



Sermon – July 25, 2021
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 3:16 – 17

Hebrews 10:24 - 25

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to be in Colossians 3, verses 16 and 17. And if you're a guest with us, whether online or in the room, welcome home. It's so fitting that we're coming to this passage today. Because right now we're on the front end of a search for a new worship minister. And as we turn our hearts to the text this morning, we're going to see Paul speaking to what the corporate worship of the church should look like. We get a glimpse into what it was like back in that time period that gives us a window into what it should look like for us today. So I want you to follow along with me. Notice what Paul says beginning in verse 16 of Colossians 3.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer one more time.

Father, as we turn our hearts to You, may you clear the distractions. And will You fix our hearts affection and our mind's attention on You alone so that we can make much of Jesus this morning through Your word? And we ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

Now how much would you pay in order to fly to outer space? For some of you, you might be willing to clear the bank account, put it all on the line to get there. Others might say, "You would have to pay me an unknown amount of money because I would never do that in a million years." Well, all eyes were fixed on West Texas this week when Jeff Bezos and Blue Origin launched rocket that just went into space. And one of the news stories that kept coming up was that the last seat on this first rocket ship with Blue Origin was filled through an auction. Where people around the world could bid and offer money in order for that right to have that final seat. You want to know how much the winning bid was? \$28 million. But here's the interesting thing. This anonymous winner that paid \$28 million to go on the flight didn't actually go on the rocket this week. Why? All the news reports told us is that he had a scheduling conflict. He

couldn't fit it in between his golf game and his massage or his business lunch. I don't know what was going on. But it's like, don't you think you could kind of rework the schedule to make that happen? And in his place, it ended up getting filled by an 18-year-old from Europe. And what you notice in a situation like that is his, this one who paid the price to be there but didn't go on the mission, his preferences prevented him from pursuing his purpose. In other words, his own life got in the way of the mission and he missed the moment. And Paul is offering a similar warning to us today when we think about the subject of worship.

That our hearts can be led in such a way that our preferences might prevent us from experiencing God's purpose in worship. That we might think about worship through the lens of our way of doing things instead of seeing it through the lens of how God has called us to do it as a church. And that's why it's so fitting we're coming to this text. Because right here in Colossians 3, is one of the only glimpses we get in the New Testament of what the worship of the early church looked like. When they gathered together, what did it seem like? What were the characteristics of it? And there's not a lot of depth, a lot of information. But what we find here is something that can shape us as we prepare for the next chapter of worship right here at Central. Because what we'll notice as we work our way through this text is that Paul is going to show us three realities that should shape our hearts as a church as we honor God with our worship. You'll see the first one right back there in the beginning of verse 16 when he tells us that worship is a light that fixes our eyes on Christ. So notice how he says it there. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. You see, we live our whole lives in a constant danger of focusing our attention on ourselves. And when we gather every Sunday in worship, it's an opportunity to recalibrate where we fix our eyes. To turn away from ourselves and instead, to our Savior. And what Paul is showing us here is that if we see that worship is a light that fixes our eyes on Jesus, it will help us to recognize that Christ must be at the center of our worship. That's why he says there, let the word of Christ dwell. That word of Christ, the Bible, the entire story from Genesis to Revelation, is one of worship.

Now, what is worship? It's when the people of God gather in the presence of God to offer their praise to God. And from the beginning of Eden, Adam and Eve are worshiping God while they're in the presence of God, offering their praises to Him in the garden. And then you fast forward to the exodus. And when God gives Israel the Ten Commandments, those first two are: you shall have no other God before you, and you shall not bow down to idols. They are focused on worship. As the story of Israel plays out and they enter into the promised land, we see the battle for worship that's going on there. Will they worship God in His way, by His practices, in His temple? Or will they turn away from Him and follow the idols of the nations around them and have their hearts led astray? And even when that's going on, the prophets are there. They're declaring to the people that one day a Messiah will come who will make all things new and He will restore the worship of the people of God. And we see even from the Old Testament this theme emerging that God must be at the center of our worship. And that what we worship is what we become. We become what we behold and what that fast forwards us into the coming of Christ. And remember where the first worship of Jesus takes place. It wasn't at the temple. It wasn't at the cross. It wasn't at His return. It's right there as a baby in the manger. Those wise men come and the text tells us that they bowed down and worship Him. And then we see the war of worship take a new dimension when Jesus goes out into the wilderness after His baptism and He faces temptations from the enemy. And satan comes to Him and says, "I will give you all the kingdoms of this world if You will do one thing." And what is it? If You'll bow down

