

September 14, 2008

Colossians 3:1-4 Part 2

Alright – I'm glad you are back this morning. Grab your Bibles and let's go back to Colossians chapter 3. We started looking at the first 4 verses of this chapter last Sunday and we'll finish that up today. And I heard from several of you last Sunday that I skipped a big chunk of the statements in the message map – the notes – and you're right – I sure did. It's good to know you are paying attention. But for those of you type A personalities who went home in a panic because you had blanks that weren't filled in, you can relax, I'll bring those into our time today so you'll go home fully filled out today. Hopefully. So let's look at Colossians 3:1-4.

Last Sunday we saw in verses 1 & 2 how if you are a Christian, you have been raised to eternal life right now – not waiting for you to die physically – but because you have died in Christ and been raised with Christ, that you have eternal risen victorious life right now. Which means we live in a paradox. That's what we are yet we live day to day in the process of becoming what we are. Christ is our treasure – our motivation – our why – our pursuit. We set our minds on the things above because that is where Jesus is. We bring His values and glory here through how we live because our thoughts are on Him so we see this life through His eyes.

So, what we see in these 4 verses is in many ways a reminder of all of chapters 1 & 2. That **our lives are Christocentric**. Big word – easy understanding. Look at it in verse 1-4. **We have been raised with Christ in the PAST in verse 1. We are hidden with Christ in the PRESENT in verse 3 and we will be revealed with Christ in the FUTURE in verse 4.** Folks this is unmistakable. **For the Christian, everything makes sense ONLY when seen in terms of our identity, our relationship, and our union with Christ.**

Paul builds on that truth in verse 3 when he says, **“For you died.”** In Greek, the original language, that is the **aorist or past tense**. Whenever a Greek wanted to say something that was **already done and FINISHED and absolutely irrevocable and couldn't be changed**, he said it in the aorist tense. That's what this verb means. It indicates that a death took place at salvation.

Galatians 6:14 expands the thought when Paul says “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” In what sense has the believer died? I mean we're walking around here today right? **The believer has died in the sense that the PENALTY for sin has been paid.** God's Word makes it clear – the wages of sin is death. You sin – you gotta die. By union with Jesus Christ, we die the required death in Him. Remember from last week and the sermon before that – when we surrender by faith to the truth of Jesus Christ, in the mind of God we are propelled back 2000 years to the cross of Christ and we die in Christ – we are buried in Christ – we died the required death in Him. So the penalty of sin is paid and sin can never claim us again. Which means like we discussed in chapter 2, **sin's presence and its power still can affect us, but its DOMINANCE over us is ended and it cannot condemn us.** Folks – that is good news this morning, amen?! Dying with Christ points to the definitive and irreversible split with our old life. We are to be as lifeless and insensible to it as a corpse is to the stimuli of the physical world. I don't want to belittle that incredible truth this morning in any way, but in this passage it is the next statement that is the emphasis.

He says **“and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”** The best way to start looking at what that means is to look at what it doesn't mean. Remember Jesus said we are to be a city on a hill which can't be hidden. So in that sense, “hidden” is therefore a bad thing.

Think Batman – with all the hype on the newest installment of the Batman movies, most of us can identify with this. Batman – Bruce Wayne – has a dual existence. When all was calm and safe, he is Bruce Wayne eccentric good looking billionaire. Not so normal for us, but you get my point. But when chaos breaks out or the “Bat symbol” is turned on, then the three piece suit is cast aside and out comes the image that strikes fear in the heart of criminals – Batman.

In a twisted way, many Christians are like Batman. They keep their Christianity concealed beneath their street clothes. Days, maybe weeks go by before some crisis occurs demanding that they abandon their normal routine and adorn themselves with the costume of Christianity in order to perform some great feat of faith or mercy. But as soon as the crisis passes, they – like Batman – return to their everyday existence as mild-mannered teachers or mild-mannered students or mild-mannered accountants or doctors or builders or preachers.

And we wonder why the Church today is so ineffective and its presence so dismissed in our society. There are too many who profess the name of Christ but who want their commitment to Him to remain “hidden” until threatening circumstances require they take a stand. My point is that **Paul in no way wants us to think of our lives as UNSEEN or obscured when he says ‘hidden.’** Instead, what “hidden” means first is that the source of our spiritual life is inexplicable to those who **DON’T KNOW Jesus**. Unbelievers are unable to grasp the full truth of our new life because, like **1 Corinthians 2:14** says “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” There is an element of mystery to the rationale and motivation of the Christian life.

