I’m going to make it. What if I throw in the towel before I get there? After all, I’m a spiritual wimp when the going gets rough.*” Ah, look at **v.5**, “*...you who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*” Not only is your inheritance protected, so are you. Your faith in Christ for new birth secures for you the protection of God. Picture a brand new father cradling that tiny little one in his arms, whispering to him, “*I am going to take care of you.*” And good fathers do their best to do that throughout the lives of their kids. Our heavenly Father does no less, but he is much mightier. **When we put our trust in him, God safeguards our faith and our life.** Faith doesn’t protect us; God does, even when our faith seems weak.
- F. Peter began, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*” and in **v.6** he says, “*In all this you greatly rejoice even though you’ve had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*” **Even though! Let’s stop and thank God!**

Listen to **vv.6-9...**

## II. WE LOVE THE LORD BECAUSE EVEN OUR TRIALS ARE TRANSFORMED INTO TREASURES

- A. Peter’s audience suffered for being Christians. They were maligned and accused of wrongdoing. He said they “*suffered grief in all kinds of trials,*” trials of every dark color, you might say. Suffering, whether from persecution or poverty, from depression or disease, is hard not only because of the pain but because it all seems so pointless, so useless. Except for believers in Jesus.
- B. Even while they were suffering—seriously hurting and weeping and weak—they still “greatly rejoiced.” **Their joy, despite suffering, was proof of their “living hope.”** God had implanted within them—and within us—a faith that is not drained away by suffering. Oh, that doesn’t mean we know how to handle the hardships, or that we don’t question God, or that we pray and sing easily when we’re afraid or heartbroken. **Faith doesn’t mean we feel triumphant.** But God guards true faith, saving faith, and instead of undermining our faith, he sees to it that our suffering refines it.

Illus.: I knew a woman whose husband left her for another woman. Her counselor sexually abused her. Her daughter nearly died from anorexia. She couldn’t pay her bills. I called her Job-ette. She didn’t understand God, or why he so seldom answered her big prayers. But still she prayed and sang and thought of heaven. That which was left was gold.

Illus.: He lay there dying, week after week. A little hope some days, and then more bad news. He prayed, she prayed, we all prayed, but still it got worse, and harder. Yet he spoke of God’s goodness. He tried to persuade others to put their faith in this God of his. He looked forward to

eternity with this God who seemed so silent. That which was left was gold.

- C. Notice that first line of **v.7**, “*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith....*” **Suffering doesn’t prove the genuineness of your faith. Your new birth does.** Your living hope and indestructible inheritance prove your faith in Christ. **You don’t have to prove your faith when you’re under pressure. You need to rest on it.** It started as gold. No Christian starts their new life with flaxen faith that *eventually* turns to gold. The faith that trust Christ for salvation is golden from the start.
- D. **Furthermore, fiery trials don’t destroy faith. They refine faith, as gold is refined in the crucible.** Trials, you might say, get the lead out. Faith is **clarified** under pressure so we see Jesus more clearly when it’s all over. Faith is **extended**, given a longer reach, a stronger grip. Faith is **instructed** in trials as we’re forced to look more earnestly into Scripture.
- E. **Don’t miss that phrase about your faith—“of greater worth than gold, even gold refined by fire.”** We scarcely realize how valuable our faith is to God. Faith—which God gives to us in the first place—seems so lightweight, so ethereal, so undependable. We think faith is only valuable if we can summon up a miracle of some kind. But your simple faith in Jesus as Savior, your faith to trust him day in and day out, to obey him and work through him, that’s gold, and you have nothing in all your life so valuable nor so enduring.
- F. In **v.7** put the first and last phrases together: “*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith (your golden faith) ... may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*” When we see words like “*praise, glory and honor*” we assume they refer to Christ. But here,

incredibly, the praise, glory and honor is not Christ's but ours! When Jesus comes back and we are taken to heaven forever, we each will be met in heaven with *praise, glory and honor*—from God and his angels, and from one another for our golden faith. I imagine us standing there dumbfounded, stammering, “*But I didn't do anything. I owe everything to Jesus.*”

Yet comes back the praise: “*But you trusted Jesus. In your suffering, you prayed. You obeyed God's commands and believed his promises. You loved others for Jesus' sake.*”

You protest, “*Oh, but I was so bad at those things!*”

“*Oh, your sins—though they were many—were all forgiven and forgotten long ago. All we see here is what you did by faith, and what you became by faith, and there is more than you realize. Someone bring this saint a white robe and a crown!*” And then the Lord himself welcomes you, “*Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your reward!*” **Let's stop and thank God for that!**

## Conclusion

This passage began, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*” After recounting two of the unassailable benefits of our new birth—our living hope and our indestructible inheritance—Peter said it again, “*In all this you greatly rejoice*” even while we wait for Jesus Christ to be revealed—for Jesus to come again. And now after telling us how extraordinarily valuable our fire-refined faith is he concludes in **vv.8-9**, “***Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***”

**Love springs from gratitude.** When it seems our love for Christ is fading and becoming threadbare recount again what he has done for us. Go into detail, as Peter has done here. And this tells only part of our salvation story. We can sing, too:

*It's thanks to you that I am living*

*And again I lay down my life at your feet*

**Illus.:** Let me read something for you, something that happened over 20 years ago in China, from the extraordinary book, *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun:

Nine prisoners from the men's and women's prisons in Nanyang were to face public humiliation and trial that day. I was one of them. We were driven around the town, while our crimes were read out on a loudspeaker. I was so full of joy at the chance of being paraded in front of people for the sake of Jesus Christ! My heart was bursting with gladness.

On the way to the trial I couldn't contain myself. I'd just seen Brother Huang promoted to glory [he'd been shot by guards] and eternity was so real to me. I sang out to God in a loud voice. The captain threatened me with his electric baton. "Shut up Yun! How dare you sing! If you continue to sing I'll skin you alive." ...

I kept singing loudly... [and this is part of his song]: *I will give my life and spill my blood to please my Heavenly Father, That wearing the crown of life I will enter the kingdom of God.* [*The Heavenly Man*, pp.152-153]

Now there's a man who loves Jesus. I want to love Jesus like that.