

The Greatest Plus Sign Ever

I Peter 1:3-9

August 13, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to I Peter 1. Many of our children will be going back to school this week and several of the ones here at the church seem to like math as their favorite subject. But what is a butterfly's favorite subject? Mathematics. What is a bird's favorite type of math? Owlgebra. What is a math teachers favorite season? SUMmer. Sorry, but I thought you might enjoy SUM jokes about math.

About a year ago now, Nancy was talking to an 8 year old girl. The girl's parents had not brought her up in church nor had they told her anything about Jesus. As Nancy talked with her a little about Him, the subject of church came up and the little girl asked Nancy, "I do have a question. Why do churches have plus signs on top of them?" It took Nancy a little bit to figure out what she was talking about, and then she realized, she was talking about the cross! This little girl sadly had no clue what the greatest symbol in the world stands for and yet her comment illustrates perfectly what that symbol actually does. On this day when we baptize new believers and rededicate others, we're going to talk about what Jesus' cross, the greatest plus sign ever, adds to our lives.

If you're able, please stand as we read from 1 Peter 1:3-9 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 — 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 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 your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and 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 goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

It's important today before we get too far into our message to understand that no child or adult 2000 years ago would **ever** mistake a cross for a plus sign. Having witnessed horrific crucifixions on a fairly regular basis, they would never think for an instant that a cross would add anything but pain to a person's life. Indeed, it added a ton of it to Jesus' life and of course ended His life as well. As we've noted before, crucifixion was invented and later perfected to inflict the maximum suffering possible for those condemned to die in that way. In Jesus' case, add to the physical suffering the spiritual, emotional, and mental weight of every human sin ever committed and that pain explodes exponentially. For Jesus, the cross was the biggest **minus** sign ever.

But in God's typical mode of operation, He took that which was designed for harm and pain and evil and turned it into joy and gain. He did it for Joseph in Egypt, for the Israelites in slavery, and for many others. Ultimately, it was Jesus' own sacrifice on this instrument of cruel torture that supplied the power and the energy to transform every other speck of human suffering and leave behind not a big negative, but the biggest positive ever. Because of Jesus' cross, God adds so much to our lives!

This passage declares that first and foremost Jesus adds a new birth. Say New birth. Through the miracle of Jesus' plus sign, the cross, those who accept Him as Savior are born again! Our old lives of sin are forever erased by Jesus' blood and we can begin again and then to live lives of obedient service to the One who blessed us beyond measure. It feels so good to be free of all our binding sin! So in one sense, the cross is a minus sign subtracting our sin and wickedness before adding our new birth into righteousness and holiness.

And this new birth is into a living hope. Say living hope. A lively hope. A certain hope. Not wishful thinking, but a certain hope of resurrection and eternal life. How's that for value added? That's the greatest plus sign ever! Our dead end eternity of misery was subtracted and an eternity of joy and happiness was added. I love the way God does math!

Down in verse 9, Peter brings us back to name of the whole package of benefits that come through Jesus' cross. Say salvation. Being saved from God's wrath being poured out on us because of our sin and being saved to a glorious heaven because of God's love. I love God's salvation package. It's like a sunshine box with many smaller gifts inside that we get to keep opening day by day by day now and throughout all eternity!

Peter goes on to describe this new life. He says in vs 4 that God adds an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. Everything in this life does one or all of these. We have to paint, replace, repair, restore, or maintain everything we own or it decrease in value or function. But not our inheritance that Jesus adds. It's color fast. It doesn't fade. It doesn't spoil, it has no expiration date, and it doesn't perish for it is kept in heaven for us! Say heaven. Peter didn't see all that John saw in heaven so he doesn't describe it all here, but John goes into some details about how grand and glorious that place is! We've talked about it earlier this year. Its splendor is beyond our ability to even imagine! No sickness, disease, or death. No grief, heartache or tears. I'm so thankful Jesus has subtracted all these from our future and in their place has added joy unspeakable! Delight in abundance! Pleasure beyond measure! I love God's math! He subtracts our sin, adds new life, divides our sorrow, and multiplies our joy!

In verse 5, Peter highlights another blessing Jesus' cross adds to us. Say protection. Peter says that through faith, we are shielded by God's power. And there is no greater power than God's. So even though the Devil wants to destroy you, nothing's going to happen to us that God doesn't know about and can't overrule. Not one thing. Sometimes we wonder why He allows what He allows, but His Divine wisdom is much higher than ours and He knows the end from the beginning. Later in this passage, Peter goes into more detail about how our trials prove whether or not our faith in God is genuine and real, or just a sham. Even the trials that God allows can add good qualities to our character that lead to maturity here and decorate us for eternity. Peter says they will result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus is revealed. And we want to add praise and glory and honor to He who has added all things to our lives, do we not?