and worship me. And when Jesus is speaking to the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman, He tells her what worship should look like. That those that honor God with their worship must do it in spirit and in truth. And the whole New Testament story from the book of Acts to all of Paul's letter and elsewhere is this unfolding picture of what it looks like for the people of God to gather in the presence of God to offer praise to God in anticipation of the heavenly reality that is even going on right now in God's throne room. Where the angels are gathered to worship anticipating the day when Christ shall return. He will come back. And as Paul tells us in Philippians 2, at that moment every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So when Paul speaks here in Colossians 3 and says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," he's reminding us of the reality that we need to focus and to fix our eyes on Jesus that He might be the center of our worship.

I don't know how you feel about going to the dentist, but I look forward to it. In fact, I look forward to it a lot because my dentist is our deacon chairman, Craig Scasta. And I know it's kind of vulnerable for a pastor to be in that type of position with a deacon chair. There's a lot of things that you could do to me. But I know when I walk into that exam room, you lay down on that chair, they recline you back and as you're looking upward, one of the things you can see is that there is a light that is on a track. And I've never walked into a dentist office and when they laid me back that light was perfectly positioned to hit exactly where my mouth was. Instead, what they have to do when that client comes in is they have to reposition it to get it just right so that that light is properly focused. It might have been in a different spot for someone else or they might have had to move it out of the way in order to clean it. Something has moved it from where it's intended to focus. And unless there is an intentional effort to do so, it will be focused in the wrong place. It will be fixed on the wrong position. And what we know about our hearts throughout the week is that same battle rages in each of our lives. That we constantly have to re-fix our eyes on Jesus. We have to re-center our hearts. We have to refocus our worship so that the light of the gospel might shine in our lives. And see, Paul is calling us here to center our worship on Christ. But the danger that we face when we come into worship is that our hearts and our priorities can put other things at the center. Maybe it's our preferences. Maybe it's our practices and traditions. Maybe it's the good life principles that we teach. Maybe it's our politics or any number of other things. But here's what we know, Central. If Jesus is not at the center of our worship, this week and every week we might as well shut it down and go watch The Olympics. If Jesus is not at the center of our worship search as we are seeking God's man to lead us into the next season of worship, we might as well call it off and start all over again. Worship is a light and that light shows us how Christ should be at the center of our worship. But notice the way that verse 16 also shows us how Christ should be the treasure of our worship. That's why he says there that the word of Christ dwells in you richly. This is a command to allow the word of Christ to take residence. To be the owner of the home of our hearts. To be the owner of this house of prayer right here at Central. The word of Christ is not some overnight guest that overstays his welcome. The word of Christ is not the college student that comes home just to get a home cooked meal and do the laundry. No, the word of Christ should be the owner of our hearts. The one that's at the center of the life of this church. The focus of our attention. The true treasure as Paul speaks here of our affections. That's why he says the word of Christ must dwell in us richly. He's picking up on themes that he's already talked about if you look back in Colossians 2:3. Do you remember how he describes Jesus there? He tells us in Colossians 2:3 that in Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So what he's calling us to do is to take the treasure of Christ through the word of Christ to drive the worship of

Christ. That's one of the reasons I can't wait to see us start up our life groups again next Sunday. Because we gather not just to worship, but also in that time of community and connection and growth so that we might see the word of Christ richly dwelling in us. That should be the desire of our hearts. And when we do that, Central, the gospel will be a light in our lives. Jesus will be at the center of our church. He will be the treasure of our worship so that we can embody this first reality that worship is a light that fixes our eyes on Christ.

