

The Glory of Christ (pt 1): Heavenly Hope

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[0 : 00] Now can we turn together in our Bibles to Paul's letter to the Colossians.

And we're going to spend the next few weeks working through Colossians 1. Thinking about some of the wonderful images that we find to help us to see the glory of Jesus there.

So this evening we're going to read and concentrate on the first eight verses. Especially from verse 3, Paul's Thanksgiving section. So Colossians 1 from the beginning.

From God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people.

The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven. And about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

[1 : 21] In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world. Just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant. Who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf. And who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Amen. So this evening we're going to concentrate on verse 5 and the wonderful picture of hope that we have there. Jesus Christ, our heavenly hope.

I guess it's been apparent to us that the notion of hope is something that's important. Not just personally but on the world stage. Colossians 1 and this good news of hope is something that connects with our hearts and our longings.

And we've just been, I'm sure, all sort of catching up with what's been happening at COP26. And people have been sort of swinging between a sense that there is a hope, though it is fragile.

[2 : 30] But perhaps others feeling that there is a sense of hopelessness. People experiencing a new sense of eco-anxiety. People being questioned on the streets of Glasgow.

And no doubt you could replicate it elsewhere. What world are our kids going to enjoy? What world is going to be left behind for our grandkids? There's that wanting of hope but sense of growing hopelessness.

We see it too in the world stage. It's the other thing that's been capturing the news. The migrant crises. You know, we are used to seeing those desperate attempts to cross the water to find a better life in southern Europe.

But now we're seeing people trying to get through Belarus into Poland and beyond. We're seeing it in South America. And we understand that there are those who will risk everything and pay everything for even just the slight chance of the hope of a better future for them and for their children.

But of course, it's not just something in the headlines. It's something deep in our hearts. We all have hopes and dreams, no doubt, for the present and for the future. Those dreams often serve to motivate and energize.

[3 : 48] But sometimes when hopes are dashed, we can find despair growing. Hope is important. And Christianity then presents us with good news.

When Barack Obama wrote his biography, he wrote of the audacity of hope. And that big dream of better race relations. Well, the gospel of Jesus Christ gives us a far more audacious hope.

A mind-blowingly epic hope of glory. It's central to the gospel and crucial to our hope, as we'll see today, is the coming of Jesus and his personal work.

And the eternal hope that is wrapped up in what he came to do. And so perhaps as we think about this theme of hope, and we find ourselves at the school gates or in a coffee shop, or we're talking to colleagues, and perhaps this is a talking point for us.

Hope streams longings for the future. Perhaps opportunities for us to weave the hope of our Creator and Redeemer into those conversations. But let's take a look with Paul to see how hope fits into the gospel message.

[5 : 06] So let's read again verse 5, or verse 4 as well. Because we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love you have for all God's people, the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven, and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.

It's by way of background. Paul is writing to this church in Colossae, and it becomes clear in his thanksgiving, verse 7 and 8, they've heard the message of the gospel of grace through Epaphras, and they have believed.

And so Paul wants to encourage them to keep on in their faith in the Lord Jesus. But he's also very aware, and if you read the letter, and please do read the letter, you find lurking in the shadows there are false teachers.

That seem to be suggesting perhaps that all we have is now, and so Paul will deliberately draw attention to future hope. But certainly these false teachers saying, yes, you need Jesus, but you also need this special knowledge that we and only we can provide.

Yes, you need Jesus, but have you heard of these other ceremonies that you need? And so what Paul does to answer that is to focus on Jesus as supreme, unique, and all we need for salvation.

[6 : 21] And so that kind of underpins the letter. The section that we have just read is Paul's thanksgiving. You notice in verse 3, he's thankful to the Father for the church and for God's work in the lives of his people, and especially the reality that they have believed the gospel, the true message.

And then central to this thanksgiving section is verse 5, and it's this hope that Paul speaks of. This hope which is a heavenly hope.

It's stored up for them in heaven. It's a hope found in the true message of the gospel. So you put those three things together. There's the hope, there's the hope stored up in heaven. It's hope found in the gospel.

