

The Church: The Hope of the World

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:27

Posted by Bob Young

Introduction

Columbian author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, well-known book titled, *Hundred Years of Solitude*, tells of village with contagious amnesia. Forget the identity of various objects. To limit the damage, they put signs: "This is a _____. The name of this village is Macondo." They even put up a sign that says, "God exists." I fear that the church is in danger of just such forgetting.

From prison, Paul wrote the words of Colossians 1, reminiscing about his own sufferings, and recommitting to the presence of Christ in his life as a power for faithful proclamation. It was also from prison that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. The Philippian letter reminds of principles the church can put into practice to be the hope of the world. The church is the hope of the world when its lifestyle complements the gospel. Live in a way becoming to the gospel (1:27). Stand firm. Live without jealousy. Many are motivated by selfish ambition and jealousy.

When the church can live above the typical level of our contemporary world, the distinctiveness of the message is apparent. The church living like Jesus is the hope of the world. The church is the hope of the world when its attitudes are like those of Jesus (2:5ff). Have the mind of Christ, humble, self-emptying, sacrificing, without self-advancement, obedient. God exalts in due time, but the hope of the current age is in the church which is serious about following Jesus in thinking and attitudes.

The church is the hope of the world when it adopts the priorities and purposes of God. The siren songs of our age beckon, but the things profitable in this world are lost when it comes to following Jesus. The church that can escape the call of materialism and the values of this world will affirm the greatness of knowing Christ, gaining Christ, being found in Christ, knowing Christ as the source of genuine power for living. The church is the hope of the world if it can learn to live above the world.

"...Christ in you, the hope of glory...." (Col. 1:27)

A bold statement: The church is the hope of the world! All of us know that Christ is the hope of the world. But the text says, Christ in us is the hope of the world. As long as Jesus remains a concept, an idea, an abstraction, little hope can be extended. Christ as a living, active force in the lives of his people—this is the hope of the world.

I am constantly challenged by the question: are we a church with good news? Are we able to nurture spiritual life; are we ready, willing and able to spread the good news?

I am grateful for the mission activities of the church at large. I am grateful for our interest in missions—missions around the world, missions on the home front. "Every heart where Jesus does not dwell is a mission field; every heart where Jesus does dwell is a missionary."

Jan and I go regularly to Latin America. In Latin America the church is growing. A few years ago, the Managua project committed to knocking every door in Managua: result was 658 baptisms. The church in many places is growing tremendously. Why?

There is no inherited Christianity. There is no inherited faith. Each generation must rethink the faith for itself. Our children are precious, our families valuable. Our children are safe, but they are not safe forever. They will reach a point where they need to be saved. And we must be available to help. We must not waver. We must not falter. All need the salvation that is available only in Christ. In Christ, people are saved. Out of Christ, people are lost.

The local church is the hope of the world. Local church is the only place there is power to change the world. I believe the local church is where the rubber meets the road. If the local church is powerless, the church cannot grow. If the local church is distracted, the church around the world cannot grow. The power to change our world is in the local congregation.

I. The Church Grows when it has the Mind of Christ. The Church is the Hope of the World when it has the mind of Christ. The church must never forget Christ as its example of an attitude of sacrifice and selflessness.

The comparison of North America and Latin America is interesting. We talk about love, Latinos talk about unselfishness. Some people who talk about love can cry and really care, but not everyone talking about loving is. I like the concept, unselfishness. When we rid self of self, we can cry and care and contribute. What is the mind of Christ? Luke 19:10 says seeking and saving the lost. Phil. 2:5 is followed by 6-10. Yes, it is preceded by 1-4, but 6-10 is a much better description of what is involved in having the mind of Christ: refusing to hang on to honor and position, humbling self, emptying self, abasing self, sacrificing self. It is this attitude that grows the church. It is putting others ahead of self, it is thinking together, but it is ultimately whether you and I are willing to follow the example of Jesus, and get rid of self. To seek the lost, identify the lost, save the lost is not judging, but unselfishly loving.

In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, the master of Caius College speaks to the freshmen: "Let each of you discover where your true chance of greatness lies. Seize that chance, rejoice in it, and let no power of persuasion deter you in your task."

II. The Church Grows when it is Evangelistic. The church is the hope of the world when its message is the message of Jesus. The church must never forget Christ as the only source of salvation.

The church grows when it is not distracted from its real purpose. Eph. 3:10; 1:9-10. The example of Jesus urges us to take seriously the Great Commission.

