

Colossians: A Big Jesus for Life's Big Problems

4: Christ – The Hope of Glory

September 30, 2018

- Key Texts: Colossians 1.27; 1 Corinthians 1.23
- Key Words: Christ, Hope, Glory, Mystery, Gospel
- Summary: The Gospel is a “mystery”! Jesus, the “God-Man,” was willing to die for us, and then to live “in” us – our “hope of glory.” The only thing “crazier” than this story would be the refusal to embrace him if it is true.

Now I just typed “Jewish newborn baby” into the search bar, and then randomly picked one out. I really don't know whether Jesus looked like this little guy, but it'll do. He was just a cute little guy. “Mary did you know?” ... Most of you guys know that song. We sing it at Christmas. A little richer than most Christmas carols.

- “Mary did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?” Doubt it!
- “Mary did you know that this little guy would give sight to a blind man?” That he would calm a storm with his hand?” He looks so ordinary, so helpless.
- “Mary did you know that this seemingly helpless little tyke has walked where angels trod? And that when you kiss your little baby, you (literally) kiss the face of God?” I mean, he's cute, but ... God?! How's that even possible?!
- Did you know that through this little guy “the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again, the lame will leap, the dumb will speak ... the praises of this little lamb?” Why would they call him that?
- “Did you know that the little guy in your arms, nursing from your breast is Lord of all creation?” And that he would “One day rule the nations?” Her baby, a king? Remember, she's just a teenage peasant from a backwater town.
- “Mary ... Did you know ... Did you know that “that sleeping child you're holding is the great ‘I Am’?” Which means ... did you know that you are holding God?

Quite a few years ago the magazine “Popular Mechanics” commissioned a team of forensic anthropologists to recreate what Jesus might have looked

like. Some British scientists and some Israeli archaeologists studied the skulls and the skeletons of Israel in Jesus' day and they came up with this. The Bible says Jesus was kinda average to look at, so maybe 5'1", about 110 pounds – a little guy by our standards. They gave him the skin color and the hair color and the hair style they think would have been typical of that time and place. What do you think?

Now Todd preached last week on one of the greatest passages in the Bible. He did a great job; he always does. But if you were here, did you really listen to what he said about that squirrely little guy?

- He said he is the image of the invisible God. He said, the God that our eyes can't see, because he is transcendent, and omnipresent, and because he is not composed of the stuff of creation – the stuff we can see, and hear, and touch ... He said that this is God making himself visible, and hearable, and touchable. Really?!
- He called him the firstborn over all creation. Which doesn't mean that he was born first. It means he has authority over creation; this ... guy ... who grew up a peasant boy in Galilee, this guy is really pre-eminent.
- In fact, Todd said, this guy is the creator ... of everything. In other words, when the Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" ... he's the one did it! "All things were created through him, and for him." Hmmm.
- Todd said, "He is before all things," I think that means he is ... eternal. It means that this guy who was born in Bethlehem, just south of Jerusalem, in reality there has never been a time when he wasn't. And he said that in him somehow everything holds together. In other words, without him it would all fall apart... Really?!
- He called him the head of the church. This ... guy ... is "the head of the church." Our church, every church.
- And he called him "the firstborn of the dead." Which doesn't mean that he was the first guy to be raised from the dead; but that when he walked out of his tomb he owned death, he had authority over death, he was preeminent ... even over death.
- In fact, Todd said, "God in all his fullness ... God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ." Later on Paul says, "In Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body." (Colossians 2.9) Do you buy that?

- And because he was all that and a bag of chips, he had the ability to reconcile man with God by dying on a cross? ... Hmmm.

Have you ever thought about how weird all that sounds? I have. Sometimes the strangeness of it all strikes me when I am up here preaching. This stuff is just ... crazy! It is almost literally absurd!

Do you actually believe all that stuff about some guy, born to a ... “virgin” in a backwater town in a no-nothing province of the Roman Empire 2000 years ago?

- A real guy, with fingers and toes.
- A guy like one of us – the “creator” with a belly button, over a belly that growled when he got hungry ... A God who gets hungry?!
- A guy who could cut his feet on a rock, who got toothaches, and headaches, and colds.
- Who got tired after a long day; who would sunburn if he didn’t cover his skin, and got goosebumps if he got too cold. A God with goosebumps?!
- A real guy who needed sleep, and a bathroom, and a shave. A God in a bod.
- And a God who ... dies? That almost sounds like a disqualifier for a God, doesn’t it? A guy who claimed his death would absolve you – all of you – of your sins.
- A guy whose followers claimed God raised from the dead. They say they saw him, repeatedly, ate with him, talked with him, touched him. They were willing to die for that claim. All of them.
- And because of all that, a guy they claimed deserves our total allegiance.

