

The Hope of Glory

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[0 : 00] Well, our text today comes from Colossians 1.27. It's this, Christ in you, the hope of glory. That's the sermon.

I have a few more things to say. This is the fourth week in our series on hope. And the problem for us, of course, is not that COVID has crushed so many hopes.

The problem is that we are hopelessly hopeful. If you could just surgically remove somehow the capacity to hope, the problem would all disappear, wouldn't it?

It's a very strange part of us as humans. Despite our hopes being constantly disappointed, despite our hopes lying to us, we just keep on hoping and dreaming.

We are incurable and inconsolable hoppers. We keep looking for the thing that is going to bring us that good, that blessedness that we so desire, despite the fact that every hope we have in this world lets us down.

[1 : 07] Now, if you're under 30, you're just not going to believe me when I tell you this. But everything you put your hope in, in this world, will let you down. It will disappoint you. In fact, we have a whole book in the Bible which is about this.

It's called Ecclesiastes, which we're going to do after Christmas. And it's written by the richest, most famous, most successful, most married, most clever person in the world at the time, King Solomon. And he sets out to understand, why do I keep putting my hopes in things that let me down? And when they fail, he looks at the thing and he says, it's lied to me again.

He says, the things I put my hope in are just weightless, vanity, emptiness, vapour, frustration. So he goes on a hunt and he starts with pleasure, which is pretty close to the highest hope in Vancouver.

And he has every possible pleasure at his fingertips. And so he indulges himself in them. He gives himself over to pleasure. And at the end of it, his conclusion is, it's of no use.

[2 : 15] It's weightless. It's emptiness. And then he gives himself to achievement, another very Vancouver idol. He builds houses and vineyards and gardens and parks and pools.

He gives himself to sex with over a thousand women. Comes to the end and he says, it's emptiness. It's ultimately unsatisfying. And then he goes for wealth and possessions.

He accumulates more than any other individual in the world. He would be what we call a billionaire. He has the finest art collection, the most brilliant musicians of the day.

He becomes a connoisseur of the finest wines and the finest foods. He has the adulation of fame that make him terribly popular. And he says, it's just vanity.

It's like the wind. I recently read that Lady Gaga feels so empty and alone, she struggles to go on. Jim Carrey, Harrison Ford, Michael Phelps, the Olympic swimmer who won many gold medals.

[3 : 17] They all say that fame and money in this world, it just hasn't fulfilled our hopes. And the thing is, we react to the disappointment of our hopes in very different ways.

Some of us blame the thing itself. We say, if only I'd married a different woman or chosen a different career or gone to a different place on holiday, then I'd get that thing that I'm after.

Most of the bored rich people in the world have discontentment like this and they hop from one hope to the next, recycling through divorces and hobbies, desperately hoping for the real thing.

Some of us blame ourselves. So we try harder and we work harder and we run faster with increasing anxiety and insecurity. And the hope, it keeps seeming out of reach for us.

Some of us become cynical and we say, well, hope is just something for naive young people. And these people who are cynical tend to feel a bit superior to others.

[4 : 21] And what they do is they try hard to say, I'm not going to expect or hope too much out of life. And they work desperately hard to stifle the desire for what is transcendent in them.

Solomon tells us why we are so hopelessly hopeful. We will get to Colossians in just a minute. He says this, God has put eternity into the human heart so that we cannot find out what God has done from beginning to the end.

We are hopeless hoppers because God has put eternity and the desire for eternity into our hearts. And nothing but the eternal God can satisfy our desires and hopes.

See, we expect meaning and substance and weightiness out of life. That's the way God has made us. That sense that if only I could find someone or something who will never leave me, who will love me utterly, who will never let me go or go away, who will bring the blessedness I so crave.

That desire, it's from God. And God has made us for this mutual love and to dwell with him forever. And that's why every other hope disappoints.

[5 : 40] And this is not something that we could figure out on our own. God has hidden it as a mystery. And we would have to wait.

We had to wait until the coming of the Son of God into the world at that first Christmas to reveal to us the true weightiness and the true blessedness of what he intends for us.

And when Christ comes, we see the love of God and the gift of God exactly matching our deepest desires and hopes. It's the hope of glory.