Why does one man refuse to exploit an opportunity for financial gain when others so easily justify circumventing the law? Why does one teenage girl steadfastly resist the sexual advances of a boyfriend when others so quickly yield without a thought? What accounts for a life that is qualitatively different when that very difference costs so much from a worldly or economic or political perspective?

My new life is hidden in Christ and I have to realize that they are not going to understand me – that this is not my domain – this isn’t my sandbox – this isn’t even my home. I am a stranger and an alien here. And as that sinks in, we take comfort in what John writes in **1 John 3:1-2**: “The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him...”

I don’t want to belabor this but think of it in terms of what we can and cannot see of a flower. The root system is concealed beneath the ground surface. How the flower gets nutrients from the soil that cause the growth of its stem and leaves and petals is unseen. But the beauty of the rose is for all to see. Its color & fragrance are ever on display for the joy of all people. That is just like the Christian whose strength & motivation & inner life are “hidden with Christ in God” but whose kindness & perseverance & love are a perpetual witness to the glory of God’s grace within.

Secondly, our lives are hidden with Christ in God in that **‘hidden’ means we are eternally SECURE**. We are **safe, hidden protectively from all spiritual foes**. Jesus tells us in **John 10:28** to those who He gives eternal life, “they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

You know anytime I can point you to God’s Word to explain God’s words rather than trying to use my own, that’s the best option for both of us. And in this situation, no passage states the glorious truth that Paul is presenting here more eloquently than **Romans 8:31-39**. Turn there and listen to what God has written:

TEXT

Our lives are hidden with Christ in God – EMPOWERED by truth the lost world can’t comprehend and SECURE beyond the reach of any threat. Again – that is awesome news this morning. But, Paul continues in verse 4 by saying “When Christ, who is your life, appears; you also will appear with him in glory.” Let me pull out the “who is your life” part and focus on what’s left.

“When Christ appears” – obviously a reference to when Jesus comes back. And we know about that – we believe that – even if we don’t understand it, we claim it. But I want to make sure you understand that when Jesus comes back, it will not be like when he came the first time. The first time, Jesus divested Himself of so much of what is rightfully His. Philippians 2 remember tells us He humbled Himself, took the form of a man and not just a man but the lowest of men, a servant. He

humbled Himself to become obedient to the most horrific death maybe ever created by the mind of man. He came in weakness and servitude and humility and humanity. He came to save mankind the first time. That's not what happens next. The next time Jesus shows up, it is not to save man. It will not be in humility. It will not be in weakness. He will come to judge. **The next time Jesus comes, He will come to CLAIM those who are His and destroy those who are not. He will come in GLORY.** Listen to how it ends, Revelation 19:11-16

TEXT

On that day, our being "hidden with Christ" will come to culmination. It will become apparent who really belongs to the Lord. For Paul says when that happens – when Christ appears, we also will appear with Him in glory.

Now when he says "**in glory**" he is not referring to a place but an **EXPERIENCE**. It is like what Paul had in mind in **2 Thessalonians 1:10** when he declares that Christ is coming to be glorified *in* his saints. John Stott explains it this way: "So how will the coming Lord Jesus be glorified in relation to his people? Not 'among' them as if they will be the theater or stadium in which he appears. Nor 'by' them as if they will be the spectators, the audience who watch and worship, nor 'through' or 'by means' of them as if they will be mirrors which reflect his image and glory – though in a sense all of those are true – but rather Jesus will be glorified 'in' them as if they will be the filament [in a light bulb] which itself glows with light and heat when the electric current passes through it."

When Christ appears, we appear in glory – engulfed by His surging splendor and experiential participants OF his glory FOR his glory. Again – that is awesome news today. But it is good news for a certain group of people. It is for those who fit the phrase that we skipped: When Christ – what does it say in verse 4? "**When Christ who is your life appears.**"

Folks listen – **Christ does not merely give life. He IS life.** In **Galatians 2:20** he says "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Remember in **Philippians 1:21** Paul put it simply, "for me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

Paul is expressing that vital, irrevocable union we have with Jesus that we talked about last week. It is such that the Christian simply cannot conceive of life in any meaningful way separate from the indwelling, energizing, loving presence of Jesus Christ. **Our personal identity is so wrapped up in who Christ is and what He has accomplished, that it simply makes no sense to speak or even think of a "me" INDEPENDENT of Him.**

