

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

"Pursuing God with Our Heart and Mind" Colossians 3:1-4

Turn to Colossians 3, we will be there. We've finished Colossians 1. If you recall, **Colossians 1 grounded the church in truth**. It taught us to grow in our spiritual life. We need to know Christ and we need to know His work, what He did in His reconciliation.

Colossians 2 guarded the church from error, because there are other ideas about how people should be helped. The ways of man are not right and we need to be careful, to be protected from persuasive arguments and empty deception and those sorts of things. Which moves us to Chapter 3.

Colossians 3:1-17 grows the church in relation to God. To become more holy. Now to seek to try and develop an understanding of this point here and how important this passage is, Colossians 3:1-4 is what we will be looking at today. It really is pivotal, it's the turning point of the whole book. The book hinges around these four verses and everything else, the rest of the book, flows from this understanding of these four verses. If you ripped these four verses out of the book it wouldn't make any sense, and what comes after it would have lost its foundation.

To try to help you appreciate this, the truth of these verses, I would like to read you a letter, if I could. This letter was written in October 1869. It was written by a man named J. Hudson Taylor. He was a missionary to China and he wrote to his younger sister named Amelia. Aside from some introductory things he said this, and I will apologize up front, it is a rather long letter, you will have to recall there wasn't e-mail back then, there wasn't even air mail, there was boat mail. If you were going to write a letter you'd probably want to write a long letter because you wouldn't get a chance to write one until the next boat left. So here goes, hang with this if you can:

As to work, mine was never so plentiful, so responsible, or so difficult; but the weight and strain are all gone. The last month or more has been, perhaps, the happiest of my life; and I long to tell you a little of what the Lord has done for my soul. I do not know how far I may be able to make myself intelligible about it, for there is nothing new or strange or wonderful - and yet, all is new! In a word: Whereas I was blind, now I see. Perhaps I shall make myself more clear if I go back a little. Well, Dearie, my mind has been greatly exercised for the past six or eight months, feeling the need personally, and for our Mission, of more holiness, life and power in our souls. But personal need stood first and was the greatest. I felt the ingratitude, the danger, the sin of not living nearer to God. I prayed, agonized, fasted, strove, made resolutions, read the Word more diligently, sought more time for retirement and meditation - but all was without avail. Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of sin oppressed me.

So what to do? Most people probably don't care a whole lot about their sinfulness. For those that do there are lots of ideas of how to solve this. If you go to your average book store, you'll find rows of self-help stuff that won't have much to do at all with Colossians 3:1-4. I hate to say, but I think that if you go to the Christian book store you'd be hard pressed to find many books that deal with the truth of Colossians 3:1-4. But this really is pivotal if we are going to understand how to grow, how to overcome this state of oppression, sinfulness, difficulties, struggling with our sinful condition.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Let's read Colossians 3:1-4, **“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”**

This is really in contrast to what we have seen in the last chapter where the persuasion of men, the ideas of men and the philosophy of men sought to move people away from the truth of Christ. And even religionists can move people away from the truth of Christ. The legalism of rules and regulations instead of ministry to the heart. The supposed visions of getting a greater spiritual relationship with Christ through mysticism we saw last week in verses 18-19. In verses 20-23 was asceticism, seeking to build restrictions in our lives to protect us from sin. It may limit us to some degree but it will never deal with our hearts. Holiness begins from the heart so we are going to look at that this morning.

1. Pursuing God with our heart (3:1)

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

a. Our mandate

We are commanded to “keep seeking the things above.” Keep seeking, continue to pursue those things, have that desire within you to pursue God with Your hearts.

What are the "things above?" They are clarified by a contrast with "the things that are on earth." The things that are on earth are not strictly things that are sinful (cf. Luke 17:26-30).

