

THE GLORY TO COME

Eleventh in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on the Body of Christ from Philippians 3:8-4:1
“[Christ] will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” Philippians 3:21

Last May America celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Jamestown. The colonists endured five months at sea, and suffered from starvation, disease, and Indian attacks. The majority died, but somehow the colony prevailed.

Archeologist William Kelso has been digging at Jamestown since 1994. He has uncovered a million artifacts and located the walls of James Fort. Kelso tells how a couple of British tourists approached him while he was at work one day and asked the question every tourist asks: “Have you found anything?” “Absolutely,” Kelso replied. “Do you see that black stain in the clay? That’s the wall of the fort built in 1607.” The tourists stood silently for a moment, then one of them said, “You mean that’s it? America, the great superpower began as—just dirt?” “Yes,” Kelso said. “I guess it was just dirt.” The tourists pressed on. “Shouldn’t there be a ruined castle, or marble pillars, or--something real?” “No,” Kelso said. “Just dirt and plenty of hope.” (American Heritage magazine, Winter 2008, 51)

Perhaps that’s a good way to express what it means to be a Christian: dirt and plenty of hope. Turn with me to Philippians 3. Verse 21 says, “[Christ] will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” We live in the here and now in humble and painful circumstances, but in the midst of it all there is hope. Notice the parallel. One day in the future the Lord Jesus Christ will transform our lowly bodies and remake them like his own glorious body. Let me take you through Philippians 3, beginning with verse 8 and help you to see three things. **1. The hope of glory, 2. Our home in glory, and 3. Taking hold of glory.**

1. The hope of glory. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of glory? The word is used in several ways. For example, glory can refer to light. We see this in Luke’s account of the birth of Christ. It’s night. The shepherds outside Bethlehem are murmuring as they recline around the fire. Luke says, suddenly angels appeared before them, “and the glory of the Lord shone around them.” (Luke 2:9) Boom! In the pitch blackness bright light bursts forth, blotting out the stars. Shadows retreat. Darkness disappears. The angels of God have come from his presence, and their appearance radiates God’s eye-blinding glory.

The word glory can also refer to high praise and honor. “Glory to God in the highest!” the angels exclaim. (Luke 2:14) The news the angels have come to announce is straight from God himself. It is the best news that men could ever

hear. The Savior of the world has set foot on our planet. He has come with mercy to deliver his people from our sad and miserable existence. Praise the One who has set this awesome plan in motion. Honor him and tap your fellow humans on the shoulder and say to them, "Look! Look! What a great God this is! See what he has done!"

Finally, the word glory can refer to power and majesty. In Matthew 16:27 Jesus talks about his second coming. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with his angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." Handel wrote his magnificent oratorio, *Messiah*, in the space of twenty-four days during the Summer of 1741. One of my favorite choruses proclaims, "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." Perhaps the best known piece from the *Messiah* is the chorus, "Hallelujah!" It is said that when Handel completed it he just sat there. His servant shouted at him from the next room, but Handel made no response. At last the servant stormed into the room. Handel was holding his face in his hands, weeping. He picked up the finished score, waved it at his servant, and said, "I have seen the face of God!" Hope and glory.

2. Our home in glory. One day in heaven God will make us conform to his glory. In *Philippians 3* Paul mentions several aspects of our future glory. First, in verse 11 Paul speaks of "the resurrection of the dead." He is looking forward to it for himself and he says that we shall also be raised. Elaborating on our bodies in *I Corinthians 15:42-43* Paul says, "It is sown a perishable body, It is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." When he says our bodies are sown, he is talking about funerals. I recall the day we buried my father. The bugler at the military cemetery played *Taps*, the veterans in their uniforms folded the American flag and handed it to me; the pall bearers—his grandsons—escorted the body to the caisson, and then we waited while workmen lowered the casket into the grave. As they finished my two sisters began to sing the song our dad sang to us when he tucked us into bed as little children: "Hush my dear, lie still and slumber, holy angels guard thy bed. Heavenly blessings without number gently falling on thy head." I was unable to sing. I had watched his body slowly die, growing weaker by the day from the illness that was stealing his life. But my dad had no fear of dying. He knew, as I know, that one day, when Jesus comes, his grave will open, and he will step out, a new man—strong, vibrant, freed from death's grasp, never to be sick or old or weak again. Not ever! That's actual reality for the Christian.

