

Colossians: On Things Above Part 3

Colossians 3:1-4

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on July 30, 2023

Wave After Wave

As a child, our parents inundated us with ideas that were intended to produce desirable actions and words on our parts. But the problem was these ideas were absolutely not true. They were rumors and myths invented by our parents in order to manipulate us into obedient compliance.

For example, I remember the various myths my dad used to convince me to not swallow watermelon seeds or chewing gum. I was told that for every watermelon seed I swallowed, an entire melon would grow in my stomach. And I was convinced that any time I swallowed bubble gum, it would remain stuck to my innards for seven years.

For years I was convinced that the source for all chocolate milk was a brown cow. My dad would tell me that it was illegal to turn a light on inside the car while driving at night. In that regard, until I was in junior high, I was convinced that what my mom said about the moon following you at night was true. Regardless of where we went, THERE IT WAS!

Perhaps the worst and most damaging myth I was taught was from my oldest brother. He had me convinced that the ice cream truck only played music to alert children that they were OUT of ice cream and could not sell us anymore that day. The other day I, for the first time in forever, I heard an ice cream truck down the road and the music started playing, and I had a single tear roll down my cheek.

Over the course of our lives, we will be bombarded with thousands and thousands of mindsets or ideas about reality. What is or is not real. Those ideas crash into us endlessly. While some are ultimately harmless, others can be devastating. And regardless of your age, these ideas will continuously roll under our minds like currents under boats. Some thoughts and ideas will rock our lives. Others may capsize us completely.

In the third chapter of Colossians, Paul directs us toward a solution to all of these competing ideas. There are great realities or certainties that God has revealed to us. And Paul directs us toward the mindset or the character of the heart that engages those realities.

Once you realize these things, you will be able to discover new things about God throughout your life. I invite you to turn to Colossians 3:1-4. (read text)

Realities forming Cornerstone

The Lord reveals to us ideas that are unbelievable except by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. These four verses lay out for believers a reality that is so amazing, anyone who sets their minds and hearts on this divine reality they will be dramatically different from anyone who does not believe.

Paul calls us to a new mindset which makes this new reality possible. This mindset will make the pathway of obedience in 3:4-4:6 possible. Paul also teaches about some realities that are to become the cornerstone of this new life in Christ.

First, and most significant to the foundation of our new lives, is the reality of God. We see Paul refer to God in verse 1b, “Seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,” and in verse 3, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Without the reality of God, nothing else in this passage, in this entire book, in this entire collection of books, is real. Scripture teaches us that the reality of God is an objective reality. This means that God exists as an independent reality regardless of whether a person is aware of Him or not. He is an objective reality. God is in an external reality. He exists in both this physical world as well as in the metaphysical world. This is all high-falutin’ philosophical mumbo jumbo that means God is not just some made up idea. This is not religious confusion. This is not a trip to the Land of Make Believe. We need to also understand and be aware of the fact that many people in church in Paul’s time and in our time today are playing pretend with religion.

Christians are theists as opposed to atheists. This means that Christians are among those who claim to believe in God. However, scores of these theists in churches today actually don’t believe in God. They believe in the idea of God. They believe in the system that supports the idea of God. They love themselves some religion. They love believing in the power of the myth of God rather than actually believing in the God of the Bible.

There are scores of pastors and preachers who do not think that their idea of God needs to relate to any objective reality outside of themselves. For them, what is most important, they preach and believe, is for their “idea of God” should do good things for the world. They wholeheartedly affirm that religion is valuable and that the idea of there being a God is a beneficial and useful idea because that idea can help you be a healthy, wealthy, and better person.

Here is the problem with believing in the idea of God rather than believing in God. Paul does not say that your life is hidden in Christ who is at the right hand of an idea or that your life is hidden in an idea. Paul has been building to this point in Colossians. We know that God is not an “idea” that helps us be better people. God in chapter 3 is the same as He was in chapter 1. There we learned that God is the Creator of all things (1:16). In other words, God existed and was there before people had any concept or any idea about God being there. He is the Creator of everything, including our brains, our minds. That includes minds that have chosen to imagine that God does not exist as a reality beyond a person’s thoughts.

Paul teaches in chapter one that God has a visible image of Himself that is eternal and was not created in the Son (1:15). And in the Son is the fullness of the deity (1:19; 2:9). The Son holds everything that exists together (1:17). The Father loves the Son infinitely (1:13) and sent the Son into the world to carry the punishment for all the sin of God’s people (1:14; 2:14). God is not an imaginary, made-up, make-believe idea. The world is the creation of God, and the world is not made up.