People every time you find yourself talking in terms of rights or entitlements, you are disregarding the fact that the only thing we truly deserve is death. We have no independent life on our own. We can claim no right in our bodies our minds our souls or possessions. The only life we have now is the life of Christ in us. Therefore – listen – **our interests must be identical with His. Our goals and aims and vision must be co-existent with His. All that is PRECIOUS and dear to Jesus should be to us as well and all that is OFFENSIVE or painful to Jesus should affect us in the same way.**

And I know – that doesn't happen right away. I know that takes time – it is a process – it is a life long process of being conformed to Jesus – of moving into life in Christ one step at a time. But in light of what has already happened to us – we died & were buried & were raised with Christ. And in light of what is going to happen to us – we will share in his glory when He returns and forever. Then our lives right now must be more and more radically different – there must be progress – there must be change – there must be movement and if our salvation is real there will be. You won't have to make it. You won't have to fake it. If your salvation is real, you will make progress – there will be movement – there will be change – because Jesus is alive in you.

See to say that Christ is my life is to say that my life exists ultimately to make Jesus look great and glorious. Not that I make him glorious but I do reveal and display his greatness and glory in all He does through me. **This life he gave me only has VALUE so far as it is lived for his glory.**

And that is what we have got to get our hearts around in these first 4 verses. Listen, as long as you are preoccupied with the world's system – as long as we are caught up with money and fame and trustees and popularity and fashion and education and power or whatever. As long as those are the things you love the most – and you can tell if you love them most by what you think about most – as long as you do that – listen – **as long as you are preoccupied with the world's system, you will never REACH your world with the gospel like God wants.**

That's why verses 1 and 2 are what they are – since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. When God says "Come out and be separate from them" in 2 Corinthians 6:17 it isn't just about personal holiness – he is talking about evangelism. There is no way you are going to touch the world until you get out of it and see its needs genuinely and honestly and realistically.

See the key to living the risen life is to have life centered on Christ – not this present world – in order to impact this present world with and for Christ.

I've quoted so many times from Oswald Chambers My Utmost for His Highest, but listen to how he explains this.

On Jan 6 he writes: "The lasting value of our public service for God is measured by the depth of the intimacy of our private times of fellowship and oneness with Him."

On Mar 17 he writes: "My worth to God publicly is measured by what I really am in my private life. Is my primary goal in life to please Him and to be acceptable to Him, or is it something less, no matter how lofty it may sound?"

On Nov 16 he writes: "The true test of a saint's life is not successfulness but faithfulness on the human level of life. We tend to set up success in Christian work as our purpose, but our purpose should be to display the glory of God in human life, to live a life "hidden with Christ in God" in our everyday human conditions. Our human relationships are the very conditions in which the ideal life of God should be exhibited."

Church, do you see why I warned you last week that everything was changing? That these two chapters are not just about what you believe – they are about how you live. Do you see how these first 4 verses are crucial for us not only to understand but to begin to do – not only to seek heaven, but to think heaven. To read the Word – to think the Word – to live the Word. To be moving into life in Christ one step at a time together. Because this life that we have been raised to is not our own and it will be over in an instant. So we live it on purpose. We live as if the world is how it should be to show it what it can be so people will see in us what life one day will be.

So ask yourself this morning, **is Jesus precious to me or are He and His expectations a BURDEN in my life?**

Where am I so caught up in the principles and values and demands of this WORLD SYSTEM – of the things below – that I am of no use to the glory of Jesus?

Or are the values of Christ – the truths of this book – so filling my THINKING that people don't understand my LIFE?

If my life only has value in as much as it glorifies God...

If my worth to God publicly is measured my intimacy with him privately...

Where do I stand?

What must change?

Will I take seriously the obedience that will follow in Colossians?

See in the same way we had to see chapters 1 & 2 before we would do chapters 3 & 4, we've got to deal with verses 1-4 in chapter 3 before we see the importance and value of the verses that will follow.

So this morning, if you are saved – if you know you love Jesus because He first loved you – and you want to know how to show that – not to repay Him like you are in debt or something – but to respond to His love with your own – then start here. **Cultivate a heart that loves Jesus by loving His Word – by DOING His Word.** Not to make you save, but because you are saved. Not to prove anything to anyone else – but to love Jesus because you want Him to become your life.

Jesus – you have shown me your glory, now help it CHANGE my life today.