But I want you to notice Paul doesn't stop there. He keeps going in this text and in the middle of verse 16, we're going to see a second thing that needs to shape the next chapter of our worship at Central. Where we see that worship is a window that focuses our minds on Christ. And notice how he says it there in the middle of verse 16. He says, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. So in other words, worship is not just a light that fixes our eyes on Jesus, it's a window that focuses our minds on Jesus. And notice something, I didn't call worship a portrait, but a window. You see, when you look at a portrait, you look at it. When you look at a window, you look beyond it. You're not looking like a portrait at what is there, you're looking at it like window as in what you can see through it. The idea is that through our worship, we get a glimpse into heaven. That's one of the things I remember about watching that Blue Origin flight take off this week. Watching it with the boys as this rocket was configured in such a way that I just had these massive panoramic windows for these people flying to look out and to see the heavens around them. And as they sat in those chairs and as they rose to those heights and they looked out those windows, they weren't sitting there thinking, "Wow! That glass is really nice. Must be very thick." No, they weren't focused on what was on it; they were focused on what they could see through it. And that's what our worship is intended to do is to function as a window to open up the heavens so that we might see Christ and focus our minds on Him. And that's what Paul is connecting for us. Because how is it that the word of Christ richly dwells in us? Well, look back at the text, the way that it sets up. It dwells in us when we teach and admonish one another through singing. Do you see the way he says that? There's this connection there; teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom and singing. In other words, our songs strengthen our sanctification. Our music makes us more like our Messiah. Our singing is part of what God uses for both direction and correction in our lives. If we want to understand what true corporate worship looks like as a church, we need to recognize that worship is not just for exalting Christ, but Paul is showing us it's also for equipping the church. It's part of what God uses to grow us and shape us to be more like Jesus. Congregational worship contributes to our conformity to Christ. It teaches and admonishes us. Do you remember back to your childhood to how you learned the alphabet? Some of you might have been taught by your parents and you memorized it. Or maybe you played with blocks where you did better recognizing the letters. But I imagine for most of us, the way we learned the alphabet was through the song, The ABC's. And by singing it over and over again, it instructed us. There are some songs that are intentionally instructional. I think about that old series, Schoolhouse Rock and songs like Conjunction Junction or the 50 Nifty United States where you can lock down all the states. And no, I'm not going to tempt myself to try to perform it right here in front of you because I'm sure I would fail. There's something about music that focuses our minds in a way that nothing else does. That's why you can't remember what you ate for lunch yesterday or the Bible passage that you read last week, but you can hear a song on a radio you haven't heard in 20 years and the moment it comes on you've got every line. It's because there's something about the way God designed music and singing to make things stick in our lives; to focus our minds. And when Paul is speaking here of this reality that through our

singing that is part of what God uses to teach and to admonish us. He is showing us that in corporate worship, there is a sermon in the songs. There is a lesson in the lyrics. That as we sing to one another, God is using that to shape us. And one of the big temptations in church is to think that the singing before the sermon is just the warmup to get our hearts ready. And I know we probably wouldn't say that out loud. We wouldn't want anybody to actually think that about us. We probably don't think that about ourselves. But just look at our activities and patterns. I would guess most Sunday when our worship service begins, there's about half of you that have made it into the room by the first song. Maybe you're struggling to get the kids out the door and to get them checked in. Maybe you bumped into that friend you've been waiting to see that you haven't caught up with for several weeks. Maybe it's just been one of those days and you need that second cup of coffee and you want to get that before you come in here. I get it. Before I was your pastor, I was the one sitting in the pews just like you and I'm just as guilty. But I can't help but wonder if one of the reasons that we feel fine about that, especially even those of you who couldn't imagine being late to a meeting, who couldn't even fathom missing a kickoff at Kyle Field, you're casual about getting here on time. Because you miss the purpose of the worship. You see it through this individual lens, they think that what it's doing is it's softening my heart in order to get me ready to receive the seed of the Gospel being planted in me through the sermon. And of course it does that, but it doesn't do only that. What Paul is showing us here is that when we gather together to sing, that our songs themselves are sermons, that our praise is proclamation, that it's part of what God is using to form us, to shape us, to convict us of sin, to help us to press on in the faith. And that's why Paul says more about what this looked like in an ancient church like in Colossae.

If you look back in verse 16, what types of worship does Paul have in mind there? He specifically mentions in verse 16 singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. He mentions these three types of music. And as the scholars have researched it, they distinguish them in this way. That the psalms would be songs based on the Old Testament psalms that we have today. That these hymns would be newly constructed music that the church had written for itself. In fact, many scholars think that Colossians 1, verses 15 through 20 is one of these ancient hymns. And then it speaks about these spiritual songs. That perhaps they're speaking less about the content of what is sung and more about the heart behind it. That it is rooted and it's grounded in the spirit of God. There's a lack of clarity on exactly what these three distinct types of songs are. But there is one thing we can be sure about. There was a variety of musical expression even in the early church. Why is that? Because there's a variety of people in a variety of situations with a variety of preferences. And what Paul seems to be showing us is that even in the earliest days of the church, that they were blending together different forms of worship for the sake of building up the body. It's one of the reasons I love the fact that we are a multi-generational church. Some of you are old souls like me who love to sing the hymns, including the third verse. Others of you can't wait for us to sing the newest and latest thing and that freshness keeps your heart aflame to God. I love the fact that we're multi-generational. I love the fact that we don't have two different worship styles, a traditional and a contemporary. We are one body with one mind with one spirit seeking to honor God by following the pathway that Colossians 3 lays out of embracing this blend of musical expressions that reflect every aspect of who we are and address every aspect of our lives. Worship is a window into heaven. When we come together and sing, it focuses our minds, it expresses our emotions, it directs our energy, it clarifies our thoughts, it softens our souls, it stirs our affections, it shapes our desires. That's why the author of Hebrews will tell us in Hebrews 10:24 and 25, you'll see it on the screen that we need to