What does “the things on earth” mean? This is beyond just sinful things, it's more all encompassing than that. There is a good verse that I would like us to look at in Luke 17:26-30 that shows this, that the things that are on earth are not strictly the things that are sinful, it's beyond that and when we look at Christ's words about His coming, His second coming in Luke 17 here's what He says about this, **“And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.”**

So these things they were busy doing were not in and of themselves sinful, where they? In fact, other things could have been written here about their sinful behavior but what was put here was buying and selling, planting and building, these are the things of earth. But then even Jesus was involved in building. He was a carpenter and Paul was a tent maker and in order to live you have to eat and drink. These things are not anything that righteous people avoid. Righteous people do these things.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

What is it that sets the things on earth apart from the things above? What is it? Well, it is really the motivation for why these things are being done. Back to the heart issue, if we are buying and selling and building and planting to further our own interest and our own desires we are very much caught up with the things of earth. If we are buying and selling and building and planting to seek to serve God's will and His desires, those are the things that are above. So you can actually make tents, as Paul did, and sell those tents to provide an income so that God's purposes can be better served just fine. Or you can do that for very earthly reasons, for things that are very temporal and that are passing away. So the things above are the things that have to do with the Lord, His will, His desires, His goals, His purposes, what He cares about, the things that are lasting, not the things that are passing away. The things about people and their spiritual lives rather than the things of earth and all the stuff that we can get brought to us. So pursuing God with our heart is seeking the things above not the things on earth.

b. Our motivation

What's the motivation for this? Why should we do this? We are motivated for two things here.

1) We are motivated by our position.

We have been raised up, if you have been raised up by Christ. This "if" has the meaning "since." It assumes it, it's the word for "if" that assumes these things are true. So we can say, "since you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above. Rather than eternal destruction you have eternal life, you have been raised up because of what God has done for you, keep seeking the things above, pursue Him with your heart."

2) We are motivated by Christ's position

Because of our position, what He's done for us in raising us up and because of Christ's position, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Where is He? Seated at the right hand of God. What does that mean? That means He's been exalted.

Christ is exalted to a place of honor. That is what the right hand of God is. The King's right hand was the most exalted place. It's a place of honor. Christ has been honored, Christ has been raised up and we should seek the things above where Christ is, in a place of honor.

Now back to this letter for a moment. He writes,

I knew that if I could only abide in Christ all would be well, but I could not. I would begin the day with prayer, determined not to take my eye from Him for a moment, but pressure of duties, sometimes very trying, constant interruptions, often very wearing, would cause me to forget Him. Then one's nerves get so fretted in this climate that temptations to irritability, hard thoughts and sometimes unkind words are all the more difficult to control. Each day brought its register of sin, failure, and lack of power. To will was indeed present with me, but how to perform, I found not....Instead of growing stronger, I seemed to be getting weaker and to have less power against sin; and no wonder, for faith and even hope were getting very low.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

I hated myself; I hated my sin; and yet I gained no strength against it. I felt I was a child of God; His Spirit in my heart would cry, in spite of all, "Abba, Father," but to rise to my privileges as a child, I was utterly powerless. I thought that holiness was to be gradually attained by a diligent use of the means of grace. I felt that there was nothing I so much desired in this world, nothing I so much needed. But the more I pursued and strove after holiness, the more it eluded my grasp.

I do not think I was striving to attain it in my own strength. I knew I was powerless. I told the Lord so, and asked Him to give me help and strength and sometimes I almost believed He would keep and uphold me. But on looking back in the evening, there was sin and failure to confess and mourn before God.

I would not give you the impression that this was the daily experience of all those long, weary months, but it tended to be a too frequent state of soul and I almost ended up in despair.... All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was how to get it out. He was rich, but I was poor; He was strong, but I was weak. I knew full well that there was in the vine, in the root, the stem, abundant fatness; but how to get it into my puny little branch was the question.

So he obviously had a desire, an eagerness to strive after the things above and have holiness well within him but it was a struggle to see that accomplished. So just having the desire is not enough, there's more to having faith that produces holy living and that gets us to our second point.

2. Pursuing God with our mind (3:2-4)

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

So what's the call here?

a. Our mandate (3:2)

The command to “keep seeking” speaks to the desire to actively pursue the things above. The command to “set your mind” speaks to the focus of our thoughts.