Second, in verse 12 Paul says he expects to "lay hold of that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." What was it that the Lord Jesus had laid hold of Paul for? You may turn to the story in *Acts 9* of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He was traveling to Damascus to arrest the Christians there and scatter the church, when he was struck down by a bright light. The light was the glory of

God, for hidden within it was the living Christ. Verse 15 says, Saul “is a chosen instrument of mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”

If Jesus laid hold of Paul to carry out his purpose, he has laid hold of you and me also. He has something for each of us to do for him. It may be your role as a parent, or the enabler of your husband or your wife. It may be as a laborer in the church, or a witness at your work, or as one who helps to hold back the tide of evil in our day. Our goal, then, is to carry out his purpose. When we faithfully follow Christ and look back on our lives from the perspective of heaven, we will see how he has woven our lives into the pattern of his work in the world. In other words, in heaven you will see that your life is not in vain. You are not unimportant. You are a vital and necessary thread in the tapestry God is creating. You will have great satisfaction in heaven when you see what he has done through you. And you will rejoice. You will be thankful because you’ve been useful to him. You’ll see how your discouragements and sufferings have been turned into good. You’ll see people who are in heaven because of you. You’ll comprehend your part in the battle for what is good and righteous. You’ll see how you’ve participated in building the body of Christ across the world.

Third, in verse 14 Paul says, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. At the end of his life the apostle said, “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (II Timothy 4:8) The apostle is telling us that in heaven God will give rewards to his faithful servants. These rewards don’t come by merit but by grace. Paul says he is aiming for the prize. He wants to serve Christ here and now to the best of his ability. Only God knows how well we’ve done with what he’s given us. Do you recall the story Jesus told about the talents? To one servant the master gave five talents, which was a great sum of money. To another servant he gave three talents, and to yet another, one. He ordered them to invest what he had given them and to bring the profits to him when he called for an accounting. The servant with five talents earned five talents more and the master rewarded him. The one with three earned three talents more and the master rewarded him. But the servant with one talent did nothing with his, so what he had been given originally was taken from him. (Matthew 25:14ff) The apostle Peter writes, “The God of all grace [has] called you to His eternal glory in Christ.” (I Peter 5:10) You and I ought to live our lives aiming for the prize. You may have started with little or with a lot. That is God’s business. But he will reward you—by grace—according to what you have done with what he has given you.

Fourth, Paul says in verse 20, “Our citizenship is in heaven from which

John sees a vision of heaven, of the glorified church. He says, I saw “the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2) This is a picture of the people of Christ descending to live in the restored Earth. What a day that will be! Barb and I had dinner last week with Ashley, our three-year-old granddaughter, and her parents. Our objective in this visit was to get even with our son by revving Ashley so she bounces off the ceiling as she waits eagerly for Christmas. We succeeded admirably. At the conclusion of our meal we began singing Christmas songs together. Finally we ran out of songs. But Ashley hadn't. We told her she could sing a song by herself, but she wasn't having any of that. She insisted we should all participate. “Guys! Guys!” she said, her eyes sparkling. “We'll all sing! Poppa. And me. And her,” (pointing to her mother). And so we all sang. Heaven will be like that. Full of glory. Full of music. We'll all sing together, and the song will never end in our home in glory.

3. Taking hold of glory. How may you and I be certain we will experience the glory God has reserved for his people? The apostle in Philippians 3 says there are three things we must do. The first is to let go of this world. In verse 8 Paul says, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.” What are the most important things to you? For many today it is our material possessions. Some of us long for power or prestige or promotions at work. Some of us desire the approval of family or friends or the fellow down the street. Some of us just want time free from the demands of community or church or children. Barb and I have received more mail-order catalogs this Christmas than in all the years we've been married combined.. Each one of them has page after page of pictures, showing us things we never knew we needed, but now cannot do without. If we had saved all those catalogs and piled them up, they stack would be at least a foot, maybe two feet high. But possessing the catalogs is not the same thing as possessing the goods themselves. We've treated most of those catalogues like rubbish and tossed them out. If you hang on to the catalogues eventually they will grow brown and wrinkled. A lot of the things we want most in this life are like the catalogues. When we die we'll lose them all. So Paul is saying, let go of the things of the world. Make some comparisons. Evaluate what is really important in life. Set some priorities. For Paul the most important thing is to know Jesus. What is it for you? The glory God promises to his people will be much more valuable than anything that holds us to this world. Make Christ priority one. Let go of this world. Take hold of Jesus!