recognize the importance of gathering together so that we can grow together. Here's how he says it:

²⁴Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see this Day drawing near.

You see how he says it there? Do not neglect meeting together. And if anything has tested that resolve in our lives over this last year, it's been this COVID season. Where if you remember back in March and April at first when we couldn't meet, we would tune in online. And in that time period, for that moment, it made us appreciate what we missed. There was a longing to be back together. But over time as that continued to be experienced, at least for some, the ones who at once appreciated what they missed, were now apathetic about it. They didn't mind it. It's kind of nice being at home. Worshiping from the lake. Being able to fit worship into our schedule. But if we are going to recognize what Paul is saying here, that worship is a window and that part of what God is using worship for is not just to exalt Jesus but to equip one another, we should have the same longing of Hebrews 10 to gather together in worship. To stir one another's affections together. Because your singing next to someone, even if it's off key, might be part of what God uses to make them more like Jesus. That's the type of window that worship should be. But I want you to notice the way that this text ends as we go on.

At the end of verse 16 and into verse 17 we see a third dimension of worship here when Paul tells us that worship is a mirror that forms our hearts for Christ. So see how he says it, end of verse 16,

¹⁶...with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

So Paul shows us here that worship is not just a light, it's not just a window, it's also a mirror that reflects and forms our hearts. That, in other words, the corporate worship that we gather to express on Sundays should fuel a committed worship that is lived out in our lifestyles throughout the week. The idea is, as so many have said before, worship is more than a song, it's a lifestyle. And it's a lifestyle that we should embody in several different ways as individuals. First Paul is showing here that we need to worship with all our hearts. That's why he says, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Worship is a matter of the heart. It begins in the heart, but it doesn't stay there. See, what the Bible knows is that what the heart prizes, the mouth praises. We need to worship God with all our hearts with this thankfulness in our hearts to God. That's why the prophet Isaiah warned of the temptation in Isaiah 29:13 of hypocrisy in worship. It's a warning that Jesus picked up when speaking to the Pharisees and prophet says it like this:

And the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips while their hearts are far from me and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.

Is it possible that for some of us in the room today, it looks like we are worshiping God with all our hearts and yet our hearts are far from Him? Is your heart far from God this morning? Does

what your mouth sing match what your mind thinks? Do those hands that are raised accurately reflect the feelings in your heart? Paul is calling us here to worship with all our heart even when, perhaps even especially when we can't imagine doing it. When we can't fathom feeling like it. That's when our hearts should lean into the nearness of God the most. Whether that's when you walk in this room and you feel enslaved to a besetting sin. That's when you walk into this room and you've just experienced the crushing weight of unthinkable loss. You're trapped in trials. You're overwhelmed by stress. You're gripped by anxiety. In those moments, God meets us in the valley of our lives and brings us upward to heaven in worship if we'll seek Him with all our hearts. But he doesn't just say worship with all your heart. He goes on to say worship with all your life. And that's why he says at the beginning of verse 17, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now Paul is here offering a summary of everything he said in about the last chapter and a half. And so he's speaking about more than just worship, but he is certainly speaking about our worship. That our worship should be something that grips our entire life whether in word or deed. The entire spectrum of who we are, what we say, how we serve, should be a reflection of what we sing. And how do we know that's true? It's when we do these things as he tells us there in verse 13, in the name of the Lord Jesus. This phrase, in the name of the Lord, it shows up 18 times in the Old Testament. And each time it speaks about something that is taking place in the name of the Lord there are two common characteristics about it. In that moment when something is happening in the name of the Lord, it is a reflection or a manifestation or an embodiment of two realities: the power and the presence of God. When we do things in the name of the Lord, we are doing it in a way that declares He is with us and He is for us. His presence is with us and among us and we are doing it in the power that He provides. And when Paul speaks here of that reality for us, that we should do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus including our corporate worship, it is a reminding that as we gather here on Sundays right here in this room, the power and presence of God is with us. Does our worship reflect that? That God is here among us? That His power is made manifest through us and in us by the, by the work of His Spirit? That's what Paul is driving at when he's calling us to worship with all our lives.

