
“Beholding By Faith What We Will Behold By Sight”

John 17:24

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AT A GLANCE

After twelve weeks away, Pastor Brian has returned from his sabbatical and offers a word of thanks to the staff, elders, and congregation of Wildwood Church and points us to the future as we are transformed by beholding the glory of Christ!

A WORD OF THANKS

Good morning, Wildwood! It is so good to be back with you this morning! Let me begin with some words of gratitude. I want to say a word of thanks to our incredible staff. The trust test of a staff culture is what happens when the leader is away. Do standards drop? Does productivity collapse? With a god staff, the answer is no. And Wildwood, we have a great staff! Not only did church operations continue, I see progress and movement forward in several areas of the church.

I am sure the workload increased for most of the staff, but I know Pastor Andrew bore the weight of leadership most in my absence. He had to be the one to determine whether an issue rose to the occasion of reaching out to me or be resolved internally. That’s a heavy weight to bear.

I’m grateful that there were no issues that had to be elevated to me. I think that speaks to the culture of leadership we have at Wildwood. Our staff and elders are empowered to lead and to make decisions. They know I trust them, I value them, and I was willing to accept the outcome of their decisions. I am grateful to be part of this staff and one of these elders!

Speaking of our elders, I want to thank the elders of our church for dutifully, faithfully, and joyfully exegeting the Word of God for you this summer. I think that, too, is a major win for Wildwood. I hope you agree. When I was interviewing for this position eight years ago, I told the chairman of the search team when he was sitting in my workshop in Lancaster, Texas that I am convicted that biblical elders are able to teach. It’s the one thing that distinguishes elders from deacons. I told him it’s what elders do. It’s a calling and it’s a sacred privilege that we should not take lightly.

The chairman of the search team sort of chuckled a little and he took that word back to the elders on the board at that time. I’m not sure they believed me. Nevertheless, God in His sovereignty brought me to Wildwood and biblical eldership was my first priority. I was, and am, convinced that biblical eldership impacts everything else in the church.

CELEBRATING WINS

One of my sabbatical objectives was to step back and celebrate what the Lord has done at Wildwood over the last seven years. One of the most obvious and one of the most encouraging is that Wildwood is led by twelve biblically qualified elders. This summer highlighted this reality for me, and I pray for you as well. I hope that your experience over these past eleven Sundays has left you feeling loved and shepherded by a group of men who have submitted to the call of the Lord Jesus Christ to shepherd the flock by feeding His sheep the Word of God.

THE GIFT OF SABBATICAL

And last but certainly not least, speaking of the flock, I want to thank you, church, for this summer. A sabbatical truly is a gift. Not only did you bless me and my family in the love offering, but you honored the intent of the sabbatical by allowing the other elders to care for you and walk beside you and bear your burdens and celebrate your wins! I know it was a sacrifice for many of you to embrace my absence and honor the intent of the sabbatical. I thank you, sincerely, for that.

I also want to thank you for praying for me and my family while we were gone. There were so many logistical moving pieces as we crisscrossed the United States. With the exception of one minor error, which was easily resolved, there was not a single hitch in all of our travels. No car problems. No Air BnB reservation conflicts. No sickness. No fighting. Honestly, it was an incredibly smooth summer for my family. I credit that to a praying church.

I'm reading a book on prayer and one of the insights the author draws out as a former pastor is the absolute urgency of the church to pray for their pastors, especially the pastor preaching the next Sunday morning. I would like that to be the very first take away from my sabbatical this morning.

Church, the enemy would love to derail me, discourage me, and disrupt me and all the other pastors, especially the Saturday evening before we preach. Would you commit to praying for the preacher every single Saturday? Would you set a calendar reminder or an alarm or write it down, whatever it takes? Something happens in my head and in my home Saturday evenings before I preach. I now believe it's spiritual warfare and the answer is a praying church.

REFLECTIONS ON MY SABBATICAL

As I reflect on my sabbatical, I can only assume my church was praying for me and my family. I cannot thank you enough for that. I will tell you my sabbatical was everything it should have been.

It was restful. I spent the first two weeks sleeping. I think I averaged 12 hours a night. I think it took me about two months for my body to recover from what was likely intense sleep deprivation. After two months, my body finally reset to waking up rested after eight hours of sleep. It wouldn't surprise me if many, or even most Americans are sleep deprived. It's not healthy.