The church is not a place where everyone and everything is OK. The church is saved people. Those who are not saved are outside the body of Christ. We are in danger of forgetting that in the US church, but not in the Latin American church (at least at present). Evangelism is alive and well in Latin America. The church is growing, militantly pressing, conquering, seeing its value because it is purchased by the blood of Jesus. Only an evangelistic church can be the pillar and ground of the truth.

In my role as church consultant, in 24 states over several years, I have noticed that more and more churches do not know who their members are. They have dead members in the directory (physically dead). They are withdrawing fellowship from deceased people. They cannot identify spiritual weakness. Something is wrong. If we do not know our members, we cannot know our prospects. If we do not know one another, we cannot be evangelistic.

In the 2nd-5th years at Fort Gibson, we baptized 57 persons. Who were they? Largely spouses of members, our children, regular visitors. In year eight, in a Larry West campaign 45 were baptized in one summer. Who were they? They were the people with whom we had daily contact, visitors, spouses, children, family members--almost exclusively.

I like to say that the church is a place where all whose allegiance is to Jesus can be comfortable, but only Christians make up the church. The church is the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, and he is the Savior of the body. Non-Christians should be welcomed, but those outside of Christ are not in Christ. Welcoming can never mean accepting of sin. Jesus distinguished the sinner from the sin. We must love the sinner, but to hate sin requires that we identify it and exclude it from our lives.

If we do not know who is lost, we cannot know how to pray. Each week I pray for you, and especially for the hospitalized, sick, shut-in, travelers, and those who are seeking Jesus.

III. The Church Grows when it is United. The church is the hope of the world when it is rooted in the foundation of Christ. The church must never forget Christ as the center of its life.

In Latin America, the church is growing where there is a spirit of unity. Each year at Baxter, on the Sunday after graduation, 1000-1200 Christians come together from many different congregations, different countries. But there is also an immense problem with "anti" brethren, and ultra conservative forces, drawing smaller and smaller circles. Some are divisive. The church cannot grow with such division. The church must unite itself against the common foe, which is Satan.

Example: the church in Cienega grew from 0 to 80 in the 3+ years after Mitch. The church in Managua is growing, and the Managua project is a project of several congregations. Can you imagine what would happen if U.S. churches would unite in this way. Whether we worship as one or two congregations, we must be clear about our commitment to Jesus and one another.

In John 17, Jesus prayed for unity. Note vv. 20-23. Note what happens when the church is not united. There are two reasons unity is important. First, the world knows God sent Jesus, and second, the world knows God loves the world. When there is disunity, the world laughs at the local church. When the local congregation cannot get along, the world knows, your friends and neighbors know, and the power of the church is diminished. Such a church cannot grow, and cannot be the hope of the world.

IV. The Church Grows when it cares enough to seek its own that are lost. The church is the hope of the world when it cares for those who are Christ's.

Certainly, it is true that the church must care for the poor and the downtrodden and the outcasts of the world. But the first evidence of genuine unselfish caring is that the church is committed to its own lost. It is not easy to be a Christian. We sometimes forget that. The challenges that each member faces daily are often crushing. Gal. 6:1 encourages us to seek one another. We are a unique, peculiar, distinct people committed to one another. Gal. 6:10 puts the family first. We must be committed to our own lost. We must know who they are, we must care.

What a wonderful witness it is for the church when a member can say, my church family cares for me. In hard times-- emotionally, spiritually, emotionally, financially, my church family cares for me. The church cares--first for its own, and then for all around it. This is a part of the uniqueness of the church.

Conclusion

The church is the hope of the world if its dependence is upon God. God's transcending peace comes from such dependence. Our sufficiency is of Christ, and the externals no longer matter. All power that matters is from Christ. The empowered church is the hope of the world. Is the church where you worship the hope of your community? your nation? your world? The hopeful church lives and thinks with the priorities and power of God. The hopeful church can extend hope to others. How's your hope?

I know of no greater blessing in my life today than that I am a part of the church. But not just of the universal church, but that I have a church family. You are a part of my church family. And although I am here, I have never left the hearts of thousands of Christians with whom I have been family in past years. The local church, thinking unselfishly with the mind of Christ, evangelistic, united, caring enough to reach out and restore its own--this church is the hope of our world.

I ask again, can we be the church with good news—nurturing the spiritual journey, evangelizing the lost and hurting of the world. If we can, that will indeed be good news that will make a difference in our world.