But notice the way that this text finishes. Paul also calls us to worship with all our gratitude. That's why he says at the end of verse 17, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. So if you look in these three verses from 15 down to 17, some element of thanksgiving shows up in each one. So you look back in verse 15, it tells us, and be thankful. Then if you look in verse 16, it says, with thankfulness in your hearts. And now in verse 17, giving thanks to God. The thankful heart is the worshipful heart. The grumbling heart doesn't worship. And one of the things, as I've been watching the Olympics over the last couple days, it's great to see the sports, but isn't it just a disappointment, it's so sad to have no fans in the stands. There's nobody there to celebrate the success of the victors. In fact, for some of the wins I've watched so far, they've got a live camera capturing the feed of the watch party for family and friends that are back in the United States. And as we're watching it, we can't help but follow along and cheer on the victors. And there's a reason for that. It's because champions celebrate. Winners worship. When there is success, it can't help but overflow in a celebration. And that's not just true on the athletic field, that's true through the gospel of Jesus Christ. How could it be that for some of us, it's so easy to raise our hands in celebration when the aggies score a touchdown on a Saturday? But we couldn't imagine raising our hands right here to celebrate the victory we have through our resurrected king? The gospel of Jesus is a victory announcement that what God is showing us is that through His Son, He has made a way for us in salvation. That we who were brought low by

our sins could be raised high through salvation because He paid the price for us on the cross and unless we keep that front of mind with grateful hearts, we will not worship in the way that pleases God. Because only grateful hearts worship. When we think about this next chapter as we begin our search for a new worship minister, my prayer is that they embody these three elements that we see about how worship is a mirror that forms our hearts. We want to find someone as our next leader in this area who worships God with all their hearts as a musician. Who worships God with all their life as a leader and who worships God with all their gratitude as a shepherd.

As that Blue Origin flight took place this week, there was one person who wasn't on it who was supposed to be. They couldn't clear their schedule to make it work. But there was another person on that first flight who had had their schedule cleared and available for nearly 60 years. Did you hear the story this week? One of the other travelers on this rocket was a woman by the name of Wally Funk. And Wally, along with 12 other women, went through the training process all the way back in the 1960's during the space race so that they might one day be astronauts. And these 13 women who completed their training successfully never got to fly in space. And from that day back in 1961 when that training began, 60 years have elapsed and Wally Funk who longed to fulfill her desires, longed to complete the mission to travel into space, and this last week she did it. At age 82, she became the oldest person to ever enter into space. Now just think about the difference between these two passengers for a minute. Think about this first one who bought his way onto a flight he wouldn't take. And the reason that it didn't happen is because his preferences prevented him from pursuing the purpose he said he was committed to. In other words, he determined whether or not he would embrace the mission on the basis of his life. The idea was that he wanted to fit the mission around his life. And yet when you look at Wally Funk, you see the exact opposite taking place. She doesn't fit the mission around her life, she reorients her life around the mission. I will wait however long it takes. I will do whatever it needs in order to fulfill the purpose I have sought to achieve from the beginning. And when Paul paints this picture of worship for us today, he is calling us to have that type of heart. One that sacrifices our desires, that lays down our preferences, that reorients our lives around the mission as we seek to worship God in heaven. And the way that we do that is by remembering the realities that Paul speaks of here, that worship is a light that fixes our eyes on Christ. Worship is a window that focuses our minds on Christ and worship is a mirror that forms our hearts for Christ. Let's do that together, Central, as we enter this next chapter in worship.

Can we pray together?

Father, we're coming to You saying that there is no greater God than You. You are the one true God and You are worthy of our worship, our devotion, our desires. Lord, I'm laying them at our feet, at Your feet right now, God. I'm asking You that You would stir the hearts in this room to worship. That we would recognize the gift that You've given us through Your Son and that we could not help but overflow in thanksgiving and praise. And even now as we gather corporately, we are lifting up to you this next season of worship, God. That we would lay aside our preferences and desires and seek your heart for worship. Seek the leader that You are driving us to. And we pray even now You are preparing them for this next season with us. And as we ready our hearts to respond, God, will You fix our eyes, focus our minds, and form our hearts on Christ alone. And we ask these things in His name. Amen.