

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
March 7 & 8, 2015
Paul Tshihamba
Hope Revealed
Ephesians 3:14-19, Isaiah 40:31**

Well, good morning, church! I am so glad to be here this morning! You know why I'm so glad? I came out of the house, picked up my keys and did not put on a coat. I just walked outside. That's one reason. The other reason is because my wife woke me up and kicked me out of bed at 8 o'clock when I thought it was 7 o'clock, so I am just glad to be here on time, barely! My name is Paul Tshihamba and I'm one of the pastors here at CPC. It's just great to be part of this series that we're calling "Hope". It's a series where we're exploring the unique role that Jesus plays in our everyday lives, Jesus who is the hope of the world. As we journey through Lent toward Jesus' victory over death, and as we set our gaze on the cross and the resurrection, we do so by reclaiming this thing called hope. John Crosby introduced the first two installments of the Hope series, first by defining what hope is, and then by exploring what it looks like when all hope seems lost.

In today's sermon, we are going to be probing the question from a slightly different angle. We are going to be looking at Paul's Letter to the church at Ephesus, and through that lens, exploring different aspects of hope. Today we are going to be focusing on the topic of Hope Revealed. How is hope revealed? I would suggest that that happens in a variety of ways, all of which can be summed up in one word: worship. God gathers us in worship to give Him honor and praise, and we've discovered that as we worship in an ongoing and vibrant community of faith, one of the things that happens is that we begin to take on the attributes of the one we worship. We become more Christ-like. And the more that God's grace and peace starts to take hold and define our lives, I would suggest, we have more hope.

The text we are going to be reading today is really a prayer Paul wrote in a letter he wrote to the church in Ephesus. It was a prayer that I believe he prayed numerous times simply because he wrote it down and made sure that this church had it. What I want to do this morning is read through this prayer with you. Just allow these words to kind of soak over you as we start our time together. Here is what Paul prayed:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And then in this next part here, I want you to join me together and let's read this last portion together.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen [Ephesians 1:14-21].

Amen?

[All:] Amen.

Here is what this prayer means. It means very simply that God is able. God is able! Before we go any further, just think about all the situations, all the circumstances, the struggles that you face where you believe there is just no possibility, that there is just no chance, no way forward. There is no one who has the ability to figure it out, whether it's in your family or your marriage or your work. That struggle is well over your head. The good news, my friends, that Paul is teaching us, that he is exhorting us to know, is that our God is able. Good news, such good news! But this prayer is not just a reminder of what God can do. It's not just a reminder that God is able.

There are three things that I want to lift up out of this text. The first one is this: Hope is fueled by worship. Paul is actually teaching, he is actually challenging the church to a certain way of living. He puts it this way. He says,

. . . ²¹ to him

that is to the God who is able

be glory in the church

Glory in the church! It's a funny phrase, isn't it? You may have read this verse before and just kind of passed right by, but what does it actually mean? What does it actually mean? Is it about having great sermons? Is it about having a full room of people gathered together? Is it about a certain style of worship or liturgy or programming?

Glory in the church! Paul once wrote this to the church in Corinth,

³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God [1Corinthians 10:31].

The question that we have to wrestle with is what does this mean, practically in your life this week, Monday to Friday? What does it actually mean? I know a lot of people who wrestle with this. They struggle. There is a lot of confusion around this, "Do all for the glory of God." Does that mean I'm supposed to give God more credit, like He kind of has a weak ego? Is that what it means? That He is kind of a needy God up there who just needs me to give Him more credit for the things that I do? Is that what this means? We're confused. We're not really sure. We see a phrase like "glory in the church" and it's like, "I'm not even sure how to imagine what that is so I'll just kind of keep reading." But Paul is exhorting the church to a certain way of being. One of

the problems with this phrase “glory in the church” is that it can actually be unclear to us what God’s glory actually is.

When Moses was leading the Israelites out of the wilderness toward the Promised Land, he found himself worn down, frustrated, uncertain about how to keep going, a place that I know I’ve been in and I’m sure you’ve been in as well. He made a fairly remarkable statement to God.

¹⁸ Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory [Exodus 33:18].”