We realize that for Paul, their hope is rooted in the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus is the hope of the church. So what does Paul say about the gospel?

How does the gospel connect to hope? Well, first of all, and I suppose fundamentally, to remember that when Paul uses the word gospel, that word gospel means good news.

[7 : 32] And that word was borrowed from language of the day. So if you were in the Roman Empire at the time of Paul's writing, you might hear a message of gospel good news.

If the Caesar had won a great victory in battle, if the Roman Empire had conquered another land, or you might hear gospel being announced because a son had been born to the emperor.

Gospel in the Roman Empire, in other words, was centered on Caesar. And so what the Christians do is really radical and significant because they make good news, not all about Caesar, but all about Jesus.

Good news because Jesus is Lord. There is good news because King Jesus has been born. He has come. There is good news because of the victory of Jesus at the cross and the resurrection. So to say the gospel is good news. It is challenging the culture of the day to consider who really is Lord. And the point is that from the beginning, the church understands where does hope lie?

[8 : 42] Hope lies in Jesus, who he is. It's the Son of God. What he's come to do, bring salvation. So gospel is good news. Gospel is also truth.

Verse 5, they have heard the true message of the gospel. It's important for us to recognize that the gospel is a body of teaching.

The gospel is revelation from God. In other words, it's not human speculation, not something created by Paul and the disciples and the apostles. It's not morality or ethics.

The gospel is not, here's some steps for how to live. It's about God's salvation. And it's revealed by God himself in this word, the gospel.

For Paul, our author here, gospel and truth can be interchangeable. You can see that in the book of Romans, for example. You go to Romans chapter 2, verse 8.

[9 : 44] There are people who are being challenged because they are rejecting God's truth. But then in chapter 10 and verse 16, people are being challenged because they're rejecting God's good news. Truth and good news.

Truth and gospel interchangeable. And I think this matters when it comes to talking about our faith with others. Because it's rooted in truth, this isn't, here's my feelings about God versus your feelings about God.

Our hope and confidence isn't built on our warm feelings. It's built on a body of truth. God has engaged our mind. God has sent revelation.

And so we can have confidence because we have objective truth, not just something subjective. But then it's important to recognize, as Paul tells us in verse 6, the gospel is also about God's grace. See there at the end of verse 6, having said the gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

[10:53] To understand the gospel is to have a firm grip on this reality. That we are not saved by our own merit. We are saved by God's grace.

We are saved because of God's commitment to us in Jesus Christ. We are saved because God has freely chosen to make a free and merciful offer to us, to forgive us and give us eternal life in Christ Jesus.

So the gospel is about God's grace. So good news and hope then come together for Paul because the gospel is rooted in the work of God.

Here's the basis for confidence, not in ourselves, but in what God has done through Jesus. It's the Father's eternal plan that leads to the sending of Jesus.

Our hope is in Jesus, the Son's willing obedience and in the work of the Spirit in opening our eyes and doing that work of conversion in our hearts. Paul speaks of the power of the gospel a little later on.

[12:08] If you have your Bibles, look at verse 21 to 23. As he comes to look at the power of the gospel and the importance of hope within that, he talks about them being alienated from God and previously being enemies, but now reconciled by Christ's physical body through death.

Through faith in Jesus, we will be presented wholly in his sight. But then look at verse 23. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. So we need to hold on to this hope, this certainty presented to us in the gospel. The gospel is confident expectation, not wish fulfillment.

It's rooted in Christ, that greater things are still to come. That what God has begun to do, he will complete. And that explains why, when we come back to verse 5, there is a future focus to the hope that Paul speaks about.

So let's think about that, Jesus and future hope. But perhaps, before we get there, boys and girls, we can switch our brains on. So have a little think how many famous trios you can think of, or things that come in threes.

[13:36] I was having a little think earlier. I could think of the three musketeers, the three little pigs, the oldie locks and the three bears. But I bet you have more. You can think about that.

