

## Sermon – April 16, 2023

Pastor Dan Hollis

### 1 Peter 1:3-9

It's a classic image: you see it in movies, you read it in books, I even grew up watching it happen in cartoons. You're in a medieval marketplace, and you hand the shopkeep a gold coin. Or you're a treasure hunter unearthing an old chest full of gold, and you toss a coin to your fellow adventurer. And what's the first thing he does with it? He takes it and clamps it between his teeth. "Oho it's gold all right."

'Course when I was growing up, I thought you were supposed to bite into gold coins because if they were *counterfeit* you could, like, snap 'em in half or something. Turns out, it's actually the opposite. Gold is a *soft* metal, and if you bite into an unalloyed gold piece you'll actually leave a *mark*. That's how you know it's *really* valuable. If you *don't* leave one, you know somebody saved some gold by mixing in other cheaper metals when they made that coin.

It's like the pennies gathering dust at the bottom of our car cupholders—you think those are *copper*? Since 1982, they're mostly zinc, with just a *little* copper coating around 'em. Though it still costs almost *two* cents to manufacture *one* penny, so—y'know—make *that* make sense.

Now, God has given *us* a gift that's more valuable than gold—*certainly* more valuable than a penny. *Easter* is all about reminding us of that gift: the gift of God's love, and the new and imperishable life that comes with it. You *can't* leave a bite mark in God's love, and no matter how much time passes or how much heat you apply, not even *death* can truly end the *life* of even one single human soul that God loves.

"By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

The resurrection of Christ—someone who was both human and Divine—was a *cosmic* moment of two copper wires coming together: people and God. All of a sudden the circuit's complete, and this rush of new life—this electrical current—*links* us all, *fuses* us all... and—as long as we *maintain* that circuit—it fills us with the power to (in the words of the old commercial) keep "going and going and going..."

On Easter we affirm again and again that God's love is stronger than death, that through Christ *death* was defeated and *you*—God's precious creation—will endure beyond it. Our souls, or the *fate* of our souls, what 1 Peter calls our "inheritance," is imperishable. It cannot be defiled and it will not fade away. That promise is one of the reasons I found

faith attractive at a young age: there was nothing scarier to me than the idea that one day I may not exist.

I distinctly remember as a kid a moment riding in the car past a cemetery in, like, New Jersey or something, and imagining all those people... lying in the dirt, with no light, unable to move, never seeing or hearing or doing anything again. And God, that terrified me. And to this day, I still can't wrap my head around a time somewhere in the future... when I *don't* exist. Not even just lying in the ground unable to move, but just not even *being*. It's as scary to contemplate as it is for our mortal human brains to even picture.

So yeah, a God that promises I *never* have to face that... *nonexistence*? Even if I still have to suffer through death, perhaps even a painful one? Even if that God *doesn't* promise that my life on Earth will be free of pain and sadness? I'll grab onto that copper wire any day of the week.

Our lives have value. Our well-being, our wholeness, our peace and comfort *are* as precious as gold, both to us and to God. And our faith, too, is that precious. Our trust in God, our gratitude to God, our commitment to God, and our good works inspired by that God... are golden.

But gold is a soft metal. Apply enough heat, and it starts to melt. Bite it hard enough, and you leave teeth marks. Our comfort can shatter, our well-being can melt, our bodies can break. And our *faith* can bend.

I would be surprised if there was a *single* one of us in this room or watching online whose faith had *never* been shaken, myself included. That there wasn't something that happened to you, or something that happened to someone else, or something you heard, something you learned, or even something you *thought*... that left a few teeth marks in that gold coin.

But while your faith may be worth your weight in gold... God's *love* for *you* is a far more precious metal. It's stronger than diamond, stronger than titanium alloy, stronger than anything on the Periodic Table, and it has no half-life. You live in God's *love*, and God's love does not decay.

In the time of 1 Peter, the early Christians were facing a lot of disdain from the people around them. Whether it was Jewish peers or Roman peers, everybody looked at these Jesus-followers as an aberration. Cult-y weirdos at best, dangerous heretics at worst. They professed belief in a Savior who had been executed by the Empire but miraculously rose from the dead to save them from the powers of this world... and yet where is he now?

For something like fifty years these people have been putting their faith in something they can't see, and as a result acting in very illogical ways.

They're giving all they have to those in need, they're loving their enemies and praying for those who persecute them, they're washing the feet of those *beneath* them and trying to overturn the whole way things *work*! And why, because some invisible homeless criminal told them to?

The Bible calls faith "the substance of things hoped for," and "the evidence of things unseen." It's no wonder that society back then *and* people of today find that kind of faith strange. It's baseless, foundationless, it doesn't stand up under "rational" scrutiny, it's weak, it's weird, it's "fair-weather" faith, it's outdated faith, it's wishful thinking, bite into it hard enough... bite into it hard enough and you'll leave teeth marks.

But that's okay. It's *okay* that your faith isn't perfect. It's okay that your faith bends under stress, because it's still as precious as gold... and *gold* when *melted* can be *reshaped*.

That's something special about faith that can't be understated. Sure, it's not unmoving and rigid... but that also means it's not rigid and unmoving!

When I learned about the Big Bang in science class, my faith was *gold* enough to be *reshaped*... to *include* the Big Bang, and now the idea of God creating the world like *that*... is an image that *excites* me and spurs my mind in new directions, instead of *forcing* me to toss out either my *faith* or the *evidence*. When I would encounter human *suffering* in a hospital bed or a prison cell, my faith was *gold* enough to be reshaped to recognize all the ways that God *is* at work in the lives of those suffering, *even* when that suffering still exists. It didn't force me to either toss out my faith in God or decide that those suffering *must* deserve it. No. Because while my faith may only be as precious as gold... God's love for *all* of us is far more than that; it does not break, it is never cast aside, and nothing can make it bend.

Gold is a luxury, and *we* have the *luxury* to bend... because God's love *doesn't*. Our faith has the luxury to melt and reshape, because God's love will be there for us through it *all*, until we find that new shape that'll shine brightly even in the face of the deepest darkness.

Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ took a hit, a big hit, to *show* that God's love lives on even through death. Today, our faith can take a *bite*, and *still* maintain its value... so forge a faith that's golden.

Amen.