

THE HOPE OF GLORY

Ephesians 1:15-23

INTRO: Since March 1st we've been looking at the idea of holiness in our Lenten study that has now run two Sundays overtime. I know you know it, but let me remind you that holiness is something we need to be growing into all the time. We didn't just start it on March 1 and it doesn't end with April 26. Holiness is a lifelong process. You see, the result of holiness is knowing we are *walking* with Christ in this life and *being* with Christ in the life to come. That is the hope of Glory because it is the promise of glory. Luke Keefer's concluding words in his book, EVERYTHING NECESSARY, from which I drew inspiration and ideas for this series by the same name, are this:

"In a cemetery in London's East End, one will find the graves of William and Catherine Booth, founders of the Salvation Army which did much to redeem this slum community of the city. Their gravestones record the usual information of their birthdates. They differ, however, in recording the dates of their deaths. Instead of the ordinary "died on _____," their headstones read, "promoted to glory on _____." In the style of the Salvationists, one's death was viewed as the last promotion to the highest rank possible in the army of the Lord.

Every analogy must end somewhere. The process of human life has served us well as an extended analogy throughout the study of the holy life. It began with the comparison of conversion to the miracle of human birth. We have viewed various stages and developments of life, both physical and spiritual, in pursuit of maturity. But now we come to a halt. Natural life comes to an end in death; spiritual life does not. Death for the Christian is real, but transitional. It finds not the cessation of life, but the fulfillment of it in the eternal kingdom. The holy life has no end; it simply undergoes a transition from this life to eternal life. The Christian life concludes not with a death certificate but with a promotion to glory. Hallelujah!"

This is the hope of glory and this is the plan for those who are faithful in Christ. This the happy ending for Christ Followers. As we conclude this series, let's talk about what it takes to get to that happy ending. First, let me read a bit of Paul's opening words to the Church in Ephesus. (Read Ephesians 1:15-23)

Now, some comments on the text. First . . .

We need to love Christ AND love all God's people

- Paul says, *For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people*, Ephesians 1:15. Two things that characterize the people of God are faithfulness to Christ and love for humanity. Really you cannot truly love Jesus and not love his creation – which of course, includes humanity. Some do struggle with it though..
- Jesus dealt with this as he confronted the Pharisees. They had a loyalty to God which made them look down their noses in contempt at those they deemed less faithful than themselves. This is how they looked at Jesus and yet they were the ones who were failing.
- A Christ Follower loves Christ and loves humanity. One commentator writes *"However orthodox a Church is, however pure its theology, and however noble its worship and its liturgy, it is not a true Church in the real sense of the term unless it is characterized by love for its fellow men."* He then quotes Jonathan Swift who wrote, satirically, *"We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."*
- If you say you love Jesus, you must then, necessarily love your fellow humanity. Make that a priority ABC!
- That means . . .

You need to know for yourself

- Paul says, *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you*, Ephesians 1:18a. You've heard me say how I accepted Christ as my Savior at age eleven but I really came to know him when I was twenty one. My entire life up to that point, and certainly the ten years from my conversion until my crisis of faith was lived on the coattails of my parents and other godly people I knew. In my time of crisis I realized as clear as day that I needed to know him for myself. One person mistakenly said *"As I take my shoes from the shoemaker, and my coat from the tailor, so I take my religion from the priest."* There are many things you can rely on someone else's expertise to do, but they can't have your faith for you. Thank God for teachers and preachers who can share Jesus with you, but to truly know Jesus, you have to know him yourself. Christianity is nothing unless it is a personal discovery.

- Paul goes on with his prayer and prays for a fuller revelation and a fuller knowledge of God. That is because for the Christ Follower growth in knowledge and grace is essential. As I said in my opening, holiness is a lifelong process. For a lifelong and fulfilling marriage, it takes work and it takes study and understanding of your mate. So it is with following Jesus. William Barclay says “*The Christian life could be described as getting to know God better every day. A friendship which does not grow closer with the years tends to vanish with the years. And it is so with us and God.*”
- So, it goes without saying, but . . .

We need hope

- Looking a verse 18 again, Paul prays for a new realization of Christian hope. *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you*, Ephesians 1:18a. Society almost thrives on despair. Headlines scream negativity. Friday’s headline in the TG was “ALMOST ONE MILLION OHIOANS HAVE LOST JOBS IN OUTBREAK”. I wanted to call them and tell them it was truly fake news. Yes, one million workers have been idled by this virus – but only a fraction of that number truly lost their jobs because of this virus. But the TG knows if it bleeds, it leads. A lot of people look for the gray lining. Pessimism often rules but for Christ followers there is hope and we need to spread it. The Good News is that the world is not spinning into oblivion, it heading to glory. Remember this Church, in a world which looks chaotic, it is for us to remember that God is still in control. That is our hope!
- And then, realize . . .

We need power

- Paul moves on with . . . *and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*, Ephesians 1:19-20. He prays for a new realization of the power of God. For Paul the proof of that power was the resurrection. It proved that God's purpose cannot be stopped by anything, least of all humanity. Paul finishes by speaking of the conquest of Christ with *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*. Ephesians 1:22-23 In essence Paul's prayer is that men should realize the greatness of the Savior God has given to them. And that we have that power too. We are not powerless! We have infinite power in Christ. Let’s not shrink away from our calling. In fact there is also power in numbers. That’s why we need to know . . .

We need each other

- Listen to verses 22-23 again, *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*. Ephesians 1:22-23. He calls us what we are the body of Christ.
- This world is a disunity. Here in our own country, we are divided right down the middle politically and compromise is seen as weak minded and as betrayal. Barclay writes, *There is disunity between Jew and Gentile, between Greek and barbarian; there is disunity between different men within the same nation; there is disunity within every man, for in every man the good strives with the evil; there is disunity between man and the beasts; and, above all, there is disunity between man and God. It was Paul's thesis that Jesus died to bring all the discordant elements in this universe into one, to wipe out the separations, to reconcile man to man and to reconcile man to God. Jesus Christ was above all things God's instrument of reconciliation*. This is why the Church, I’m talking about us, we ARE the Church, must not be sucked in by the disunity of the world. We need each other and we must stand together and not allow the things and thinking of this world to divide us.
- That’s why . . .

We need the hope of glory

- And we need to take it to the world.
- Let me use a timely analogy. What if tomorrow, a lab, makes THE discovery of THE foolproof preventive vaccine for COVID-19? And not only that, they find THE medication that cures COVID-19 in those who are suffering from it? That vaccine and that medication will need to be distributed. Fast! It needs to be produced and taken around the world. NOW! Labs need to know the combinations to make it. Production

facilities must retool and produce it. Doctors and nurses and pharmacists must know about it and be trained to administer. The cure and the preventer is there is there but one person cannot take it out to all the world; many are needed.

Conclusion: That is what we are ABC. We have the Good News of the cure of the worst disease ever – SIN. We have the answer for death, it is the hope of glory. The world desperately needs that hope. F. B. Meyer ends his commentary on this text with “*Ask him to fill all of you with all of him.*” Do that. And then in the abundance you are filled to the brim with, take that hope of glory to the world. Amen.