Next time you’re worn down, next time you’re worn down and burned out, next time you’re frustrated, this is the prayer I want to challenge you to pray. “God, show me Your glory. Show me who You are.” This is really very important. God’s response to this question here, these profound words, is this,

¹⁹ And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, [Exodus 33:19]”

God’s glory is His goodness. The writer of the Psalm says,

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God; [Psalm 19:1]

Have you ever seen a night sky? Maybe you’re out in the countryside and you can peer into the depths of the universe. You can’t help but think, how great is this! Whoever did this is amazing! To glorify God in our lives means that our lives should evoke that kind of response. Our lives should evoke a similar response, that whoever is doing this, whoever did this, whoever did what God is doing in my life, is amazing! Listen to how Dallas Willard once put it.

To glorify God means to think and act in such a way that the goodness, greatness, and beauty of God are constantly obvious to ourselves and all those around us. It means to live in such a way that when people see us they think, thank God for God, if God would create such a life.

Thank God for God. Isn’t that an interesting phrase? “Glory in the church” means that when people see the church, they would think to themselves, “Thank God for God.” Now here’s the tricky part. How many people here have actually been in a real church? Okay, this is not a trick question. You are in a real church right now. So if you’ve been in a real church, then you’re quickly and keenly aware of how messy, how broken, and how inglorious we can be. Of course, the apostle Paul who wrote this prayer knew this all too well. The churches he was planting and encouraging and building were a complete mess. People were incorporating pagan rituals into their worship. They were ignoring the needs of the poor. They were abusing alcohol during Communion. Sure, the heavens might declare the glory of God, but the church? I mean, sure a beautiful ocean scene or a mountain vista declares the wonder and majesty and glory of God, but a church full of people like me and you?

Here’s the deal. “Glory in the church” means God’s will, and our calling is that the church would glorify God, that when people see or experience Christian community, they would think, “Thank God for God that He would create such a place.” Which brings us to our question for this morning and it’s simply this: How do we do this? How do we fit all of this into this box here? We can’t do it without God’s help. It’s clear throughout the New Testament that we can’t do this

without God's help, His grace, His power, His mercy, His transformation. We can't do this without God's help. Which leads me to the second point.

Hope fueled by worship doesn't just happen; it's cultivated. It's cultivated by establishing a pattern of connecting regularly to God personally and also through the encouragement of worship with other followers of Christ. You and I, we may be a mess, but we're in it together. The second part of verses 17 and 18,

17 . . . I pray that you,

now Paul is speaking to the Ephesians but he is also speaking to the church,

being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ

Rooted! Grounded! Established! Does anybody remember what happened on January 15, 2009? The headlines read *Miracle on the Hudson*. US Airways Flight 1549 took off from LaGuardia Airport in New York City bound for Charlotte, North Carolina. Two minutes after takeoff, the airplane ran into a flock geese. Both engines were badly damaged. They lost power. The plane was heading north over the Bronx. Instantly, Captain Chesley Sullenberger and his copilot had to make a whole lot of decisions real fast. They could see one or two small airports nearby but they couldn't guarantee getting that far and likewise, landing the plane on the New Jersey turnpike was way too risky. That left one option, landing on the Hudson River. It's not easy to crash-land safely on a river, and in the two or three minutes they had, not a long time at all, before they hit the water, the captain and the co-pilot had to do a whole lot of things.

They had to shut down the engines. They had to set the right speed so the plane could glide as long as possible without power. They had to get the nose of the plane down to maintain speed but then get it up again before hitting the water. They had to disconnect the autopilot. They had to override the flight management system. They had to activate the ditch system that seals valves and vents to make the plane waterproof. Most of all, they had to fly and then glide the plane in a fast, sharp left-hand turn so they could come down facing south, going with the flow of the Hudson River. They had to straighten the plane up from the tilt of the turn so that upon landing it would be exactly level. And finally, they had to get the nose back up again, but not too far up, and then land straight and flat on the water.

That is at least a small list of some of the key things they had to do in a couple of minutes. There are probably a ton of other things that we amateurs wouldn't even understand. But they did it and as you know, everyone got off safely. So many people described the incident as a miracle and at certain level, I really wouldn't want to question that, but for me, the fascinating thing about this whole deal is the way it illustrates the vital truth, a truth that many today have either forgotten or have never known in the first place. You could call it the power of acquired habits. You might say that it was the result of many years of training and experience. The ancient writers would have called it virtue. It's what happens when someone has made a thousand small decisions requiring effort and concentration, to do something which is good and right, but it doesn't come naturally. Then on that 1,001st time when it really matters, when they find what needs to be done, they do it automatically. That's what it looks like to be rooted and grounded.

