

CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY

SERIES: GREAT TRUTHS RECONSIDERED

by Doug Goins

In the last two messages, Steve Zeisler focused on issues of our identity in Christ and the incredible difference that he makes in our lives. In the first message (Discovery Paper 4598) he looked at Jesus' beautiful words in John 15 about abiding in him, the miracle of drawing our very life from him, just as a small branch with grapes on it draws sustenance from the larger vine that's rooted in the ground. Our union with Christ is absolutely necessary for genuine spiritual life and health and effectiveness, for living out any kind of vital faith. In the second message (Discovery Paper 4599) Steve looked at 2 Corinthians 3-4. With Christ as our victorious leader, we can live with tremendous confidence, because the competence that we need for life, the credibility, if you will, comes because of who Christ is and what God has accomplished through him on our behalf. It's that spiritual dynamic that allows us to live with authenticity, honesty, openness; with attractiveness, influence, and effectiveness. We all want that kind of life.

As I listened to those two messages, I was thinking of the twenty years that I've been privileged to serve here at PBC with men and women who really understand how to live this way. These people don't want to waste their lives. They are convinced that God has made them adequate to be ministers of a new covenant. They really want their lives to count for Jesus and for the spread of his kingdom. They take a lifestyle of ministry very seriously.

I got a prayer letter last week from a son of this church, Chris Verschuyl, who was born and raised here. He grew up in our youth ministry, went to Gunn High School and then Claremont College. His mother, Mary Verschuyl, is our pastor for Care Ministry. When he graduated last year, he decided to take a job in Los Angeles and live with a group of six other men and women, young college graduates who are all working full-time. They've chosen to live together in a community in Boyle Heights, just east of downtown Los Angeles, which is 99.9% Hispanic. Chris said he thinks they're probably the only Anglos within eight or ten blocks. They've moved into an apartment complex, and they're working at developing relationships. They have children coming over to get help with their homework, to play on the computers, and to play soccer with them. They have weekly barbecues where husbands and wives gather. I was so impressed with the purity of Chris' vision of his calling. There was in his letter a wonderful transparency, as Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians 4:2, this openness with which we live our lives in the sight of Christ.

I asked Chris if I could share some of his letter with you. He said, "I'm certainly no role model. I don't consider myself any kind of hero or anything." But he consented, because we're his own church. He wrote this:

"In October, as I was standing in line for a ride at an amusement park with my teammates and a neighbor, I had a seizure-not as bad as it could have been, doctors say, but still 45 seconds of convulsions and absolutely no memory of about three minutes of my life. The explanation I have been given for why it happened was the fact that my medication level was low... so the medication was increased and now it's back to life as usual.

Or not. Coming face-to-face with the fact that my life is very literally out of my control-whether or not I live or die is completely up to God, be that being caught in the crossfire of a driveby or having a seizure at the wrong moment... it shook me up considerably....

The seizure has made me begin to realize that only a dedication to knowing and following God, which overflows into practical, unglorious love for my neighbor, has anything to do with my treasure in heaven. And yet as much as I have resolved over and over this fall to really begin to get to know this Jesus I call my savior and my friend, learning to pray with a packed, working-world schedule has been very difficult.

Pray for increased faith to believe God really wants to be my friend and lifelong partner, and for the discipline to make listening to and responding to God's voice my first priority this spring.... Please also join in praying for wisdom for me and my team as we try to discern God's will and timing for the beginnings of structured... ministry here....

We cannot go on just living here and being 'the nice white folks.' God has us here for a purpose much larger and deeper than that. Jesus and his gospel are revolutionary, both socially and spiritually, and we are here to

live it out in word and deed. And... we're just taking our first baby steps toward learning what that means."
(1)

I was humbled by that letter. Do you have that same pure vision for your life to count for Christ? I'm not sure I do, and I know people who have walked with the Lord for fifty or sixty years who haven't yet come to that point of understanding what the Lord desires from us. Chris is not a fanatic or a zealot. He's describing normal Christian living, at least the kind of Christian living the apostle Paul found normal.