It’s no wonder the apostle Paul tells us that this perception of Jesus was a “stumbling-block” to the Jews, and sheer “foolishness” to the Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 1.23) Think about what we say we believe.

- Do we really believe that behind this seemingly chaotic universe, at least in our little corner filled with so much pain and injustice ... do we really believe that behind all this there is a creator who simply spoke it into existence? That all this is on purpose? ... Yeah.
- Do we really believe that this God, who would have to be huge, with about 1 billion trillion stars and however many billion trillion planets to manage ... Do we really believe that this immense God cares about

and fixates on little old us? Do we really believe that in some way he actually created us humans as special ... in his own image? ... Yeah, we do.

- Do we actually believe that somehow this little corner of the universe went to hell because two people however many years ago messed up? Do we really believe that we are messed up in part because they messed up millennia ago? ... Yeah, we do.
- And do we really think that God thought that the best way to fix us and to save us from the punishment he was planning for us was to subject himself to extreme humiliation and pain? We believe he's God, right; and that as God he makes the rules, right? So why would he do it this way? Couldn't he have fixed us and saved us from his own punishment in a way that was a little less masochistic? ... Maybe.
- And to get it done, do we really believe he impregnated a virgin? That he chose to come into our world through the birth canal of a peasant teenager? That our Creator, our Lord, our Savior, our God fed from her breast and was dependent on her to keep him safe and warm? ... Yeah, we actually do.
- And do we really believe that when he ... "grows up," (you know ... the guy we think is really eternal) ... when he grows up he goes out and collects a motley bunch of misfits to be his disciples – guys, they were not the A Team – and then he goes around teaching stuff so counter-intuitive, and working all these ... miracles ... they claim? ... Yeah.
- And we actually think this was all this was just set-up, right? We believe that although he was really God – in a bod – that although he had all this power and authority, this all-knowing, all-loving God decided that the best way to save us from our own sins, the best way to spare us from his own punishment, was to subject himself to extreme torture and execution – for us? And we actually think that the creator, the eternal, all-powerful God ... died? Yeah, we do.
- And we believe his followers' claim that he didn't stay dead. And we believe their claim that his death fixes our brokenness. And that because of who he was and what he did he deserves our total allegiance, right? Yeah. That's about it.

A stumbling block to the Jews ... No kidding! Foolishness to the Gentiles ... and to billions of others who have blown him off, or marginalized him, or

say they believe in him but then live like he really doesn't matter. Go figure! Guys, this is either the craziest con in history, or ... Or the craziest thing anyone could ever do would be to blow him off, or marginalize him, or say they believe in him, but then live like he really doesn't matter.

You see, we Jesus followers don't think it's about "being religious," or "being spiritual." It's not about how religious we are, or how spiritual we are. And we don't think it about "morality." The heart of this thing is not about living by a different set of moral rules, or a stricter set of moral rules than everybody else. And we don't think it's about some new idea about God, some new philosophy of God. The heart of this thing is way bigger than any of that. And way more ... seemingly ... absurd.

If you have a Bible app on our phone or tablet, or one of those old fashioned paper Bibles, find Colossians chapter 1. We're going to unpack verse 27 in a couple minutes. Colossians chapter 1, verse 27. While you are getting there, I'm going try to set the context.

Todd preached on chapter 1 verses 15-20 last week: Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of creation, the creator, the sustainer, the head of the body, the one who rules over death itself, God in a bod, who died on a cross to make peace between man and God.

Well, here's what comes next. The apostle Paul says, Before Jesus – before Jesus -- "You were God's enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now (God) he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. (As crazy as that sounds! That's how he chose to do it. And we get it.) As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. (In Christ, that is your reality! Which ... matters ... a lot! He says,) But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News (The Good News, the Gospel, this crazy story of a God-man who went to a cross for you). This Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it." (Colossians 1.21-23)

And then Paul writes some words nobody really understands. We wish he would have unpacked it, explained it for us. Books have been written

about this next verse. Paul says, “Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you (we can get that part), and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions (... what?), for the sake of his body, which is the church.” (Colossians 1.24) What does he mean by that: “I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions”? I can tell you what it doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean that the cross of Jesus wasn’t enough, that it was somehow inadequate, that maybe there is suffering we still have to go through to pay the rest of our sins, against God. It can’t mean that – because the apostle Paul and all the other apostles tell us with crystal clarity that Jesus took all of our sins to the cross, he paid for all of our sins with his death on a cross. It’s done; and it’s all grace! Now, I have some ideas about what Paul does mean, but I don’t want to get bogged down here. I will talk about it in this week’s notes; but for now I’m just going to jump past it and keep going.

