

THE HOPE OF GLORY
Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church
January 26-27, 2019

Scripture: Colossians 1

Text: Colossians 1:27

This is my last sermon as the Senior Pastor of Autumn Ridge. I knew immediately the text I wanted to leave with you. It is taken from Paul's letter to the Colossians. Here it is: **"Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)**

These are seven superb words. Let's remember that seven is the number of perfection. This is a perfect statement of the gospel.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached on this text in 1883 and said this about it: "The essence of it is Christ. The sweetness of it is Christ in you. And the outlook of it is the hope of glory. The words read like a whole body of divinity condensed into a line."

During January we have been looking at the grand theme of hope. We conclude with this majestic subject of **THE HOPE OF GLORY.**

In recent days people have said some extravagantly gracious things to me. Frankly, if I had known you were going to be so wonderfully kind I would have retired years ago.

However, all this focus on me and Gretchen seems to be missing an important ingredient. And that's you, the congregation. After all, a pastor is ineffective without a church. A preacher is lost without an audience. So it seems to me that any celebration on this day should be directed at you.

After all, some of you have suffered through 30 years of my sermons. You have endured hundreds of Spurgeon quotes. There was a recent article in the *Post-Bulletin* where Pastor Woody said I quoted Spurgeon 3,406 times. But that's probably an undercount.

If all the people who have heard me preach were laid end to end, they would be a lot more comfortable. The truth is you deserve the credit.

That's why I want you to hear these words of scripture ringing in your soul:

"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

By God's grace I may have blessed you down through the years, but far more you have blessed me. Any pastor is only as good as his congregation. And you have helped to make me the minister I am. You have made faith real as I have seen Christ in you.

You have given me hope for glory, as I have witnessed the reality of Jesus worked out in your life, in good times and bad.

You have not only done this for me, you have done it for my children. It can be a challenge growing up in a pastor's home. But they saw Christ in you. You have given Nicky, Emily, and Hannah a deep love for the church of Christ. I did not think they would be here this weekend but they surprised me on Saturday afternoon by showing up at the front door. They are followers of Jesus because they saw the best of Christianity in you. The gospel came alive in your example.

And what you have done for me you have done for so many others. This week I received an email from a friend in Singapore who visited our church last year. He experienced the love of Christ through the Autumn Ridgers he met. His story is repeated every week.

So thank you for being the means that God used to strengthen my faith, improve my skills, and deepen my love for Jesus.

There are two great themes about church life that Paul draws our attention to in this first chapter of Colossians. The first is **the extraordinary privileges of pastoring**. There are many joys in being a minister of the gospel. Paul mentions four that resonate strongly with me.

He begins with **thankfulness**. Paul speaks for me when he says, **"We always thank God,... because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people." (v.3-4)**

The apostle goes on to describe how he is, **"giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light." (v.12)**

Paul didn't start the church in Colossae, but while he was church planting in Ephesus a man called Epaphras had come to faith and had taken the good news of Jesus back to his hometown of Colossae. Epaphras sent Paul regular updates and Paul was thrilled to hear of the progress that these new believers were making.

Thankfulness is the overwhelming emotion Gretchen and I feel this weekend. We are so grateful to God who brought us here 30 years ago. How lovely that four members of our original calling committee are still part of our congregation and are dear friends.

We are thankful to the Holy Spirit for all he has accomplished over three decades of our service together. We are thankful that our church is more racially diverse. We are thankful to you, for the friendship, love and encouragement you have showered upon us.

This is not to deny that there have been difficult seasons, but they seem inconsequential in comparison to the vast majority of positive experiences we have enjoyed. And even in the bad times we drew strength from the Steer family motto which is "The more difficult the way, the more glorious the victory." All this has been possible because of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Another privilege of being a pastor is to witness **growth**. Paul expresses his joy that, **"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." (v.6)**

It has been so thrilling to see people come to Christ, be baptized, discover their spiritual gifts, and step out in service. I have rejoiced in the creative ways Autumn Ridgers have applied the gospel, whether that's through our Art Series, Family Camp, Next Chapter, Olmsted Outreach, Compassion Evangelical Hospital, the marriage retreats at the Elizabeth Lodge, the Blessing of the Bikes, the Barnabas Program, the church garden, Backpacks for Kids, the free medical clinic, and on and on and on.