Colossians 3:1-4 reveals the most fundamental reality ever: God. All of Scripture is consistent with this.

The Son at the Right Hand of the God

Another reality is revealed in the Son being seated at the right hand of God. 3:1b tells us Christ is seated at the right hand of the God. Paul has also been leading us to a clearer understanding of Christ throughout Colossians. He has taught us that Christ is the eternal, loved Son (1:13). He died (1:18; 22; 2:12) and now is alive again because God raised him from the dead (2:12).

Paul then teaches us a bit about Christ’s position. He is above: “Seek the things above, where Christ is.” Christ is not above the clouds or above the sky or above the stars geographically. He is above all stars, all sky, all space.

He is above everything. Jesus is not doing some back and forth. He is not being shuttled in between the presence of God and back here to creation. He is there at the right hand of God. And God is not creation.

This is a mind-bender here. In the incarnation, the Son who was divine and eternal and spirit became flesh – when Jesus was born, he became the image of the invisible God. The incarnation was the divine entering creation. Certainly a divine mystery. And then another divine mystery occurred at the ascension of Christ when the flesh entered the realm of the divine. Christ is the God-man. He is both God and man and ascended into heaven that way. That is as far as my pudding brain can stretch. It is incredible to consider that, to think about that, to focus my thoughts on the incarnation and the ascension, placing my attention and my thoughts there.

He is at the right hand of God. This means that the Son occupies the place of highest honor, highest power, and highest authority. All the powers of the universe are subjected to Him. And what does He do in that place of highest honor, power, and authority? The Bible tells us that the Son is interceding for us.¹

And Christ is seated. This means that His work is done. Jesus Christ came and completed, fulfilled His salvific or saving work. It was a decisive, once-for-all-time sacrifice. And it is done. Hebrews says, “After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in high.” (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus Christ is above seated at the right hand of God.

What About You?

As if that wasn't enough, Paul then shifts attention to the believer's relationship to the Son. Revealed in these verses is a beautiful promise that we too easily take for granted. If you are in Christ, your death is behind you. It has already happened. Not your physical death. No, that is a doorway of promise, the start of a spiritual journey to the presence of God in glory. While many do not want to die very soon, believers need to understand that physical death is an entrance into glory. It is an occasion a believer should look forward to, not dread.

The death to dread has already happened to us if we are in Christ. Which means that our life now is not at all what the world around us assumes or things it should be. They have no idea what true life is outside of Christ.

¹ Romans 8:34

Paul says that our life is hidden from world – hidden from us – with Christ in God. “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” This means that, despite what we tend to assume, the worst is actually behind us. Regardless of our trouble and suffering, if you are a Christian today, the worst is behind you.

“So, if you have been raised with Christ.” There is a resurrection coming one day that is as certain as what we have already experienced and modeled in our baptism.

“Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Jesus details in John 10 how secure the relationship is between God the Father and God the Son. Nothing can separate the Father from the Son. And the same security is extended here to the life of a believer. It is hidden, kept, safely and securely with Christ in God. While it may not be clear, or obvious to the world (hidden), our life in Christ is secure.

Paul is reminding Colossian believers again of something he wrote back in chapter 2. “When you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” (2:12) When a believer is baptized by immersion in water, that act of coming back up out of the water is symbolic of the fact that we died and were buried and rose with Christ. In chapter two, Paul was clear and explicitly declared that faith is the internal device or tool of the Spirit that bonded us or united us to Christ. We are saved by the grace of God through faith – believing – in Jesus.

This means that no matter how awful or difficult life ahead can be for us, the most glorious experience of life awaits us. Very often my wife reminds me that, should I outlive her, I am to have a party with music and Mexican food instead of a typical funeral. We’re not going to sing funeral dirges and sit in stoic silence. Instead, we are going to celebrate. It makes sense. Why mourn the greatest and most glorious thing that could happen to a person?

Imagine getting the greatest news ever and, upon telling your friends and family, they sit and weep and drone on with “God be with you till we meet again.” No, when a believer dies, bust out the burritos and slather on the extra jalapenos because the greatest thing has happened to them.

Paul wants us to get ahold and also to be held by this reality. There are two great glories in every believer's life. The one in the past when a believer received salvation in Christ. And the one to come when the believer enters glory. That is where our thoughts are to be placed. Set your minds on those things – on the two glories that bracket the believer's life. All of the stuff that happens in between those things, all of that stuff grows ever clearer and more defined by those two glories. I always thought that line we sang all those years ago wasn't accurate. The things of earth do not grow strangely dim by the light of Christ. No, the things of earth grow clearer, and they are exposed as to what they are. Nothing compared to the glory of Christ.

