

Renewal Is at the Core of Christian Faith

Anything that becomes visible is light

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, January 3, 2021
PASSAGES	Ephesians 5:11-14; Ephesians 4:28; John 4:28-42
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:00:30 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Renewal is at the core of the Christian faith — not only the renewal of all things to come, but renewal now. Paul tells the Ephesians that when the light exposes what is hidden, “anything that becomes visible is light.” What Christ uncovers in us, once confessed and repented of, becomes a source of light and hope for others.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Our faith promises the renewal of all things, but it is shallow, even hypocritical, if it places renewal only in an unreachable future.
- ◆ Without hope, faith hollows out and life in Christ becomes white-knuckling through another day.
- ◆ Paul’s call to “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness” was written to believers, and exposing darkness begins at home, in us.
- ◆ When the light shines on a believer’s sin and they repent, the thing itself becomes light: the thief becomes a giver.
- ◆ The Samaritan woman’s hope became the hope of a whole town. Hope rising in one heart can infect a community.
- ◆ Look at what Christ is exposing with him, until you can see his grace in it — even if you still limp.

- ◆ It is not ultimately about you: Christ's mission is for the world, and he means to make his people a community of light.

► 1:00:30

On the first Sunday of 2021, Geno Hildebrandt began with a plea: more than perhaps ever in the modern church, life together in small groups matters, because of isolation and lockdown. Those in groups “have a distinct spiritual advantage.” If you are not in one, see Matt Ryniker “right away,” and come to family night on the 13th. “We will not last long individually.”

Renewal now

► 1:03:22

He was glad to have 2020 behind them — “you know the joke that’s coming: hindsight” — and expected the pandemic to decline by the end of 2021. His theme: “Renewal is at the core of the Christian faith” — of individuals, communities, and ultimately of all things, promised by Jesus himself ([Matthew 19:28](#)): resurrected bodies in the presence of a resurrected Christ, in a new heaven and new earth.

► 1:04:29

But our experience is fractured lives in weakening bodies, divided communities and a broken world, and faith is strained. If we place renewal only in an unreachable future — “pie in the sky when we die, by and by” — we risk an empty, hypocritical religion. “I’m a broken person in a broken world, and it’s just going to be broken always — thank God Jesus is coming back”: that shallow faith, Geno said, “is not faith at all, actually. Renewal is now.”

► 1:05:42

Without hope our faith hollows out and our energy drains, and life becomes “an exercise in white-knuckling through another day. Just hang on, brother.” “If you’re just hanging on, there’s a noose around your neck.” The great hope is Jesus’ return, but this morning he wanted to embrace an *attitude* of hope.

Wake up, O sleeper

► 1:06:48

The believers at Ephesus had begun sliding into unrighteousness when Paul wrote them a stern exhortation across chapters 4 and 5 to wake up and walk worthy of Christ. In it, he gives a reason for great hope.

► 1:07:58

“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”

EPHESIANS 5:11–14 ↗

“Take no part” is an imperative — “in your face: stop it.” And “expose them”: not merely turning away, but saying, that’s wrong, let’s not go that way.

► 1:08:33

Paul is writing to the followers of Christ, not to unbelievers or people of other faiths. Was Geno turning Hope into “the thought police”? “I’m not headed that way at all.” The point is that exposing dark things begins at home, in us — and the real point is what happens when things are exposed.

“Anything that becomes visible is light”

► 1:09:34

Geno had the congregation repeat the phrase: *is light*. “It’s not like the light, it’s not sort of light.” The hope of the text is easily lost in those seven words, because Paul has already said that exposed things become visible. When he adds “for anything that becomes visible is light,” he is saying something more.

► 1:10:47

Part one: the light shines into the darkness and exposes broken relationships, angry words, sinful opportunities. Part two: when that happens in the life of a Christian, “the thing itself becomes a source of light.” “You kidding, pastor? No, I’m not kidding.” Our sins, exposed to the light of Christ, become a source of light for others — “only when we confess and repent, of course.”

► 1:12:05

So what better word for the first Sunday of the year than “wake up”? After the holidays of food, couches, television and football, “it’s time to wake up spiritually.” When believers turn from the

unfruitful works of darkness to the fruitful works of righteousness, they themselves become a source of light. What he is describing, Geno said, is the grace of God in people's lives.

The thief who becomes a giver

► 1:13:36

“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”

EPHESIANS 4:28 ↗

► 1:14:21

This is addressed to Christian thieves, “which I find hilarious.” Get a job, and with the same hands that grabbed what did not belong to you, do hard labour, and then give away what does belong to you. “That totally turns that thievery inside out”: former thieves become “contemporary blessings.” If thievery were merely exposed, a thief would just say, “Sorry, Geno, I won’t steal anymore.” Paul says that is not close. “Use your hands to give, not to get.”

► 1:16:10

Geno remembered working as a day labourer in college for a dollar sixty or two dollars an hour. When his pastor told him to tithe, he thought, “Are you kidding? I work hard for a living.” Letting go of what you have worked hard for is hard; for a former thief it would be harder still.

► 1:17:38

“But here is where we begin to see the depth of the riches of the grace of God.” If the thief’s heart truly turns to Jesus, the difficulty essentially vanishes and he counts it an honour to bless others with his labour. “That’s redemption, dearly beloved... That on which the light has shined has now become light itself.” Those who knew him as a thief now watch his work and generosity and receive hope; so does the person who receives his gift.

The woman at the well

► 1:19:06

Orthodox Jews travelling to Galilee usually went around Samaria, home to people with a half-Jewish, “cafeteria” religion. Jesus walked straight through, his disciples nervous, because he had work to do

there. Tired, he sat by a well and spoke with a Samaritan woman — doubly scandalous, a woman alone and a heretic — and in that conversation she became convinced he was the Messiah.

