



December 27, 2015
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*Joy for Every Longing Heart:
What Hope Do We Have?*
Colossians 1:21-23

This past weekend Jennifer and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary. We went down to a B&B in Olympia [the Inn at Mallard Cove – highly rated on Trip Advisor] on Friday and Saturday nights to take a little time out. It wasn't the most convenient time to get away with all the Christmas events happening. But we felt it was important to take a few moments away to celebrate and acknowledge a significant milestone. We each wanted to be with our best friend!

I share this, husbands and wives, to draw your attention a special date we want you to save on your calendar: Friday night and Saturday February 12-13, Valentine's Weekend. We are having a marriage retreat here at Chapel Hill. David and Kelsey Burke will be our guest speakers. David is pastor of Fremont Presbyterian Church in Sacramento and part of our EPC Presbytery. Kelsey was the speaker at this year's women's conference, and they are mentors of Larry & Megan Hackman. So get that down on your calendar. This will be a fun time of enrichment and growth for your marriage.

Today I am wrapping up our series from Colossians 1:15-23 as we have looked at one of the most magisterial passages in the New Testament about the Person of Christ. Mark, Ellis, Larry and Megan have done a superb job unpacking Paul's grand and lofty description of the supremacy of Christ. Let me read it to you one last time, and include verses 21-23 which I am going to focus on today.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from

accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”

Paul tells us that Christ is the image of the invisible God; by him all things were created and all things in the universe are held together. He is the head of the body, the church, and in all things Christ is supreme. All of the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ, and through the cross Christ reconciled all things to himself through his shed blood.

This morning we are asking the question: What Hope Do We Have? Given what we have just read and studied about the magisterial nature of Christ, what hope do we have in this world as flawed, sinful, depraved creatures of a perfect, all-powerful God? The short answer is that apart from Christ we have no hope, but in Christ we have hope for the present and hope for the future.

Let me re-read verse 21 in The Message translation:

“You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got.

The Colossians were a good “case study” before Paul wrote his letter. They were enemies of God, rebellious thinkers! They all had their “backs turned to God.” That’s such a powerful image. Have you ever tried to talk to someone whose back is turned to you? Have you ever been treated by someone who pretends you don’t even exist! What a feeling of rejection!

In some religions if you convert from that religion, the entire family turns their back on you. They may conduct a funeral for you and treat you as though you were dead; they may even try to harm you because they view you as an infidel.

From God’s perspective, that’s how we all were before we accepted Christ! We were dead in our trespasses and sins, and we treated God as if he were dead... non-existent. We had absolutely no interest in a relationship. We can see this vividly in our culture, turning our backs on anything having to do with God.

Think back for a moment what your life was like before you knew Christ—even those of you who were raised in the church—before you made Jesus Lord of your life.

I know there are a lot of you who can clearly remember what you were like before you accepted Christ, and even in your early years as a follower of Jesus. I remember what I was like! I was a happy pagan before I knew Christ; I was happy and carefree because I did whatever I wanted! If I’m honest with myself, I will

admit that I was self-centered. I had no relationship with the God who loves me and cared enough to die for me.

I would have fit right in to this Colossian Church! And I dare say I bet many of you would have too! The Colossians were a young church filled with “baby” believers. Paul had to remind them that not too long before they were enemies of God because their thoughts and deeds were evil. They were rebellious toward the ways of God, and they were being easily duped by people teaching false doctrine about Christ.

After reminding the Colossians how they were before they knew Christ and how God reconciled them to himself through Christ’s death on the cross, Paul encouraged them to “continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, not moving away from “the hope of the gospel.”

So what is our hope in the gospel? What is our present and future hope in Christ?

We live in a world today which is without a lot of hope. And what hope many people have is in stuff that doesn’t last very long! But in Christ we have hope! I love how Paul describes our present hope for those who are in Christ:

“For I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and the life I live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for me.” Gal 2:20 (RSV)

Here’s your present hope: God reached out to you through Christ and reconciled you to himself through Christ’s death on the cross. If you believe that, you are a new creation! You are gloriously dead to yourself; you have been crucified with Christ! And now you are alive to God in Christ Jesus who dwells in you through the Holy Spirit! Hallelujah!

This is your present hope. Your present hope is not in who will be our next president... thank goodness! It’s not in who will be the next champion of *The Voice*, or how many things you can accumulate on this earth that makes you feel secure or good about yourself.

