

14/11/21

“On things above!” – Col 3:1-11

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Colossians is a small letter that is just 4 chapters; 95 verses; 1980 words. It takes around 15mins to read it. And we come to a passage today that sees the transition from the theory to the practical, from the theological teaching to the application. How do we live out what we believe?

A few weeks ago, Jarrod reminded us that in Christ our roots grow deep. Paul continues to state the efficacy and all sufficiency of Christ; that He is supreme in all things and all the fullness of God is found in Him. Jarrod challenged us to re-evaluate the foundations of our lives. Kate then helped us to see that there is no need to pursue anything else but Christ, whether that be shadow religion, deceptive philosophy, spiritual experiences, human traditions, or useless rules. Christ and Christ alone is who we worship.

So, I'd like to encourage you to go back and re-read  from 2:6 right through to 3:11, to the end of our reading today. You'll find that Paul mentions  Christ 13 times in just 28 verses. He says, **“since you have received Christ, you are in Christ; you are with Christ.”** 6 times he mentions that we are in Christ or in Him. 7 times he says that we are with Christ or with Him. And throughout this passage he says that because you are in Christ, you have died with Christ, and been raised with Christ, so... live your lives in Christ. Christ is his focus; mentioned 30 times in this letter, and he says, since you have died with Christ and been raised with Christ, .. live differently to the world. Don't live as the world does!

So we come to verse 1 of chapter 3.  **“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.”** (3:1-2)

Christ is seated at the right hand of God. In the Old Testament we see that the right hand of God represents his power, presence, protection and provision.  In Psalm 110:1 we see a prediction of the coming Messiah. **“The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'”** A place of authority!

And in numerous places throughout the New Testament, we read of Jesus at the right hand of God.  Ephesians 1:20-21 notes, **“...that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”** The right hand of God refers to Jesus being in union with the Father, and in a position of all power and authority. And Paul says, “since you have been raised with Christ” where He has all power and authority, live differently as a result,  “set your hearts on things above.”

For the average person their day is made up of sleeping, eating, working, maybe some exercise, and relaxing. Same process day in, day out. We can become so used to it that all we see and focus on is what's in front of our noses.

Have you ever walked to the top of a lookout, sat down on the grass and looked at just that? The grass in front of you, and maybe a lady beetle as it shuffles along a fallen leaf. No, we generally centre our focus on what is far away and enjoy the view from on high. We enjoy the overview or the greater perspective.

Our world and daily routine however, has a way of closing in on us and we become the centre of our universe. Our day-to-day responsibilities and pressures become all consuming; the worries of work, family, and the desire to make more of our earthly existence and possessions in the hope that they will bring us happiness. It can be a struggle for all of us as we focus in on the grass that just before our noses, and let the glory and hope of eternity slip from our view. We forget the blessings and promises we have through our adoption as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters with Jesus, and our satisfaction in Christ slips away as well.

One of the problems of focussing on ourselves is that we can become disappointed in God – because our focus is on our problems, complaints and dissatisfaction, and we want God to fix it all and make heaven on earth for us. There are times of course when we are facing major obstacles and fears, and we can become overwhelmed by them. However, we often wrestle with such fears because our focus is still on us rather than on God, and we seem to forget that our God is so much greater than any difficulty we face..

So, what do you allow to dominant your thinking? Your job; the other kids at school; your kids or grandkids; your health, Covid; your lack of finances; your entertainment, games, videos, social media; your sport. What takes up most of your thought energy; planning; worrying? Is your mind on earthly things or things above?

Paul says, “**set your hearts on things above.**” ○ He says it twice, “**set your minds on things above.**” I don’t think that’s any coincidence, but he says your hearts and your minds. The heart is the seat of our emotions and the mind the seat of our intellect.

Now, I’d like us to think about Jesus for a moment; how He kept focussed on things above, on eternity despite the battles that he faced; desertion, injustice, loneliness, anxiety, suffering. We are told in Luke 9:51 that “**As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.**” Notice, that “as the time approached for Him to be taken up,” not the time for Him to die; the time to face the music; the time for His trial. But there’s an emphasis on the things above. He resolutely set his face – He determined in his mind that it’s time to go to Jerusalem; as it was time to be taken up.