The third point, **hope fueled by worship gives courage to face hard circumstances**. Paul's prayer that God could do immeasurably more was written to a church in the city called Ephesus, a city where Paul spent over three years of his life doing ministry, more than at almost any other place. He was in Ephesus for a reason and that reason wasn't because it was easy. Listen to what Paul wrote about Ephesus when he was writing to the church in Corinth.

⁸ But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because a great door for effective work has opened to me,

and then I love how he adds this piece here,

and there are many who oppose me [1st Corinthians 16:8-9].

As I read through this, I thought, well, that seems kind of like a contradiction. You'd think a great door for effective ministry, for effective work, means that the folks who opposed him were no longer there. They've taken off and now there's this clear path, a clear door, for new opportunity. But Paul is quite clear. Being in Ephesus is not going to be easy. It's going to be risky. Ministry in Ephesus is going to take courage. There could be struggle. There could be pain and problems, but Paul decides the opportunity to change lives is worth the risk. What do you think about that? Is the opportunity to change lives worth the risk? If we look back at the history of the early church, if we look at the legacy of the first three centuries of the church, the early church was defined by bold, risk-taking faith.

If you look at this week in front of you and you don't feel there is a step you need to take that is going to require sheer, raw courage, you may not be hearing what God is saying. One of the most common commands in the Bible is simply "Do not be afraid. Fear not." Some of you just need to hear those words right now. They just need to pierce into your soul. God has this word for you, "Do not be afraid." Jesus had to remind His disciples of this day after day after day after day. Even in situations that were dangerous or life-threatening, He would say, "Where is your faith? Don't be afraid." It almost seems insensitive, but He was trying to make it clear that there was a step that needed to be taken and it was not to find a place that would protect them from fear or possible danger. The step we need to take almost always has to do with courage. "You don't have to be afraid." I sat down with a friend last week to unpack this idea in a modern context and I want to invite you to listen in on our conversation.

[Video begins. To view, see link below]

[PT:] Hi, Bethany.

[B:] Hi, Paul.

[PT:] I know that through your work with IJM [International Justice Mission], you've encountered some pretty challenging situations, some challenging heart-breaking situations. But in that, you've seen real hope and throughout all that, there is this sense of people being able to join together in worship and being able to kind of call on God as the source of their hope. I'd love to hear a little bit about that. What does that look like for you?

[B:] Well, International Justice Mission is an institution I've actually had the privilege of working with for more than a decade. What we do in the world is bring rescue to victims of horrific violence—human trafficking, slavery, rape, illegal detention, police abuse—and we bring prosecution to the criminals who are committing those abuses. We work with governments all around the world to do that. One of the most important things I've probably learned in the last decade of my life is what it means to worship God in the middle of circumstances that don't make any sense and are really painful.

For one of our global prayer gatherings a few years ago, we set up the night to invite people into some of the most dark places of suffering in our world. We had investigators who had undercover cameras that they had taken into these very spiritually and literally dark corridors of Calcutta and other red light, prostitution, trafficking areas of the world. They went in and captured footage of girls as young as five being sold and offered on the market to whomever would come and buy them. You would see the pimps selling them and the girls being forced to act a certain way to try to look marketable. So we had this grainy black-and-white footage by our investigators in these narrow corridors of all these children being sold and then going along the streets and all of the people who were there swarming to find people to buy. We put the film up on the screen as people were walking in that night, footage on B-roll of these devastating images of what is real in the world in regard to suffering.

Then we put words up on the screen. It wasn't the statistics about suffering in the world and it wasn't an explanation of the images that they were seeing. What it was was a worship song. So on top of these horrible images, the words started to scroll of this old hymn about how Jesus will reign over all the earth. We all came in and were looking at these pictures of what looked like defeat and then we stood up and were called to sing together the truth of victory in Jesus and to call out hope and proclaim hope over the reality of darkness. I think that will stick with me for the rest of my life because I think that's such a picture of what worship is. It's proclaiming who God is despite whatever reality of suffering we might be seeing, and it's proclaiming what God is able to do even when we feel totally powerless.

[PT:] So the reality is that there are people sitting in the pews at CPC who are living in their own darkness, and their own state of despair.

[B:] And feel deeply alone in that.

[PT:] So regardless of whether it is in Calcutta or in Edina, there is that sense in which we understand and need to grasp the fact that worship is what draws us and refocuses and recalibrates our sense of belonging to Christ and belonging to each other. I think that's been key for me. I'm a professional preacher guy and yet like everybody else, I grapple with and struggle with that sense of what is this all about at the end of the day? It's that weekend experience, not that it can only happen on the weekend, but for me, consistently, it is when I gather together with other believers that I remember who I am and I remember who we are and I remember most importantly who He is and what that ultimately means.