A commitment to servanthood

The text this morning, Colossians 1:24-29, describes Paul's own vision for a lifestyle of ministry. Paul wrote these words when he was under house arrest in Rome. He was writing to a church he had heard a lot about but had never visited, in the city of Colossae, in what is now Turkey. Look closely at how Paul's heart for people and for ministry resonates with what we heard from Chris about his goals and motives for a lifestyle of ministry. We'll start in verse 23:

...the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The apostle Paul had a unique calling as an apostle—a pioneer, a missionary, a church planter penetrating areas of the Gentile world for the gospel. I haven't been given that apostolic ministry. My gifts and calling of being a pastor-teacher in a local congregation are very different. My gifts and calling are unique to me, just as your gifts and calling are unique to you. But each one of us can apply to ourselves the phrase in verse 25: "...according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit..." "Stewardship" is sometimes translated "commission" or "office" or "dispensation." The reality is that each one of us is commissioned by God to a lifestyle of ministry. We have a stewardship responsibility, and God really wants to put us to his use. All he needs from us is a willingness, a responsiveness. That's Chris' desire. He understands this sense of commissioning from God to make his life count.

Twice Paul defines himself as a minister. In verse 23, he says he's a minister of the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. In verse 25, he says he's a minister of the church, the body of Christ to which God called him. "Minister" is probably not the best translation. "Servant" would be the most literal and the best translation. A minister in our day and age has come to mean a religious professional, but that is not Paul's thinking. The word means an ordinary servant, somebody who lives in submission to higher authority. In Paul's time, a servant was required to give up his life and his rights to the one who was greater than he was. Paul gave up his life to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the good of the church of Jesus Christ. Paul understood that God had given him the tremendous opportunity and the great joy of serving the gospel and the church.

For us authentic Christian ministry is always expressed through the same commitment to servanthood. We have the wonderful privilege of living as servants of Jesus Christ, as servants of the gospel message of salvation in Jesus and as servants of our brothers and sisters in the body, whether here at PBC or elsewhere. Wherever God places us, there will be a body of which we're a part, which we represent.

Let's look again at this summary of Paul's vision for ministry in verses 24-29. We can see five aspects of an authentically Christian lifestyle of servanthood.

The motivation for servanthood

First, Paul talks about what motivates the way he lives his life. Basically it's concern for the spiritual needs of other people. Look again at verses 24-25: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit..." Ministry is about the good of other people, not what we can get out of it. Paul expresses that in three phrases: "for your sake," "on behalf of His body (which is the

church)," and "for your benefit." Paul had learned to serve the Lord, not out of any selfish motives but out of a willingness to live for the good of other people.

This is very clear in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of those two verses in *The Message*:

"I want you to know how glad I am that it's me sitting here in this jail and not you. There's a lot of suffering to be entered into in this world-the kind of suffering Christ takes on. I welcome the chance to take my share in the church's part of that suffering. When I became a servant in this church, I experienced this suffering as a sheer gift, God's way of helping me serve you...." (2)

Paul wasn't afraid of pain and sacrifice. Spiritual warfare is reality, and there will be a price to pay for helping people come to Christ and grow up in him. Paul wasn't a masochist; he didn't like being in prison at all. But he could rejoice in what God was doing through his struggles. He knew that his suffering was purposeful: other people would benefit from it.

Chris and I even communicated about that in terms of his physical struggles with seizures. That's not purposeless. God will be honored as Chris tries to live his life to the glory of the Lord even with that limitation. Paul's limitation was being in prison. We will have limitations physically, relationally, emotionally.

What mattered most to Paul was that people come to faith in Christ and grow in him. That was enough personal payoff for him. That ought to be our most powerful motivation in anything that we do. Yes, there's personal enjoyment and fulfillment, but that isn't what drives us.

The content of our message

The second aspect of an authentically Christian lifestyle is content. There is a message that we have to share with people as we live our lives. Paul summarizes it wonderfully in verses 26-27:

"...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The message is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This builds on what Steve taught us in the last two messages. Christ died for the forgiveness of our sins, and he rose again so that he might live in us. That really is mind-blowing! The resurrected Christ is not just *for* us, although he is totally committed to us. He is not just *with* us in everything we do, although he promised to be with us. But he also promises to literally be *inside* of us.

Paul says this mystery was hidden through all of Old Testament history. It wasn't revealed to Adam and Eve or Noah or Moses or Samuel or David or any of the prophets. But now, in the final days of redemptive history, the full disclosure of the mystery has been made.

And because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we've been reconciled to God and to one another (1:19-22). It bridges ethnic differences and religious differences. We've been made one. It's an incredible mystery. Jews and Gentiles alike can share in the riches of God's glory, and the glory is that we're indwelt by Jesus Christ himself.

Now who is this Christ who lives in you and me? Verses 15-18: "And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything."

