

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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COLOSSIANS – Hope of Glory
Being Heavenly Minded
Colossians 3:1-4

We are at the halfway point of our verse-by-verse study of Paul's letter to the Colossians. And our text serves as a critical transition in this book. In the first two chapters, Paul has been correcting the different false doctrines that were being pushed on these new Christians through the influence of false teachers.

In our text last week, Paul was confronting something known as legalism. Legalism is the belief that to be acceptable to God and overcome the influence of sin in our lives, we have to keep a list of rules by our own power. Paul corrects that idea by focusing on the person and work of Jesus. We are forgiven of sin and given a new life of freedom through faith in the powerful work of God in Jesus. Only Jesus can overcome the power of sin in our lives. One of the last verses in chapter 2 says that manmade lists of rules are worthless in stopping the power of sin. Even if those lists include good things like the Sabbath and feasts and ceremonies found in the Old Testament. Lists of rules will never save us from sin. That's why we need Jesus. That's why Paul has pointed to Jesus over and over and over again throughout this letter. Rules don't save us. Jesus saves us.

And here's why I say our text is a critical transition in this letter. Paul is getting ready to say some things you might not expect given what he said last week. Chapter three and most of chapter four are essentially a big list of things we should and shouldn't do.

As he gets really practical on what it looks like to fight sin and live in victory, he lays down some clear lists that basically serve as the dos and don'ts for the Christian life. So, how do we approach the list Paul gives us without falling the trap of legalism? That's what this morning's text is all about.

Colossians 3:1–4

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

In between Paul's warnings about legalism and his detailed descriptions for how we should live as followers of Jesus, he gives us this paragraph. And it joins the two sections together perfectly. These truths help us avoid legalism and they help us live in victory over sin.

And I hope you notice the structure of this text.

- Verse 1 – You have been raised with Christ
- Verse 3 – You have died (with Christ) – That's something he made clear in chapter 2
- Verse 3 - Your life is hidden with Christ in God

- Verse 4 – When Christ appears, then you also will appear with him in glory

Four times in four verses Paul mentions things that are true about us because of Jesus. Those are statements about the new identity we have when we place our faith and trust in Christ. And he isn't just mentioning our identity in Christ in passing. He's building an argument of sorts around it.

In verse 1, he uses the phrase “***if then you have been raised with Christ.***” In our English translations, that phrase sounds kind of like Paul isn't sure about something. Like he's saying maybe they have been raised with Christ and maybe they haven't. That's not how we should read that. In the original language, that phrase is known as an adjective inferential. It's used to draw our attention to the implication of something. We should read it more like, “Since you have been raised with Christ.”

Paul is saying, “What I'm about to say is derived, or inferred, from the fact that you have been raised with Christ.” You see that a bit more clearly in verse 3. Before he refers to three more points of our identity in Christ, he uses the word “for.” “For you have died.” That word is a causal word. It shows the cause of something. Think of the word “because.” The car is hot because the AC doesn't work. My stomach is growling because I haven't eaten today.

That's how the word “for” functions in our text. It shows the cause of something.

What Paul is doing is saying “Since these things are true about you in Jesus...because these things are true about you in Jesus...live like you believe they're true.”

In other words, he is calling us to live in light of our identity in Jesus. And that gives us our big idea for this morning.

BIG IDEA: WE LIVE IN VICTORY OVER SIN AS WE LIVE OUT OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus miraculously transforms us by His gracious power through our faith in Him. He gives us a new standing and identity before God. And Paul says the call of Christ is to live like the blessings of the gospel are already true about you as you trust in Jesus.

That's the exact opposite of legalism. Legalism says, “work so that these things will be true about you.”

Legalism says we have to work hard so that we will have new life in the resurrection. In verse 1, the gospel says we've already been raised to new life in Christ.

Legalism says we have to work hard so we can join Jesus in the presence of God. In verse 3, the gospel says we're already joined to Jesus in the presence of God.

Legalism says we have to work hard so we can have the chance of attaining glory. In verse 4, the gospel says we're already guaranteed to appear in glory with Jesus.

We don't fight sinful behaviors and experience victory by working hard in our own power to live the Christian life. We experience victory by believing we are what God says we are as we trust in Jesus. It's called living out your identity in Christ.

And in the rest of our time together, I want to walk through our text and show you three practical things we do as part of living out our identity in Christ.

