

## Jesus' Present Ministry: Implications for Our Spiritual Transformation

I want to begin this morning by inviting each of us to do a little self-examination. I'm going to read a portion of Scripture in which Paul lays out some of the things that we should seek to put away in our lives as well as things that we should seek to put on. I want you to listen and reflect. Are you putting off the old and putting on the new? Invite God to show you how you are doing in these things.

*<sup>5</sup> Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed . . . <sup>8</sup> But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another,*

*<sup>12</sup> . . . put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> Beyond all these things put on love,*

How are you doing in these things? Obviously, all of us have work to do, but what is the trend that you see in your life? Is there growth in these things? Jesus does want you to make progress in these things. Making progress in these things is the normal Christian life.

Over the past several weeks, we have been looking at Jesus' present ministry at the right hand of God and looking at many of the implications that has for our lives. We seen implications of our prayer life, for how we can engage the spiritual battle, and we've seen what it means for our perseverance. Today, we are going to see how it has implications for our spiritual transformation.

Today, we are looking at Colossians 3:1-4. In this passage Paul will urge us to have a mindset rightly focused on Christ who sits at the right hand of God, which will help us continue to grow in Christ. And so let's look at the passage.

In verses 1 and 2, there are two imperatives that essentially communicate one core command and that is that we are to:

### I. **Focus On Heavenly Realities** (vv. 1-2)

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, . . .*

And the idea here is "since" you have been raised up with Christ. The Colossians had believed in Jesus (2:6) and in that genuine faith, they had been raised up with Christ at the moment they believed (2:12). They were a new creation in Christ with a capacity to live a new kind of life. And so since this is true Paul urges them to . . .

*. . . keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.<sup>2</sup> Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

Paul is urging a focus on heavenly realities. Our focus is to be on *the things above, not on things that are on earth*. Now, when he says that we are not to focus on things on earth, he is not saying that we should not think about family or friends or not give appropriate attention to our work. That's not the point he is making. And so, what is he talking about?

It is helpful to look at the flow of Paul's argument in Colossians. One of the things that Paul is addressing is a false teaching that the Colossian believers were being exposed to that was a mix of Jewish legalism, and asceticism, and angel worship and these kinds of things. This is what Paul has been addressing right before we come to our passage. Right at the end of chapter two, in verse 23, Paul says:

*<sup>23</sup> These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

All of this man-made religion, this legalism, this asceticism, these are the *things that are on earth*. And they are of *no value*. They do not help one lay aside areas of sin, or put on godly character. If we want to experience genuine transformation it will not come from these earthly things.

If we are going to see spiritual transformation, it will not come through trusting in these kinds of things, in what we can do in our own power, but rather through making an ongoing, continuous, diligent effort to seek the things above where Christ is *seated at the right hand of God*. He is the risen, victorious, exalted Lord. He is the one who continues His ministry at God's right hand on our behalf.

In verse 2, Paul commands us to *set [our minds] on the things above*. We have a choice where we direct the attention of our minds. Will it be on the things on earth – on self-effort? Or will we choose to focus our minds on the things above? The fact that this is a command means that this does not necessarily come naturally for us. We have to work at this.

Now, what exactly are the heavenly realities on which we are to focus? As I've thought about the flow of the passage, I think the best way to summarize the *things above* is that Paul is talking about the Gospel and its results in our lives. The Gospel is the message about Christ. He died to pay for our sin. He was raised victorious over sin and death and exalted to the right hand of God. Spiritual transformation is found in the Gospel – in what Christ has done for us!

Romans 6:4 tells us that Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Earthly things (legalism, asceticism, man-made religion) do not help us walk in newness of life. They are of no value against fleshly indulgence (2:23). But the Gospel is! That's the heavenly reality that we are to focus upon and as we do so we can ex-

perience spiritual transformation. Through what Christ has accomplished for us we can put away things like immorality, impurity, covetousness, malice, lying and other such things. And through Christ we can put on things like kindness, humility, patience and love.

And so focus on heavenly realities. Keep setting your mind on the good news of the gospel, because it is through what Christ has done for you and what He now does for you at God's right hand that you will see spiritual transformation happen in your life.

Now, as Paul goes on in this passage, he gives the reason why your focus is to be on heavenly realities. The reason you are to . . .

## II. Focus on Heavenly Realities because of Who You are in Christ (vv. 3-4)

*<sup>3</sup> For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

Paul is giving the reason for what he has just commanded and the reason is all about who you are in Christ. Paul talks about a past, a present and a future reality of who you are in Christ.

And so in terms of our past, Paul says, *you have died* with Christ. Jesus died and in your unity with him, so too have you. And in dying with Christ, you have died to sin. You are set free from slavery to sin. You are no longer under its dominating power. This is who you are in Christ. This is why you are to focus on heavenly realities.

In terms of the present, Paul says that our life is now *hidden with Christ in God*. This idea of being hidden with Christ has a sense of safety. But being *hidden with Christ* also has the sense that there is something that is true of us that is now hidden or veiled. Who you truly are in Christ is not yet visible to the world and even to us. For instance, back chapter 1, Paul said this about the Colossians and us:

*<sup>21</sup> And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.*

We were alienated and hostile in mind. We were engaged in evil deeds. But now we are reconciled. And in Christ we are holy and blameless and beyond reproach. This is who you are in Christ, and yet, there is a hiddenness to much of this now. But that doesn't make it untrue. It is true of you now. And so because of this, we are to focus on heavenly realities.

Finally, in terms of a future truth about us Paul says that when *Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory*. At the end of the age, when Jesus returns and his full glory will be on display, we too will be *revealed with Him in glory*. Philippians 3 says this:

*<sup>20</sup> For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>21</sup> who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

And so when Jesus returns, we will share in His glory; we will be given our glorious resurrection bodies and we will have a glory that is like Jesus' glory. Obviously, this is something that is now hidden, right? But in Christ, this is exactly who we will be! And so, because of this, keep focusing on heavenly realities.

