



Sermon – October 13, 2019
Dr. Matthew McKellar

Verses Covered

Colossians 3:1 – 4

Thank you, Wes, and thank you Central. It's always great to be back with you. And despite everything, I do love your pastor and I appreciate him so much. Looking forward to his dissertation defense here shortly and hopefully we'll get him newly minted and graduated.

I'm so glad you're here. If you have a Bible, would you take it and turn to the book of Colossians. Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 4. And while you're turning there, you may have seen when you were watching NFL on Sunday afternoons or Monday nights or whenever, I was reading recently that Pizza Hut has a new ad campaign. You may have seen it. They show the pizza piping hot and then someone says, "After all, you can't have football without the Hut." Maybe you've seen that ad, and it's rather clever because it blends together those two things. The idea that you're going to watch a professional football game, you need a big piping hot pizza in front of you. You know, some things just go together. I think as we come to our text this morning, really in a sense, that is Paul's argument. Life and Christ go together. Life and Christ go together. You follow along as I read Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 4. This is the word of God.

¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit. We ask for Your namesake and for the exaltation of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that You would open our hearts and open our minds and make us different people. People who leave here today treasuring Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in a way we never have before. All this to the glory of King Jesus we pray. Amen.

When you come to the book of Colossians, you have Paul almost in a panic. It's as if his hair is on fire because what is most precious to him is being threatened. We don't know the details of the heresy in the church at Colossae to which Paul wrote, but we do know that there was a false man-centered, man-made teaching that was threatening to cast a cloud over the supremacy, the

sufficiency, the worth, and the beauty of Jesus Christ. And that is what Paul is concerned about. After his soaring Christology in chapter 1, by the way, you ought to go back this afternoon and read chapter 1, verses 15 through 23. One of the most soaring, Christ-centered, Christ-exalting passages. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, first born of all creation, in Him all things hold together. God's purpose in that all things is that He might have first place, the preeminence. He's the Creator. He's the Sustainer. He's the Redeemer. What you can say about Jesus, you can say about no one else. And then in chapter 2, Paul proceeds to expose the man-made religion offering its regulations and its experiences and its visions. You can read about it there. And Paul says none of these things is sufficient for harnessing the indulgences of the flesh. That is to say, none of these man-made ideas can change the inside of a human being. You've got to have Jesus.

And then we get to chapter 3. It's as if Paul answers this question. How do I live for Jesus in the theatre of this world where I'm constantly bombarded by messages that would not lead me to love Christ, to exalt Christ, to value Christ? How do I live for Christ in the spectacle of the theatre of the world as one writer calls it? Tony Reinke had a great book, *Competing Spectacles: Treasuring Christ in the Digital Age*, writes this: All of my concerns are dwarfed by this one: (listen to his one concern) boredom with Christ.

Did you hear that? Boredom with Christ. He writes in a digital age, monotony with Christ is a chief warning signal that the spectacles of this world are suffocating our hearts from the supreme spectacle of the universe: Christ. You know, from time to time we're told whatever our situation is, you know you need to, you just need to look in, you know, just look inside. You need to feel good about yourself. You need to have better self-esteem. You need to go back there and heal those memories. You need to do this. You need to look in, look in, you know, I look all through Scripture and when it comes to crisis and challenges and world-view, I never see a time in the New Testament where the Bible tells me or tells you; the answer's inside of you. Now I'm not against self-examination, and we need to examine ourselves and be honest with ourselves, and with the Lord on a regular basis. However, there's a morbid introspection that can lead to the paralysis of analysis. I would ascribe to the view of the Gaither's who years ago sang, all I have to offer Him was brokenness and strife, but He made something beautiful of my life. If you're looking for answers within yourself, all you're going to find there is a broken down human being desperately in need of Jesus Christ. Others say, "Well we need to, we need to look around. We've got to be in touch with our culture." And certainly there's an element of truth to that. But as you look around in the theatre of the world, it seems all it does is promote those things which are counter and opposed to the reign and the rule of Christ.

How then should we live? What does the word of God say? That's what we're going to see this morning. We don't primarily look in. We don't primarily look out. But primarily the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit says, "We look up. We look up and we keep looking up." In fact, what Paul says in these four verses is important, you don't want to miss it. Essentially he's saying, "Let your interaction with expiring things be governed by your interaction with eternal things where Christ is at the center and where He is the supreme focus. Think about expiration dates. Everything has an expiration date. This side of heaven, apart from the return of Jesus any moment, you and I all have an expiration date. Food has an expiration date. Clothes wear out. Shoes wear out. Things wear out. We live in an expiring world. And Paul says, "By the power of the Holy Spirit, as we live in an expiring world, we need to be governed as believers by eternal