My second take away is I am going to re-evaluate my rhythms and I encourage you to as well. I simply cannot thrive on 6 ½ hours of sleep. It feels high-speed to think I can, but I was damaging my health and I was unable to think as clearly as I need to. Young parents, I'll just say God's gives special grace during those years of raising infants. I know there's not much you can do there. You trust Jesus and you sleep when you're able. But at some point, we have to consider healthy patterns of sleep and work and play. That's where I am now.

My sabbatical was restful and it was reinvigorating. I loved being at Gitche Gumee for Camp Wildwood in July. I described it as a sort of shot in the arm, a reminder of what I'm fighting for and why I desire to be here for the long-term. It was such a great week! I got to preach five times that week and baptize nine of our people! And we had a lot of fun together exploring the Upper Peninsula. Lord willing, well do it again in July of 2026. You should consider being part of it!

My sabbatical was refreshing for my spirit. I spent two weeks by myself in Alaska looking at a mountain range. One week on the Knik, a glacier-fed river, and another on a small lake-side hobby-farm. The bulk of my time awake was spent worshipping, praying, reading, journaling and meditating on the glory of Christ. Most of the time I was sitting next to a fire. But even on the rainy days, the Lord contented my spirit to sit on the bed in the tiny yurt and do it just the same, only with raindrops falling on the canvas roof.

My sabbatical was reconnecting for my family. As you probably know, or could predict, ministry takes a toll on families. There's an ironic saying that goes, "The cobbler's wife wears no shoes." It's ironic because the thing the cobbler does best is make shoes. All too often other people get the best of her husband. The saying isn't about cobblers and shoes. It's about the sort of care a man gives to others at the expense of his wife and kids.

One might imagine that a pastor's wife and kids must get constant pastoral care anytime they need it. It's silly to say out loud, because the truth is often the exact opposite. I don't think Kellye and the kids would say they "have no shoes" so to speak, but we'd all agree that it was nice to reconnect, just us, with no pressure of ministry pulling my heart's affection or mind's attention away from them. I mean I danced in the campground laundry room and I cooked over a Coleman stove. I sort of crushed it as a dad this summer! I'm just saying...

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

I mentioned that I spent most of my time on my solo-trip meditating on the glory of Christ. I've been reading Hebrews every other day, chapters 1-7 one day and 8-13 the next, for the last two months. I think I've read it about 25 or so times. And I'm also reading an abridged and translated to modern English version of John Owen's "The Glory of Christ." I am finding that while the whole Bible, and especially the New Testament reveal to us the glory of Christ, no single book of the Bible is more saturated with His glory than Hebrews. This is why the men are going to study through Hebrews this year at our Saturday morning breakfasts every other month. If you weren't here yesterday morning, I hope you'll plan to make our next one on November 9th.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that beholding the glory of Christ has a transformative effect on us. He says we are transformed from "one degree of glory to another" into the image of Christ.

No one can see the glory of Christ unless the Lord opens their eyes to it, though. That's why people could literally see Christ with their eyes and still put Him on the cross. We behold the glory of Christ only by faith.

But once our eyes are enlightened to behold His glory initially, we continue to behold His glory as we read the Word, which reveals His glory, and importantly, as we dwell upon what the Word reveals. This must be an important message, because last night I listened to Pastor Andy's sermon and he said the very same thing last week that I'm saying today. What an affirmation!

We must discipline ourselves to think about Christ. But our minds are so full of worldly things that Christ is often the last thing we think about. If you want to be transformed into the image of Christ, you will be so to the degree you behold His glory.

WHAT GLORY ARE WE BEHOLDING?

But what glory are we beholding? Isaiah tells us he had no stately form or beauty. Jesus had no place to lay His head. His kingdom is one we cannot see or touch. No beauty, no riches, no political or military power. So what glory are we beholding?

In what we call Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, which Al Knott preached to you on August 18th, Jesus after speaking of how He has glorified the Father and after He asked that the Father would restore Him to the glory He had before, Jesus prayed that His people would be with Him where He is for what purpose? John 17:24, Jesus tells us why He desires that we would be with Him in Heaven. He tells us the point of Heaven. What Heaven is going to be like. What eternity will be like. He says, **"...to see my glory that You have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."** John 17:24

Ultimately, the prayer Jesus prayed for us is that one day we would be able to fully see His glory in Heaven. That is the hope of Christ and it is the hope of every true believer. We long to see Christ in His glory. That will be the epitome of Heaven: Christ exalted and glorified. Like our solar system revolves around the sun, being dependent upon it for life and light, so Heaven will revolve around the Son of God. As it is written, *“The city will not need the sun or moon to shine because the glory of God will give it light, and the Lamb will be its lamp.”* Revelation 21:23