○ He also set his heart on things above; He was at peace within his emotions. We are told in Heb 12:2, “**But for the joy set before him he endured the cross.**” In the midst of the pain, suffering and humiliation, He endured the cross for the joy that was before Him. He knew well the words of Psalm 30:5, “**weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.**”

When Jesus was in torment the night before His crucifixion praying to His father – our Father – as Pete Grieg says, ○ “When His soul was overwhelmed and he prayed “**Take this cup from me,**” Jesus resolutely anchored Himself in the Father’s love, and said “**Yet not my will but yours be done.**” He came to that Garden in torment, but left in peace; safe and secure within the love of His Father. His heart and His mind were focussed onto things above; **set** on things above.

When our hearts and minds are **set** on things above we too may face the difficulties that this life throws at us in peace; strengthened and sustained by God and His promises. The worries of this world lose their power when we focus on things above the world.

And the only way that we can set our minds and hearts on things above is by reminding ourselves that we have died to our old life, and remind ourselves of the fulfilment of the life to come; the hope of glory. ○ V,3-4, **“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”**

Because we are in Christ we have died to the old life and are being renewed in becoming more like Christ, and we believe in an eternal glorious future spent with Him. Although our world and its ways are constantly calling for our attention, we choose to listen to one voice – Jesus Christ, and focus not on the worries of today, but the glory to come.

And so, having spelt out the theological arguments, Paul now brings in the practical application. How do we apply this into our lives? Christ is in you and with you, but you are not a robot under His control. You control how you live! Faith without works is dead – academic understanding is useless unless it affects the way we live.

And so, today we deal with the negative side of being in Christ; negative in the sense that its the ugly side of what we need to deal with. Next week we look at the positive side of being in Christ; the freedom to pursue the good fruit. And so Paul says in v.5 and following...

○ **“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (5-10)**

Paul outlines two areas of sin. The first are those areas that have a stronger grip on us; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. He says that they used to walk in these ways, but still he says, “put them to death,” which means to “deprive them of their power” or “destroy their strength”. And in the Greek the word is in the aorist active tense, so Paul says, “keep on putting to death”; go on depriving of its power over you. These are areas where the Devil may have a foothold that can become a stronghold, so be alert and keep depriving them of their power over you. The more you put them death, the weaker they become. Keep putting them to death!

But then he says, “rid yourselves of anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language.” He reasons that as a new creation and one who is continuing to be made new into the image of Jesus, then do your best to throw them out. And as a new creation there is no room for racism or discrimination (v.11). As a new creation we should see less and less of these sins.

You see, Paul is asking them to live their lives from a spiritual perspective, not an earthly. “Earthly” things include the very things that Paul asks them to avoid. It is the way of the world to pursue sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. Many of the modern day movies, songs, computer games, etc, follow this way of thinking. And it is the way of the earthly human nature to react in anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, lies and unforgiveness; to be racist and discriminatory. And so much of what we see on social media and relational problems that make the news stem from such as these.

And Paul says that we are to put these things to death and get rid of them. As we set our minds on things above we give our time and attention to the things that please God rather than “men” or us. The things “above” are the things and the ways of God that please Him. ○

So, at the moment, are we more concerned about ourselves; our mind on earthly things? Are we consumed by our world, thinking of ourselves and how to ensure our well being, happiness, satisfaction, freedom, comfort and pleasure? Do we react and relate with one another from a worldly perspective? Is our mind on earthly things or on things above? And how prepared are we to suffer and stand firm in our faith; to endure till the end?

The writer of Hebrews shares some very similar thoughts to Paul, and says it this way...

○ **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”** (Heb 12:1-3)

Making a conscious effort to turn our eyes upon Jesus; to set our hearts and minds on things above; shift the focus off our earthly problems; trust ourselves into God’s care; brings us peace and glorifies Him. Nichole Nordeman says, “I want to grow dim, standing next to Him.”

Can we take a moment in silence to reflect and ask the Lord where is my primary focus? What earthly things eat away at me or consume me? Lord, what do require of me?

Will you **choose** to **set** your mind on things above? So, let’s stand and sing together..

Song: TN 293 Turn your eyes