All I did was be a cheerleader because you came up with the ideas, you stepped forward to run them, and you generously funded them.

Each day I leave my study upstairs and go for a walk around the church building to watch the different events taking place. Sometimes I don't recognize an activity and I have to ask a colleague what's going on. They will reply, "Oh, that's such and such a ministry that's just been formed." Once again you have come up with a solution to a need.

So I praise God for the spiritual growth in you. For the 37 local outreaches that you have created or are participating in. For the 70 missionaries we are in partnership with. For our progress towards our 20 by 20 goal. The good news is that we have another six from our fellowship going in mission this year. I rejoice this won't stop with my departure because it has come about because of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Another extraordinary privilege of pastoring is **prayer**. Paul writes, **"We pray for you." (v.3)** He goes on to add, **"since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you." (v.9)**

As my day off is Monday, my work week begins on Tuesday. Every Tuesday morning I meet with the other pastors in the Hyde Room to pray for our congregation. It has been one of the most enjoyable and rewarding things I have ever done.

Our Elder Board meeting begins with your church leaders on their knees interceding for this congregation in prayer. It has been an incredible privilege to go to hospitals and homes with our pastors and elders to anoint sick people and pray for them.

We have sometimes see God act in miraculous ways in restoring people to health in response to our prayers.

Over the years we have had concerts of prayer, nights of prayer, and even weeks of prayer. I assure you Gretchen and I will continue to pray for you for the rest of our lives. And you will continue to pray and see God at work because it is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Another extraordinary privilege of pastoring is **preaching**. Paul tells his friends in Colossae, **"I have ...the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness."** (v.25)

During the 43 years I have been in ministry there have been multiple prophecies about the demise of preaching. People say that congregations today don't have the attention span or the interest to listen to a lecture on the Bible. Yet despite these predictions of doom, God continues to use what Paul calls **"the foolishness of preaching."** (1 Corinthians 1:21) As you look at the large growing churches around the world today you see that they are led by great preachers. Indeed, many of the new young preachers speak for up to an hour, and their congregations don't seem to mind. Although I have never had the courage to do that. Do I hear an Amen?

I have always regarded my main task as preaching. I have been enormously grateful for the encouragement you have given me. Every week I get comments or emails about the sermon. Some of them are positive!

I am thankful for the freedom I have had to preach the whole counsel of God. The Elders have encouraged me to speak on controversial topics like sexual purity, biblical marriage, and racial justice.

The preaching of the gospel must be at the center of the life of the local church. For it is by preaching we learn that, **"God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."** (v.13&14) It is in preaching we discover that it is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

So both Paul and I are deeply grateful for the extraordinary privileges of pastoring.

Now the Apostle moves on to talk about **THE THRILLING CALLING OF THE CONGREGATION.**

Because it is not just pastors who are called to churches but congregations, too. Pastors come and go, but congregations remain. This is your church and in the weeks and months to come there are three tremendous truths that Paul wants you to grasp about your role as members of Autumn Ridge.

The first is that we are **carriers of Christ**. Let us rejoice that it is **"Christ in you."** (v.27)

Normally Paul refers to the Christian as a person "in Christ." But here he reverses it. He says it is "Christ in us." That is remarkable. It means we enjoy all that Jesus has. Jesus has access to the Father. And so do we. Jesus is seated in heaven. And so in some extraordinary way we are seated in heavenly places with Christ.

Paul refers to this as a mystery. In his day there were mystery religions that promised their followers the secret to life. Sometimes you had to go through an elaborate membership process to learn the secret. At other times you had to pay a lot of money. Paul says "I will tell you what the mystery is, and you don't have to pay for it. The mystery is Jesus." He is the secret to a fantastic, fulfilled and forgiven life.

Let's never forget who Jesus is for **"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through 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." (v.15-18)**

Yet the eternal Son of God is in us. For it is Christ in you. Many people will not read a Bible, but they will read you and you are a carrier of Christ.

Your job and mine is to live for Jesus and make him known. For Jesus is what Autumn Ridge is all about. That is why, **"Jesus is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ." (v.28)**

But not only are you carriers of Christ, you are also **holders of hope**. Hope is the theme that appears again and again in this first chapter of Colossians.