Well, for Paul, there is a trio that keeps coming again and again. We heard it in 1 Thessalonians, as we began. And we find it here, too. It's the trio of faith and hope and love.

Perhaps when we hear those, we think of 1 Corinthians 13. We think of a wedding service, perhaps. Now, these three remain, faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.

It seems like for Paul, this trio represents the basic description of the true Christian. A true Christian is someone who has faith and hope in God's work in Christ Jesus, and who has love for God and love for the church.

This trio, faith, hope and love, serve as evidence, pointed to the reality of God's work in a person's heart. So let's have a little think about these as they are presented here.

[14:40] Faith, love and hope, because the order is changed. And we'll see why. So what is faith, first of all? Well, we need to recognize that faith itself is a grace from God.

It's a gift. We need to understand that to see, to hear, to believe Jesus is good news, to believe that we have a need of salvation, that we have a sin problem that only Jesus can fix, that's not natural to us.

That's a supernatural work. It's a gift of faith. Paul makes clear that faith, verse 4, is in Christ Jesus. As a family, we've been trying to learn the New City Catechism. A very helpful device. It comes in song, which is even more helpful. And one of the questions is, what is faith? And what is faith in Jesus Christ?

I have to say it in the way that the song goes. And it's receiving and resting on him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel. It's receiving the gift of Jesus Christ, and resting and trusting in that gift, as we hear it in the true message of the gospel.

[15:52] That's faith. It's rooted in the Lord Jesus for salvation. But we can say more than that, too. Faith is about life under the lordship of King Jesus.

United to Jesus by faith, we now live under his rule in glad obedience. Our citizenship has changed. We're in a new kingdom, no longer the kingdom of darkness, and we're in the kingdom of light. And just as in any kingdom, the ruler sets rules to live by, the Bible then becomes our rule of faith for how to live under the lordship of King Jesus.

So faith is both in Jesus and under his rule. Now, what about love? What does Paul say about love here? How do we see this love in action?

Look at verse 4. Paul is thankful because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people. So this love has a particular direction.

[17:06] Now that a person belongs to Jesus, brought into the family of God, there is a new love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the things the gospel does is it creates this new community, this new family, which is utterly unique. Paul points to its uniqueness in chapter 3, verse 11, when he says, here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

So every barrier that would normally be there in a society or a culture, every dividing line of race, of language, of ethnicity and culture are broken down in the gospel or should be broken down in the gospel because we're all one in Jesus Christ.

But what Paul is saying here, the evidence of our love for God is love for his people, love for his church. John, the apostle, wrote something along the same lines in his first letter, chapter 4.

He said to them effectively, we can't say we love the God who is invisible if we don't love our brothers and sisters who are right there in front of us. We can't claim to love the God.

[18:24] We can't see if we don't love those in God's family that we do see. So Paul says to love Jesus is to love his church and he's thankful that that's in evidence in their lives, in that active way, a costly way, serving, encouraging, sacrificing, helping one another.

But I think what's interesting from Paul is that while we're used to probably hearing faith and hope and love, here we have faith and love and hope.

Now, what is hope and why does that come as the third of the trio? Look with me at verse 5. We find the reason why. He says that our faith and our love spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.

So hope is the foundation of the other two, or to use another image, hope is the root and faith and love are the fruit that grows.

And here we discover that this hope that encourages our faith and encourages our love is future-focused. It is stored up for us. We are still awaiting the full realization of it and there's that sense of expectation that comes with hope.

[19:44] I can't speak for every child here, but any given day, if I ask our children how many days till Christmas, they'll know in a heartbeat. Expectation.

Hope. The day's coming. Hope is future-focused so often and so it is in the gospel. And that's something really powerful.

Alexander the Pope had the proverb that said, hope springs eternal in the human breast. But as we look around our world just now and as we see that people kind of despair about the future, we see a loss of hope among so many.

The statistics on addictions bears that out. The rise of anxieties bears that out. The sense of hollowness that people are beginning to feel bears that out.

And it's a reminder to us as the church that we for ourselves, we need to hold on to gospel hope to recognize all we have is not now, so much is still to come.