The second thing we must do is found in verse 9. We must put our “faith in Christ” so that we may receive “the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.” In other words, if we hope to enter heaven we must trust in Jesus, relying on what he did for us on the cross when he paid for our sins with his own life. When we put our faith in Christ he removes the record of our sin and replaces it with the righteousness he earned by his own perfect obedience.

You cannot get to heaven by doing good deeds or by being religious. Only Christ can get you into heaven.

Last Tuesday Barb and I toured the White House. The Christmas decorating had been completed only the day before. We arrived at 9:30 AM and already the line of tourists was a block long. I pulled out my cell phone and dialed a number. "We're here, outside the southeast gate," I said. A minute or so later our son came out and greeted us. "Follow me," he said. He took us to a uniformed officer with a clipboard who flipped through his pages until he found our names and crossed them off. We walked to the front of the line of tourists. Another uniformed guard waved at us and smiled. We came to the metal detector where visitors are required to empty their pockets. We passed right through. Then we entered the White House. This house is full of glory. Part of the glory is because of who lives there. Part of the glory is because the White House is a symbol of America itself, a museum that honors the greatness of our nation and its leaders over more than two centuries. And part of the glory lies in the decorations for Christmas. The colors are somewhat muted this year--golden hues and soft tones of green and red. There are wreathes and Christmas trees and boughs from fur trees set with lights. Elegance, that's the word that comes to mind. But the White House is nothing compared to heaven. If you wish to enter heaven, the Son of God himself must escort you in. He will show his credentials to the guards who salute him, and since he is our sponsor we may enter places where others may not go. And then we see the glory that is within. As we passed through the exquisitely decorated White House dining room I realized I will never be able to sit down for a state dinner with the President, but that hardly matters. One day I will dine in splendor in heaven as the guest of the Lord Jesus. And so will you if you love him. When you arrive at heaven's gates, will Christ be there to pass you through? Trust him now so that your entry into the glory of heaven will be guaranteed.

The third thing the apostle says we must do is to persevere. In verse 12 the apostle says, "Press on." In verse 14 he says, "Press on." In verse 16 he says, "Let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." He is talking about obedience to God's commands. You and I cannot be saved by our obedience for we will never meet God's requirement of perfect righteousness on our own. Nevertheless, we must commit ourselves, after Christ has saved us to live as he wants us to. The proof that we belong to him is revealed by how we live. If you are Christ's, you will keep his commandments. So live by his standard. Press on! Press on!

We started out this morning saying that the Christian life is a contrast between dirt and hope. We live in a hard world. We have sorrows and troubles. But there is glory in the future. A young couple sent out a Thanksgiving card this year with the pictures of their three little children on the front. I thought you would like to hear what they wrote on the back. "Lily's absence is felt through each day and the pain of losing her is unbearable at times. However, we are

sincerely thankful for the nearly three months we had with her. We are thankful that Lily is enjoying eternity in the presence of her Creator. We are thankful for the blessings that the Lord has given us this side of heaven—our marriage, our surviving children, Jaida and Jack, and a new baby girl, due in late February 2008. We are thankful for each of you, our dear family and friends, who have mourned alongside us and generously offered your prayer, support, and encouragement. For all this we give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.”(Psalm 106:1) That young husband and wife are living in the dirt but keeping their eyes on the glory to come. We must do that too.

Have you experienced the worst life hands out? Then keep on hoping. There is glory to come. God’s people keep moving forward even through their tears. We live in the dirt. Our bodies return to dirt. Our possessions and our accomplishments will be buried in the dirt. But that’s now. Our future rests upon the promise of glory given to us through Jesus Christ. So, live with the hope of glory. Anticipate our home of glory. Take hold of Christ and watch for the glory that will surely come.

Preached by Dr. Rick Perrin on December 9 2007 at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, 5637 Bush River Road, Columbia SC 29212 and the Northwest YMCA on Kennerly Road
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