And that brings us to Colossians 1.27, where the apostle says, at the center of the word of God is the mystery. This mystery, 1.27, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

That's it. So I've got two points. And the first one is Christ in you. Christ in you, the apostle says, who is this Christ in us?

[6 : 55] Well, we're in Colossians 1. Where the apostle has given us the highest, most majestic view of the complete supremacy of the Son of God. Remember, Jesus is the reason for creation.

He holds all things together, as Ray was telling us. All the fullness of God dwells bodily in Jesus. He's the perfect reflection of the grace and glory of God.

And that Son of God came down from heaven and entered our humanity in humility, receiving humiliation. To become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, so that we might enter his glory and participate in the life of God.

You remember, he took our sins to himself to reconcile us to God. And he rose from the dead, defeating death. And he now sits at the right hand of God on high.

And he will come one day to judge the living and the dead. It's this Jesus. This Jesus, the gospel reveals, who is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

[8 : 04] And for everyone who worships him and trusts him and have turned from other gods to him, here it is, Christ in you. I mean, he's not just Christ with you to strengthen you.

He's not just Christ beside you to guide you and to encourage you. He's not just Christ above you or below you to rule and protect you. He is in you by his Holy Spirit, sharing his life with you, giving you now the hope of glory.

There is no other religion that makes this promise. The idea of the founder living in us is unique to Christianity. Muhammad does not dwell in his followers.

Buddha does not live in his followers. Their followers look to their leaders for influence and teaching. There's nothing like the closeness that Jesus Christ has with his followers.

Christ in you. And if we grow to understand that and believe that and grasp at it, it will wean us from all the tragically inadequate hopes we have.

[9 : 10] And we'll come to see that Christ alone can satisfy our needs for blessedness, which we long for. And why does he do this? Why does Christ do this? Why does he enter into our lives?

And the answer is very simply. It's because of his love. He knows what we were made for. He was the one who made us. And this is the love we so desire.

It's a closeness and a companionship that's completely reliable and pure. It's completely accepting and gracious. And it's full of life and eternal.

And, you know, this is exactly what Jesus said to his disciples when he was with them. In the Gospel of John, on the night before Jesus was crucified, during the Last Supper, he teaches his disciples about his death, about his resurrection, and what's going to happen when he goes back to glory and he sends the Holy Spirit upon them.

In John 14, verse 20, I just want to read this verse to you. He says, Did you hear that?

[10:31] You are in me, you are in me, and I am in the Father. And then two verses later, he lays bare the fact that this is based on love. Verse 23, he says, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and the Father will love him.

And we will come to him and make our home with him. Permanent, ongoing dwelling. Never to leave.

Because in the Old Testament, God visited his people for periods of time. In the fire, in the cloud, or in the temple. But since Christ has come and died in our place, since we are born anew and his life is in us, Christ has taken up permanent dwelling place in us.

And even death cannot take that away from us. And Jesus goes on and then goes out and he prays. And in chapter 17 of John's Gospel, we have the privilege of getting the longest, of listening to the longest prayer Jesus has recorded as praying.

It's just right before he's arrested in chapter 18. He's praying for his disciples and for how he and the Father are going to dwell in us so that we'll know his love.

[11:45] And in chapter 17, verse 23, Jesus says this. He prays that I, Jesus Christ, in them, all my disciples, and you, Heavenly Father, in me.

Why? So that they may be perfectly one. So that the world may know that you have sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

That's the purpose of his dwelling. Father, he says, I desire that they also, all my disciples whom you've given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory that you've given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Isn't that astonishing? This is no ordinary love. It's not a love that runs cold or hot depending on whether you're naughty or nice.

It's a love that arises spontaneously in the heart of God. There's nothing we can do to turn it away. He loves us with our weaknesses and our wobbling and our warts.

[12:56] He loves us before the world was made. And it's a love that gives its life for us so that we might be saved. It is an eternally weighty love.

It's the one that we crave. And he wants us to know that love and to enjoy his love and to bind us to himself as the source of love. And so he comes to dwell in us so that after we are raised from the dead, we will dwell with him forever.

This is the ABC of the Christian life. It's not some spooky experience reserved for super Christians. It's a critical truth that makes the Christian life livable.