I hope you understand the implications of this. This text puts Jesus at the very center of time and eternity. And if he's in us, then everything that he is indwells us. The all-knowing, all-sovereign, all-powerful, unchangeable, omnipresent creator God in Christ is in us by his Holy Spirit! And only in him can we find fulfillment. You and I were made by Christ for himself, to be owned by him. We were made to be filled up with him. He is our life, and he is the source of our expression of life and servanthood to other people. He is the one who makes us adequate.

The method of communication

The third aspect of an authentically Christian lifestyle is methodology, or the approach that we're to take in relating to people. It has to do with communicating verbally. In verse 25, Paul summarizes it generally as concern that he "might fully carry out the preaching [the proclamation, the communication] of the word of God." Then he details it in verse 28: "And we proclaim

Him [Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom...." Paul was given a ministry of making the word of God fully known. He was committed to declaring everything God had taught him to everybody he came in contact with for their benefit, to enrich their life. He was just being obedient to what God had called him to.

Every one of us is called to be a communicator, to be praying for opportunities to talk with people about the difference Jesus makes. You don't have to be a theologian or a Bible teacher. But you do have a reservoir of experiences, things you've learned from the Lord Jesus, that other people need to know. Most importantly, we need to help people understand this mystery of Christ living in them.

Paul summarizes the methodology with three words in verse 28. The first is "proclaiming," which, as I said, just means communication. Every place we go we're to talk about him. We're not to talk at people, but we're to converse with people about Christ, who is our life. Second, we're called to "admonish" people. That means to counsel, to warn them, with an arm around their shoulder: "I'm really concerned about you. You're going the wrong way. There is a Person who can redirect and define your life, and his name is Jesus." Third, the word "teaching" shows up in verse 28. We're asked to teach or explain Biblical truth. Again, we're not to be theologians, learning religious things for the sake of learning. Biblical truth points to the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ transforms people. We're to be good students of the Scriptures so that we can integrate them into our conversations. We have tremendous confidence that the word of God really is relevant because it relates people to Jesus Christ.

The goal of a lifestyle of servanthood

The fourth aspect of an authentically Christian lifestyle is the goal. In verse 28, Paul says he always thinks in terms of this goal: "that we may present every man complete in Christ." That implies that we're to commit ourselves to people for the long haul. The goal is more than just their initial salvation. The purpose of everything we do in ministry is to bring individuals to mature Christianity. Spiritual maturity in this context means understanding and acting on this wonderful, mysterious principle that Jesus Christ is our life. Because he is within us, we can live hopefully and confidently that we will grow up. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it [carry it on to completion] until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). Spiritual maturity also means that Galatians 2:20 can be reality for us: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." Christian maturity is understanding and living "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It means thinking, acting, depending, working, and playing in response to that wonderful truth.

Growing up is a gradual process, but as we grow in maturity, we will believe with more and more confidence that Christ inside of us is more powerful than anything—the evil world system that we're fearful of, the direct onslaught of satanic evil in our life, and our own fleshly habits, wrong urges, sinful tendencies. Jesus Christ in us is committed to replacing the ugly things in us: the fear, suspicion, self-condemnation, and so on. That's what the hope of glory is all about. He's not done with us yet.

So we can live with Christ-confidence, optimism, and boldness as we seriously commit ourselves to this goal of walking alongside people for the long haul, helping them grow up into this understanding.

It's going to be hard work. It's an exhausting assignment. There's something about giving yourself in a spiritual ministry to somebody else that's draining of spiritual and physical strength. Remember the story in the gospels of the woman who wanted healing and touched the Lord Jesus' robe. He had a sense of power being drained out of him (Mark 5:25-34). At times it can feel like that for us as we commit ourselves to working with individuals through their struggles. I confess that at times it's very easy for me to avoid the responsibility of ministry, of walking along with people in this process.

The resource for overcoming our weakness

But verse 29 gives us the good news that there is a resource for this hard work, the fifth aspect of an authentically Christian lifestyle: "And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." "I labor" is literally "I work as hard as I can." Then the next verb is *agonizomai*, which means to contend or struggle. This sacrificial lifestyle can be agonizingly difficult at times. Paul is honest about that. Then he goes on to say, "...According to His power, which mightily works within me." The word "mightily" is *dunamis*, from which we get the word "dynamite." The word "power" is *energeia*, which appears twice. It can also be translated "energy." It's *his* energy that energizes me when I've got no internal resources to draw on. If you recall the TV commercial, the Energizer Bunny is probably not a bad image here. "It just keeps going and going and going...." His source of power is inexhaustible. My physical and emotional reserves run low very easily. But it's the Lord himself who is committed to this responsibility, and it's not my energy or my internal reservoirs of strength that count. It's his presence, his authority, his power that overcome my resistance to ministry opportunities, my fear, my weariness, my ambivalence about people, my depression, my boredom. Christ is our hope of glory, our power and strength and energy. Second Corinthians 4:7 says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not of ourselves." We're weak clay pots, but the power doesn't come from us. It's from God.