And so, keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. As you set your mind on heavenly realities, you are reminded that everything has been done for you in Christ. Christ is now your life. You are a new creation in Him and because of this spiritual transformation is possible. And as you keep seeking the things above you will be reminded that your life here is to increasingly be conformed to what true of you in heaven and you trust Christ to help you put off the old and put on the new. This is the implication of Jesus' present ministry for our spiritual transformation!

At the start of our time, I asked you to reflect on the things that we are to put to death in our lives as well as things that we need to put on. I'm sure all of us sensed some areas of needed growth in our lives. But let's suppose that in that reading you sensed the Spirit saying to you that anger (v. 8) is something that needs to be put to death in your life. It needs to go. It needs to be replaced with things like kindness, and humility, and gentleness and love. But how does that happen?

Well, one approach is the earthly approach that Paul talked about in Colossians 2. That's an approach that is all about self-effort. And so if you try that approach, the next time you get angry you might determine that you are going to work harder try to avoid situations that make you angry. You're going to avoid that person at work that drives you crazy. You're going to avoid that topic of conversation that creates anger every time you and your spouse talk about it. And on top of this make a renewed commitment, "I will not get angry." You are simply going to try hard to keep your anger in check. And maybe through these things you are a little more pleasant to the people around you . . . for a time . . . but you know that inside the pilot light of your anger is still on. It hasn't been touched. And when the right set of circumstances show up, it is going to roar into full flame again. See, this earthly approach is something that Paul says has an appearance of wisdom, but which has no value against fleshly indulgence (2:23).

The other approach is to focus on heavenly realities. It is focused on Christ, the gospel, and who we are in Him. But practically, how do we do this? I think that there are many things that we can do, but essentially I think we do this through spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are practices that help open our lives up to the activity of God. They are things that keep us closely dependent on God – things like studying the Bible, prayer, fasting, times of silence and solitude, confession and, service are just a few of these practices.

Any of these might be helpful, but let me talk about three of them and how they can help you focus on heavenly realities and see spiritual transformation take place in your life. They all start with “w” to help you remember them.

First, **be in the Word**. There is nothing more important for you in staying clear about heavenly realities than the Word of God. 2 Timothy 3 says this about God’s Word:

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

God’s Word teaches. It defines what is true – in Christ you have died to sin and its power over you. You have been raised to life in Christ and it is possible to walk in newness of life. And God’s word will teach you and remind you that it is God’s will for you to be gentle and kind and loving.

God’s Word also reproves and corrections. God uses His Word to bring us to heartfelt conviction and repentance. You will not put away anger until you come to a place of genuine conviction and repentance over your sin. And God’s Word trains us for righteousness. God will use it to train you in the way of love and gentleness and humility. And so be in God’s Word.

Second, if you want to focus on heavenly realities **regularly Worship**. Worship is the spiritual discipline of focusing on and declaring the greatness, and beauty and glory of God. Obviously, this is something that we do when we gather here each Sunday, but worship is more than Sunday gatherings and it is more than singing. It is a posture of our heart before God. It is remembering that He is the Creator; we are the created. It’s about thinking rightly about God and responding in praise, adoration and thanksgiving.

And so, as you are seeking to put away your anger, you seek to regularly worship God – every day. On Sundays, you show up with a sense of, “God, reveal yourself to me. Help me to think rightly about you.” And so you focus on the truths about God that is declared through song and word and you respond. But you are also worshipping God daily. You spend time in the Word and in prayer. And maybe you go for a walk after work to set your mind on God. You do these things to focus on God. And as you do you reflect back to Him his beauty and greatness, etc. As you regularly worship God, it gets clearer in your mind that your life is about God; not you. And you realize that much of your anger comes from thinking that life is about you and wanting to control your life and the people around you. But through worship, you begin to release control of these things to God. Worship brings you to a place of humility before God and a dependence upon Him that spills over into your interactions with others. And so regularly worship God.

Finally, as you are seeking to put off your anger, **Walk with other believers**. Typically, we call this spiritual discipline “fellowship,” but that didn’t start with a “w” so this is the way I’m saying it. If you are going to keep seeking heavenly realities, you need to be part of a community of people who are seeking the same thing. You need to be walking with such people. When you

walk with other believers, you let them speak into your life. Life can get so disorienting and busy and chaotic at times that if we are left to ourselves we can so easily get off track. We can find it hard to keep seeking the things above. But when we are relationally connected to others who are also seeking to focus on heavenly realities that can be so helpful.

When you walk with other believers you begin to trust them and you can open up your lives to them. And so God might lead you to confess your sin of anger to them, which can be so powerful. And in doing that, maybe this group reminds you of the Gospel and God's grace and how much God loves you and that He is committed to your transformation. And that renews your faith and helps you keep looking to God and trusting Him to change your heart. And so walk with other believers.

Now, of course there are other things that you can do to focus on heavenly realities, but you get the picture. These disciplines of the word, worship and walking with other will help you focus on heavenly realities. They will help you experience spiritual transformation that is found in and through Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of God.

As you know, today is Palm Sunday, which means that we are heading into Holy Week. I would love for you to apply what I'm talking about to the rest of your lives, but sometimes it is help to think in terms of shorter chunks of time. And so what I'd like to ask you to do this week is to make a special effort to focus on heavenly realities. This week be reminded of the Gospel. This week be reminded that you have died and been buried with Christ. This week be reminded that you have been raised up to new spiritual life with Christ and you are actually seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This is reality. This is heavenly reality. Focus on these truths this week for they have far reaching implications for your spiritual transformation.