On Good Friday it was clearly laid out. The worst death happened on that day. When I received salvation, that death that Christ died became my death. I never had to experience it. I only experienced glory! The worst is over! And now above me and before me is the glory that my life is in Christ, and it is absolutely secure because it is hidden with Christ in God and someday it will be revealed to me in that second great glory to come.

Set on Things Above

It is with this understanding of ourselves and Christ in God that we are to set our minds on things above. Paul wants us to constantly be setting or seeking that mindset on those things. This is not us always focusing on sunshine, lollipops and rainbows. It means that we place our thoughts and our focus above with Christ is.

This is a new mindset. A new one. Not an old one just reheated or tweaked or altered somewhat. It is a completely new way of thinking. Set your mind on those realities – God, the Son above and seated at the right hand of God, and your life being hidden with Christ in God because of your death, burial, and resurrection achieved through faith and modeled through baptism.

And this is not “setting your mind on something and then disagreeing with it.” This is not “set your mind on something but still dislike it.” Paul emphatically uses the word *phroneite*. He uses the same word that he used in Philippians 2:5 when he said, “have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Have this mindset, this attitude, this disposition, this temperament, this way of thinking and feeling and responding.

What is supposed to shape the way you think? What is supposed to shape your emotional life? What is supposed to make up your attitudes and the pattern of your responses to things in this life? The realities that are above. The reality of God. The reality of Christ seated at the right hand of God. The reality of your true life hidden with Christ in God. Those are the things that are to shaping us because that is where we are supposed to set our minds.

We are NOT to set our minds on things of this world. This world is not supposed to shape our preferences in people or entertainment or even in worship. This world is not supposed to shape our preference in clothing or our job or our hobbies. Our entire mindset, our entire “heartset” is to be set on the realities that Paul lines out in Colossians 3:1-4. That is how a Christian is supposed to see the world. We are to be shaped and led, governed, by the realities that Paul lays out for us in these verses.

And Paul tells us to seek this out. To always be seeking this lifestyle, to always be seeking this pathway to that mindset shaped by the things above.

This means chasing them. Pursue them. Track them down. Seize them. Hold onto them. Focus on them. Lean into them. Try to understand them as best as you can. Base your life around them.

This is a heavenly mindset. And it is allowing that mindset to change you. By pursuing it and seeking it out. Now, understand, this is not something that can happen for us unless we seek it. Nobody gains a heavenly mindset passively. You don't just fall over into it, and it doesn't just fall into you. You have to pursue it. You either seek it or you don't have it. That is it. You are either setting your mind on those realities or you aren't.

Those who are trying to fall into it passively have probably been recipients of that their entire life. People have preached at them. Music has been performed for them. Classes have occurred around them. And they assume that their presence in the room was enough. Maybe that is you. You've been fine believing the myth, being around the system, listening the stories of God and you think that is enough. But you never set your mind on those life-changing realities. You've never considered the two glories and frankly, dying scares the stuffing out of you. I would put it to you that is it possible that you've never experienced salvation?

Is it possible that in all of that religious, theistic activity, perhaps you never received salvation by grace through faith. You tried to lean into it by experience, sort of a church-ed version of works-based salvation. But you've never really thought about the divine realities Paul speaks about in Colossians 3.

Sure, you like thinking about God and you feel a sense of comfort and familiarity in these rhythms. But setting your mind on the things above? Seeking those realities all the time? Be honest. Does that happen? Or do you have to be coerced into faith? Do you have to be prodded into that sort of thing? Do you not give all that stuff another thought until you're back in this room? Where are you setting your mind?

Listen, I am old enough to know better about the moon chasing me and watermelon gut. Those things are silly myths that don't deserve a second thought. But the things above deserve constant focus. Are you seeking them out? Let's pray.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Wednesday Bible Study is taking a break for July.

Pray for all going to Children's Camp this week!

Childrens Ministry Trip to Sky Zone in Hagerstown: Sunday August 13th. 3-5PM. Cost is \$10. We will meet AT Sky Zone at 2:45. Sign up at the welcome center. This is for all children ages 4 through 5th grade.

Men's Ministry Trip to The Ballpark in Loudon: August 19th, 11AM-1PM. The cost is \$25 per person. The Ballpark is a unique batting cage experience that allows a batter, through the wonders of technology, to hit in any ballpark they choose! Enjoy a great time! Sign up in the welcome center.