We are to focus our thoughts on the things above not on the things that are on earth. It is not enough to have the desire within your heart, you need to turn your attention, your focus, your thoughts to the things above, where Christ is, the things of God. Direct your attention on those things. And in that change will occur.

Why should you do this? Let's think of the motivation.

b. Our motivation (3:3-4)

This is the part that many people are not particularly interested to hear. They may not have spiritual ears to hear, spiritual eyes to see or a heart that really desires to hear these words. That's why it is not very common in bookstores because it is not a selling point to many people. But it's the truth of God's Word and it is really fundamental to holiness.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

1) We are motivated by our death with Christ (3:3)

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died. This is true. You have died. If you are a believer, you're a Christian, you have died. All Christians have died with Christ. This is the truth, it is not you who live but Christ who lives in you. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ with God.

Death isn't a real popular concept but it is a common one in the Scripture. Lets look at some of those.

Colossians 2:20 just a few verses earlier says **“you have died with Christ”** so don't forget it. You died with Christ.

Romans 6:1-11, which in that book springs the teaching of how to have a holy life, how to live in righteousness, starts from verse 6:1-11 with these teachings and I'll read this for you, **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”**

This is the truth. We have died with Christ and we need to know that we have died with Christ so that we can stop living for ourselves and the things on earth. We can stop being focused on the things on earth and focused on the things about us so we can be focused on the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand because we have died and it is not our life.

There are other verses. **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** this concept pops up again, **“for love of Christ controls us having concluded this that one died for all therefore all died that he who lives is to no longer live for himself but for Him who died and rose on their behalf.”** All died!

It pops up again in **Galatians 2:20**, **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me.”**

It even shows up in the words of Jesus. When Jesus in **Luke 9:23-24** spoke about His impending death, He would be crucified and killed. Then He spoke to the people that were seeking to follow Him, and He said this, **“He was saying to them all ‘if anyone wishes to follow me let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me for he who wishes to save his life will lose it and he who loses his life for My sake he is the one who will save it.’ ”**

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

So this concept of being dead with Christ comes up in many places. It is not an isolated concept here. And it comes up in many places because it is so important. It's so important to understand so that we can stop living for our own interest and our desires so we can live for Christ. We can keep seeking the things above, we can set our minds on the things above because of who we are, dead with Christ. And hidden with Christ in God for you have died with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

2) We are motivated by our position with Christ (3:3)

And what's our position with Christ? We are hidden. This means a couple of things. Being hidden "with God in Christ" shows the exalted position we enjoy. Who we are is not known by the world.

This is in contrast with verse 4. **"When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."**

Now we are hidden, we will be revealed. So this exalted place that we have is not clearly seen because it has been hidden but it will be revealed, it's coming, and that revelation should motivate us

Being hidden "with God in Christ" also shows the secure position we enjoy. There is a double protection of being with God in Christ. **Hebrews 13:5-6** says, **"Let your character be free from the love of money."** And why? **"Because He himself has said 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"** There's a double emphasis there, **"I will never no never leave you or forsake you."** He is with us, He is protecting us so that verse 6 can say "why should I be afraid, what can man do to me?" Nothing, so we've been hidden.

Back to the letter, I think this shows this if we have spiritual eyes to see the importance of these truths:

When my agony of soul was at its height, a sentence in a letter from dear McCarthy was used to remove the scales from my eyes.... "But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One."

As I read I saw it all! "If we believe not, He remains faithful." I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh, how joy flowed) that He had said, "I will never leave you." "Ah, here is rest!" I thought. "I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more. For has He not promised to abide with me - never to leave me, never to fail me?" And Dearie, He never will!

But this was not all He showed me, nor one half. As I thought of the vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured directly into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in having wished to get the sap, the fullness, out of Him. I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. The vine now I see is not the root merely, but all - root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit; and Jesus is not only that; He is soil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for, or needed. Oh the joy of seeing this truth! I do pray that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened, that you may know and enjoy the riches freely given us in Christ.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Oh, my dear sister, it is a wonderful thing to be really one with a risen and exalted Savior, to be a member of Christ! Think what it involves. Can Christ be rich and I poor? Can your right hand be rich and the left poor? Or your head be well fed while your body starves?....

