

The President Ponders

It's been a wonderful privilege to serve our churches as President. I have really enjoyed the fellowship and hospitality. However, it has also been a challenge spiritually to faithfully preach the gospel. If we are not careful, we could just recite the gospel story and message, as we have received it from others. Our society is rapidly changing, and although the message of Gospel never changes, how it interacts with the society around us does. We need to be constantly wrestling in prayer, with the scriptures in one hand and newspapers in the other, seeking to grasp where the Gospel offers peace and hope to our restless generation, or when it contradicts and challenges sin and injustice.

With the celebration of the Ascension in mind I want to explore how the Gospel's focus on eternity speaks into three current issue that our society is struggling with, and how the answers it gives us offer hope, dignity and peace beyond the wisdom of our age.

Feminism - is the hope of women to be respected and treated equal with men. This is a noble hope, and the feminist movement has made some great changes in our society, which gives me hope for the aspirations of my daughters in the future. Of course nothing is that simple, and at times the feminist agenda has actually had negative effects on family life and ironically, has undermined and confused the very identity of females it sought to protect.

Yet it seems to me that the HOPE of the gospel offers far more to humanity. While feminism hopes for equality with men, the gospel offers in some aspects equality with Christ. We are to be co-heirs with Him, in sharing His inheritance. We are called to be children of God. We are to be clothed in His righteousness, which means we will outshine the angels. As R.M.McCheyne said "The angels have on creature-righteousness, the redeemed the righteousness of God." (*MEMOIR AND REMAINS OF THE REV. ROBERT MURRAY M'CHEYNE - Sermon 9 - Revelation 7:9 The Great Multitude*)

Co-heirs with Christ

John 14:1-4 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Galatians 3:26-29 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 4:6-7 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

Clothed in His righteousness

Isaiah 61:10 I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Zechariah 3:4 The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you."

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Revelation 7:9, 13-14 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Taken from the hymn "I am a debtor" by Robert M. McCheyne

**When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see Thee as Thou art,
Love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.**

Hedonism - is the pursuit of pleasure at all cost. C.S.Lewis famously said "we are far too easily pleased", which in turn prompted John Piper to write about 'Christian Hedonism'! This at first glance seems like a contradiction in terms, but while the world is willing to sacrifice their health and sanity in the search of pleasure through sex and drugs, our Hope and Pleasure is found in heaven, and the call is to take up the Cross and follow Him. Our call is to lay down our lives that we might receive an eternal inheritance through the Grace and Glory of the Cross. In short "We are far too easily pleased!" What pleasure does this world find in their pursuits, and how long does it last? How much do they spend and sacrifice in its pursuit?

A worldly Hedonism

Matthew 4:8-10 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Luke 12:19-20 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Hebrews 11:24-26 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

See also Luke 16:19-23, Revelation 18:7-8

Hope and Pleasure found in Heaven

Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

See also Mark 8:34-38, Luke 9:23-26

Further reading

"The Weight of Glory," an essay by C. S. Lewis

"Desiring God" by John Piper,

The Westminster Shorter Catechism summarizes the

"chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

Narcissism - is a fixation with oneself and one's physical appearance. Narcissus was a hunter known for his beauty, and when he was shown his own reflection in a pool, he fell in love with it, not knowing it was only a reflection, and so he lost the will to live. There is a form of social media today that requires you to take a 'selfie' (picture of yourself) every time you send a message. Our society is bombarded by images of the 'perfect person' for all of us to aspire to, and ironically, if we indulge, we are left feeling worthless.

So the equation goes something like this:

The Media presents us with the 'Perfect' image

First, we are attracted to it!

Second, we aspire to be like it!

Third, we are left feeling worthless and unloved!

It seems to me that the Gospel is the very opposite of this:

The Gospel shows us the Perfect Man - Jesus

First, we turn from looking at media images and ourselves to Jesus and His teaching and we find ourselves falling short and guilty

Second, in His death we discover love, grace, forgiveness and peace

Third, through His resurrection and ascension we receive

- A. a true Identity and dignity equal to that of Jesus
- B. A promise of a secure Home in Heaven
- C. the gift of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, and who not only aspires us to be like Jesus, but gives us the strength and courage to see it through to the end and into eternity!

Response to Understanding who Jesus is

Isaiah's vision - **Isaiah 6**

The Transfiguration - **Matthew 17:1-13**

John's vision - **Revelation 1:9-18**

Consider the following

- The Magi's response to seeing the baby Jesus - **Matthew 2:11**
- The disciple's response to Jesus after he had calmed the storm - **Mark 4:35-41**
- Peter's response to Jesus after the great catch of fish - **Luke 5:1-11**
- The disciple's response at His transfiguration to hearing God speak - **Matthew 17:6**
- The faith of the Centurion - **Matthew 8:5-13**
- The words of the Centurion who witnessed Jesus death **Mark 15:38**

The Spirit's work in revealing Jesus

John 16:8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

John 16:12-14 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

1 Corinthians 2:6-11 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—
these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.