[20:53] And it gives us good news to present to a world that is desperately in need of a hope that is solid and eternal. When Paul speaks of future hope in other letters, he points in different directions.

So in 1 Thessalonians 5, he emphasizes the reality of future salvation. Jesus has begun the work of salvation.

He has begun building his kingdom, but that work is not completed until the day he returns. And his people are with him forever in the new heavens and the new earth. That's salvation complete. And that's still waiting in the future. 1 Corinthians 15. Hope for the future there is of bodily resurrection. That as Christians, we believe that the moment a believer dies, their soul goes to glory, to be with the Lord.

But it awaits the return of Jesus and resurrection, perfect resurrected bodies. Titus chapter 2. There the anticipation for the future is of the glory of Jesus being fully revealed.

[22 : 05] Now we see through a mirror just dimly. But there's going to be a day when we see perfectly. There's going to be a day when we see Jesus face to face.

When we know and are known fully. And that's a wonderful hope. But all the time, when Paul is writing about present hope, or he's writing about future hope, he's talking to us about Jesus. Jesus and Jesus alone is our hope. I wonder as we read verse 5 and we heard the hope stored up for you in heaven, I wonder if it made any of us think of Jesus teaching where he said, don't store up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasure in heaven for where your treasure is there your heart will be also. You get that sense that Paul is echoing that. And for Paul, what's the treasure in heaven? The treasure in heaven is Jesus. Nothing less than Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

And so Paul is thankful that this future hope is motivating their faith and their love. How does heavenly hope help?

[23 : 21] Help us today, help us tomorrow. Dick Lucas, who was a Bible teacher down in London, he said that it leads to a proper balance between experience and expectancy.

So that sense of having faith in Jesus now, getting to know Jesus now, is preparation for eternity with him. So there's experience now, but there's expectancy that grows as we come to see how good he is.

Loving our fellow Christians now, committing to one another in a local church, provides for us an imperfect, and it is an imperfect mirror of life in the new heavens and the new earth.

We'll be with our brothers and sisters for all eternity. See? And remember that good news, that heaven, to use Jonathan Edwards' wonderful phrase, heaven is a world of love.

One of the challenges I guess we have as brothers and sisters in Christ is our own sin and the sin of others, so we can find that we let one another down, we speak and act in ways that are unhelpful and unkind, but then that will be a thing of the past.

[24 : 35] Then there'll be nobody we are in a rush to avoid or to pass by, then we will be so glad to share fellowship with one another and with our Lord Jesus.

And so what we experience now creates that sense of expectation for the future. On Friday, we were round at Friends having a meal together, and the high point of the meal was the dessert. It was a gingerbread trifle with a blackberry sauce, some creme anglaise, some double creams and blackberries on the top. Right? It was as good as it said.

Getting the taste of the sauce before the main course was even on the table, what did that do as we were getting things ready?

It created a sense of anticipation of this wonderful flavor, this wonderful dessert that was still to come. And what the Bible is wanting us to understand that all that we know of the goodness of God, the love of God, the mercy and the kindness of God, the wonder of the Lord Jesus is just a taste.

[25 : 55] It's just a drop in the ocean of what is coming to us for all eternity. And so we need that sense of future hope to give us that help.

Probably when life gets difficult, when life is full of struggles to remember and to hold on. That's not all that we discover about hope from Paul here.

We also see Jesus brings global hope. This is in verse 6. He talks about the true message of the gospel that's come to you in the same way the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

Now this is something that we really need to focus on as Christians and something that runs counter to culture. it's the question what is the greatest hope that anyone could be offered today? What is the one thing that regardless of the age of a person, the culture of a person, the place of the globe where they find themselves with the greatest hope that they could be offered?

[27 : 15] Biblically, the answer we give is that the great hope is that someone can wake up a sinner far from God dead in their sins heading for a lost eternity but they can go to bed a child of God they can go to bed with eternal hope knowing sins are forgiven made alive in Christ through hearing and believing the gospel.

