

IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US - the Hope of Glory

The essence of the miracle of Christmas, the true meaning, is the Creator coming amongst the created. God sends His Son, as a baby, to be born, as a man, to live, to suffer, and to die among us. This Jesus died but then he defeated the power of death and rose to new life.

Because of Immanuel, God with us, we live.

Immanuel, God with us, it is true in the past, it is true in the present and it is true in the future. In this season we remember an event when God revealed Himself among us in the form of His Son, as a baby, in humble circumstances. He is with us today - we are aware of his presence bringing hope, and peace and joy and love into lives which can so easily be swamped by the darkness and pain of the world. And we look forward to the day when the eternal sun will shine and He will be with us fully and completely.

Immanuel. God with us.

Colossians 1:24-27 – Christ in you, the Hope of Glory

24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people (saints). 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This is a letter from the Apostle Paul, written from his imprisonment in Rome to a largely non-Jewish Christian church in Colosse. This passage has some typically obscure parts to it but I want to focus on the phrase at the end, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That in itself is not a straightforward aphorism but before we look at that let me just whizz you through the verses up to that point.

V 27 Amongst the Gentiles

Remember he is talking to what he calls, "Gentiles". For the Jews the world was divided into two groups of people: us, the Jews, and everyone else, the Gentiles. So this letter is also addressed to us (unless you are Jewish!).

V 21 I rejoice in what was suffered for you

Paul comments on his sufferings – sufferings which he considers to be part and parcel of the Christian life and which he happily takes onto himself – especially if it helps others experience the fullness of God's word in their lives.

V 26 The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages

Paul says that there has been a mystery which is now become known to some - not only to Jews but also to Gentiles, i.e. everyone can hear this secret if they choose.

By “mystery” Paul doesn’t mean some strange, cult-ish practice. Neither does he mean a puzzle or a paradox. Nor is it something restricted to the Jews. By mystery he means a secret. God’s secret. A sacred secret, hidden in the past – only revealed to a few but now revealed to all the saints – i.e. the church – us, you.

What is this secret that has been revealed? It is His plan of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ: a person, whose birth, life, death and resurrection has opened up a way back to God for everyone. A glorious, rich, secret!

V 27 The glorious riches of this mystery

The secret is Immanuel – God with us in Jesus Christ – a glorious, rich treasure of a secret. Paul’s picture is of a palace stocked with treasure being opened up for you to wander in and share in full.

V 27 Christ in you, the hope of glory

Christ in you – is plural – this is for you and you and you. For all the saints who give their lives to following Jesus.

So what does this aphorism mean, Christ in you, the hope of glory?

There are several words there, all pregnant with meaning, but let’s look at the phrase in the round.

School reports

Do you remember bring a school report home with you? By and large we are anxious to present a good report to our parents and gain their affirmation and see them smile. In a trivial, temporary way, we enjoy some slight glory or fame in their eyes – if only we can present a good report.

There is a sense of wanting to be able to present something good to parents, to be of good report. To have a little bit of glory.

Here are some examples of not such good reports without much of the sought-for glory!

- *I am sorry to have to tell you that he is doing his best.*
- *Welsh headmaster: By educating this boy, we are depriving some Welsh village of its idiot.*
- *History: When the workers of the world unite, it would be presumptuous of Dewhurst to include himself amongst that number.*
- *Convinced that the boy was constantly cheating but unable to prove it: Peter is steadily forging his way ahead.*
- *English: the improvement in his handwriting has revealed his inability to spell.*
- *Geography: Leonard does well to find his way back home each day.*

Think of glory as in a “healthy fame”. Fame as when people think of you or talk about you and give you some glory. It can go wrong and become the celebrity cult. But the

best side of “fame” is when someone is known for doing something good and wonderful. Jos Buttler for scoring the fastest 100 in English ODI history. Nelson Mandela for forgiving his captors. Florence Nightingale for radical nursing. Gwen and Elaine for serving the people who use our debt advice centre or child contact centre. Glory as fame. Glory as having a good report.

Christ in you the hope of glory is what happens when God is with us, Immanuel, and when there is hope that far from being condemned and cast out we are the recipients of glory – we can have a good report. How can this be?