things.” This passage is really simple. There are two key imperatives and they sound a lot alike. They’re not repetitive. One reinforces the other. But let’s look at them quickly. First of all, Paul says, “By the Holy Spirit pursue the things above.” Look at it. Seek the things that are above. Right there in verse 1. Seek the things above. What does it mean to seek something? Well, the terminology here, it’s the same term used when the Bible depicts Jesus as a shepherd who seeks the lost sheep. It is to pursue. It is to go after. And the nature of this command is such that it’s saying, keep on. Paul says, “Look, keep on. Make continual effort to seek the things above.” And by the way, it’s not a suggestion. It’s a command. You know, you think about commands in Scripture. And most often, these commands are given because the Lord knows that we are prone to forget, but we have a tendency to do the very thing that we shouldn’t do. It is not natural to seek the above things. It is natural, isn’t it, to govern our lives by what we see and by the here and now. And apparently our culture is very gifted at doing just that. And apparently, a lot of professing Christians have excelled at doing just that. Not a suggestion, but a command. For instance, the Bible says, avoid immorality. Why do we get that command? Because we have a fallen, fleshly nature. We have a tendency toward that sin, right. The Bible says, don’t forget. Remember. Remember. Remember. Remember the goodness of God. Why do we get that command? The answer is, because we are so prone to forget. Seek the things above. It’s a supernatural thing. It’s something we need the indwelling Christ to cultivate in our lives.

Now look at it. Notice what Paul does. Seek the things above. What are you talking about, Paul? I’ll tell you what I’m talking about. Where Christ is. When Paul writes about seeking above things, he’s not talking about some mystical idea out there. Oh, you just ought to lift your thoughts upward. No, he qualifies it. Seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Now the things above would be those unseen things. Those things in the heavenly realm at which Christ is the center. And to be seated at the right hand is the place of honor and authority. Would you notice Paul writes to these believers and he particularly emphasizes not only that Jesus is the focus of things above, but that Jesus is seated in a place of honor and authority at the right hand of God. It’s no accident, ladies and gentlemen, that Psalm 110, verse 1 is the most oft quoted Old Testament text in the new. The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my feet until I make Your enemies Your footstool. It’s a place of unrivaled authority. And so what’s the motivation? We go back to the first part of verse 1. If, literally, since, if you’ve been raised with Christ, if you’ve been raised with Christ, then seek the things that are above. We were singing about it this morning. In Christ alone. And we got to that swelling chorus, there in the ground His body lay. And then we move on from that and what do we sing? And what do we celebrate this morning? That Christ is risen! He conquered death! And since I share in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, my life ought to be different. My aims, my ambitions, my outlook should be centered in that place of highest honor where God has exalted Christ. You look back at chapter 2, and Paul says, all these manmade philosophies, all these claims of these celestial experiences, they don’t help a person harness, they don’t help a person overcome besetting sin. The only way you overcome besetting sin, the only way you spoil the attractiveness and sweet promise of sin is by savoring a Christ who empowers you to defeat it. But the truth is, you and I don’t think of things above so often. Because our love for Christ is distracted. In fact, it is deficient. Here’s Paul saying to the church at Colossae, “Look there is no going beyond the One who is in the supreme position at the right hand of God the Father.” Think about that. His current position. His current position guarantees you access to the very presence and throne room of God.

Well, then there's a second command, as I said, similar to the first, but not repetitive. It's like it drives the stake deeper. If you are going to pursue the above things, then you must preoccupy yourself with things above. Look back at our text. Verse 2.

²Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

Another command. It's all about mindset. If you're going to pursue the above things, then you've got to have the proper mindset. Again, Paul's terminology is such that he's saying, keep on considering, keep on thinking about it, preoccupy yourself, think meaningfully about heaven. Meaningful thinking about heaven is constantly under attack today. Let me give you a couple examples. It's common to hear, "Well, you know what, He's so heavenly minded, He's no earthly good." I like the response of Randy Alcorn to that in his great book on heaven. He says, "Relax. That's not your problem." Rather, he says, the problem is, we're so earthly minded, we're no heavenly good. C. S. Lewis put it like this. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world, were just those who thought the most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the middle ages, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on earth precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world, that they have become so ineffective in this world. Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither. Wow! Clyde Kilby at Wheaton College put it like this. Failure of Christians to think effectively of another world is a cause of their ineffectiveness in this world. Here's a radical command. In the midst of yourself and your stuff and your schedule, the word of God commands you to treasure and preoccupy yourself with Jesus Christ. To think about Him constantly. To reflect on Him continually. To govern your every thought and action by Him. What about this contrast, not things on earth? Is Paul saying we should retreat? That we should adopt a life of monasticism? Just crawl up in a hole in the ground and just cover ourselves up? No, no, no, no. All you've got to do to know that's not the case is look at the rest of chapter 3. Paul writes to believers living in the world. You put off these behaviors. You put on these things. And then he addresses everything from, from husbands and wives and parents and slaves and masters. He's not saying disengage from the world. No, not at all. You still have a marriage. You still have family. You still have work. You still have relationships. You still have leisure. You have all those things. But all of that is to be governed by looking up to Jesus. Listen to me. Riveting your attention to Christ will not make you clueless and careless. It will make you confident and assured that there's more to this life than just existing.