That's the greatest hope as a church that's all we've got in that sense but it's all we need. And that hope we can offer not because of our wonderful personalities that will draw people to faith in Jesus because we have it not because of our ability to argue or convince someone into the kingdom the hope rests in the gospel and the gospel being powerful.

The gospel is a message and it's a message that's living and powerful or to use Paul's phrase it's a gospel that bears fruit and grows bearing fruit and growing throughout the world.

Again I think here we have from Paul another echo of Jesus the parable of the sower and the seeds and the seed that fell on the good soil and that seed grew and produced a crop that seed the good news of Jesus that good news of salvation by grace alone produces a crop when the church expands when mission happens when people submit to Jesus as Lord and Paul gives thanks because he sees that this future hope of eternity with Jesus that's so central to the gospel is being believed not just in Colossae but all around the world and it's this same hope that should drive us in mission too when we really believe that the gospel is powerful that the gospel is the greatest need for men and women and boys and girls today we begin to understand just how much mission matters

I think it's as we understood to apply this to our local context I think it's as we grasp this that we will really support our mission partners both prayerfully and financially as we think about becoming a mother church to Gala Shields I think it's as we understand that it's the gospel that people in Gala Shields need that we'll commit to Craig and Amy and the team that will be formed there I think as we believe in the power of the gospel it's what will cause us to pray for local mission for international mission it will cause us to give and it will lead some of us to go perhaps just to go to the other side of the office to begin a conversation to establish a relationship with the hope of sharing Jesus but perhaps it will lead us to go to the other side of the world to give our lives for the mission of Jesus to see his kingdom come and his will being done in our life and in the lives of others as we understand that people need the hope of the gospel the world needs the hope of the gospel for now and eternity so as Paul begins his letter to the Colossians he begins by reminding them and by reminding us of how important hope is

[31 : 18] Jesus and Jesus as our great hope perhaps you saw in the news this week the church in Glasgow they put up a sign outside its church building that basically said I think it was that the world's greatest need is for churches to preach Christ crucified not claim it change perhaps provocative perhaps we might question the wisdom and say well perhaps we could have shown solidarity with the emphasis on stewardship and such things but we need to understand that the point holds what the world needs far more than any significant climate change is to hear the good news of the Lord Jesus and to believe if the world is at one minute to midnight as Boris Johnson borrowed that phrase we need to recognize the eternal urgency of people hearing the gospel message for the world to hear the truth of eternal hope that's found in the

Lord Jesus that's why the world still needs the church because the church has the gospel it's why our friends and our neighbors they need our faith and our love and our hope that it might point them to Jesus to move a little bit forward to Colossians chapter 2 and verse 13 here is our hope here is the hope of the gospel when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh God made you alive with Christ he forgave us all our sins having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us he has taken it away nailing it to the cross dead in our sins that God made us alive with Christ by forgiving our sins that's that's our great hope it's our great need and it's the great need of our world let's pray in that light our father in heaven we are so thankful and humbled this evening as we consider the hope that is held out to us in the gospel that hope that you have sent your son the Lord

Jesus to become one of us to die in our place the just for the unjust to bring us to God we thank you that by faith in Jesus we can know that our sins are forgiven that we are no longer alienated from you no longer strangers or enemies but brought into your family given the hope of eternity Lord we thank you that you have given to us in Jesus a hope that is solid and secure that is stored up for us in heaven thank you for the promise that Jesus who is in heaven now as Lord of the church caring for the church praying for the church that same Jesus will return and he will make all things new and

he will take his people to live with him forever in the new heavens and the new earth and perfect resurrected bodies where sin and death are no more

Lord to a world that is looking and longing for hope as we understand how crucial hope is to life and to motivation and to perseverance and may you give us both wisdom and boldness and love and urgency to share the good news of the Lord Jesus with others we pray that we would be a people of faith and of love that would spring from that great hope and all to your praise and glory and in the name of your son Jesus we pray amen now we'll close our time this evening singing the hymn Isaac what's hymn when I survey the wondrous cross and let's stand to sing together werollío together