Peter tells us about another value added benefit Jesus adds to our lives. Say glorious joy. In vs 8, he writes, "You are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy!" Not in the future in heaven, but right now, as we believe in Jesus and wait for Him expectantly. This doesn't mean life will be all unicorns and rainbows, that it won't be problem or pain free, but it does mean that beneath it all, there is a current of inexpressible and glorious joy moving us, like the Gulf Stream, ever closer to God's harbor of heaven. There may be storms on the surface of life's sea. There may be grief in all kinds of trials as vs 6 declares, but the destination as well as the Captain of our ship make it all endurable and even enjoyable.

For a few more things Jesus' cross adds to our lives, turn to Rom 5:1-5. Many passages tell us of God's awesome addition. Rom 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we **know** that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has **poured out** his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

So God adds peace to our lives! We are no longer His enemy! We have also gained access by faith to His very throne room that we may bring our requests, our prayers, our burdens, our joys. We have 24 hour help line! When you buy some products, you get customer support. When you receive Jesus, you have the best customer support ever! 24/7 everywhere, never busy.

Vs 5 reminds us of one of the best parts God adds to us. Say Holy Spirit! He has given us Himself! His Holy Spirit indwells every single believer to provide God's power, wisdom, presence, peace, and every other good thing. He could have just saved us and then left us to our own but He didn't, In His grand design, **He** moved into the temples of our bodies and souls. That's only possible because of the greatest plus sign ever, the cross of Jesus Christ.

Vs 5 also reminds us of His great love that He has poured into our hearts! Say love. God's infinite, extravagant, lavish love, poured into us. We may not even feel it right now, but if you're saved, He's poured it and is pouring it into your heart even now! Like a gigantic crane with an enormous bucket of chocolate milk shake or whatever else you like. Only so much better! His love. Poured into our hearts! That we can enjoy and then share and distribute to all those around us. Only possible by the cross. Brought to you by... Jesus' plus sign.

In 1 Tim 1:14, Paul tells us of two other things are in God's bucket. "The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." So grace and faith are also in the bucket. Dumped, poured, and dispensed into our hearts. Of course mercy is there as well.

Paul describes the grace part a little more in Eph 1:6-10 where he talks about "... [God's] glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the **riches** of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." The riches of God's grace. God's not stingy. Because of the cross of Jesus, the greatest plus sign ever, the Father adds to our lives the abundance of His grace. But wait, there's more! As the TV salesman says. He gives us wisdom and understanding as well! How of you want wisdom and under-standing? Me too! The good thing is there's enough to go around to all of us!

But we should order now—not because there is limited supply but there is limited time. You may think you have a long time. Deadly heart attacks happen every day. Accidents take people instantly into eternity. I'm not trying to scare you into heaven, but I'd rather do that than lull you into hell. Both are very real and it's not God's will that ANY should perish.

There's one other benefit from the great plus sign of the cross, and that is our Christian family, the Church. Say church. 1 Tim 3:15 tells us that the church is God's household and is the pillar and foundation of the truth. If we're not in a church, we're not in God's household. As we celebrate the new birth of these today, we recognize that they were born again not as orphans, but INTO the church, family of God. We don't have to flounder around as an abandoned infant. As a neglected child wondering through life on our own. We have a full family of sisters and brothers to love and to be loved by. To be prayed for and to pray for. A place to use our gifts and to share the love, mercy, and grace He's given us. A place to grow and mature. God never intended for us to live a solitary Christian life by ourselves. But always and forever in the community, the closeness, the fellowship of Jesus' Bride, the Holy Church, that the Bible says is the pillar and foundation of truth! If you're not involved in a church, you're missing out on one the best parts that Jesus' plus sign adds to your life!

We could go on all day, all week, the rest of our lives listing and discussing all that God adds to us because of Jesus' cross. We don't have time to cover it all, but in 1 Tim 6:17, Paul tells us that "God ... richly provides us with **everything** for our enjoyment." Wow. What a great plus sign! He adds it all!

The question is have you received what Jesus died to add to your life? Today, these individuals who have accepted Jesus have decided to receive God's salvation package complete with all the add-ons. To receive all the blessings from the greatest Giver ever! They are only available through Jesus. Through His cross. By asking for the forgiveness of your sins that Jesus died on that plus sign to add to all. And through that, God adopts you into His family and begins loading you up with all the things we've talked about today and so very much more. Don't you want to get all that's coming to you? All that Jesus suffered and died for to add to your life? Receive Jesus today and all that He adds and if you have, will you please tell someone else this week about the greatest plus sign ever, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.