► 1:21:02

“So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’ They went out of the town and were coming to him.”

JOHN 4:28-42 ↗

► 1:21:36

Her words were “a little salacious.” She had been married five times and was living with a man who was not her husband, and her reputation was terrible. “Come see the man who told me all I ever did” — “that was bait. They took the bait.” Light had shone into her heart, giving her hope of forgiveness, cleansing and acceptance by the holy God; for the first time in a long time she did not feel rejected and alone. Just by opening her mouth, she began giving hope to others.

► 1:23:38

“Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” They asked Jesus to stay, he stayed two days, and many more believed: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.” Here is honour given back to a rejected woman. “Do you see with me, dearly beloved, how hope arising in the heart of one person can infect an entire community?”

► 1:25:22

Once she had been a beloved young bride in that community, with a bright future in view. It was crushed, and crushed again, five or six times, until she lived on the margins as an outcast. Then she met Jesus, and her hope was so powerful that God used it to change a town.

Our story

► 1:26:44

“This story is our story, both individually and corporately.” If we have confessed, repented and followed Christ, the dark things his light revealed have become sources of light. “Almost everything I know to tell people about how to repent doesn’t come from reading the Bible. It comes from repenting — confessing and repenting myself.”

► 1:27:51

Geno has visited many people in hospitals and mental institutions, places that frighten people, but not him — because as a young boy he visited his mother in the state hospital. He remembers her shuffling out in socks and loafers, eyes glazed, kneeling close to see who her children were. “That’s not my mother,” he thought, and went home unable to sleep.

► 1:29:48

Over time he came to see the goodness in his stepfather and in the care that brought his mother home whole; later she told him more of her experience. “That was dark, wasn’t it? You bet it was dark... and God had plans to use that darkness to bring light later on.” If you are in darkness today, don’t give up. “None of your craziness bothers me at all, Hope Chapel. You can thank my mother for that when you see her in heaven.”

Look at it with Jesus

► 1:31:05

So what is Jesus shining light on in your life: a broken relationship, a long-endured sin, a place of abject hopelessness, an addiction you cannot get victory over? “Wherever the light is shining on those items in your life, Christ wants to make that a source of light for other people. Wherever you feel hopeless, Jesus wants to make that a place where you can give hope.”

► 1:32:15

First, look at it. Do not turn away and pretend it is not there. Ask, “Jesus, what do you want me to see here?” When we cannot bear to look, he says, “Come with me; let’s look at it together.” Geno looked at his own dark experiences with Christ “until I was no longer angry with it, until it no longer gave me pain the instant I saw it,” until he could see the grace of God in it.

► 1:34:27

Then you begin to see something there to help others, “even if you still limp... Christ can use your unconqueredness to help others.” Eventually “it’s not about you.” Christ cares about you and your sin, but his mission is for the world: “you’re a part of it, but you’re not the point of it — he is.” There are people around you who need the strength and hope you received from your dark places.

From Saul to Paul

► 1:36:14

Saul, a respected leader and student of Gamaliel, was knocked to the ground and blinded on the road to Damascus: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:1–9). Everything he thought he was

serving God by was corrupt. He spent the rest of his life spreading the gospel he had tried to destroy, planting churches across Asia Minor and Europe.

► 1:38:01

He counted it all loss for the sake of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7–8). His great darkness became light in his soul, then light across Asia and Europe. Jesus crushed his planned future as a bearded rabbi in Jerusalem, and that loss “no longer grieved him”; it gave him joy. For the thief, it means giving away what those hands earn; for the Samaritan woman, the courage to face the town that pushed her away; for Paul, a life of bearing the gospel.

A community of light

► 1:39:58

“Everywhere I look in this room are light sources for Jesus.” What if we understood ourselves this way — a community of light, not for ourselves or only our families, but for the people around us? It is what Jesus meant by a city on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14–16).

► 1:40:39

It is like Christmas Eve at Hope, when Jack takes the flame from the Advent wreath and passes it on, “and the light begins to spread until the room is glowing,” one of the most beautiful things Geno has seen there — “a perfect analogy for the spread of the gospel one person to another. I’m a light source, you become a light source, and on it goes.”

► 1:41:47

He prayed that the Spirit would give courage to look with Jesus at what he is exposing — sin, a broken place, a sad experience that holds us back — until we see his grace in it, confess and repent, and “shine brighter and brighter for you, Lord Jesus, for your purposes.” Then he and his wife, PJ, stayed to pray with anyone who wanted it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- [Matthew 19:28](#)
- [Ephesians 5:11–14](#)
- [Ephesians 4:28](#)
- [John 4:28–42](#)
- [Acts 9:1–9](#)
- [Philippians 3:7–8](#)
- [Matthew 5:14–16](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno warned against a faith that puts renewal only in the future. Where have you settled for “just hanging on”?
2. What does it mean to you that “anything that becomes visible is light”?
3. The thief’s hands turn from taking to giving. What would that kind of reversal look like in an area of your own life?
4. The Samaritan woman’s testimony brought her whole town to Jesus. How has someone else’s honesty about their past given you hope?
5. What is Christ shining light on in your life right now, and how will you look at it with him this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt preached this message on the first Sunday of 2021, urging the church into small groups during lockdown. He spoke of years of hospital and mental-health visits as a pastor, made easier by childhood visits to his mother in a state hospital, and of working as a day labourer in college. His sister Melinda is part of Hope Chapel, and he and his wife, PJ, prayed with people after the service.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6lew4DfiFM&t=3630s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.