

"We Shall All Be Changed"

(A Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost)

Text: Romans 8:12-25

Lectionary Texts: Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 8:12-25

Subject: Glorification.

Desired Response: Remind ourselves of the reality.

How To: Make an association with gates, bells, fruitful tree, butterflies, etc.

How Long: Begin this week.

Sermon in a Sentence: "The great hope of our glorification increases as we remind ourselves of its reality."

Worship Theme: "God wants us to look forward to spending eternity with Him."

I received a letter just a few weeks ago from the wife of a dear friend and colleague with whom I had the distinct privilege of laboring for many years at the insurance company where I worked during most of my professional career. This is what she wrote:

Sad news—my beloved husband died on Thursday, June 1, 2017. He had broken his other hip and seemed to be doing quite well. But, he never could stand with that leg. Then, his 98-year-old heart gave out.

The hospital was doing all they could, and he finally said, "I've had enough." He removed his oxygen mask. Both my daughter and I were there with him and he gave me a big kiss and just raised his eyes to heaven and was gone—no panic, no fuss—to be with the Savior he loved.

I'm grateful for the 74 years we had that God granted us, and that he is now able to thank Jesus personally for saving him. I plan to stay here at this place.

Waiting and dreaming of my own Call to come home,

(And, the wife of my dear friend signs her name)

"Christianity is not just a matter of 'pie in the sky, by and by.'" Ever heard that said? The statement, of course, is true. Following Christ certainly relates very much to our present existence.

Unfortunately, while affirming the relevancy of our faith to the here-and-now, such a comment tends to do so at the expense of putting down an equally important truth. Namely, that a glorious future awaits the believer at the

end of this life. How much a person thinks about heaven is probably determined by factors like age, health, or the spiritual freedom known in this country. But, I suspect many Americans think about heaven very little. I confess sometimes I'm at fault in this regard.

A problem with being a member of the great American middle-class is that the present offers too much. Life has so many enjoyable aspects to it, what really can the great attraction of heaven be? At least I'm sure a good number—given the option—would just as soon stick around here a little longer!

All of which means that as I've prepared this sermon, I've been aware that your initial response to the gospel word—glorification—could be less than enthusiastic. Oh, we sing "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue." But, it appears as though a good many throughout the ranks have invested quite heavily in the here-and-now!

My prayer has been that, as a result of this message, maybe you'll feel a little more of "the angels beckoning you from heaven's open door. And, you won't feel (so much) at home in this world anymore." Okay?

There's no question but that's where the Apostle Paul's first loyalties were.

Romans 8 is an interesting chapter. In it we find three special words of the gospel: adoption, glorification, and justification. Today, we want to focus on that middle word: "glorification." Here's Romans 8:12-25:

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 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. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Now, out of that passage, there are a number of very significant verses. For example, verses 15-17—you'll recognize these verses:

"When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs [H-E-I-R-S – that is, those who share in God's wealth as inheritors] ... and if children, then heirs, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Another great verse—verse 18:

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

And, later on in this chapter, the conclusion found in verses 30-31:

"And those whom he justified he also [here it is again] glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?"

Many times pastors have read this passage in hospital rooms— sometimes just days or hours before dear friends or congregation members experience firsthand the total scope of what that phrase "all things" actually means.

"Glorification" is defined as: "being raised to a full possession of the wonders that are ours when God shares His glory with us." These are wonders like new bodies, free from disease and the aging process. Right now that has to sound especially good to some of you, and to me, as well. For your sake and mine, I'm glad this is part of our inheritance in Christ: no more fatigue, no more medications, no more surgery, no more pain, no more feeling trapped in a body that's wearing out faster than we desire.

"Glorification" means release, as well, from the pull of sin. Do you ever grow weary of having to fight temptation? Knowing certain allurements don't bring true pleasure, I'm frankly amazed at the enemy's ability to still make them appear attractive to us. But some day, all that will change, and we'll be robed in the very righteousness of Christ.

Then, perfect fellowship will be ours, with no problem in terms of time or space. We will talk with Jesus as long as we want. We will reunite with loved ones—saints from the distant past as well as believing family members whose memory we still cherish. It's sounding better all the time, isn't it?! Here's Revelation 21:3-4:

"And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. ... And he will wipe away every tear ... and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning ... nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.'"

Maybe you recall how John Bunyan ends *The Pilgrim's Progress*. So many of these ingredients are beautifully tied together as Christian and Hopeful come to the end of their long journey:

Now you must note, [Bunyan writes] that the City stood upon a mighty hill: but the pilgrims went up that hill with ease ... sweetly talking as they went, being comforted because they safely got over the river, and had such glorious companions to attend them.

You are going now, said they, to the paradise of God ... and when you come there you shall have white robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King ... There you shall not see again such things as you did when you were in the lower region upon the earth— ...sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death; 'for the former things are passed away.' ... The men then asked, What must we do in the holy place? To whom it was answered, You must there receive the comfort of all your toil, and have joy for all your sorrow; you must reap what you have sown, even the fruit of all your prayers, and tears, and sufferings for the King by the way.

Here Bunyan reminds us of the words of the Apostle Paul, as recorded in Galatians 6:7-8:

⁷ *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.* ⁸ *Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

Bunyan continues:

There also you shall serve him continually with praise, with shouting and thanksgiving, whom you desired to serve in the world, though with much difficulty, because of the infirmity of your flesh. ... There you shall enjoy your friends again that are gone thither before you; and there you shall with joy receive even every one that follows into the holy place after you. There also you shall be clothed with glory and majesty, and put into an equipage fit to ride out with the King of Glory. When he shall come with sound of trumpet in the clouds, as upon the wings of the wind, you shall come with him ... yea, and when he shall pass sentence upon all the workers of iniquity, let them be angels or men, you, also, shall have a voice in that judgment, because they were his and your enemies.

