

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 71 – THE CHURCH - HOPE]

Our focus has shifted to the role and function of the church.

- ◆ We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13, and worship and service.
- ◆ The church as the body of Christ needs to be people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

Last time we looked at the subject of faith. This time our focus is on the subject of hope.

- ◆ I want you for the moment to imagine a world where there is no death, funeral homes, or cemeteries.
- ◆ A world where there is no sickness, disease or mental illness, and therefore no healthcare facilities.
- ◆ A world where there is no crime, accidents, or acts of nature to threaten our lives.
- ◆ A world where there is no sin, wickedness or evil of any kind.
- ◆ A world where each individual has everything he needs to live comfortably and has a purpose for his existence.
- ◆ In fact, there doesn't seem to be anything to worry or stress about at all.
- ◆ In addition, loved ones surround him, even the ones who were hard to live with in the past, except now they seem to have improved remarkably, and are even a joy to be around.
- ◆ Everyone has a radiance and joy about them and a boundless energy which is just as well as there is no night time here to rest and recuperate.
- ◆ All this is great, but the most remarkable thing about this world is the relationship each person has with the One who has made this world possible.
- ◆ People are naturally drawn to Him and He mingles effortlessly with all and has a remarkable way of putting everyone at ease.
- ◆ Yet there is something special and unique about Him even though He is human just like us.
- ◆ In truth, He is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, the God who became human so we could become like Him.
- ◆ Our new nature ensures all our thoughts and motives are holy and pure and a divine boundless love embraces all living creatures.
- ◆ The highlight of each "day" is when Jesus is joined by the heavenly host along with its new additions, in worship of the Father.
- ◆ Time is suspended and spirits soar to unimaginable heights as the heavenly chorus bursts forth in worship of the Father.

This world we have just imagined is the culmination of God's plan to make us in His image.

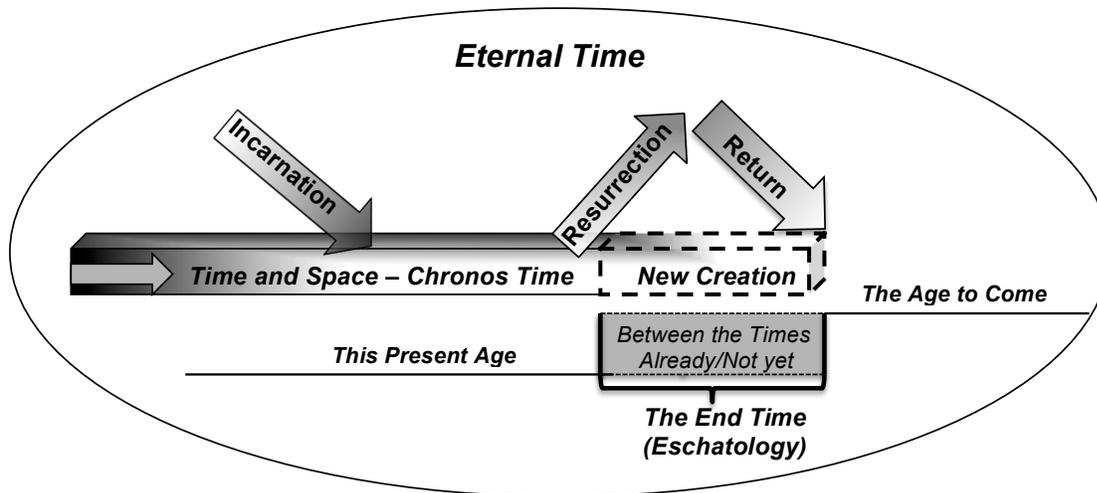
- ◆ After many millennia of sin, pain, suffering and death, He is at last sharing the life and love that exists in the Godhead itself with a forgiven and newly created humanity.
- ◆ This is the reason for which we were created, to share intimate communion with God and one another.
- ◆ Yet we are told by scripture that even the most fertile human imagination cannot come close to conceiving what God has in store for those who will inhabit the heavenly realm of the kingdom of God.
- ◆ ***1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV) "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."***

This is the future reality Christians hope for, long for and pray for.