Well what are these things on earth? I go back to chapter 2, verse 23. And at the close of that passage, it says, all of these earthly things, they relate to the indulgence of the flesh. That is, the world that we live in, the fallen sinful world caters to our own selfish sin nature. In fact, we even get a catalog of that in chapter 3, verse 5. You can look ahead to it. What does Paul say? I love these commands. Seek, verse 1. Set, verse 2. Verse 5, put to death. How's that for a motto? Seek. Set. Put to death. Therefore, what is earthly in you. And notice this list: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these things, the wrath of God is coming. Those are the earthly things. Well, look at our motivation. We are raised with Christ. But not only that, look at what Paul says. For you have died with Christ. When you put your faith in Christ, when you trusted Him, you identified with Jesus. Not only in His

resurrection life, but in His sacrificial death for you. That's what your baptism was a picture of. Buried with Christ in baptism. Raised to walk in newness of life. Union with Christ. What is the key to living in the theatre of this world with an eternal focus? The answer, it's vital union with Jesus Christ. It's valuing Him as the ultimate spectacle and focus, an object of your praise. But look at the rest of the text. You're raised with Christ, you died with Christ, and you are hidden with Christ. You're hidden with Christ. It's a concealment. What does Paul mean by our being hidden with Christ? Well, you know, there are some things that are concealed. I put it like this. If an unbeliever is watching you as a believer, now that person may not understand you, they can't understand what makes you tick, what motivates you. In their minds, you have no visible means of support. Ah, but the Bible says, you are hidden with Christ in God. And the way Paul expresses that idea is that it's a permanent thing. You're safe and secure. Whatever you deposit into a relationship with Jesus Christ, no one and no thing can ever take away from you. What can you say that about with regard to anything else in your life? You can make a deposit of money in the bank. It can be gone tomorrow. You can invest your time, but that time is gone, poof, it's gone. But what you invest, what you invest yourself in in knowing Christ, in loving Christ, you are hidden with Christ in God. There is a permanent security. That's why the slave trader turned hymn writer to write these words. Rejoice, believer, in the Lord who makes your cause His own. The hope that's founded on His word can ne'er be overthrown. Then get this. Though many foes beset your road and feeble is your arm. Your life is hid with Christ in God beyond the reach of harm. Why should, why should Christ be the obsession, be the preoccupation of my life? Because I'm raised with Him. I died with Him. I am hidden with Him. Stunning isn't it?

Anybody else do those things for you? Anybody else make those claims? Except for Christ. But as the late night TV ads say, "But wait! There's more!" Look at verse 4. Would you look what Paul does? When Christ who is your life. Did you catch that? When Christ who is your life appears, you will also appear with Him in glory. Oh, what a beautiful position the believer has. What a glorious prospect he has when Christ who is your life is manifested in contrast to concealment, you're hidden with Christ, there's concealment now but there's appearing coming in the future. You will appear with Him in glory in that heavenly existence where Christlikeness is shared. That's almost like a foreign language to our culture today. And sadly it is to many Christians. The fact that one day the hope of a believer is that I'm going to be with Jesus in eternity, and according to 1 John 3:2, I will be like Him for I will see Him just as He is. Raised with Christ. Died with Christ. Hidden with Christ. And glory with Christ. You see what Paul's after? The default setting of your life should be a preoccupation with Jesus Christ. Everything ought to trace back to that. So let's plug in this passage quickly this morning. Stop living like this world is all that matters. Reject the tyranny of the temporary. You know those who help us with financial planning and life insurance? They say you need to think 5 years out, 10 years out, 20 years out. Here's a passage of Scripture that says you need to think 30 million, trillion, gazillion years out. I don't care how long your life is on this planet, it's little more than a finger snap in the face of eternity. We need perspective. Perspective to understand that his life is for the purpose of preparing for that life which is to come. And that means that I ought to make decisions, not based on what is right in front of me, but from the eternal perspective. The perspective of Jesus. What does that look like? I heard the story of a man who was very successful in his business. He had a wife, family, he loved the Lord, he was involved in his local church, serving faithfully. There came the day when he received a wonderful job opportunity in a city about four or five hundred miles away. It offered incredible benefits, more money than he could imagine, more security, and