WE BEHOLD NOW ONLY BY FAITH

But no man should ever expect to behold the glory of Christ by sight if he has not first beheld His glory by faith. This is the great distinction between those who will inherit eternal life and those who will not: the glory of Christ. No man who has failed to behold the glory of Christ by faith should have any aspirations of beholding the glory of Christ by sight. This was the error of the Jews in Jesus day, and to this very day. Though He walked with them and spoke with them, and performed many miracles in their presence, they're hearts remained veiled to His glory.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3, *“For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”* 2 Corinthians 3:14-16

One of the major themes of John in his gospel was signs. Jesus performed many signs, seven to be precise, a perfect number, sufficient to demonstrate His divinity. Yet over and over again, the error of the people is that they would observe the miracle but miss the sign. They would see the physical manifestation of the power of God, but they would deny the source. They would deny the implication, namely that Jesus was God in the flesh.

So, too, do people today, even religious people, who crowd around Jesus only for a free breakfast after feasting on the five loaves and two fish the night before. There are many who would come to Christ only to be made much of by God. They imagine that the greatest evidence of God's love is that He would make much of them. That He would do for them. That He would grant them eternal life in Heaven and met every need on earth. But that is a perverted and twisted thought. The greatest evidence of the love of God is the lengths He went through to allow you to make much of Him.

Afterall, that was man's created purpose, to glorify God. To see the glory of God cover the earth like the waters of the seas. This is man's highest and greatest purpose in life, to make much of God. Yet, this is impossible to do in our fallen nature. Nothing we do for God matters if we have failed to behold the glory of Christ by faith. All will be burned up. All will be ashes in the hand of the man who fails to see that the very Creator God has stepped out of Heaven, becoming man, lived a perfect life, obeying the entire Law, died a sinners death, atoning for your sins and mine, rose from the dead in a literal bodily resurrection, defeating death, hell, and the grave!

DO YOU SEE HIS GLORY BY FAITH?

Do you see the glory of Christ? Do you believe in your heart without hesitation and do you put all of your hope in the truthfulness of these claims? Do you anxiously look for Christ's return? Do you long for heaven because in Heaven you will behold by sight what you have beheld here by faith?

If the answer to those questions is no, you have not beheld the glory of Christ by faith, you do not truly hope in Christ, you do not truly without hesitation believe the things I've spoken, you want heaven but only because you don't want hell, I call you to repent. I call you to believe. You will say to me, how can I believe if my eyes remain unveiled? I pray here and now that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ would enlighten your hearts and remove the veil that you might see Christ in all His glory, glory full of grace and truth. That you would see clearly your own helpless estate and that

without the aide of Christ through His Holy Spirit, you will be eternally lost and condemned. That you would marvel at such a thought that the holy Creator of the universe would step down into the flesh and become like you so that by faith you could live with Him forever. That you would weep over your sin and your shame and your brokenness and you would cry out for mercy as the sinner you are. And that you would find relief from the pains of your estrangement from God and be reconciled to Him and adopted into His family as a beloved child.

And if indeed you have come to behold the glory of Christ, I invite you to rejoice and I rejoice with you because you will receive your reward! You will see Christ with your eyes and by seeing, you will become like Him for you will see Him as He is. As it is written, *“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is...”* 1 John 3:2

Your transformation, slow and arduous as it might be while you wait, full of turns and set-backs, and regrets, will be completed on that great day! You will neither feel pain, nor will you cause pain. You will neither hurt, not hurt others. You will cry no tears, and no one will cry tears because of you! What a glorious day that will be when by sight, we behold the glory of Christ, and we are finally and completely transformed into His image.

DISCIPLINE YOUR MIND

In the meantime, I invite you to do more than wait. I invite you to more earnestly behold the glory of Christ, asking that the Lord would reveal to you Christ’s glory in the scriptures each day as you read, and for help as you discipline yourself to *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”* Colossians 3:2 Ask the Lord to displace the worldly things that so clutter your mind that you might be more prone to let your mind dwell on Christ and His glory. In so doing, and the degree to which you do these things, you will be transformed into the image of Christ, from one degree of glory to another. Not only will you have His Spirit living in you and His nature given to you, but you will begin to reflect Him in your thoughts, words, and deeds more and more. What He values you will value more and more!

Wildwood, it is good to be back with you! I thank you all and I thank the Lord God almighty. I pray that as we spend the next couple of weeks exploring the glory of Christ, that you will go out with great anticipation of beholding His glory by faith more and more each day and that you will return each week with joy in your heart as we gather to worship our risen, and glorious King, our merciful, and majestic Savior, our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory! Amen?!