

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Introduction]

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

If someone ever gives you a horse, and you want to figure out how old it is, there is a simple way to estimate its age. Just look at its teeth.

When a horse is about five years old, it has lost its baby teeth and grown its permanent adult teeth, much like people. But unlike us, a horse’s permanent teeth keep rising out of its gums for most of its adult life, which helps compensate for the constant grinding down of its teeth as it chews.

Because a horse’s teeth are constantly growing, it’s possible to guess the age of a horse based on how far its teeth have risen out of its gumline. For example, horses over the age of 25 tend to have longer more angled teeth than younger horses.

Of course, if someone does give you a horse, it would probably seem ungrateful to immediately check to see if they’ve given you a young horse or an old horse. It’s like checking for a price tag on a Christmas gift to see how much someone spent on you. This is likely the thought behind the old proverb, “Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.”

[Looking for Faults]

That old proverb, which dates at least as far back to the year 400 A.D., remains important for us to keep in mind today. We are constantly tempted to take the gifts that God has given us and focus on the negatives. We take our blessings for granted and find faults in everything.

Just this week, my son was happily playing with a toy Peter Pan pirate ship, and he turned to me and said, “Now I have a pirate ship just like my friend, Lukie, but Lukie’s pirate ship is still bigger and cooler than mine.”

We learn to make these comparisons at a young age, and we continue to make them as we grow into adults. One of the places I see it most is when people talk about their jobs. It seems like no matter how excited a person is to get a new job, within a few weeks, they've already lost the excitement and replaced it with the little annoyances that they weren't expecting

[Ungrateful Receivers]

And this is exactly what Israel did when God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, and they found themselves in the wilderness with no food or water.

God gave Israel the gift of freedom from their slavery, and they sang and rejoiced for a little while, but not for long. Soon they became critical of God's gift, even saying that it would have been better if they had just stayed in Egypt.

God gives us gifts as well. He gives us bodies; he gives us a place on the earth; he gives us our families, our homes, and our jobs. These are all gifts that are meant to bless us, but we so often take those gifts and immediately start to inspect them for defects. And when they aren't to the standard that we would like, we treat God's gifts as if they were burdens. We focus on the bad. Our attention is absorbed in our dissatisfactions and our sufferings.

[The Greatest Gift]

We even try doing this to God's greatest gift, the gift of being connected to Jesus' death on the cross through baptism so that we will also be connected to his resurrection on the last day. Even this great and glorious gift gets set to the side when we focus on the trials that come along with it.

We get so distracted by our temporary suffering. We think, it's great to be saved, but do I really have to get up and go to church all the time now? Do I really have to love my neighbor as myself? Do I really have to love my enemies? Do I really have to praise God in the midst of so much heartache?

[No Flaw Can Mar]

It's a matter of perspective. We're here in the present, and our worries can overwhelm our days, weeks, months, and even our years. It could be chronic pain, the death of a loved one, or an unhealthy workplace. These things can affect every part of our day. They feel big, overwhelming, and sometimes even final.

But in light of the salvation we have in Jesus, our problems which are big to us today, are small when compared to an eternity with our savior.

God's gift of life and salvation doesn't come without its struggles. We might look at that gift and think that it's riddled with defects, even to the point of breaking. But our vision is limited. We can't always see God's plans to take our sufferings and use them for His glory. But that doesn't mean he isn't doing just that. We might lose perspective, but God's gift of grace is always bigger and better than any trial we might face in this life. Even death pales in comparison to the life of the resurrection that awaits us.

[Rejoice in the Gospel]

The apostle Paul shows us how our perspectives ought to be in his letter to the Philippians. Paul has been thrown into prison, and he's not sure if he will come out alive or dead, yet he does not moan or mope about his sufferings. Instead, he is glad, because through his imprisonment, the Gospel of Jesus was spread to the entire imperial guard, and to everyone else who saw his persecution.

Some took advantage of his imprisonment and started preaching the Gospel to usurp his position of leadership in the church. But Paul does not complain about the people who want hurt him out of rivalry. Instead, he rejoices, because whether or not they did it with pure intentions, Christ was still being proclaimed.

[Conclusion: A Change of Perspective]

In comparison to the great gift of salvation we received from Christ, nothing can measure up. No pain, no sorrow, no trial, no persecution can outlast the promise of the resurrection. God gave us His son. Jesus gave us his life. And in your baptism, the Holy Spirit delivered this gift to you.

Through the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, you have received the promise of eternal life in paradise.

It's yours! And even though your resurrection is still yet to come, you have the promise of the Gospel right now. You have an eternal family, the church, that you get to be a part of today! The best part of this gift may be yet to come, but you get

to treasure what it offers you now. Peace and joy, even in the midst of persecution and suffering.

Don't look the gift horse in the mouth. Don't let your focus drift away from the promise of the empty tomb. Don't miss out on the chance to rejoice in every moment of your life! For God has given you the gift of new and eternal life. Amen.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
