

Colossians 3:1-4

October 27, 2019

Once there was a wee little lad who was out on a hike with his dad. It was early in the morning, still dark and cold, well before the sun had risen.

"Daddy, where are we going", the little boy asked his father, while following along in his footsteps.

"To see the sunrise over the three mountain ranges, Son. Keep walking."

"But Daddy, its cold out here and I can't see anything. Why are we walking in the dark, anyway?"

"To see the sunrise over the three mountain ranges, Son." Keep walking."

But I don't want to walk, I'm tired. Why don't you carry me?

You have legs, Son and you need the exercise. Keep walking."

Are we there yet? What are we doing this for, again?

"To see the sunrise over the three mountain ranges."

So, after another ten minutes of this kind of talk the little boy and his dad finally arrived at their destination, an overlook near the top of a mountain.

The dad took a seat on a boulder and bid the boy come sit with him.

"On my knee, Son.

Look out there, what do you see?"

At first the boy saw only blackness, but that began to fade as a colorful light began to emerge. Slowly the sky took on a blue hue with streaks of orange and red ever intensifying as the circle of the sun began to rise above a distant ridge.

The orange ball grew lighter and brighter and soon everything around shed its blackness as trees and clouds and mountains came to view more vivid than can be described.

"How many mountain ranges do you see?" asked the dad.

"One... two ...Oh... now I see three!", said the boy.

For the first time in his life the young lad was seeing the sun rise over the three mountain ranges!

"Thanks Dad. Thanks for bringing me here."

And just like this little boy, we find ourselves walking through our own lives, headed somewhere, often following somebody else's lead, hoping they know where they are going. Because the journey is dreadfully cold sometimes. It's often too dark to see where we are headed. We grow tired and weary in our journey, and frequently ask ourselves, why are we doing this? Where are we going?

For those of us who are wearied by life's journey, our text from Colossians will come as a breath of fresh air...a gentle reminder of why it is that we walk and where it is, we are headed.

Proposition:

For we all are on journey through life, the success of which depends upon whom we are seeking and how much we savor Him along the way.

So far, during our recent trek through Colossians, we have seen hints at how to do this.

We were actually commanded to walk back in Colossians 2:6.

"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him" - Colossians 2:6

Notice that this command told us where to walk. We are to walk in Christ, a Christ who has been given to us. Wherever he might be we are to walk with Him. Indeed, we are to walk in Him.

In chapter 1, the Apostle Paul even prayed that we might walk in Him. Listen to what he said in Colossians 1:9-10.

From the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Colossians 1:9-11

So, according to this text, there is a special way to walk. We should walk wisely, in a way that pleases God. And we should walk in a way that bears much fruit on his behalf.

But up until now, Paul hasn't given us many specifics in Colossians. He hasn't told us what to do while walking. He hasn't even told us what to look for while we walk.

But all of that changes with the coming of Colossians chapter 3. From chapter 3 verse 1 on, the questions of what to look for and want to do, are answered.

Watch for this change as we delve into this morning's text, beginning in Colossians 3:1. We will be reading from the English Standard Version.

If then you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things that are above where Christ is,
seated at the right hand of God.
Set your mind on things that are above,
not on things that are on earth.

For you have died,
and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ who is your life appears,
then you also will appear with him in glory.

Notice the explicit commands to "Seek the things that are above" and to "Set your mind" on them. These will serve as two of our main points this morning.

But first, we mustn't skip over that condition which so loudly presents itself at the head of verse one. For indeed, every command that follows it will be impossible to do if this condition has not been met. You must walk with Christ, but you can only do this:

If You Have Been Raised

“Raised from what?” you might ask.

Well according to Col 2:12-13 we were dead, dead in our trespasses and sins. Notice what it says:

Having been buried with him (Christ) in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses...God made alive together with him, having forgiven all our trespasses. Col 2:12-13

So according to this text we were all dead in our sins, yet we are no longer dead. Our sins have been forgiven and now we have been raised along with the same one with whom we were buried. Of whom do we speak? With whom have we been raised and made alive again? With Christ!

So, when Paul says “if you have been raised with Christ” in Colossians 3:1 he is referring to truths presented previously. All of those who have been buried with Christ have also been raised with him.

Notice the past tense of the verbs “raised” and “made alive” in all three of these verses. Each occurrence in 2:12, 2:13 and 3:1 are already completed actions. Those who have been buried with Christ are already

raised again. They are not still dead. They are alive and kicking right now!