So Paul speaks of **"the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven." (v.5)** Then Paul exhorts the Colossians, **"do not move from the hope held out in the gospel." (v.23)** In our text we are told that it is **"Christ in you, the hope of glory." (v.27)**

You have been holders of hope for the Steer family in the difficult times of our life. When my parents died and Gretchen's parents died, you offered hope. When our daughter Hannah was born and spent a week in intensive care, you provided words and prayers of hope. When our son had lung cancer, you gave hope to him and to us.

Hope is what great congregations give to their ministers and to one another and to the community around them. How necessary this is for we live in a world hungry for hope. God has placed Autumn Ridgers in Rochester to hold out his hope.

Writing to the Corinthians Paul refers to our lives as **"jars of clay."** God packs our jars full of hope so that we can dispense it to hope-seeking people.

A third part of our thrilling calling as a congregation is that we are to be **guiders to glory.** For it is **"Christ in you, the hope of glory."**

John Owen was called the "Prince of the Puritans." He was Vice Chancellor of Oxford University. He was also a Congregational minister. Back in the 16th century Owen preached a sermon on this text, **"Christ in you, the hope of glory."**

In his message he said, "The special object of hope is eternal glory. The peculiar use of it is to support, comfort, and refresh the soul, in all trials, under all weariness and despondencies, with a firm expectation of a speedy entrance into that glory."

The fact that we have the hope of glory is proof that God answered Jesus' high priestly prayer in that Upper Room when our Lord asked his Father, **"I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory." (John 17:24)**

Glory is a reference to the glorious future prepared by Jesus for his people. So it is another word for heaven. Glory is the place where we will have glorified bodies, glorious companions, glorious reward, and glorious rest.

So how do we get to glory? Most people think it is a matter of living a good life and being kind to others. But the problem is we can never be good enough or kind enough. The Bible says we get to glory through Jesus. For he is the way, the truth, and the life.

But it is not just an abstract belief about Jesus that gets us to glory. It is a relationship with him. It is Christ in us. It is being indwelt by Jesus, controlled by Jesus, possessed by Jesus. It is that which gives us our assurance of salvation and the confidence that glory is our destination.

Over the years I have had the enormous privilege of sitting with people who were dying. Very often they express regret at opportunities missed or bad things they have done. I listen to them and then gently ask, "Is Jesus your Savior? Are you trusting completely in him?" They answer, "Yes, to the best of my ability I am."

So I gladly tell them, "Then you have nothing to worry about. Based on Jesus' promise he has gone to prepare a place in glory for you." When we get to glory we will be made perfect for glory is one of the golden rings that make up the chain of faith that binds us to Christ.

For faith starts with election. This leads to salvation. Then sanctification. And finally glorification. Glorification makes us completely perfect and free from sin.

So there is a powerful personal application of this text **“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”** But if Christ is in us we cannot keep him to ourselves. We must point the way for others.

A couple of years ago Gretchen and I walked the Camino in Spain. It is an ancient pilgrimage that goes for 500 miles. We covered it in five weeks. It was one of the greatest experiences of our lives. We enjoyed it so much we are going to do another Camino through Portugal this fall.

As we walked the Camino we met many people. Sometimes folk were lost. They weren't sure of the direction to Santiago, which was our final destination.

So we would help each other. We would say, “This is the way. I'm going there. Come along with me.” So every Autumn Ridger is to be a guider to glory, pointing the way to the Father's house. For the gospel is good news of a great future.

People from Rochester have changed our country through their innovations in computer engineering and medicine. Sometimes those changes have not been positive. 100 years ago this month Prohibition became the law of the land when the 18th Amendment was ratified. This banned the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcohol. By terms of the Amendment the country went dry in January 1920.

The National Prohibition Act was known as the Volstead Act. Andrew Volstead grew up in southeast Minnesota. He served as a member of Congress for Minnesota for 20 years. As we know Prohibition was a disaster. It turned law abiding citizens into criminals. It made Al Capone a multimillionaire. Thankfully it was repealed in 1933.

But Autumn Ridgers are called to change the world in a positive way. We are to offer thirsty people the water of life. This turns dead people into living ones. Bad people into good ones. Criminals into law abiding citizens.

Here is the reason you can do this. It is **“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”** Never forget this is a description of your faith and your future. May God richly bless you all and may Jesus be your treasure.