an opportunity to go up the corporate ladder. But after considering that offer, he said, “You know what, I’m appreciative. I’m glad people appreciate my gifts. It’s a wonderful offer. But right now, I’m going to stay in my current position.” Some people around him and near him were, were just stunned. “What are you doing? What are you thinking? You’re missing the one opportunity.” And his response was, “Look, the most important thing to me is my children know Jesus and love Jesus. We’re in a church where the word is taught. My children are growing. They’re being disciplined in junior high and high school ministry. I’m serving the Lord, teaching a Bible study. I’m having the opportunity to make an impact for Christ where I live. The Lord has provided my current vocation and more than enough money for my family. Therefore, I’m going to stay where I am.” Now look that’s not to say that it would have been unbiblical or inappropriate for him to take a position elsewhere with better opportunities. That’s not the point. The point is, you don’t make decision based on what is right in front of you. You make decision based on Lord Jesus, You’re the King and Lord of eternity and the most important thing is that I grow in fellowship with You and that the people around me grow in fellowship with You. So put me in the place where that can happen in a maximum way.

Value, as Tony Reinke says, “Value the weight of eternal things more than the shiny bait of expiring things.” And can I just say this? If you’re going to have this mindset that Paul is writing about, you’re going to have to saturate yourself, I’m going to have to saturate myself in Scripture. Scripture feeds appetite for Christ. Scripture feeds appetite for Christ. So if you’re here this morning and say, “Oh, I realize, I realize too often I get into a monotonous mindset about the Master and majestic King of the universe. Oh, what shall I do? What do I do?” You saturate yourself in Scripture. You let Scripture feed your appetite for Jesus. You dare to be a sojourner with shallow tent pegs. Shaped at every step by your relationship with Christ. Paul is saying to the churches, he’s saying to the church at Colossae, he’s saying to us today, “You have one job. It’s to love and treasure Christ above all things.” Richard Baxter, the Puritan said and prayed, “Oh, Lord, make these carnal minds of ours so heavenly and these hard hearts of ours so spiritual that loving You and delighting You, in You might be the work of our lives. You see, you might say this morning, “Well I’m a, I’m an executive. I’m an office manager. I’m a doctor. I’m a lawyer. I’m a rancher.” You define yourself by your vocation, but before you’re any of those things, if you’re a believer, your first job is to make delighting in Christ the work of your life. Celebrate the exalted status of Christ. You talk about the ultimate spectacle and I’m convinced our lack of capacity to rejoice in and to relish the exaltation of Christ is owing to the pride and idolatry in your heart and mind.

This is an encouraging text, but at the same time I have to tell you it’s, it’s one of those that exposes the distance between God’s values and our values. Let me tell you what I mean. Holy Scripture, including this text, makes it very clear to me that God the Father has an unimaginable, indescribable, incalculable fervency for His Son, the Lord Jesus. That is the Father’s heart. It must be your heart. It must be my heart. I need to have an indescribably fervency for the Christ of holy Scripture. Jonathan Edwards says, “Scripture wounds us and then it binds us up.” Isn’t that right? It convicts us and it challenges us. But the good news is, we have the Holy Spirit living within us and the word of God doesn’t call us to do what He will not equip us to do. We’re called to strenuous effort and focus and preoccupation in the power of the Holy Spirit. I love the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 119:36 and 37. Incline my heart, Lord, to Your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in Your ways. Here’s

a text that is screaming out to you and to me saying, let your awe appetite be calibrated by the unseen beauty and worth and spectacle of Jesus. Keep looking up. Keep looking up. Let the eternal govern the expiring and one fine day like a smart phone screen made blank by the rays of direct sunshine, we shall see Christ's face. On that day all the vain spectacles in this world of illusions and all the pixelated idols of our age will finally and forever dissolve away in the radiance of His splendor. This is our King. This is Christ. And you can't have life without Him.

Would you bow with me as we pray?

In a moment we're going to sing a song response, a song of commitment. I know there are staff members here today that would love to visit with you and talk to you about a relationship with Jesus Christ. Maybe you're here today and there's never been a time when you have turned from trusting in yourself and your things and your efforts to trust alone in Christ who died in your place for your sins. There are folks here who would love to talk to you about that. Maybe there are some other decisions you need to make today related to church membership, responding to God's call to vocational ministry. This will be God's time for you this morning.

Father, we praise You. We worship You. Lord, deliver us from anything that would dampen our devotion to You and let us treasure Christ now and always. And Father, make our hearts tender so that we might increasingly value and treasure Jesus Christ, Your Son, above all things. This we pray in His strong name. Amen.