1. See yourself in light of Jesus
2. Seek the things above
3. Set your mind on things above

1. SEE YOURSELF IN LIGHT OF JESUS

What do you see when you take an inward look at who you are as a person? Some of us see ourselves in light of what other people have told us – failure, hero, disappointment, winner. We see our greatest successes or our worst mistakes. We see our strengths or our weaknesses. And we live in light of those things. We make decisions at work in light of our strengths or other people's opinions of us. We make decisions in our marriages in light of how we've messed up in the past or how we fear we'll mess up in the future.

But Paul is saying that the way we will enjoy the life Jesus has for us is when we see ourselves in light of what Jesus has already done for us. For those of you who might be visiting with us, there's something you should know about a miracle that's at the center of Christianity. When we place our faith and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are spiritually united to Jesus. That union with Jesus transforms us and makes us new creations. It changes the way God the Father sees us and relates to us. It's our new identity in Christ.

And Paul mentions four things about us in Christ that shape the way we live when we believe they are true.

You have died with Christ.

Colossians 3:3 For you have died...

Paul talked more in depth about this in chapter 2. In 2:20, he says we have died to the elemental spirits of the world. I believe that's a reference to the false gods who hold people captive in their sin. Romans 6 says we have died to sin and are no longer slaves to our spiritual enemy. In other words, the person we were apart from Christ is dead. That's not who you are. And the power of sin and Satan have been broken.

And let me give you one, quick practical thing that means for the way you live. You don't have to sin anymore. You aren't a slave to your sin. Some of you might be exhausted by the patterns of your own sin. You think, "I can never be different. I can never stop living this way." Friend, if you are trusting in Jesus, that's a lie. You have died to the power of sin and spiritual bondage.

You have been raised with Christ.

Colossians 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ,

We talked about this on Easter Sunday. Since we have been miraculously united with Christ, not only has His death become our death, His resurrection has become our resurrection. But one thing we didn't talk about on Easter was just how far we have been raised in Christ.

Ephesians 2:4-7

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

If you are trusting in Jesus, you are united with Christ. And if you are united with Christ, you are with Him in the heavenly realm. I believe this is the dynamic Paul is referring to in verse 3 of our text when He says our lives are hidden with Christ in God. I'll be the first to admit that I don't fully understand what this means, but in a very real way, we are in the heavenly presence of God through Jesus.

And just think for a moment how this might impact the way you live if you really believed it. Do you talk the way you would talk in the presence of a holy God? Do you relate to others the way you would if you were interacting with them in the presence of a holy God? Do you pray and praise the way you would if you were aware of being in God's presence?

You are raised up with Christ into heavenly places.

You have Christ living in You.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ who is your life appears,

To be united with Jesus means we are united to the power of Christ's life flowing through us. As we trust in Him, He lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is our life.

There are so many practical implications to this that I hardly know where to begin. Let me start here: Jesus empowers submission and obedience. As you look at the life Jesus lived on the earth, you find that His life was marked by perfect submission and obedience to God the Father. So, if you want to demonstrate the power of Jesus flowing through you, you have to step into obedience. Christ is already in us, but His life won't be expressed through us apart from obedience because Jesus doesn't empower rebellion and disobedience.

Again, think how different that is from legalism. Legalism is all about proving our ability through our works. Living out of our identity in Christ is about showing Christ's ability through our obedience. Legalism is about our lives being conformed to a list of rules. Living out of our identity in Christ is about our lives being transformed by the power of Christ in us.

What would change about the way you lived in your marriage or at your work if you truly believed that Christ is living in you and willing to empower your submission and obedience to God the Father?

If you are trusting in Jesus, then Jesus is living in you right now. That's your identity in Christ.

The last thing Paul tells us about our identity in Christ is...

You will be glorified when Christ returns.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

When Jesus returns, He is going to finish the work He has started in us. He will transform our mortal, sinful bodies into His likeness. We will be made just like Him. That's what the Bible refers to as "glorified." We will be the display of God's glorious grace. We will live forever as monuments to the power and grace of God. Romans 7 says we will be unveiled as the sons and daughters of God Almighty.

In verse 3, when Paul says our lives are hidden with Christ in God, that word "hidden" is a word that was used to describe hiding treasure for safekeeping. When we genuinely trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are secured in Christ by the power of God.

That's a guaranteed work that Jesus promises for everyone who trusts in Him. And when you believe that, it impacts everything about your life on earth. Think of how you would face the trials of this life if you truly believed they will all come to an end and result in you being made just like Jesus. Think of how you would store up treasures in Heaven if you believed this life on earth was just a vapor and you will live in eternal glory with God. Think of how you chart your journey through this life if you believed your trajectory was the glory of heaven. How would you stop living to pursue the stuff of this world? How would you start seeking God's glory in your decisions and relationships?