- ◆ "Hope" is closely related to "faith" as we read in Hebrews 11.
- ◆ ***Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.***
- ◆ We express hope in this future we just described even though it is not something tangible we can comprehend with our seven senses.
- ◆ Rather, "hope" is something we comprehend through our new spiritual sense of "faith."
- ◆ What is remarkable about both faith and hope is, both will pass away when this future is realised, as there will no longer be a need for either of them.
- ◆ What will persevere for all eternity is "love," humans communing with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and with one another.
- ◆ Which means for the present discussion, "hope" belongs to this present age.
- ◆ By this present age, we mean the time between Jesus' resurrection and His promised return or as scripture classifies it, "the end time" or as it has come to be known in theological circles, "eschatology," the study of final things.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 71 – THE CHURCH - HOPE]

- ◆ If we go back to our figure, it looks something like this.
The End Time. (See figure below).



- ◆ This whole period is classified as the “end time.”
- ◆ So like faith, hope is a quality Christians are to display during this period between the resurrection and the promised return of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit heralded the beginning of the age of the New Creation which would culminate with the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints to glory.
- ◆ But it also heralded the beginning of the end of the present age and as the graph shows, there is this overlapping period of time between this present age and the age to come that has been labelled “between the times.”
- ◆ This is the church age where believers live in this “between the times” period where the future kingdom had “already” begun, but has “not yet” been fully realised.

This overlapping period creates a tension because on the one hand we have scriptures that take very seriously Christ’s victory over sin, death and evil, yet other scriptures that predict the powers of sin, death and evil will be with us until the world ends such as the following.

- ◆ ***Matthew 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.***
- ◆ ***Matthew 24: 22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.***
- ◆ On the other hand we have scriptures that indeed confirm Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords and did triumph over sin and evil when He rose from the grave.
- ◆ ***Ephesians 1:21-22 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.***
- ◆ ***Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***
- ◆ So how are we to reconcile Christ’s lordship over the ***powers and authorities*** with what we see on the evening news each night?
- ◆ Well the reality is, both positions are correct. Christ has indeed achieved victory over His enemies through His life, death and resurrection.
- ◆ Yet it is also obvious sin, suffering, evil and death is still part of this present world’s existence.

The solution is best explained by an example from WWII.

- ◆ The decisive battle of WWII was the Allies’ landing at Normandy on D-day.
- ◆ This was the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany despite their stubborn resistance for another year.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 71 – THE CHURCH - HOPE]

- ◆ The Allies had no option but to battle on until the final victory was won.
- ◆ In the same way, the decisive battle of the ages was won when Jesus rose from the dead after defeating and overcoming the combined evil powers of both the spiritual and physical realms.
- ◆ Yet despite the best intentions of men of goodwill down through the ages, evil is so powerful that only Christ at the end of history will finally subdue it.
- ◆ This “between the times” period is like a twilight zone where the light of Christ still battles against the powers of darkness.
- ◆ Yet despite the evil we see in the world around us, “hope” is believing this twilight period is the dawn before the new day when light overcomes darkness rather than the twilight at the end of the day when the darkness overcomes the light.
- ◆ This is not a futile hope, rather it is based on the historical fact Christ has already triumphed over evil. Therefore the final victory is guaranteed although it will not occur until Christ’s second coming in power and glory.

Meanwhile, like the Allies after D-day, Christians are called to be the light of Christ in this dark world (Matthew 5:14-16).

- ◆ Of course Christ has the power to end evil anytime He chooses, but just as He opposed evil in His lifetime as a despised, rejected and crucified Lord rather than an all-conquering victorious Lord, there is purpose in allowing evil to continue until His final all-conquering return.
- ◆ **Matthew 13:27-30** *“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest.*
- ◆ Any farmer knows it is bad advice to allow the weeds to grow unchecked among their crops.
- ◆ So there has to be a reason for Jesus to give this advice.
- ◆ And part of the reason has to do with the critical role the church is to play during this “between the times” period.
- ◆ Paul spells out this role in 2 Corinthians 5.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 5:17** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*
- ◆ However, as they are part of this new creation together with the accompanying knowledge of the kingdom of God, Christians are to be Christ’s representatives of the age to come in this already/not yet time frame.
- ◆ This is important to understand, as the future that we hope for has to be projected back into this present dying age.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 5:18-20** *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*
- ◆ Christians are enlisted into God’s work of **“reconciling the world to himself in Christ.”**
- ◆ This vision of the future kingdom of heaven should not only produce hope for believers, but also hope for unbelievers.
- ◆ They need to be shown there is an alternative to the evil, dying, and sinful world they experience around them.
- ◆ Contrast for a moment an atheist’s view of the world with that of a Christian’s perspective of hope.
- ◆ From an atheist’s point of view, there is no higher purpose to this life; any chance of an improved future for humanity is in the hands of fallible human beings, and he is frustrated by his lack of ability to do anything about it.
- ◆ No wonder depression and frustration is on the rise in an increasing godless world.
- ◆ In contrast, a Christian whose hope is based on God’s ability to guarantee humanity’s future, can remain positive regardless of how desperate conditions look.
- ◆ A Christian’s hope is not a passive hope that only looks to the future. It is an active hope that impacts this world in this “between the times” period.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 71 – THE CHURCH - HOPE]