Our motivation for ministry is a concern for the spiritual needs of other people. The message we never stop communicating to people is that Christ lives within us, and that gives us confidence and makes us hopeful as we look at ourselves, at opportunities, at the future. The method of our ministry is communicating God's word to individuals. The goal is to stay with people in their growth toward spiritual maturity. And the resource that we trust is the power of God that transcends anything that we've got to offer people. In this paragraph Paul is not espousing a religious program or a curriculum for discipleship. It's an exciting lifestyle committed to personal relationships.

Below is an excerpt from an article that I found about 25 years ago by Dr. Dick Halverson, who was then the chaplain of the U. S. Senate. He was reflecting on the radical implications of what it means to have Christ living in us.

"Where are you going to go tomorrow morning? Christ is there in your body. Christ is there as much as He is in his own body. He is literally present where you are tomorrow morning, and Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, etc. We preachers have been communicating for years the idea that the only time anything is done for Christ is when we do something consciously spiritual. As though one can turn Christ on and off in the body. He said you are the salt of the earth. He didn't say you may be or you ought to be, he said you are the salt of the earth. He said you are the light of the world.

He didn't say you may be or you ought to be, he said you are the light of the world. You are the light of the world-I didn't say that. Jesus said it. Now salt is no good when it's not salty, and light is no good when it's covered. And just as he was in the Garden of Eden, Satan is busy all the time, every moment of every hour in history trying to get you and me to think that we can substitute something we do for the light and the salt of Jesus Christ. And Jesus said if the salt has lost its saltiness, what is it good for? It's good for nothing.

There's no program, no plan, no method that can be conceived by the mind of man which will compensate for salt that is not salty. We go around with our little programs, when all the time God dwells in our body and says, 'Just cut out your programs and let me live my life in you and through you.' He just says: Believe this. How infinitesimally insignificant what we do or say our witness is compared to the presence of Christ in our bodies wherever we are."

I saw this illustrated beautifully, almost unconsciously, by a lady in a church in Hamburg, Germany. Candy and I spent a week of our sabbatical there with a pastor friend. On a Wednesday night at a wonderful Lutheran church that was alive with the Spirit, they had an open sharing time of prayer requests and praise for things God was doing among them. It was so rich, and I felt very much at home. A dear lady came up and shared this story, asking for prayer for a woman she had begun correspondence with, that she would come to faith.

The sister who was sharing had gone to the south of Germany on vacation with her husband for a week in a resort. She had had great expectations that they would have really quality time alone. But she said they weren't having a great time. The weather was horrible, cold and rainy. She and her husband weren't doing all that well; they were grumpy with each other. And she said she was kind of disappointed and sad at how the week was going, just kind of frustrated, having invested all this money and time.

But they ate three meals a day every day at the same table with the same people, and there was a lady with whom she became friends. About halfway into the week, this lady said to her, "You know, I love the way you look at life. There's something really different about you."

She told her church, "I was really flabbergasted. It just didn't make sense to me."

But she went away from the meal and thought about it. She came back at the next meal and told the woman that it wasn't her. She said, "I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He's my Savior. He's the Lord of my life. It's not religion. It's not the fact that I'm a Lutheran and a church member. What you're attracted to isn't me; it's Jesus Christ who lives in me."

That's the reality that I want us all to grasp. Jesus lives in us, and he would love for his life to flow out through us so that every place we go, in casual conversations, people say to us, "You're different. I like how you look at life." Then we'll have a chance to talk about Christ in us, and the hope we have for glory, for perfection, for completion, for being who we've always wanted to be.

NOTES

1. Used by permission of Chris Verschuyl.

2. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996. NavPress Publishing Group, Colorado Springs, CO. P. 422. Used by permission.

The Scripture quotations in this message, unless otherwise noted, are taken from New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Catalog No. 4600
Colossians 1:24-29
3rd Message
Doug Goins
January 17, 1999

[Back to Index Page](#)

Copyright© 1998 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.