

**September 7, 2008**

*Colossians 3:1-4 Part 1*

Alright good morning. I am glad you are here today because this morning, pretty much everything at least begins to change. We've been in Colossians chapters 1 & 2 for 7 months. And like we saw 2 weeks ago, we have looked in depth at the theology that Paul has given us – a theology of Jesus – who He is is, who He is for us, what that means. That Jesus is creator, sustainer, supreme, that He is God, that He is the only source of true knowledge of God, that Jesus is my reconciler, that my salvation, my forgiveness, my victory are in Him, in fact everything I need is in Jesus.

And to be honest, you could come for 7 months and nod your head and rejoice in that truth and convince yourself that all is good. In fact you could answer the question we hit so hard two weeks ago – who do you say Jesus is – and even if you've wrongly convinced yourself that you are a Christian when you actually aren't – you could possibly still think everything is ok. Or if you are a Christian and you do actually believe all that we've seen, you too could wrongly convince yourself that that means everything is ok.

But today all that changes. Because if chapters 1 & 2 are real in you, then chapters 3 & 4 will be as well. And 3 & 4 aren't about what you believe; 3 & 4 are about how you live. And what's amazing is that there is no break between them. The chapters & verses weren't written by Paul – it is all one thought – one flow to him. The life of 3 & 4 flows right out of the belief of 1 & 2. And we see that right off the bat. Look back with me to chapter 2 verse 20. It says "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules?" Then verse 23 says "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, their harsh treatment of the body, but they all lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

So what does have the ability to restrain sin? To restrain sensual indulgence? In verse 20 Paul says since you died with Christ – verse 1 of chapter 3 continues that thought and answers our question. Look at it with me today – chapter 3 verses 1-4.

Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

Verse 1 again – **since you have been raised with Christ**. Some of your versions may say "If you have been raised with Christ" but this is the "if" of reality – it ought to be since you have been raised because it is **an already ACCOMPLISHED reality**. And I hope you get that this morning. If you are a Christian – you've already died. At salvation you were crucified with Christ – so you died to this world. Romans 7 tells us you died and rose from the dead and took on eternal life right then. And I want you to understand, **eternal is not a quantity of life, it is a QUALITY of life**. The eternal life we are raised to with Christ is not a matter of time or quantity. It is a matter of quality. Which gets to the point I was making earlier. We've talked about this before – but **the paradox of the Christian life here is basically the process of BECOMING what you already are**. This is what I am positionally – raised to life with Christ – I better become like I am- better live up to my position. That's the paradox. Becoming what I am. And listen to me, if we you never feel the growing pains of that process, it is doubtful whether the new life has ever begun in you.

But salvation was totally accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ 2000 years ago. It is dependant on what Christ did, not on what I do. But after that, my Christian ethical conduct must be grounded in the victory of Christ's resurrection. Our ethical and moral conduct must exemplify that we are in Christ – that we are – like we'll see in this passage and we saw back in our study of Philippians – we exist in heaven.

So what these 4 verses point to is **the believer's UNITY with Christ as the root principle of the whole Christian life. It is the source of power for all that we do.**

And yet you know regardless of where you go – what church you visit – who you talk to – you can always count on at least one constant reality, one thread that unites all Christians & denominations & whoever – we all struggle with the temptation to sin and want to know how to defeat it – how to break out of its grip.

And to a large degree, the church has failed in its well-meant efforts to equip us to wage war on the world, our old sin natures, and the enemy. Typically the approach to getting people to do what is right is to tell them in a loud, angry, even threatening voice – “Don't do what is wrong!” You know what I mean?

We assume that if we portray the horrid consequences of sin in enough graphic and revolting terms, we've succeeded in motivating the human will to turn from it.

Now I'm not saying that sin doesn't have horrible consequences. I'm not saying we shouldn't make that clear. But if all we really bring to bear against the incredibly powerful allure of sensual indulgence is basically a “Just say “NO”” campaign, then we don't stand much of a chance. Like Sam Storm has said, “Any approach to resisting temptation that consists solely or even primarily of a teeth-gritting, fist-clenching, will-wracking resolve not to yield will ultimately fail. Or, if it does succeed in the short term, it will produce a joyless and mean-spirited legalism that will hardly prove attractive to either Christians or non-Christians.”

See what we are missing – without being too simplistic – is that we sin because it feels good. Sin has a remarkable capacity to please. Granted the pleasure of sin is passing – is fleeting – is transient – but it's still pleasure and that's why we are so ready to yield to it. **The bottom line is that when faced with temptation, the immediate gratification of sin will almost always triumph over the FEAR of its long term consequences.**

So what Paul is showing us here is that the way to defeat that temptation is by faith in God's promise of a greater pleasure. Look at what he says – “Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.” See **holiness comes** not from the legalism or asceticism of chapter 2, but **from a heart CAPTIVATED and controlled by the beauty and majesty of the risen Jesus and all that we are in Him and all the we have in Him and all that we have because of Him.**

He says set your heart on things above. The verb there for “**set your heart**” basically means seek – and in the present imperative it means **keep SEEKING** – a continuous action. It is what Jesus commanded in **Matthew 6:33** when He said, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.” **What Paul is advocating is that our preoccupation with heaven GOVERN our earthly responses.** To be preoccupied with heaven is to be preoccupied with the One who reigns there and His purposes, His plans, His provisions, His power. It is **to view the things, people, and events of this world through His eyes and with an ETERNAL perspective.**

And look – the sole reason why Paul says we should be preoccupied with the things of heaven – that we should set our hearts on – should seek the things above – is because that is **where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.**

I don't have time to go into it this morning, but time and time again whenever we see Jesus referred to in heaven it is at the right hand of God. That is **not a location issue, it is an AUTHORITY issue.** The right hand of God is a position of authority, of Lordship, of power, of truth, of righteousness, of victory. The “things above” that we seek aren't about the things themselves, but because they are connected to Jesus as Lord.