Verse 25: The apostle Paul says, “I have become the church’s servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its (incredible) fullness.” In other words, I don’t dare soften it; or tame it; or sophisticate this word of God. I will not steal the awe from its awesomeness; I won’t try to yank this word of God from the very edge of absurdity. He calls it: “the mystery (no kidding! Who could have thought up something like this? A mystery) that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people (to people like us ... who actually buy it!).

And here it is. Here’s the part I want to drill down on. Paul says, “To God’s people – to people like us -- God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles -- again, people like us –God has chosen to make known the glorious riches of this mystery, which is ... which is ... Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1.27) This mystery ... this mystery ... is Christ ... it is Christ in you ... and you, and you ... and it is our hope of glory.

Now the word “mystery” didn’t mean to them what it means to us.

- How many of you guys like mysteries? A “whodunit”? A book, or a movie, or a TV show with all these twists and turns, maybe dropping these clues that finally lead you to the unexpected.
- Or, “It’s just a mystery to me.” “I can’t figure it out! I’ve tried! I’ve studied it, poked at it, pondered it – and it’s still a mystery to me. I don’t know!” Been there, done that?

No, for them “mystery” meant something a little different. Paul’s is talking about something that used to be hidden, but now it’s out there. There were clues before, but no one could figure them out. But now it’s out there. Now you can see the one at whom all the clues were pointing. Now it makes sense. No one could have figured it out before; no one would have guessed what God was really doing ... but there he is ... there he is ... God ... in a bod ... Really! It’s a mystery! It’s mind-blowing; it’s on the very edge of absurdity; it’s ... ineffable – your mind simply isn’t big enough to get it, entirely.

- This guy, about 5’1”, medium build, brown hair, with a cut on his foot and a cold ... this guy is the image of the invisible God.
- This guy – who gets hungry and tired – this guy is not only the first-born of all creation, he is actually the creator himself, and the sustainer of the universe. Take him out of the equation, and everything falls apart.
- This guy – with a birthday, and a Nazareth address – this guy is actually eternal – no beginning, no end. In reality, there has never been a time when he wasn’t; nor will there ever be a time when he isn’t.
- And then ... and then this guy – this man-God – this eternal one died. And when he walked out of the tomb he owned death. And in some way, his death made it possible for every single one of us – no exceptions – for every single one of us to find peace with God.

I think that qualifies as a mystery, don’t you?! Paul says the mystery is “Christ.” It’s this Jesus! It’s not a new religion, it’s not a new morality – a new set of rules for how to live, it’s not some new truth about God – it is Christ. The gospel, the good news is Jesus.

And it gets weirder. Paul says, “the mystery ... which is Christ ‘in you.’” What do you mean, “Christ in me”? I kinda get that God is all around me. I mean, he’s “omnipresent,” right? Which means he’s everywhere? There is literally nowhere where God is not! I understand that we really can’t ever to run from him, because he’s already is where you’re going. I can understand that we can never really hide from him, because he’s already wherever it is you’ll try to hide. I can understand that when we try to close your eyes so we don’t see him; he’s never not going to see you. I mean, I can get that God is big, that he is everywhere, that he is all around me.

But what is Paul saying here, with this Christ “in” you, Christ “in” me. This is different. Somehow we believe this God, who is already all around us, somehow he takes up residence inside us? Somehow he wants to do life with us, in us? Somehow he wants our permission – which is so weird – he wants our permission to change us from the inside, to morph us, to transform us – back into what he meant us to be. Wow!

And it gets even weirder. You see, in English the word “you” can be either singular, or plural. It can be just you, or you all. Or better yet, y’all and all y’all. But the Greek has two different words for ‘you.’ And this one is plural. This one means or all you all. This “Christ in you” isn’t just for people like me, it’s for people who aren’t like me at all. God’s offer is reckless. He doesn’t care how old you are, what sex you are, what color you are, who your parents were, how much money you have, where you’ve been, what you’ve done, what’s been done to you – God wants inside you. He wants to do life with you, in you. He wants to root out from the inside whatever has messed you up and he wants to morph you into what he meant you to be. He cares that much for ... you – enough to die for you. Guys, this is incredible! It’s mind-blowing! It’s a ... mystery.

