

## I Peter 1:3-9

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

5 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.

6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8 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,

9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

## WHAT WE CAN'T DO - Save Ourselves

Welcome to the EKKLESIA, the assembly of believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ - the Body of Christ. Tonight, we continue our Eastertide midweek sermon series, WHAT WE CAN'T DO, with the theme of "Save Ourselves." We find our text in I Peter 1:3-9. Peter, the Apostle, promises us salvation, eternal in heaven, waiting for us. This inheritance is God's gift through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter is aware that we will suffer trials and all manner of distress as we wait for our inheritance. But the final gift will be far better than anything we now know. He encourages us by reminding us that angels are involved in all this. We are not alone.

There is an old adage that says, "Cemeteries are full of indispensable men." It's meant to be ironic, that no one is truly indispensable, and everyone must die. In light of the Easter reality, Jesus' bodily resurrection, one can debate this inevitability. He truly is the indispensable man, and the grave could not hold him.

This adage was quoted in Carl M. Cannon's eulogy for Michael Cromartie (published in Real Clear Politics on August 29, 2017) a few days after Cannon received word of his friend's death after a two year cancer battle, August 2017. Cannon contended that his friend Mike Cromartie was also an "indispensable man," not for what he had done in and of himself, but rather for his lifetime work as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Mike Cromartie started out as a left leaning, even liberal, young Christian, freshly out of college. He came of age in times of national protests against racial discrimination, and nationwide protests against the Vietnam War. He came from an evangelical background, but he was committed to the social mandates of the Gospel, advocacy for the poor, for the politically disenfranchised, even for the unborn.

In his political activist years in our nation's capital, Cromartie became friends with Jim Wallis, one of the founders of "Sojourners," a faith community and advocacy group in Washington D. C.'s poorest neighborhoods. He also befriended many younger reporters and correspondents in Washington. His goal was to convince these secularist doubters that people of faith could have intellectual integrity. One of his friends from this time, David Brooks (New York Times columnist), says of Cromartie that he introduced Brooks to every significant Religious thinker he knows, "I was thinking . . . how many of the key people in my life he introduced me to," he said. "Even my wife."

That is the very definition of an apostle, a "sent out one." That's what Peter was. Jesus sent him out to tell the good news of salvation. That's what Michael Cromartie was.

In our text for tonight Peter tells us that God has given us a wonderful gift - salvation, new birth. This is bolstered by what the Apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (vs 20) The author of the Book of Hebrews declares, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and steadfast. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain . . ." (Hebrews 6:19) Jesus has gone into the Holy of Holies, in God's presence, and there he advocates for us, guaranteeing God's gift. Later in I Peter, the Apostle says, ". . . water symbolizes the baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . ." (I Peter 3:21) and in the Epistle of I John, ". . . everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as Christ is pure." (I John 3:3)

Peter further encourages us that this gift is an “eternal inheritance.” The promise actually begins in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Paul affirms Jesus’ words in II Thessalonians 2, “. . . Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father . . . has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope,” and in the letter to Titus, Paul writes, “having been justified by His grace, we would become heirs with the hope of eternal life.”

What is even more encouraging about these gifts, new birth, salvation, eternal in heaven, is that God is determined to protect us as we wait through these times for the fulfillment of the promise. How? Through faith and God’s power. Faith is our side of the equation, and power is God’s part.

The Prophet Samuel declares, “He (God) guards the steps of His faithful ones, but the wicked perish in darkness; for by his own strength no man shall prevail.” What the Prophet wants us to remember is that through faith, which is trusting God, we are safe. Without God, we are nothing. And the Psalmist (Psalm 97:10) affirms this transaction, “O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked.” And in Proverbs 2 we read, “He (God) guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.” (vs 8)

And God’s power to protect us is beyond our wildest imaginings, “For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. They will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone,” (Psalm 91:11) and “He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber.” (Psalm 121:3)

Which brings us to the question, “Why are we suffering griefs and all kinds of trials?” Why are we going through these times, if we have faith, and God has power?

Peter acknowledges the obvious. We ARE going through difficult times, frightening times, and we see no clear end to this dark tunnel. The Apostle Paul offers comfort in his letter to the Romans, “I consider that our present sufferings are not comparable to the glory that will be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18) And the Apostle Peter promises, “. . . rejoice that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed at the revelation of His glory.” (I Peter 4:13)

Two years before his death, Michael Cromartie was diagnosed with an inoperable, untreatable cancer. At the time he lamented, “Why me? I love my wife, my kids, my job. I don’t want to leave yet.” His pastor gave him some sermons by the legendary preacher of the First Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards (18th century). Mike told Carl Cannon that reading these sermons filled him with joy. He believed in eternal life and looked forward to what lay ahead, but still he mourned leaving his wife and children, and his work, behind.

As Cromartie’s connections in American News journalism grew, his desire to communicate his beliefs to his friends only got stronger. And so he started holding annual retreats, an opportunity for journalists to speak with, and listen to, some of the greatest theologians of our time. He called these annual gatherings, “Faith Angle”.

Carl Cannon had the privilege of accompanying Cromartie on many of these gatherings, and at one, in Key West, Florida, he and Cromartie arrived a day early, on Sunday. In the afternoon, they went looking for a basketball court. Cromartie had been a point guard on his Covenant College varsity basketball team. A few minutes in the warm Florida sun and Cromartie was sinking twenty foot jump shots. Then a local kid, from the surrounding African American neighborhood, approached them, talking smack, “I can wipe the court with you two old men.” Cannon wanted to ignore the kid, but Cromartie invited him to play. What they soon discovered was that the kid had no game - he couldn’t shoot, he couldn’t even dribble. At that point, Cannon was done with it, but not Michael Cromartie.

Cromartie asked the kid about his family, his interests, his school. Cromartie even coached the kid on shooting a free throw. When it was time to go, the kid wanted to know if they would be back tomorrow. They told him, “No.” He was disappointed, but obviously touched when Cromartie left him with, “God bless you.” Cannon says he didn’t go to church that Sunday, but that hour, with that kid and Michael Cromartie, was the holiest of holy moments.

Carl Cannon remembers the day he received the word, that the most vital and alive and excited Christian witness he’d ever known had gone home to the Lord. Cromartie’s daughter said, “Dad has gone home to Jesus.” Cannon walked down the hall in his office to break the news to two coworkers. He told them, “Mike is with the angels.” One responded, “He always walked with the angels.” The other said, “He danced with the angels . . . and the angels are singing.”

Just after the end of tonight’s text, Peter asserts, “Even angels long to look into these things.” (vs 12) I do believe that angels are always keeping guard and watch over us, cheering for our

faithful following our Lord Jesus. God is faithful and will not disappoint us. Our hope is eternal in heaven and waiting for us. Here and now we long for it, and we anxiously wait for it (see II Corinthians 5:1-5).

But do we wait and hope only for ourselves? Just as Michael Cromartie lived his passion to introduce his friends to Jesus and lived such a winsome witness that even skeptics were inclined to want what he had, so we have a job to do while we wait. We, too, are apostles, sent out to live the good news in such a way that others will want to know what we know and believe, in which we trust and hope.

We have a faith handed down to us from the Apostles, through the martyrs and saints and faithful witnesses. We have the privilege of passing on this faith, with joy and passion, and encouragement. There are so many in darkness and fear. How will we care for them? Will you join in this great invitation?