And verse 1 of our text suggests another dimension about how far we have been raised. Like Jesus we haven't just been raised from the dead to hang around our old tomb. When Jesus rose from the dead he did not stay near his burial place. He got around quite a bit. According to the gospel accounts, he visited disciples on the road to Emmaus. He later traveled 100 miles North to meet with his apostles in Galilee. Eventually, he ascended to heaven and took his seat (as verse 1 says) at the right hand of God where he remains to this day.

So, in a sense Jesus was raised all the way to heaven. And he didn't go alone. He took all those who were "in him" with him. Paul even alludes to this fact in his companion letter to the Ephesians (which many scholars believe was written alongside Colossians). Note what he says in Ephesians 2:6

And (he) raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6

That's why Paul can confidently command us to seek the things above where Christ is, in Colossians 3:1. Because we are already there! We already meet the necessary condition to do so!

So, just as the little boy in our opening story was raised to the mountain top and made to sit on his father's knee, so we have been, too. We have been raised to a place where we can do something similar. Namely,

Seek the Things Above

If we have been raised, then we can and must seek the things that are above where he is.

This is not just sage advice. This is not a suggestion. This is not a choice. This is a command. This is what everyone who has been raised with Christ does.

In fact, if you are not doing this, then you probably are not actually raised with Christ.

Why do I say this? Because Christ only raises those who have already sought him. He doesn't force anyone to seek him. All those who come to him after seeing him for who he really is,

- want to come to him.
- Their desires are stoked by his beauty.
- They find his compassion and love for them irresistible.
- They follow him because they love doing so.

- They seek him out because he is so worthy to follow
- and so lovely to get to know.

So this command to “seek the things above where Christ is”, is not a hard one. For if you have been raised, seeking the one who saved you and the things associated with him, comes supernaturally.

It is foundational to walking in Christ. We cannot walk in Christ without seeking him right where he is, above all things.

But just what are “these things that are above” referred to by Paul in both 3:1 and 3:2?

When we read these verses, we get the distinct impression that the things above where Jesus resides must be heaven...and we would be right. Jesus currently resides at the right hand of God, which is a place we cannot see with our eyes.

So how can we seek for something as invisible as heaven, Jesus, and the throne of God itself? Well, verse 2 helps clarify. Notice verse 2 talks about setting your mind on the things above. The things that can't be seen with physical eyes can be perceived with the mind's eye.

And just because you can't see them doesn't mean such things are not real. Would any of us try to argue against the existence of such things as truth, honor, justice, purity, love or moral excellence. Of course not. Concepts such as these may be invisible to the eyes, yet they remain as true as anything that can be handled or touched.

In fact, when Paul says seek the things above who is to say that he doesn't mean things like truth, honor, justice, purity, love and moral excellence.

Take a look at what he wrote to the Philippians:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any moral excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8

Is it possible that when Paul tells us to set our minds on the things above in Colossians chapter 3, he means for us to think on the same things he lists in Philippians chapter 4? I think so.

Why? Because each of these concepts are closely associated with Christ. They are attributes of Christ. Christ is true. Christ is honorable. Christ is just, and so on. So, when you seek the qualities that emanate from

Christ, and recognize where they came from, you seek Christ also.

But if we have been raised, we don't just seek the things that are above. We also set our minds on those things. In short, we:

Savor the Things Above

It isn't enough just to seek the things above.

Those who have been raised

- Fix their minds upon them and do not let them slip away.
- They think hard about them.
- They continuously ponder them.
- And in so doing they begin to savor them.

What happens if they don't?

The last phrase of verse 2 provides the alternative. If they don't set their minds on the things above, they will set their minds on the things below (or as the Scripture says 'the things on earth').

What are these things on earth? To what is Paul referring?

Think of them as any thought that is in direct disobedience to Christ or anything not submitted to his reign. Whenever we forget that Christ is at the

right hand of God reigning as king, we tend to stop trusting him. And our minds drift to things below, to thoughts of disobedience.

So, you see, setting our mind on Christ takes some work. It does not come naturally. Our tendency is to forget what Jesus had done. Our tendency is to drift into unbelief and disobedience.

That is why Paul commands it here in verse 2. If we don't make it a point to set our minds on Christ on a day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute basis we will drift into unbelief. We will give way to sin which leads to despair.

So, this command to fix our minds on Jesus is very important! It is, in many ways, the key command of Colossians. All the commands that follow depend upon it.