Your hope as a follower of Jesus is not the same hope that people in the world often have. Our hope is in Christ, and we died with Christ... we have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. I live this life by faith in the Son of God who loves and delivered himself up for me! Christ is my hope. This affects everything in my life—what I believe, what I value, and how I act!

Later on in Colossians 3:10 Paul says:

“You have begun to live the new life, in which you are being made new and are becoming like the One who made you. This new life brings you the true knowledge of God.” Col 3:10 (NCV)

I love this verse because it captures the reality that we are being made new—we are becoming like the One who made us. God isn’t finished with us yet; we are all works in progress... none of us has it all together.

This is why next week’s Renewal of Baptismal Vows is important and very exciting. Because as new creatures in Christ, we are continually being renewed as we learn more and more about Christ and as we continually surrender our lives to him!

Renewal of Baptismal Vows is a great way to start the New Year! If you’ve never been baptized it’s a time to commit your life to Christ as a visual symbol of being part of the body of Christ. If you have been baptized your renewal of baptismal vows is not a New Year’s Resolution—it’s a New Year’s Declaration! You are declaring to yourself and to the world – both visible and invisible, to the spiritual rulers and authorities of this world:

I have been crucified in Christ. The old man is dead and buried; the new man is alive in Christ by faith.

My baptism symbolized the death of the old man, and the resurrection of the new man coming out of the waters of baptism! I am a new creature in Christ! That’s your present hope! Your hope is in Christ who is the light of the world and the darkness shall not overcome it!

In Southern California, the land of a zillion bumper stickers, many Christians have “NOTW” on their cars—“not of this world”, Jesus’ words to Pilate in John’s gospel explaining his kingdom. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” And as Christians our present hope is not in this world; our hope is in Christ, who raised us from the dead!!

So we not only have hope in the present but we also have hope in the future – our destiny in Christ! Paul says in Colossians 3:1-4:

“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.”

Your future hope is with Christ in heaven. Therefore, Paul says “set both your hearts (your affections) and your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Focus the small amount of time you have on this earth on kingdom matters. God’s kingdom is your ultimate destination. We’re all in preparation mode. Life here on

earth now is a dress rehearsal for our ultimate life with Christ for eternity. Therefore, devote yourselves while you are here on earth to God's priorities, because in just a short amount of time you are going to share in Christ's glory for all eternity.

In January and February I'll be preparing for a short-term mission trip to Cambodia in March. Our mission partners have requested more teaching on marriage. So I'm getting ready to do some of that.

This really excites me because before I came to Chapel Hill God was giving me a desire to serve the third-world church in some capacity. Most of the explosive growth of the church is happening in Asia, Latin America and Africa and they have relatively limited training and resources to deal with the burgeoning numbers of people who are becoming Christians.

I had been asking the Lord, "Lord is there something you would like me to do to help the Church in the 2/3 world grow in their walk with you? And then God called me to Chapel Hill and now He is opening a door to serve the church overseas. I feel as though in a small way God is preparing me and others in His Church for our future hope in Christ.

At the Christmas concert this year the Holy Spirit drew my attention to the Second Advent of Christ, which is Christ's return as King of a new heavens and earth. I was captured by the choir's rendition of *The Invitation*. Some of the words were:

And requiems will surrender and requiems will surrender and requiems will surrender to alleluias! Heaven will draw near and Christ will wipe each tear and sing a canticle of hope.

In this present world there are way too many requiems—way too much death and senseless destruction. But there is a time when there will not be any more requiems... no more funeral dirges, only "alleluia"—salvation! Heaven will draw near, and Christ will wipe away each tear and sing a canticle of hope.

Many wonder why it is taking God so long to return. We want heaven to draw near and for Christ to wipe away each tear! But that canticle of hope is for those who have placed their trust in Christ. And not everyone has been given the opportunity to do that.

Jesus is not slow to return as some understand slowness. He is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Pet 3:9

So have you placed your hope in Christ? Maybe there are one or two of you who have never surrendered your lives and invited Jesus to come in to be Lord. If that's you, let Jesus become your present and future hope today!

For the rest of you, you have placed your hope in Christ. He is your present hope and your future hope. So how are you preparing yourself and others for his return? Are there some areas of your life that you need to rededicate to Christ, or some areas that you need to die to yourself?

Are you serving others in some way and helping them get ready for Christ's return? What would that be?