3-17-24

Colossians 3:1-4

At first glance, our verses for today seem very similar to our study last week. Last week we looked at Colossians 2:6-7: *Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.* While there are certainly points of overlap and places where living these verses blend together, there is a different emphasis.

The verses we studied last week focus on doing; on how we live as Christians. This is brought out in the idea of “walk in Christ”. Through Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and worship He becomes our foundation and structure in life. Through these things our faith becomes established; sometimes we may feel a little shake in our faith but it never crumbles or falls. Because we are rooted and built up in Christ, our faith does not fail and we are able to persevere until the time comes for the fulfillment of our sure hope.

We come to understand that we cannot accomplish these things in our own strength; the forces against us are too strong. We recognize that it is God the Holy Spirit who indwells us who has rooted us and built us; it is He who has provided that faith that will not fall. It is that amazing way of God where we have our responsibility to work and cooperate yet the success comes from God; He gets all the glory. And so, because of these things, we have gratitude. We are called to a constant state of thanksgiving for the impossible salvation that our God has made possible for us.

The verses in chapter 3 include all these things and also require Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and worship; but they are more a look at where we live instead of what we do. Notice the focus on Jesus throughout. He is the One in whom we live. As a Christian we are in Christ and He is in us. There is a union which takes place; and once truly formed it cannot be broken. And there is a part involved here that is truly difficult for us to grasp because it is a spiritual reality and we exist in the physical. It is in the spiritual that we are part of Christ and He is part of us.

Paul starts with this thought: *if you have been raised up with Christ*. Now, if you have been raised up with Christ then you are a Christian. I want to consider the idea of “raised up” for a bit. In one sense, we can see this referring to baptism. In baptism, we proclaim our solidarity with Jesus by symbolically going through His death, burial, and resurrection. Coming up out of the water, we are being raised up with Him in resurrection; in new life.

But Jesus was involved in another raising up; it was His ascension into heaven that took place in front of the apostles and many disciples. The Bible tells us that Jesus ascended into heaven and He is now in the place of highest honor: seated at the right hand of the Father. And Paul brings that out in this verse 1; that is where Jesus is; seated at the right hand of God.

Now, if we are in Christ, and Christ is seated at the right hand of God, then where are we? This is one of those difficult spiritual realities I mentioned earlier. Somehow, someway our spirits are unified with Jesus as He sits in heaven. Can I back this up with Scripture? Ephesians 2:6, *“[God] raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*” Obviously this is not a verse we would use when explaining Christianity to a non-believer. This is solid food, meat, for mature Christians; I offer it for you to chew on.

So, what shall we do about this? As we sit here in our physical bodies in this church service, we know that our spirits are still with us. If our spirits were not with us, we would be dead. Physical death is when our spirit is no longer with our body. But at the same time, our spirit is actually unified with Christ in heaven. And this brings us to the flavor of these verses: where we ought to live.

In verse 1, my Bible says “*keep seeking the things above*.” Your translation might say something about the heart; about having your heart in heaven. While the word “heart” isn’t in the original Greek, it very well captures meaning of these words. Paul is telling us that we need to keep our hearts in heaven; on things above. Notice in verse 2 he says, “*Set your mind on the things above*.” He tells us to have our hearts and minds in heaven.

Our spirits are already somehow associated with heaven in reality; although still with our bodies they also exist with Christ. We cannot physically be with Christ; at least not yet. That will happen when Jesus returns and our bodies are resurrected in perfection to live with Him eternally. But in the meantime, we work to have our hearts and minds in heaven also. Our heart represents our emotions, our desires, what we long for. Our mind is our thoughts and our wills. As Christians, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we are to focus these things above.

Where is your heart? What holds your attention; what is the object of your deepest desires? Is it your career? Perhaps your house or your garden? Maybe even your family; your children or grandchildren? All these things are good things and there is nothing wrong with spending time on them and enjoying them. The problem comes in when they hold a higher place than Jesus.

It’s very easy for us to have our hearts set on something here on earth; we live here and the physical world is something we can interact with. Admittedly, it is hard to set your heart your heart on heaven. And actually, that means setting your heart on Jesus.

The examples I gave a moment ago are good things, and it is a daily struggle for the Christian to keep them in their proper place with respect to Jesus. But there is an additional battle taking place and that involves evil things. Even when we are in Christ, we are also currently in the flesh. We have a sin nature to deal with and it calls us to evil things, worldly things. There is always the lure of greed for money or possessions, for power, the draw to immorality.

The world calls us; it wants our heart to be here. Last week we mentioned Lot’s wife. Although warned not to, she turned and looked back at the city of Sodom. She was headed for freedom and safety; but she looked back. She looked back because Sodom is where her heart was; and she paid the price. Don’t look back at this world; it is Sodom. Once you’re heading toward Jesus set your heart on Him. To look back is to invite destruction.

How do we set our heart on heaven? Certainly it is by setting our heart on Jesus. But it is also by doing good works. The Bible tells us that we will receive rewards in heaven for the good we do here that are done in Christ. We can think of these rewards as treasure, waiting for us. In Matthew 6:20-21 Jesus says, *“[S]tore up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*.”