Because by ourselves, we just do not have what it takes to live the Christian life. Nothing can replace the person and power and love of Jesus in you, living and giving and forgiving.

As the apostle says in another letter, is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me. So that's the first point, Christ in you.

[14:03] Second point, not surprisingly, the hope of glory. Now, the basic idea of glory is weightiness, heaviness, worthiness in a positive and good way.

So it was used to people in the olden times of someone who was significant, an important person with perhaps substantial wealth and reputation and honour. And when it's used of God, it's not just the inner perfection of who he is in himself, his holiness and his power and his majesty and his eternity.

But it is that inner perfection as it is on display and shines out to others. So the weight of God's glory is full of significance, meaning and life.

And it is the only thing that's weighty enough to satisfy our hopes and desires. And of course, you know, the problem is that ever since the creation of the world, we have exchanged the glory of God. We've run away from it. And we've put our hopes and we've exchanged his glory for other things, lesser things. Things that don't have his weight and can't sustain our hopes.

[15:24] We've given ourselves to the same things that Solomon gave himself to, pleasure and achievement and success and taste and family. And we found they've all come short. They've all lied to us in some way, shape or form because they lack the weight to sustain our desires.

I think that's why we find the glory of God so hard to imagine or understand or even talk about.

Because it's quite threatening to be confronted with one who is infinitely more significant, infinitely more holy.

Than anything we could possibly have dreamt of. You know, in the Old Testament, the glory of God is so heavy that it would crush us if he appeared.

So when God came down on the mountain at Sinai, there were clouds and fire and thick smoke and the mountain itself shook because of the sheer significance and weightiness of God.

And whenever the glory of God came down in the Old Testament, God made sure there was sacrifice and atonement so that his people would not be consumed. But when Christ came, all the fullness of glory, all the fullness of God was in the person of Jesus Christ.

[16:41] The glory of God we can now see in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the outshining of God's glory. And the hour of Jesus' greatest glory was his death on the cross.

And that demonstrates to us that the glory of God is not just massive crushing cosmic power. It's not just consuming weightiness.

It's love and goodness. It's self-giving. It's working of salvation by God and by self-sacrifice. In fact, he gave himself so that he was crushed for our transgressions, so that we could share his glory without being crushed.

The Father has received Jesus Christ back into glory. And now Christ dwells in our hearts by faith here. And when he comes again, he will bring his glory with him, his full glory.

And the staggering thing about our hope of glory is that we will be more than just spectators. It's not just that we will see his glory, but that we will share his glory.

[18:02] Did you notice when we read through Colossians, in chapter 3, verse 4, the apostle says, that when Christ who is your life appears, you also will appear with him in glory.

So that when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead, it's not just to destroy evil and death and sin and sickness and wipe away every tear. Nor is it just to make a new heavens and a new earth in which glory dwells.

But it's so that we too will be glorified with him, with his glory, sharing his glory, even though we've done nothing to deserve it. Now the apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians in this way.

In 2 Thessalonians 1.10 he says, when he comes on that day, that is Jesus Christ, to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

The weakest Christian believer will be filled with glory. We will be flooded. We will be infused and infiltrated and saturated and soaked and permeated and penetrated by the very glory of God.

[19:22] And you say, how can that possibly be true? And the answer is the resurrection. Because these mortal, decaying bodies that are prone to disease and death in this world will be raised and transformed.

They will be changed so that they will be able to bear the weight of God's glory. This is the hope of the glory of God. There is nothing beyond this.

This is the answer to all our hopes. Christ in us, the hope of glory. And this hope of glory will never disappoint us. It will never put us to shame.

And as we walk with Christ and fellowship with him and turn our eyes on him, we are being transformed into his likeness from one degree of glory into another.

And the way Jesus Christ transforms us is he helps us set our hopes in order. Putting what our first hope should be first and everything else after that.

[20:30] Because of course, there's nothing wrong with a desire for pleasure or achievement or success or family. So long as they are second order hopes.

If we set our hopes on anything else in first place, our hopes will be out of order and it will lead to discouragement, disappointment and despair. But everyone who hopes in Christ purifies himself as he is pure and comes to know that there is nothing worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Amen.