- ◆ We can't sit around wringing our hands in despair at the evil we see in the world passively waiting for God to do something about it.
- ◆ Jesus expects us to embrace His task of "**reconciling the world to himself**" and to go forth and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).
- ◆ The world needs to hear the message that since that resurrection morning, the forces of evil are fighting a losing battle as the decisive battle of the ages has already been won and as such they have been implicated in the good news of the gospel.
- ◆ The church then, is an end-time community whose members live in the present as those stamped with eternity.
- ◆ **Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.**

So the church as Christ's ambassadors has a responsibility to share the same knowledge on which our own hope for the future is based.

- ◆ This hope is not based on some flimsy superstitious fable dreamed up by mere men.
 - ◆ It all goes back to those momentous events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ These are the factors on which both our faith and hope rest.
 - ◆ This was the decisive turning point of the ages when the kingdom of God invaded the old age of time and space.
 - ◆ It was here on the cross that the final judgment of mankind telescoped itself into the present and defeated the strangulating hold the powers of evil and darkness exercised over humanity.
 - ◆ **Colossians 2:14-16 having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**
 - ◆ The legal charges confirming our guilt were born by our Savior on the cross.
 - ◆ His sacrifice on our behalf justified us so we could be forgiven and reconciled to God.
 - ◆ We are guaranteed the hope that we are no longer under condemnation and are accepted on the basis of Christ's sacrifice and His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).
 - ◆ Three days later that final enemy death too was defeated when God raised Jesus from the dead.
 - ◆ **1 Corinthians 15:20-22 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.**
 - ◆ We are guaranteed the hope that just as Jesus was raised from the dead to eternal life, so we too will be given eternal life.
 - ◆ Our hope is firmly based on the One who is our hope, Jesus Christ.
 - ◆ **1 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope. And just in case we needed further proof to guarantee what Christ had already achieved on our behalf, God sent the Holy Spirit to confirm these truths on the day of Pentecost.**
 - ◆ The Holy Spirit brought the power of the new age to the church so it could live the life of the future in this present age.
 - ◆ But it also provided the church with the assurance of the final consummation to future glory as it lives in this already/not yet period.
 - ◆ Notice the already/not yet language used in these verses.
 - ◆ **2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**
 - ◆ We see the "**Spirit in our hearts**" confirming what has been achieved on our behalf by Jesus Christ in two ways.
 - ◆ First, we see Him confirming our adoption as sons and heirs by placing God's seal of ownership on us (Ephesians 1:4-6).
 - ◆ Second, this deposit or down payment of the Spirit is our guarantee that we will receive the promised inheritance that has been achieved on our behalf in Christ.
 - ◆ So God's Holy Spirit seals us as God's children, and is the deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance.
- But the Spirit's presence also guarantees our resurrection to glory.**

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 71 – THE CHURCH - HOPE]

- ◆ ***Romans 8:23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.***
- ◆ Through the Spirit of Christ, the firstfruit (1 Corinthians 15:20) living in us, we will share in His resurrection to glory.
- ◆ Jesus was the sheaf of grain waved before the Father on that Easter morning which guarantees our future harvest pictured by the day of Pentecost (Leviticus 23:9-16).
- ◆ When we look at these two aspects together, first Christ's saving work on our behalf, and second, the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit within us, our future is guaranteed.
- ◆ Even though we live in this twilight before the dawn period, we have tasted of the life to come and have been stamped with eternity.
- ◆ As Paul tells the Romans, this future hope needs to "overflow" to those living without hope in a dark and dying world.
- ◆ ***Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***
- ◆ We can therefore be confident this dark, evil, twilight period before the dawn will be banished forever by the dazzling light of the returning glorified Jesus Christ.