[B:] Sometimes when it comes time to go get the kids out the door and whatever it takes to actually go be in worship with other people, there is this sense that there are so many

things going on and everyone is melting down that it's just too much of a pain to even get to church. It's easy to have amnesia about what can happen once we actually get there. But being together with other believers and worshiping God, there are more times than I could ever count that I experience this transformation as I leave church and go into the rest of the day or the week. Wherever we might have been coming from, there is this great power in coming to a place with other believers and being encouraged and spurred on and having our minds and our whole spirits transformed by meeting with them.

PT: Amen!

[Video ends.]

Some of you know that yesterday marked the 50th anniversary of what became known as Bloody Sunday when 600 marchers attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge to protest the denial of the practical implementation of voting rights for African-Americans, for blacks, in this county. Last week I had the privilege of traveling with about 40 Christian leaders of different races from around the country. We drove on a bus from Chicago to Birmingham to Montgomery to Selma through Mississippi and on to Memphis. Throughout that experience, I heard stories of courageous men, women, children, lots of kids, who were fearless in the face of water cannons and vicious dogs and hate-filled angry mobs, who in dehumanizing others, lost a sense of their own humanity. Throughout this journey of remembrance, what struck me over and over and over again was this constant refrain as if it was plucked straight from the pages of Scripture itself, "Don't be afraid." Jesus speaking to His followers said,

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world [John 16:33]."

John speaking to the early believers of his day wrote

⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world [1st John 4:4].

As I read these words and meditate on them, I am reminded of this unbroken chain in the story of God and the story of God's people, who have taken this to heart and who have believed it with their whole hearts in the hope of the resurrection. Whether it's Paul writing to the Ephesians from a Roman prison cell or Martin composing his letter from the confines of a Birmingham jail, the message is the same: Jesus will be glorified.

I wonder what that means for you this morning. I wonder what that means in your life. Maybe it means something like "I'm going to take a risk that God could do something powerful in my marriage or my family." Maybe for you it means, "I'm going to take a risk that God can provide for me if I start to live with more generosity and openness." Maybe it means saying something like "I'm going to take a risk that God can heal me and change me and transform me if I just would share or ask for help with something that's really going on that I need to ask for help with." Faith requires courage and God shows up. There's glory in the church.

This leads to a fourth commitment and this is an interesting one. Here's the good news, friends. As we sense this challenge, as you sense this challenge on your heart in however God is speaking to you, here's the good news. **This glory in the church is not just an obligation.**

Because of what Jesus did on that cross, it's a promise. There's going to be glory in the church. He promises that. There's going to be glory in your life. He can take whatever you're facing, whatever your situation is, wherever you're at, whatever the circumstance, whatever the struggle, there's going to be glory in the church. There's going to be glory. It means that Jesus worked in your life. He is so committed to you, He is so faithful, that you are going to be the greatest display of God's redemption and transformation that there is. That's what it means to say that there's glory in the church. When people see you, when they see your life, because of what work Christ has done as you're surrendered and committing to Him, people will look at you and say, "Thank God for God." They'll worship Him because of who He really is. That's our mission. Praise God.

One of the things that kept recurring throughout that trip we took was this sense of worship through all this, the hardest circumstances you could imagine and throughout this, there was this soundtrack of the glory of God. Whether it was *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* or *Amazing Grace*, the soundtrack of hope is that God reigns.

Amazing grace
How sweet the sound

Sing with me.

That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see.

Let's pray.

Jesus, You're so deeply committed to us that You promised us there will be glory even in this place. In spite of all the sin, in spite of all the brokenness and pain and struggle that we bring, in spite of all the ways that we live inglorious lives, myself included at the top of that list, God, you've made us a promise, there's going to be glory. Jesus, we pray now through Your grace, we would hold fast to these commitments: to stay true to the Gospel, to be committed to our neighbors, to live bold, courageous faith, to walk through conflict with Your character. God, we just thank You! We just thank You! We just thank You! In Jesus' name, all God's people said,

[All:] Amen.

Link to video shown during this service: <http://www.cpconline.org/index.php?content=videos>
(Bethany Hoang on Worship)

A postscript from John Crosby:

"I'm encouraging our congregation to get and read The Hope Quotient by Ray Johnston (available in our bookstore). The overarching theme of the series and many of the illustrations are found in there; solo deo Gloria!"