- We cannot put off sinful deeds and put on righteous ones without first fixing our minds on Jesus.
- We cannot continue steadfastly in prayer, walk wisely with outsiders and speak graciously to one another without first fixing our minds on Jesus.
- We cannot bear good fruit and walk in Christ worthily without first fixing our minds on Jesus.

It is no wonder that this command is the central statement of our sermon series.

It is no wonder that “Fixed on Jesus” will soon be the tagline for our new church name.

But for those who have been raised, fixing our minds on Jesus is not as hard as one might imagine. Actually, it is a restful endeavor. Indeed, even delightful work. Remember when Christ famously said that his yoke was easy, and his burden was light (Mt 11:30). He wasn't kidding!

If we who have been raised remember where we are (seated in heavenly places) and who we are with (Jesus), this command is imminently doable.

And there's another reason we can fix our minds on Jesus with great success. Because according to the next couple of verses in Colossians, those who have been raised are also hidden with Christ and someday shall even appear with him.

For the Hidden Ones Shall Appear

Take a look at verses 3 and 4 one more time. Note the contrast of two key words within each.

In verse 3 “**your life is hidden with Christ**”

In verse 4, “**When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him**”

In verse 3 our life is hidden with Christ.

In verse 4 our life appears with Christ.

The only other difference between these two verses is the time frame.

Verse 3 is about the here and now.

Verse 4 is about the second coming of Christ.

Now our lives are hidden with Christ.

On that day our lives will appear with Christ.

They will no longer be hidden.

They will be on full display.

They will be perfect.

They will be glorious.

"If you have been raised... you will appear with him in glory."

If this glorious end state isn't motivation to seek him and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus now, then I don't know what is.

Now, for some points of application,

How do we set our minds on Christ?

We set our minds on Christ by seeking him in the two places where he has revealed himself.

As we learned today, Christ is hidden in God at his right hand. We can't see him directly. But he has revealed himself in his Word. So, if you let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col 3:16) you will most certainly find him and be able to set your mind on him.

We can learn quite a bit about Jesus from the Word by

- Studying the Bible.
- By listening to sound teaching,
- by reading good theological books
- and by talking about him and what he has done with fellow believers one on one
- or in small group settings.

The other place to discover the revealed Christ is in each other. Remember each of our lives is hidden in Christ, too. That means that if we train ourselves to look for Him in each other we should be able to find him.

How is this done? How do we find the revealed Christ in each other? By seeking the things above in each other. By seeking the true, honorable, just, lovely, commendable and morally excellent things that are put there by Christ.

It's very easy to spot deficiencies in one another. It's very easy to detect flaws and faults and sins. But it

takes a concerted effort to spot the good, to spot the evidences of God's grace hidden within each of us and to encourage each other with those discoveries.

There's a popular saying going around Social Media these days that gets to this point. When complementing another friend's selfie or profile pic, it's not uncommon to see a post that simply reads "My eyes are blessed" or "You've blessed my eyes". It's a way of appreciated someone's picture or video and letting them know so.

May we look for the beauty of Christ hidden in each other and let each other know so, too.

If you've been raised, the Christlikeness hidden in you will soon become evident to all.

But what if you are one of those who has not been raised, or at least thinks you have not been raised. You don't consider yourself a Christian. This Jesus talk has always been something that goes in one ear and out the other. It's never been appealing to you.

Remember the little boy I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon. Remember what it was like when he first got to the mountain top. It was all black, dark and cold. He couldn't see anything.

But then something changed. He began to see the light. Slowly but surely, the rays of the sun grew brighter and warmer changing everything around him. Within a matter of a few minutes his attitude had changed, as he beheld the beauty of the rising sun.

And so it may be with you. Perhaps the darkness around you has begun to fade as the colorful light of Christ begins to emerge. The beauty of the One who lived a perfect life and died a sinless death and then was raised and lifted to the right hand of God may be warming your soul, slowly but surely. If so, heed the words of the Apostle Peter.

You will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. -2 Peter 1:9

Soon you too may find yourself raised with Christ and eagerly seeking him out. If you have any questions about anything you've heard or would like to talk about it, there will be people up front after the service who would love to lend a listening ear and even pray with you. Or talk with another person you trust or even the person who brought you.

Now to summarize for the rest of us,

We have died with Christ.

We have been raised with Christ
We are seated in heavenly places with Christ.
Our lives are hidden with Christ
And some day, we will appear with Christ in glory!

Therefore, let's stay fixed on Christ now and always!

PRAY