Your heart will be focused on heaven if that is where your rewards are stored up. Keep in mind also that your greatest treasure should be Jesus; and heaven is where He is.

Along with your heart set your mind on things above. Your mind is your thoughts and it is your will. In the course of a day, there are lots and lots of things on our minds: There are things we have to do, there are things we want to do, there are things going on in the world that concern us. We have a lot to think about just to live this life. And God understands that; He made us to live in this world. But at the same time, do we force ourselves to carve out time for our minds to be set on things above?

We go back to what’s important to us; what our hearts are set on. The things that are truly important to us we will make time for; we will set our minds to them. If Jesus is important to us; if our hearts are set on Him; we will make sure our thoughts are on Him; we will have time for Him. Notice in life that whatever our hearts are set on is what we think about the most.

A part of this is using our wills to change how our minds work; how we think. As we are told in Romans 12:2, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*.” This requires effort on our part because our minds are naturally drawn to things of this world. We are worldly in our natural state and we will think like the world. Of course, the world is contrary to the will of God.

So we must renew our minds; and in so doing we will be transformed. Our minds are renewed by what we put into them. Do we fill our minds with worldly things from secular tv and radio and internet? How about a steady diet of the news either from CNN or FOX? How about reading books on how to succeed in gaining wealth or popularity, or even self-help; how about the current wisdom of following your heart? None of these things will renew your mind; all of them call you to the world. Do we avoid all these things? No, but dilute them with good stuff.

Renew your mind with the things we mentioned with regard to Colossians 2:6-7; Bible reading, prayer, Christian fellowship, and worship of the God of the Bible. This is the good stuff. We can add to that Christian books and programs. It is a matter of always being aware of what you are allowing to enter your mind. And beware of idle thoughts; our minds will tend toward evil. The Bible tells us to take our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ; it tells us to think on things that are true and lovely and pure and honorable and right. These are things to do, so that our hearts and minds will dwell in the right place.

Once more we are faced with the responsibility to do things we are incapable of; we need help. And of course, God provides. Paul tells us, “*For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God*.” The Bible often talks of how we have died with Christ and in Christ. It sounds like something good. How does this fit with the Bible being so focused on life? It all comes down to God being sovereign and all-powerful and that He is able to use all things for the fulfillment of His purposes. That includes death. He is even able to use death to bring about eternal life.

Make no mistake, death is evil. It is the power of the devil and it came into the world as the result of sin. Satan seduced Adam and Eve to rebel against God and the result was death to all the living. But God made death a vehicle of good. After the fall, in Genesis 3:22 it says, ‘*Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—*’ That sentence just ends without finishing the thought; as if the idea of living forever in our current fallen state is just too horrible to contemplate. And it is. Death has become a mercy to us; as long as we are in Christ. If we die in Christ, then we are made new and have access to Jesus, the tree of life, so we can live forever in the way God intended.

We also know that although we will physically die, we will have a bodily resurrection to eternal life. Have you ever considered that you, as a Christian, have already undergone a resurrection? Because of sin, your spirit was separated from God; you were spiritually dead. When you accepted Jesus as your Saviour, your spirit was reborn, made alive; it was brought back to life.

Here’s another neat part: when you accepted Christ you were also crucified with Him. Remember that part of baptism is associating yourself with the death of Christ. In accepting Jesus, along with your spirit being brought back to life, there is a way in which you have also died. Sometimes we think of it as the “old man”. The old man has died so that the new man can live.

If you’re dead, the devil can’t temp you anymore, you can’t sin anymore. While we are still temped and still sin, these things do not control us. They can’t get to us because we are hidden in Christ. Praise be to God!

These things are not easy for us. And many times they are frustrating because it seems as if we are getting nowhere. But this is a sanctification process that takes our lifetime; it is by God’s design a slow process. If you are somewhat depressed that you don’t see progress, look back at yourself 10 or 20 years ago. See how far you’ve come.

For now the world can’t see us; our future is hidden in Christ and the world is unable to see. But one day the world will gape and stare at Christ Jesus coming from the clouds, clothed in majesty and glory on a powerful white horse, followed by a vast army clothed in purity and enveloped in the glory of Christ. And that will be us. We will no longer be hidden in Christ, but revealed in Him.

Prayer

Almighty God, how can we keep from being in awe of You? You have taken something as evil as death and made it a doorway to eternal life. Although You forbid us to seek it, You have made it a pathway to comfort in Your timing and according to Your plan for us. Help us to grasp the fulness of what it means to have died with Christ; and the mystery of being hidden in Him.

We are in desperate need of the help of the Holy Spirit to set our hearts and minds on the things of Christ; on the things above. As He first drew us to Jesus, may He draw us away from the things of this world. Help us to subdue our minds to the obedience of Christ and protect us from the influence of satan, the world, and our own flesh.

How humbled and grateful we are to You Lord. Salvation was so much more than we could have ever even hoped for; yet Yor have blessed us with so much more. We can’t imagine sharing in the glory of Christ. It is His, He has earned it, He deserves it; yet You have made us fellow heirs with Him in that glory. May it forever reflect back on Him.

In Jesus’ name we pray

Amen