Christ wants in you, and in you, and in you, and in you. And for some crazy reason our God, our Creator, the transcendent, omnipotent God lets us lock the door. So you can let him in, or you can keep him out. You can keep God out. Which, by the way – if this stuff is true – that’s the real crazy!

Christ in you ... the hope of glory: the hope of glory; the “hope” ... of glory. That word “hope” doesn’t mean what some of you think it means.

- I “hope” one of you guys wins the lottery, and pays off the church’s debt, and sends me on a vacation to Hawaii, for a month or two. That would be cool!
- I “hope” the Cowboys win the Super Bowl this year, and the Oregon Ducks win the College National Championship. Not much chance ... for either one ... but we’re talking about hope, right? Just a “wish”?
- I “hope” we baptize 100 people next year and average over 1000 in worship. That’s a great hope, isn’t it?

But that’s not the kind of hope Paul is talking about it. He’s not talking about a wish, a pipe-dream, a delusion. For Paul and the rest of us Jesus

followers – our hope is an expectation – we expect it to happen; it's a confident expectation. When the omnipotent God says it's going to be so, it is going to be so! When the omnipotent God tells us what he's going to do, it's going to get done.

Christ in you – the hope of glory; Christ in you – which gives you the confidence that you will experience God's glory. Now I'm not sure I know what all that "glory" part means; but I think I have a couple ideas. When the Bible talks about the "glory" of God, sometimes it's talking about his immensity, his limitless power, his indescribably beauty, his perfect holiness, and his soul-bending grace. And that God wants to live inside us right now. He wants to give us a taste of what it means to do life with God right now. And someday he wants to do life with us unmitigated by sin ... transformed into what he meant us to be. ... Do you care?

I don't know whether this hope of glory is our confident expectation that with Christ in us life in this world is way better. I don't know whether this hope of glory is our confident expectation that this Christ in us will someday will take us way beyond this life to a life with God in a new heaven and a new earth. If Jesus died for our sins, guys; and if, because he walked out of his tomb he now owns death, guys; then when he tells us he's got something way more spectacular coming ... I'd go for it!

Do you know what the hope of glory is? Do you know what it does? We lost an incredible man last week. A week ago Friday Kerry Prather died. He was one of our elders for years; an incredibly gentle, and strong, and Christian man. He loved his family, he loved his church, he loved his God ... And two years ago he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. And the cancer ... won ... for just a moment. But Kerry had this hope, this hope of glory, because Christ wasn't just around him, he was in him. And because Christ was in him he lived such a good, powerful life in this world. He touched so many people; he was loved by so many people. And because Christ was in him – listen; because Christ was in him -- his life ... has barely begun. That is our glorious hope. A better life with God now, and a perfect life with God forever.

Now ... what if it's true? What if all this ... absurdity ... is true?

➤ What if Jesus really is the image of the invisible God?

- What if he really is preeminent over all creation, because all things really were created by him, and for him?
- What if this guy, this Jesus – really was the eternal God in a bod? The head of the church? The firstborn of the dead?
- What if inside the body of this Jesus lived all the fullness of God? How? I don't know. Because my brain is only this big!
- And what if he really did care enough about us, for some reason, that the reason he came into our world was to take our place, on a cross. Guys, actually why he went to the cross is not nearly as inexplicable as why he loves us that much in the first place. But apparently God does!
- And what if his resurrection does seal the deal? What if his resurrection proves that he was who he said he was, and that can do what he promised to do ... for us?

What would that be worth ... to you? Paul was consumed by it. He was willing to go anywhere, and suffer anything to tell people about “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Does all this mean that much to you?

Think about it: Is there anything you'd be willing to suffer for? Anything you'd be willing to die for? ... I hope so. Because if there is not, you're life is too little; you're living for too little. What would you give if this mystery, this gospel were true? What would you be willing to give up if this mystery were true? What would you hold back from this “Christ in you,” who wants to morph you into what he meant you to be? Guys, If you let him in, what do you lose? ... If you don't let him in, what do you lose?

Christ ... in you ... the hope ... of glory. The only thing crazier than believing this whole thing, is not to. To blow him off, to marginalize him, to say you believe and then live like he doesn't matter – that stuff just won't cut it. We either bend our knees, or go to war. I choose to bend my knees. You?