Just as I said at the beginning, Immanuel is past, present and future. It’s a description of what happens when God is with us. It alludes to the past; it is very much about the present but it is also a promise for the future.

To understand that future we need look back to the past. Do you remember how the bible describes the scene in the creation account when God was with us, when He had just created the world, He had created mankind, men and women, and He looks at what He has made and he says, it is very good. He was very pleased.

His celestial smile beamed glorious light over everything and everyone. He thought that it was glorious. Full of glory. It looked great and he was able to say so.

That was before, before man turned his back on God.

And in the future we will be in a new creation with a new body and we will once again see God’s smile beam on us. That day may come very soon. Jesus has promised to come back soon and take us to be with Him. This is the hope He has placed in our hearts.

That sense of being happily in God’s presence in the rich way described at creation and in heaven is a rare experience today – we’re in an in-between time when we know that is where we have come from and we have a hope that is where we might end up but it isn’t like that just now.

We know we are not in a good place with God. We are hiding in the bushes, covering ourselves with leaves to hide our shame.

We can’t believe that He would see any glory in us at all, we can’t hope for that smile. We don’t think we have a good report to hand over.

Bright light

Or we may think of glory as bright lights. When the stage lights come up and you can see the set in all its glory. When the sun rises and lights up the scenery in glorious colour. But what does it light up in us? Would we prefer the darkness?

Jesus took our shame on Himself and died for us when he was crucified at Calvary. The sin and guilt is forgiven by His great mercy and we are made sinless, righteous in His sight. Yes, we still go wrong from time to time but we are no longer sinners, no longer

by nature shamed and hiding. Jesus brings us out from the darkness of the prison of death into the light. We can stand in the light and there is something amazing to see in us – although it doesn't feel quite right to say that as a modest Yorkshireman!

C.S.Lewis talks about us all being eternal beings. You have never met a mere mortal he says. Our art and culture, our fields and food may be temporary and mortal but you are not. You and each person you meet has the glory of God within.

Maybe it is easier to think of others as immortal, glorious beings rather than think about ourselves? C.S.Lewis writes (The Weight of Glory p.45), *"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare."*

We are made to be glorious and with Christ in us there is hope of that.

When we repent we have Christ in us, transforming us. We are a new creation. Our spirit is once again united with His Spirit. Day by day as we pursue Him, listen to Him, obey Him, grow with Him, we become more and more like the glorious, wonderful person we were created to be.

In his commentary on this verse Tom Wright says, *"The image of God himself now lives in His people by His Spirit working secretly until their life and His are indistinguishable in their basic character, in true humanity."* (Colossians and Philemon, p94).

He is restoring our glory little by little.

So we can begin to glory in His smile. This may be an unusual way of thinking about glory. We normally attribute it to God – a sort of brightly lit fame attaches to Him. But think back to the garden when God was looking at mankind and all His colourful, intricate, awesome creation – He saw you then and He smiled. He thought you were full of glory. You bathed in the glory, in the glow of His love and appreciation and pride.

And one day, we will stand before Him and once again be glorious in His sight. Any day now. It's an amazing thought isn't it? The hope of glory – that glimpse of expectation that one day we will be like we were first created to be and that we will stand in front of our creator and see Him smile.

Conclusion

There is in the heart of man and woman a deep desire for glory, a sort of fame - to be loved and affirmed by our parents, our friends, our boss - but especially by our God. That is what gives life and purpose and meaning.

To be known, to be loved, to be "of good report". It comes from the way we are made and the way it is meant to be and the way it originally was. We are not meant to live in

an emotional and spiritual vacuum where we survive on meagre rations of His affirming love and acceptance. More than that, we can't live in that thin atmosphere without damage to our very soul.

When we have Christ in us, we have that hope, that expectation, of glory from our Creator and Sustainer. We can experience it in part today and fully on that final day.

God the Father looks at us and sees us through the loving sacrifice of His Son Jesus. He looks at our report and says, "This is good, this is a very good report".

That deep need to have a good report with Him is fulfilled.

Immanuel, God with us. Christ in us the hope of glory.

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