So how do we do that? If that's the issue – if that's the goal – then how do we set our hearts on things above? That's what Paul says next. Not only does he say “set your heart on things above” he

says in verse 2, “**set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.**” It would be easy to see those two phrases as the same thing, but they aren’t. See in order for us to set our hearts on things above, we must set our minds on things above. The one quote that every single preacher & commentator I read as I studied this passage this week – the one every one of them referred to was this – “**You must not only seek heaven, you must THINK heaven.**”

And we find that all through the Word of God. **Romans 12:2** says “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

We saw in **Philippians 4:8** “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.”

You say how do we do that – if to seek heaven is to think heaven – how do we do that? Well I don’t know about you, but the only truth I know of God, the only things I know of Jesus, the only realities I know of the Holy Spirit, and the only things I know of their character and their values is what I have read right here. Right? Just as practical as all get out – **if you want a heart that treasures Jesus, then cultivate a heart that treasures His WORD.** And really you can reverse that and have a pretty good test today. If you don’t treasure this Word – if you don’t love the Bible – if you aren’t studying this Word, memorizing His Word, seeking to apply His Word, if the only time you are in this Bible is half an hour on Sunday morning, then don’t tell me you love Jesus. Because the more you are in here (the Bible) the more what’s in here gets in here (my head). And the more of this that is in here, the more it shows up out here (in life).

And yet I don’t want you to misunderstand what Paul’s intent is here. To seek and think the things above does not mean we are to ignore and neglect the daily affairs and responsibilities of life here and now. **The contrast between the things above and the thing below – the things of heaven and the things of earth is the distinction between the power and principles of this WORLD system that are in rebellion against God and the age to come in which the LORDSHIP of Jesus Christ will be fully and finally manifest.**

So this distinction is not just ethical – it is eschatological. What that means is that we are to live knowing that the future kingdom of God has invaded the present. It was inaugurated in the work of Christ and it continues in us. We live now energized by the powers of the future even though we still exist in the present. We are governed by the principles & values of God’s reign not the dominion of the devil.

So when he says not to think on earthly things, he is not suggesting that we should refuse to mow the grass or take out the garbage or play with our kids or be on time for appointments. He is denouncing a worldly mindset – a perspective that is fixated on this world system to the exclusion of the kingdom of God. Not all earthly things are evil – some of them are – but even the things that are harmless in themselves become harmful if permitted to take the place that should be reserved for the things above – be it wealth or honor or power or pleasure.

Instead, the kind of seeking & thinking that Paul is talking about is the kind of devotion that Francis De Sales – one of the Western Church Fathers – says “does no injury to one’s vocation or occupation, but on the contrary, adorns and beautifies it. Every vocation becomes more beautiful when united with devotion. Care of one’s family is rendered more peaceable, love of husband and wife more sincere, service of one’s prince more faithful, and every type of employment more pleasant and agreeable.”

See the things above are whatever reflects the glory and beauty of Christ – whether it be taking the Lord’s Supper – fellowshiping with friends – or God forbid – changing a diaper. Whatever the situation – we no longer live as if this world is all that matters. We see this world – and every

situation – against the backdrop of Jesus – the backdrop of eternal life. Not forever existence after we die – but the quality of life only found in Jesus. Bringing the power – the principles – the values – the glory of the things above where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God – into the present through how we live.

Is that not what Jesus taught us to pray? Matthew 6:9-10: “This then is how you ought to pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.””

Folks nothing in this world is the way it ought to be. It’s harsh and it’s cruel and it’s broken. But that’s why there’s us. Children of God alive in Christ. It doesn’t matter where we’ve come from. It doesn’t matter what we’ve done. It doesn’t matter what we suffer. It doesn’t even matter if anyone even ever knows our names. **We live as if the world is as it SHOULD be to show it what it can be. So people see in us what life one day WILL be.**

But that’s not going to happen because we say we believe in Jesus. That’s not going to happen because we come to church on Sunday. That’s not going to happen because you listen to me or sing some songs.

That’s going to happen when we begin to see things and people and events the way Jesus sees them.

That’s going to happen when seek the things above by purposefully thinking the things above.

And **that’s going to happen when because we see & THINK like Jesus, we live like Jesus every day.**

Folks look at me – there is only one consistent test for Christianity throughout God’s Word. It is worded differently – it is described in different contexts – but it is consistently the test that we hold up as proof of salvation. And it isn’t what you say you believe. It isn’t what you do on Sunday. **The consistent test of authentic Christianity is what I asked you two weeks ago – who does your LIFE reveal Jesus to be?**

Are you becoming in practice today who you say you already are in Christ – dead to the world and raised to eternal life right now?

You want to know how you do that? How to live in the paradox of becoming what you are? Of living eternal life now? I’ll tell you.

Three steps:

**READ the Word.**

**THINK the Word.**

**LIVE the Word.**

That’s what Paul is laying the foundation for in these opening verses – not only how to restrain sensual indulgence but for everything we’ll see in the next 2 chapters – the eternal life that is ours in Christ now.

*Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

Let’s pray.