You are destined for glory. And living in light of your identity in Christ means you set your life on that trajectory now.

Christian, you aren't yet what you will one day be, but you're on your way. You are dead to the power of sin and the dominion of darkness. You are raised to new life in the presence of our Holy God. You are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit who enables the life of Jesus in you. You are destined for glory.

So, stop living like those things aren't true or that they have to wait for heaven. They are at work in you right now. Believe it and start living like you believe it.

And I'd guess that some of you might say, "That all sounds good. But I don't feel like those things are true. I don't feel dead to sin. I don't feel like I'm seated in heavenly places. I feel like I'm seated right here on earth in the midst of darkness and trouble and disappointment."

I know that feeling. But feelings don't determine truth. That's not the way it works. When Emily and I first got married, she used to say, "It's weird, I don't feel married." I'd say, "Well, you are. So, you'd better not live like you're single." By the way, Em wasn't saying she wanted to live like she was single, she was just saying that she imagined feeling married but, in most ways, she felt the same way she did before we got married. She lived in our house before our marriage and didn't move out after our marriage. She worked the same job and largely kept the same routine in our marriage that she had before our wedding. But our marriage was a settled reality. Our feelings didn't determine our reality. Now that we've been married 22 years, we can't imagine what it would feel like not to be married and we don't want to.

And it's a similar dynamic in our union with Jesus. Beware of waiting for the feeling. Live in the reality. See yourself in light of who you are in Christ and step into the life He has for you.

That's the first step of living out our identity with Christ. See yourself in light of Christ.

The second step is...

2. SEEK THE THINGS ABOVE

Colossians 3:1

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

That word "seek" means "to desire something in a way that you make an attempt to obtain what you desire." In other words, you desire something and pursue it. It describes my relationship with Chipotle. I desire it so I go after it.

And what are we to seek? The things above. What are the things above? Verse one tells us they are the things where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. That phrase "the right hand of God" is a description of where Jesus reigns at the throne of God. (Eph. 1:20; Heb. 8:1)

I take Paul to mean we are to desire to live as part of Christ's Kingdom on this earth. We are to pursue His reign over our lives here and now. We are to want His will to be done on earth in us just like it's done in heaven. This isn't a call to abandon our lives here on earth, this is a call to pursue Christ's kingdom agenda through our lives on this earth.

We seek the things above by pursuing Jesus and His reign in our lives. We say "Jesus, have your way in me. I want to go where you want me to go. I want to do what you tell me to do. I want my life to be spent in pursuit of your kingdom, not mine. Jesus, here's my marriage. I want it to serve your Kingdom agenda. Jesus, here's my job. Here are my kids. Here's my retirement. I want them to serve your Kingdom agenda.

Then we go to the word of God to find out what Christ's agenda is for every area of our lives. That's what Paul is going to lay out for us later in this chapter. Verse 16 says to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Seek the rule and reign of Christ in your life.

What would it look like for you to lay your entire life down before King Jesus today? What things are you holding onto that you need to yield to King Jesus? In Christ, your citizenship has been transferred to heaven. You are part of Christ's Kingdom. You live in that identity when you lay your life down before Jesus as your King.

That brings us to the last thing we learn about living out of our identity in Christ...

3. SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE

Colossians 3:2

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Again, this isn't a call to neglect our lives here on earth. The phrase "set your minds" translates the same word Paul uses in Philippians 2:5 when he says to have the same mind, or attitude, as Jesus. It's a mindset. It means to determine in advance how you are going to think about something.

As we go through life, we are to determine in advance the attitude and outlook we are going to have the kind of attitude that Jesus has and desires for the people of His Kingdom. And Paul builds this out for us in the passages that follow, so we will take a closer look at this in the weeks to come. But look down at verse 8.

Colossians 3:8

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Now, jump down to verse 12.

Colossians 3:12-13

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other;

The way we have a mindset that is focused on Christ's kingdom is by determining in advance that we aren't going to have a mindset that is characterized by anger or malice towards others. We are going to have a mindset of kindness and humility and patience and forgiveness.

What would change about the way you go home with your family or step into your work or school tomorrow if that were true about you? You might say, "You don't know my family or my classmates. There's no way I could do that with the way they treat me." Really? Could Jesus do it? Does He live in you? Are you willing for Him to live in you?

WE LIVE IN VICTORY OVER SIN WHEN WE LIVE OUT OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST...by seeing ourselves in light of Jesus, seeking the things that are above, and setting our minds on them.