The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being sweeter than another, is the rest which full identification with Christ brings. I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no difference where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest positions He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient.

It matters little to my servant whether I send him to buy a few dollars worth of things or the most expensive articles. In either case he looks to me for the money and brings me his purchases. So if God places me in great perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; or in positions of great difficulty, much grace; or in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength?....

I am no better than before (in one sense, I do not wish to be, nor am I striving to be); but I am dead and buried with Christ - yes, and risen too and ascended; and now Christ lives in me, and "the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

I now believe that I am dead to sin. God reckons me so, and tells me to reckon myself so. He knows best. All my past experiences may have shown that it was not so; but I dare not say it is not, when He says it is. I feel and know that old things have passed away. I am as capable of sinning as ever, but Christ is realized as present as never before. He cannot sin; and He can keep me from sinning.

I am sorry to have to confess it, but I cannot say that since I have seen this light I have not sinned; but I do feel there was no need to have done so....Christ dwelling in the heart by faith (i.e. faith in His word of promise) is power indeed, is life indeed.

There is no need he says to have done this because Christ is in him and he is dead to himself. So because of his death to sin, he can now live in holiness because his life isn't about himself it's about Christ. What's interesting here is that he didn't write this when he had just got to China. Taylor wrote there after he had been in China 15 years. He had already at this point begun the China Inland Mission, which changed the face of missions because at that point missionaries only went to the coast and he saw the many people that were inland and sought to establish a mission that would send people to reach those people for Christ. And he did that. By the end of his life there was 800 plus missionaries that had gone to China under the China Inland Mission to reach the inland of China for Christ.

So you might not have not been a Christian very long, or you may have been a Christian a long time, but regardless of what state you are in, you have died with Christ and your spiritual eyes need to be open to see that truth so that you can truly no longer live for yourself, but live for Christ who loves you and gave Himself up for you, and that will bring a motivation for holy living.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

3) We are motivated by our life with Christ (3:4)

“When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

Christ is our life. He is our life. Hopefully you can testify to that. I remember several years ago I visited what is now called a retirement community. These people weren't your average people in your average community. They had all gone out with the China Inland Mission and were living together, in a community, not able to do very much because they were very old. I remember the person I spent most of the time talking to left for China in 1922. And yet with what they were left with as far as their life being Christ, they prayed often, faithfully, for the needs of the work, consistently. Hopefully in your life, Christ is your life not only today, not only tomorrow, but throughout the rest of your life. So when you are in an old folks home you can look back and say Christ is my life and you can know that you didn't spend your life focused on the things on earth, so consumed with yourself, but your thoughts and your desires were set on the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. For then you can have confidence that your life will be meaningful. It will not have been wasted. But if you are going to do that you will have to know that your life is dead, you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

4) We are motivated by our revelation with Christ (3:4)

“When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”
We will be revealed with Him.

If we died with Christ, we will also live and reign with Christ (**2 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 3:13**). “**If we died with Him we shall also live with Him, if we endured we shall also reign with Him.**” When He comes He will come with His saints to reign and we will be with Him.

What a glorious truth. This should motivate us for the long term because something better is to come.

I would like to read you the very end of this, the last few sentences:

And now I must close. I have not said half I would like to say if I had more time. May God give you the grace to lay hold on these blessed truths....Nor should we look upon this experience, these truths, as only for the few. They are the birthright of every child of God, and no one can dispense with them without dishonor to our Lord. The only power for deliverance from sin or for serving the Lord is Christ.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Your own affectionate brother,

J. Hudson Taylor

Let's close in prayer.

Lord, we thank You for Your truth that has been graciously delivered to us. We thank You that in this we can know You, know You in truth, know that You have given us Your life and that we have died with You. Lord, we pray that You would help us to see with our spiritual eyes the truth of this so that we can avoid the errors of the world, the ideas of men, the desires of the flesh and we can overcome this with Your word. We pray that You would dwell within us in a way that we could live our life completely surrendered to You, not living for ourselves but for You where the love of Christ will control us.