And now were these two men, as it were, in heaven, before they came to it, being swallowed up with the sight of angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here also they had the city itself in view; and they thought they heard all the bells therein to ring, to welcome them thereto. But, above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there with such company, and that for ever and ever; oh, by what tongue or pen can their glorious joy be expressed!

Now I saw in my dream, that these two men went in at the gate; and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured; and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There were also that met them with harps and crowns, and gave them to them. ... Then I heard in my dream, that all the bells in the city rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them,

‘ENTER YE INTO THE JOY OF OUR LORD.’

Now, just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold the city shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold; and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps, to sing praises withal.

There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. And after that they shut up the gates; which, when I had seen, I wished myself among them.

We’re talking about “glorification”! Here’s a suggestion that may help you retain some of what I’ve shared. In my mind, I’ve made a permanent association between gates and glorification. By that I mean whenever I see beautiful gates, I stop and mentally review again the glories that are eventually to be mine. I don’t see gates that often, but I do see them often enough in photographs, or paintings, or in the real world to at least keep the matter somewhat fresh in my mind.

It might not be a bad idea for you to make that same association, or a similar one—perhaps the pealing of bells, or seeing a fruitful tree that would remind you of the Tree of Life—to use that related sound or visual as a reminder to again pull back into perspective thoughts about heaven.

Throughout history, the butterfly—having broken through the limitations of its cocoon and taken on the beauty of a more wonderful existence—has always served as a symbol of resurrection and eternal life. So the image of a butterfly would also work as a reminder of the heaven to come. Whatever you choose, just decide that its unexpected reoccurrence will immediately remind you to again review, on the spot, the inheritance that waits for you as a child of God. Got it? “Glorification.” It’s good to have something to call our future back into the center of our hearts and minds.

Reduced to a sentence, what I'm saying is: "*The great hope of our glorification increases as we remind ourselves of its reality.*" Again: "*The great hope of our glorification increases as we remind ourselves of its reality.*"

In crafting *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis brings these seven wonderful books to a glorious end in the final episode entitled *The Last Battle*. Here Lewis ties up all the loose ends of the stories and drives home the eternal purpose of his magnificent writings.

It is as hard to explain how this sunlit land was different from the old Narnia, as it would be to tell you how the fruits of that country taste. Perhaps you will get some idea of it, if you think like this. You may have been in a room in which there was a window that looked out on a lovely bay of the sea or a green valley that wound away among mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite to the window there may have been a looking glass. And as you turned away from the window you suddenly caught sight of that sea or that valley, all over again, in the looking glass. And the sea in the mirror, or the valley in the mirror, were in one sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time they were somehow different—deeper, more wonderful, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know. The difference between the old Narnia and the new Narnia was like that. The new one was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can't describe it any better than that: if you ever get there, you will know what I mean.

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right fore-hoof on the ground and neighed and then cried:

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this... Come further up, come further in!"

He shook his mane and sprang forward into a great gallop—a Unicorn's gallop which, in our world, would have carried him out of sight in a few moments. But now a most strange thing happened. Everyone else began to run, and they found, to their astonishment, that they could keep up with him: not only the Dogs and the humans but even fat little Puzzle and short-legged Poggin the Dwarf. The air flew in their faces as if they were driving fast in a car without a windscreen. The country flew past as if they were seeing it from the windows of an express train. Faster and faster they raced, but no one got hot or tired or out of breath.

If one could run without getting tired, I don't think one would often want to do anything else. But there might be special reasons for stopping, and it was a special reason which made Eustace presently shout:

"I say! Steady! Look what we're coming to!"

And well he might. For now they saw before them Caldron Pool and beyond the Pool, the high unclimbable cliffs and, pouring down the cliffs, thousands of tons of water every second, flashing like diamonds in some places and dark, glassy green in others, the Great Waterfall; and already the thunder of it was in their ears.

"Don't stop! Further up and further in," called Farsight, tilting his flight a little upwards.

"It's all very well for him," said Eustace, but Jewel also cried out:

"Don't stop. Further up and further in! Take it in your stride."

His voice could only just be heard above the roar of the water but next moment everyone saw that he had plunged into the Pool. And helter-skelter behind him, with splash after splash, all the others did the same. The water was not biting cold as all of them (and especially Puzzle) expected, but of a delicious foamy coolness. They all found they were swimming straight for the Waterfall itself.

"This is absolutely crazy," said Eustace to Edmund.

"I know. And yet——" said Edmund.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Lucy. "Have you noticed one can't feel afraid, even if one wants to? Try it."

Bunyan has captured it. Lewis has captured it. And, of course, Scripture has captured it. The end of all things that we know of our earthly human existence is expressed in one word. It's the word "glorification." As Paul reminds us from Romans 8:29-30:

²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

So, we come to understand that this magnificent word "glorification" flows from the truth of the resurrection. And, the Apostle Paul offers these words regarding the resurrection of the dead, found in 1 Corinthians 15:12-28 and 50-58:

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ 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. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

⁵⁴ *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

⁵⁵ *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

⁵⁸ *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Each day that we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, we move ever closer to the time of our Calling to go home to be with Him forever. The joyful expectation of what is to come should spur us on to devoting what time remains for us on this earth to serving Him with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength.

Let me very respectfully suggest that as you make your way through the week ahead, from time to time call back into your memory this truth: *"The great hope of our glorification increases as we remind ourselves of its reality."* May the hope of what is to come drive us forward to do the work to which God has called us in the here and now.

Amen.